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Acknowledgements

As a trained cultural anthropologist starting a PhD research at the faculty of philosophy, I initially was confronted with a classic ethnographer's dilemma. Should I attempt to become more like them, or cling to my own background? Luckily, I soon found out that despite our differences enough similarities existed. In fact, our shared curiosity about the role of media technologies opened up room for different approaches. I have learned a lot from my colleagues, and I hope that I have been able to reciprocate to the circle of knowledge.

A guiding presumption of this thesis is that people's identities are composed of relations. During the solitary activity of writing this dissertation that firm believe was challenged more than once. It is in looking back that I realize it would never have reached completion, or even a beginning, without a number of people. First of all I like to thank my PIG colleagues. No, that is not a foul play kick in the back. PIG is the acronym we used for the playful identities group, the collaborative project of which my research was part. The group is composed of Jos de Mul, Valerie Frissen, Joost Raessens, Jeroen Timmermans, Sybille Lammes, and Eva Nieuwdorp. All work and no play makes a PhD a dull job. Thankfully, this was far from the case. Our little acronym more than aptly describes the character of our regular group meetings: a healthy mix of structured game and free play, at once disciplined by goal-oriented teamwork, yet always on the verge of sliding into ludic chaos. So, thank you for your valuable comments and for your cheerful collegiality, it was a pleasure working with you. I would specifically like to mention Valerie for her great guidance during the research process, and Jeroen, who not only suggested the title of this dissertation but more than once helped me to orient myself in my ramblings. Further, I would like to thank the staff and fellow PhD researchers at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, especially Ruben, Bibi, Tina, Robin, and Chris. Additionally, I wish to thank the 'outsider' PhD researchers, who well understood how to constructively criticize each other's 'work in progress' during our monthly seminars. Thanks also to my colleagues from the TGG group (technology, behavior, and use), a collective of young technology researchers working at various universities. And I wish to thank the coordinators of the CO-OPs arts and science project in which I was allowed to participate. This experiment, sponsored in part by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), paired

Introduction. Identity, mobile media, and play

i. Identity and the mobile phone: in search of another mediation

Identities are wrought with paradox. We think of ourselves as individuals with unique personalities and characters, and also as belonging to groups of people. We want to shape ourselves according to our tastes and choices, yet keep phrasing identities as higher order impositions: innate and ours by birth, by blood, by vocation. We are constantly developing ourselves and feel reluctant to use fixed terms that suggest a standstill, yet we long for authenticity and the lasting. We have liberated ourselves from stable and sometimes oppressive identity categories, yet we want to feel attached both in time and space to larger entities. We have become highly self-reflective and have lost belief in claims to truths and essences, yet we want to believe in the real and the profound. We consider identity an end in itself, but we also employ it as a strategic means in order to reach some external goal. Despite, or perhaps because of these ambivalences, we tenaciously cling to the idea of 'having an identity'. Thinking about ourselves as beings with an identity appears to be a deep psychological necessity. As soon as we talk about identity something is at stake. Identity matters.

What is this elusive notion of identity? Let's start with some initial thoughts. The word identity can be used for individual people. A police spokeswoman in front of the camera may proudly declare that "after two months of intensive investigations the identity of the robber has been established". The police woman uses the word identity in the sense of *identification*. Being identifiable as one and the same person - even after many decades and losing all one's hair and teeth - is often called 'forensic identity'. Now suppose that the robber, after serving time in prison, wants to completely overturn his life. He breaks with all his criminal friends, moves to another city, and finds a job. Is he still the same person as he was before? Only when he thinks of himself as a self, can he still see himself as the same person. Sameness is not only a biological given but must also be approached via self-interpretation. Sameness then is but one aspect of identity. But what is this 'self' who is looking and asking in the first place? The robber likely will not understand himself in term of attributes like name, age, posture, fingerprints, and DNA samples. He may sum up a number of properties, values, behaviors, and so on that he deems typical of himself. This process necessarily

involves stepping outside of himself, to look at himself as a self. The robber's understanding of himself as a self is a different understanding of identity than mere sameness. In this question, the *who* prevails over the *what*. Moreover, the robber may have friends and family who, blissfully unaware of his criminal career, know him from other circumstances. They know him as the funny and generous guy who always pays for a round of drinks in the bar, or as the attentive son who often surprises his mum with flowers. These people too recognize him as the same person, and regard him as a self. But how does this 'self' come into being? How can we think of ourselves as selves? And how can we remain the same even when our selves change over time, and between different spatial and social contexts?

The word identity is not only used for individuals but also for groups of people who feel alike on the basis of a perceived similarity. Most people feel they belong to multiple groups. Some groups consist of people one regularly interacts with, for instance friends and work colleagues. Despite their individual differences, people in such groups often develop similar speech and shared rules for behavior. This is social identity. Groups also consist of people who may never interact with each other (and are oblivious of each other's existence), yet still feel connected to each other based on a perceived common ancestry and history, territory, norm and values, language, symbols, and so on. This 'imagined community' of people shares a cultural identity [1]. But what constitutes this 'feeling alike' of groups, and the sense of belonging? And how does this similarity relate to individual differences within groups, and to differences between groups?

Furthermore, the word identity is even used for the non-human world that is composed of spatiotemporal environments, objects and events. We may attribute identity to places (Paris, city of love), to temporal eras or moments (the Roaring Twenties), and to material artifacts (Apple's 'brand identity'). If we talk about the identity of the non-living world, we say it consists of qualities that distinguish things in it and provide us with informational cues how to interact with them. Obviously this is not the same kind of identity as human beings have. Environments, events, and artifacts cannot think about themselves as selves [2]. It is people who imbue them with character. The point is that the non-living world too has forces of its own and the potential to act upon us. We are more romantically inclined when in Paris, we sense anxiety in a dark alley at night, we experience pleasure from holding a well-designed object in our hand and feel invited to tinker with it. Our interactions with the non-living

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[1] The term 'imagined community' is coined by Benedict Anderson in his study about nationalism (Anderson, 1991).

[2] The animal world takes up a middle ground. Some animals have been proven to possess a sense of self-awareness. Elephants with a white dot painted on their forehead will touch themselves with their trunks when they see their own image in a mirror. It remains the question *how* they think of themselves as selves.

world are not simply matters of free choice. The world also imposes its logic on us and shapes us in what and who we are. In many preindustrial societies it was taken for granted that places, times and artifacts have characters and the power to act. Sacred or taboo areas in the forest, special moments for ritual, totems and masks imbued with magic; the world as acting upon humans was central to their worldview and sense of who they are. In modern 'disenchanted' societies these views became deliberately muffled [3]. Environments, objects and events in the world became inert matter over which humans could exert control. More recently, the view that the lifeless world indeed has agency has regained ground (as we will see in the next chapter when we talk about technologies). The question arises to what extent we shape the world and to what extent it shapes us.

From the above we can distill some initial findings. First, individuals and groups engage in multiple relations (I will limit myself to human identities). Identity thus is a *relational* notion. These relations are self and self; self and other people, and self and the world. Self-self relations involve how the *I* relates to the *me*, and how the *we* relates to the *us*. Self-other relations involve how *I* or *we* relate to other people, either in the second person (you) or in the third person (he/she/they). Self-world relations involve how the self relates to 'the world', which I take as a broad category that consists of spatiotemporal dimensions and instances (places, events, actions), and of objects as artifacts and media [4]. A second finding is that these relations are not naturally given or self-evident. They must be interpreted and reapplied to the self. Identity thus is a *reflexive* notion. Reflexivity means that which takes itself into account. When applied to persons it is "the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself" (and, I add, of groups upon themselves) (Mead, 1934: 134). Identity then both involves how we understand ourselves *and* how we understand the concept of self as it pertains to ourselves. In order to do so we need a medium to think with. Identity is a mediated concept, as we will see further on. Third, we have seen that these relations are not stable and fixed but give rise to several tensions. Identity thus is a *paradoxical* notion [5]. I phrase what I see as three main overarching tensions as: sameness versus selfhood, difference versus similarity, and freedom versus force [6].

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[3] Economist Karl Marx for instance sought to get rid of the 'fetish-like' qualities of commodities, since they were standing in between people.

[4] For a large part of humanity a fourth relation exists, and that is their relation with God(s). Being the atheist that I am, I leave this relation out, although in chapter 3 we will see more about religious identities as part of cultural struggles in Indonesia.

[5] The word paradox means an *apparent* contradiction. However, I shall use the term according to common parlance as the equivalent of a tension that may or may not be resolved.

Sameness versus selfhood involves the issue how we can retain permanence as the same person across different spatial contexts and throughout life, while we move between multiple settings and develop over time [7]. Neither in space nor in time are we constant. We act and feel differently in various situations, as evident from the case of the robber who is also a friend and a good son. And we change over time. The robber can become an ex-robber. For identity at the group level, the question is how permanence of identity can be maintained despite changing membership and changing group definitions. As a metaphor, the circulation of individual members in a group is like the human body that changes most of its cells several times in a lifetime yet remains the same body [8].

Difference versus similarity involves the difficulty how we can remain unique individuals in our relations with others as similar beings. As soon as we acknowledge that we are like others we give up on being different. The paradox occurs too between groups: how can a nation for instance see itself as different when there is always the overarching concept of nationalism? How can true difference exist when we use similar 'codes' (language, behavior, cultural symbols) to speak, act and think with? These are ontological questions about what constitutes actual difference, when there is always an overarching concept (Deleuze, 2004: xiii, 13-17). Inversely, the paradox involves the fundamental problem of communication. How can our unique thoughts and feelings be shared in terms that others understand (see Peters, 1999b: 4-5)? This paradox has socio-cultural, psychological and political implications. How do we cope with living among strangers in the city? To what extent do we accept fundamental differences to exist within an overarching coherent structure, like the nation-state or even the self?

Freedom versus force involves the contradiction that we are free to shape our own lives at will, yet at the same time we are being shaped by worldly or heavenly forces over which we often have no control, the 'fateful moments' that happen to us [9]. In fact, it is a double paradox. It is composed of what may be called the 'burden of freedom' and the 'shackles of liberation'. We are forcibly free, we *must* choose our own

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[6] My colleague Jeroen Timmermans has phrased three paradoxes of late modern identities in roughly corresponding terms (although with different accents): fixity versus mobility; individuality versus collectivity; autonomy versus heteronomy (living by another's laws) (Timmermans, 2010: chapter 3).

[7] As we will see in section 1.2, this coincides with what philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* identity (selfhood) (Ricoeur, 1992).

[8] There is some danger in this metaphor. It suggests members of a group are subservient to cooperating towards a common goal of the whole. It may induce groups to categorically shut out others, and regard others 'within them' as invasive alien viruses.

[9] This is a term used by Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1991: 131).

life path. We can choose to free ourselves from circumstances that we feel are confining us, only to find ourselves trapped in new situations and realizing that our so-called liberation has in fact been a reaction propelled by these circumstances.

While I have introduced these paradoxes as each arising from one of the three relations, they are interlocking. Freedom versus force also occurs in our self-self relations. People voluntarily submit to self-imposed rules in trying to achieve some goal for themselves. It also occurs in self-other relations, as we are being shaped by the ascriptions of other people. A gay adolescent who finds herself attracted to the same sex, but lives in a society that is intolerant to homosexuality, may choose to break free from the shackles. She could move to the big city where life is more anonymous and open. Still, living a life of secrecy with a same-sex partner becomes subject to new restrictions. Difference versus similarity occurs in self-self relations too. The robber after his time in jail may attempt to become a different person, yet keeps running into familiar dispositions. The paradox also occurs in self-world relations, for instance when we collectively buy mass-produced consumer goods in order to distinguish ourselves. The paradox of sameness versus selfhood necessarily involves self-other and self-world relations, when we accept that the self is never defined in isolation but always in interaction. We may say that identity as a relational notion describes *being* a self as the departing situation we humans are thrown in. Identity as a reflexive notion describes *having* a self, as we distance ourselves from our selves and become an object to ourselves, and engage in the interpretation of this self (and even may decide to *not be* this self). And identity as a paradoxical notion describes *becoming* a self, as we must continuously navigate these tensions and assume temporary or permanent positions. Being, having, and becoming are modalities of the self that shape each other in circular movement.

The attentive reader may object that I have not yet given a satisfactory answer to *what is identity?* I merely diverted this problem to the question *what is selfhood?* Furthermore, I appear to pretend that identity and its paradoxes are universal and unchanging. Third, I seem to forego the *problem* of identity as a source of various conflicts. These criticisms are absolutely justified and need to be addressed. First, what are we talking about when we speak about a 'self'? Two opposite views can be discerned. In one, the self is some inherent core property. We bring this self along to different situations and moments that we move in and between throughout life. In the other, the self emerges from interactions between people in social situations. People perform different roles in social interactions. Through impression management they

present an image of themselves [10]. These opposing views locate this 'self' differently. One sees the self as something that resides *in* us; the other as something that emerges only in interactions *between* us. They also have a different spatial view of the self. One sees the self as coherent if not unified; the other as multiple if not fragmented. They further differ in their temporal view of selfhood. One sees the self as rather stable, even permanent; the other as varying and always adapting to new contexts. Finally, they describe a different movement of interpreting the self. In the first view, the self is an unchanging core essence that we must find inside us and then may expose to the outside world. In the second view, the self emerges as the sum of theatrical roles we adopt in our interactions, which we then may internalize to become our 'self'. If the self is something inside us, how does it get there? Is it a pre-given essential core that slumbers inside us, waiting to be found through introspection? My colleague Jeroen Timmermans well phrases the time- and place-dependent origin of this idea: "a lot of Westerners nowadays live with the Romantic idea that somewhere deep concealed in them there is a metal box containing their true identity, turning their lives into the quest of the proper key to open this magic box and discover who they really are" (Timmermans, 2010: 14). Or is it something that we put there, something we more or less purposively construct from elements at our disposal, and then call our self? A constructionist view bridges the gap between the essence view and the role-playing view. In this perspective, the self is a dynamic and artificial creation, but one that has real consequences for one's sense of coherence. Further down we discuss one of the most powerful constructionist perspectives: narrative identity theory. The problem remains *who* is searching, *who* internalizes, *who* is constructing? It presupposes that we posses a space inside, an 'inner depth', in which this self can be put. This idea is a western historical construction as well, as philosopher Charles Taylor shows in his brilliant genealogy of western identity *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Taylor, 1989). Taylor traces the origins of what he calls 'inwardness' back to Greco-Christian roots. He shows that inwardness evolved from 'radical reflexivity' towards knowledge. Only when we became reflexively aware of our awareness could we focus on how the world is *for us*, and see ourselves as persons with inner depths (ibid: 130-131).

We naturally run into the second criticism. Up to now identity has been treated as a general concept. But identity is always a particular. When we talk about individual and group identities, it means speaking about *this* particular person and *that* particular group. What makes me *me*? What makes us *us*? As particulars, identities are tied to the spatiotemporal contexts in which this *me* or *us* exists, is expressed and interpreted. An

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[10] This view is commonly associated with sociologist Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1959). More about this in section 1.3.

answer may consist of concrete values and ideals, expressions and utterances, postures and actions, etcetera, that we identify with, that is, consider to belong to *me* (personal identity), or to *us* (social and cultural identities). Not only are the actual expressions of identity time- and place-dependent, so too is the *concept* of identity as the medium by which we reflexively think about ourselves, and the paradoxical landmarks on which we orient ourselves in life. Any inquiry into (changes in) identity must take these spatiotemporal dynamics into account.

The third issue is the problem of identity. Identities give meaning, value, and a sense of coherence and direction to life. But identities can also give rise to internal and external conflicts and struggles. Especially for adolescents, identity can be a confusing matter that turns all certainties upside down. A considerable number of people at some point in their lives experience an identity crisis. Taylor describes this as "an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand" (ibid: 27). In the example of a young homosexual person in a gay-unfriendly society, her personal, social and cultural identities may be incongruent. She may find it difficult to feel part of a cultural community that is intolerant towards homosexuality. In the city she moved to, her preferences may be acceptable in some social circles, but perhaps not in the village community she is from. She may also go through a prolonged period of internal struggle whether to accept her sexual preference or not (perhaps after questioning 'sexuality' itself as nature or nurture). Others may ascribe stereotypical characteristics to her, based on how they see 'people like her'. What makes her *her* is then narrowed to a simplified view of what makes them *them*. At some point, she may decide to join an advocate group for the rights of 'sexual minorities'. She uses her self-defining sexual preference as a means to achieve recognition and status as a group, in what is frequently called 'identity politics' (Hall, 2000: 118; Heyes, 2009). Identity then becomes an instrument in politicized struggles. Manuel Castells argues that in the global 'network society' the construction of identities at the group level is always characterized by power relationships (Castells, 1997: 7). Over and against the 'legitimizing identity' introduced by the dominant institutions of society, he sees the rise of a 'resistance identity' by marginalized groups. Eventually, when people redefine themselves from negative terms (anti-) into positive terms (pro-), they develop a 'project identity' (ibid: 8). Castells sees identity struggles in terms of an opposition between communities and institutions. More recently we are witnessing the resurgence of struggles between communities. These are often political clashes under the moniker of religion (in chapter 3 we examine how identities become instruments in agonistic struggles). Even if people do not experience deep identity crises, do not have to cope with stereotyping, or do not explicitly politicize their identities, identity still can

be troublesome. Coping with the three modalities of the self - being, having, becoming - is problematic enough. People may be 'thrown' into bodies, minds, sexual preferences, socio-cultural circumstances, and so, with which they feel very uncomfortable. Many also take reflexivity to the extreme, instantly applying everything that happens to themselves. This can lead to perpetual self-doubt or defensive attitudes. And navigating the identity paradoxes can lead to the paralyzing feeling that every choice narrows the pathway to future choices.

We are getting closer to a view of identity as it exists today. Taylor phrases this issue as follows:

> [T]he question is often spontaneously phrased by people in the form: Who am I? But this can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. ...
> What this brings to light is the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.
> (Taylor, 1989: 27, 28)

What I like about this formulation is Taylor's use of 'orientation' as a spatial metaphor. As I will argue later on, this spatial view is sorely missing in Paul Ricoeur's formulation of *narrative identity*, because of his exclusive attention for maintaining temporal permanence. What I like less is the strong moral imperative speaking from this passage. If we are less concerned with or not sure of the *ought*, does that mean we cannot have an identity? (By the way, I am aware that this is a value judgment too). What I am not certain of is whether identity means "knowing where I stand". It seems a rather fixed notion of identity. I do not believe that *not* knowing where I stand immediately leads to identity crisis (lucky for me that is a stance too). Could it be that identities emerge from the ongoing search for positions - trying to find out where I am going - rather than taking a fixed stance? In this thesis I try to bring in a more 'mobile' view of identity.

In fact, it is precisely the uncertainty of this knowledge that sociologist Anthony Giddens sees as a defining feature of our present age of 'high modernity' (Giddens, 1991: 21) [11]. Giddens sees contemporary life as permeated with risks and dangers. We live in an ongoing crisis that "intrudes deeply into the heart of self-identity and personal feelings" (ibid: 12). Modern social life and (western) identities are shaped by 'institutional reflexivity' and 'radical doubt'. We organize our lives by applying knowledge accumulated via various media, instead of via traditional expert knowledge systems in which our trust has waned. At the same time, we apply the scientific rational principle of radical doubt to this knowledge, thereby undermining its certainty (ibid: 3, 21). Giddens sketches the contours of identity as follows:

> In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems. In the modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are *forced* to negotiate lifestyle *choices* among a diversity of options.
> (ibid: 5, my emphasis)

Several points stand out. Giddens highlights the tension between force and choice as typical of the modern condition of identity construction. He also mentions the dialectic between the local and the global, an issue to which we return in chapter 3. Further, he sees present-day identities as shaped by media technologies, which is the key focus of this dissertation. Third, he regards identity as a reflexive project that is organized through narratives. We have reached what is perhaps the most powerful theory of identity: narrative identity.

Narrative identity has been most elaborately theorized by philosopher Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1992). According to Ricoeur, (personal) identity involves self-interpretation (Ricoeur, 1992: 114 fn1). In order to interpret oneself one needs a medium, and narrative is the privileged form of mediation, he says (ibid). Narrative fiction mediates between the three relations we already encountered: between man and himself, between man and man, and between man and the world (Ricoeur, 1991a: 27). Narrative mediation has three moments. People implicitly pre-understand their lives as being composed of narrative elements

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[11] High modernity is the late stage of modernity characterized by the rise of mass printed media and electronic communication (ibid: 25).

(*mimesis1*); they actively construct stories about their lives and those of others (*mimesis2*); and they reflexively understand and shape their lives as narratives (*mimesis3*) (Ricoeur, 1984: ch.3). For now this explanation suffices. Narrative identity is discussed in finer detail in section 1.2, and revisited in the concluding chapter. In Ricoeur's view, identity is always mediated by a dominant medium, in his case the narrative. Now, what happens when different media rise to the fore? Media that, perhaps, do not (only) have narrative qualities. Media that, perhaps, reshape the narrative character of the relations that make up our selves, the way we reflexively interpret ourselves, and the paradoxes of the self. Media that, certainly, have rapidly become so ubiquitous and dominant that it is hard to ignore them [12].

The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that the spread of mobile media technologies calls for a new mediation of identity. What then should this new mediation be? Let us take a preliminary look at some qualities of the mobile phone. Mobile phones are objects in the world. They are portable technologies that we take with us everywhere we go. As artifacts, they elicit us to explore their possibilities, and to tinker with them as toys. Further, they are symbolic items for the expressive display of identity (Fortunati, Katz, & Riccini, 2003: 1-11). Mobile phones are wireless technologies that enable us to communicate and access information and being on the move. As information- and communications technologies, mobile phones reconfigure our relations with physical and digital places and situations, the ways we organize our social relations, and how we present ourselves. Mobile phones make it much easier to rapidly switch between different settings in order to interact with other people elsewhere. This switching exposes the fact that we all, to some extent, engage in role-playing performances (Geser, 2004). Mobile phones are part of a range of media technologies that together form media spaces. These media spaces are both separate and connected to everyday life. They open up room for experimentation with different aspects of identity, but also for leisurely consumption and creation of media content. At the same time, the boundaries between media spaces and everyday life are porous. We introduce media experiences into our everyday lives and vice versa. This brief glance suggests we are looking for a concept that understands mobile media as toys and communication devices in expressive identity performances; that allows for an interactionist perspective of identity construction as playing roles; and that accounts for a spatial view of media as identity settings that are both apart and connected, both real and make-believe, both potential and actual, both serious and enjoyable. This concept, I suggest, following De Mul, Frissen, and Raessens, is play (De Mul, 2005; De Mul, Frissen, & Raessens, 2005).

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[12] According to the International Telecommunication Union, in December 2008 the number of mobile phone subscribers passed the 4 billion mark, from 1 billion in 2001 (ITU, 2009: 3).

ii. Research question, arguments, and aims

The main research question is as follows:

How can the notion of play be employed to shed light on the ways mobile media technologies shape identities?

This question has three clauses, or sub-questions. What is the influence of mobile media technologies on present-day identities? What is typical of present-day technologically mediated identities that is not properly captured in existing theories of identity, specifically the influential theory of narrative identity? How can the notion of play be employed to acquire a better understanding of how mobile media shape identities? These questions permeate this thesis. The main argument is that mobile media shape identities in playful ways, and that play is a better medium to describe this mediation. This argument is both an empirical one (describing actual identity mediations), and a constructive one (prescribing a fruitful approach to understanding mediated identities through the lens of play). A second argument is that mobile media practices in 'mobile' urban societies foreground spatial dimensions of identity construction, not just the temporal dimensions of which narrative theory speaks. Nevertheless, despite some serious flaws narrative identity as a whole should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Instead it should be modified into a theory of playful identities. The aim of this study is to work towards this to-be 'theory of playful identities' that accounts for the shaping of identities by mobile media technologies. I do not pretend to develop a full-blown theory here. Instead I present the outlines of what such a theory might look like. The second aim is to show the power of play for media studies. To this end a play heuristics is developed that is applicable beyond mobile media, and sheds new light on how media technologies 'work' in the mediation of identity.

iii. Approach and outline

How do we set about the challenge ahead? In storytelling all coherence is constructed artificially, Ricoeur teaches. That certainly applies to this study. Research done for this study includes a two-month ethnographic fieldwork in Jakarta, Indonesia; an ongoing investigation of the interplay between new media and urban culture [13]; a funded Arts and Science collaboration about GPS-based mapping of mobilities and identities in Nigeria [14]; and literature studies of play, mobile media, urbanism, Indonesia, mobility, and identity. Discordance looms large. I choose to structure the argument inductively. In **chapter 1** we begin by preparing our set of instruments in order to make the argument that the mobile phone shapes identity construction in playful ways. The key terms of the research question are conceptualized: mobile media technologies, narrative identity, and play. In order to understand this 'shaping' of identities, we look into various approaches of the relation between mobile media technologies and society/identity, and what is 'mobile' about mobile media technologies (section 1.1). In order to claim that mobile media challenge narrative identity on a number of points, this theory is discussed in finer detail (section 1.2). In order to make the argument that play is more applicable to technologically mediated identities than narrative, we investigate the play concept in its various guises, and make an initial assessment of its usefulness (section 1.3). The use of play in media studies is not entirely new. In order to hook into existing work on play for studying the media, earlier research is reviewed. Some further accents are added that I consider typical of how mobile media shape the playful construction of identities (section 1.4). A structuring 'play' framework is set up to be applied later. Part of this framework consists of distinguishing four play levels: play on the mobile, play with the mobile, play through the mobile, and play by the mobile (section 1.5).

As said, identity is always a particular. Therefore, in the ensuing two chapters empirical evidence is presented of mobile media practices in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. This shows how mobile media and identities shape each other, and what is playful about this. In section 2.1 of **chapter 2** the stakes are set. Key notions are introduced to understand how mobile media shape identity construction in Jakarta: modernity, mobility, and the terms *gengsi* (prestige) and *bergaul* (modern socializing). In sections 2.2 and 2.3 a circle is drawn around the spatiotemporal identity setting

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[13] The project The Mobile City is an ongoing collaboration with Martijn de Waal. See http://www.themobilecity.nl (see also De Waal & De Lange, 2008; De Lange & De Waal, 2009).

[14] The project NomadicMILK involved a temporary collaboration with locative media artist Esther Polak. See http://co-ops.nl/site/co-ops/english, http://nomadicmilk.net, and De Lange & Polak, 2007. GPS means global positioning system: satellite navigation.

under investigation. Section 2.2 outlines how the notion of modernity has developed, by looking at the physical domain of spatial and cultural changes in Jakarta. Section 2.3 looks at the Indonesian media domain, and explores how changes in the media landscape combined with political upheaval prepared the ground for the reception and appropriation of the mobile phone as constitutive of new 'modern identities'. In section 2.4 the ball enters the game, when we discuss the production of mobile media as one part of the production/consumption cycle. In **chapter 3** we step inside the circle by shifting the perspective to users and specific mobile phone practices. In section 3.1 the two notions *gengsi* (prestige) and *bergaul* (modern socializing) are presented to understand how the mobile phone enables people to play with identities. In section 3.2 we see how the mobile phone shapes three types of mobility: corporeal, socio-economic, and imaginary mobility. Section 3.3 zooms out to identities at group levels. It shows how identities becomes objects of struggles that take place in the media domain, and how digital media technologies are focal points in these struggles. Media technologies accentuate the tension between difference and similarity but also alleviate this. In **chapter 4** a shift is made from the particular context of Indonesia to a more conceptual perspective of mobile media and identity, yet also within a specific setting (albeit broad), namely the urban context. In section 4.1 we discuss recent technological developments whereby portable devices, location-based technologies and information networks are integrated. These developents give rise to 'locative media' practices across multiple domains. In section 4.2 urbanism and the relation between the city and media technologies is discussed. In section 4.3 a mobile location-based playground features as a case of 'play on the mobile'. We see how this playground shapes our relations to the urban environment, to other people, and to ourselves. Particular attention is given to the tension between sameness and selfhood. In **chapter 5** the playful qualities of mobile media are analyzed in finer detail on the four play levels proposed in the play framework of section 1.5. In section 5.1 we look at two other kinds of play on the mobile. In section 5.2 play with the mobile is analyzed, and several play types are identified that tie mobile media to identity. In section 5.3 the argument is made that mobile phone communication resembles traditional gift circles, as known from classic studies in ethnography. Playful practices in gift exchanges are a case of play through the mobile. In section 5.4, shifts in the tension between freedom and force rise to the fore, when we analyze (mobile) media technologies as play by the mobile. In the concluding **chapter 6** we revisit narrative identity theory, and attempt to outline a theory of playful identities. Section 6.1 is a frontal attack on narrative identity theory's shortcomings from a play perspective, both as a general theory of identity and in its applicability to technologically mediated identities. A number of propositions are formulated along the way for the to-be developed theory of playful identities. Section

6.2 involves a 'rereading' of narrative identity theory through the eyes of mobile media's playful qualities and practices. It seeks to integrate narrative and play into a theory of playful identities.

1. Setting the stage: mobile media, narrative identity, and play

1.1 Understanding mobile media technologies

1.1.1 Four dimensions of mobile media

In the introductory chapter we formulated the main research question: how can the notion of play be employed to shed light on the ways mobile media technologies shape identities? If we dissect this question, one of the sub-questions is: what is the influence of mobile media technologies on present-day identities? To pose this question is to ask: which properties of mobile media technologies distinguish them from other (pre-existing) technologies? This implies that we should start by defining what is typical about mobile media technologies, before we attempt to 'single out' its influence on identity. This raises a few issues. The first caveat is that it is hard to single out any permanent and defining properties of the mobile phone. The mobile phone is - in marketing speak - so much more than just a phone without a wire. It develops in all kinds of directions, and is used in unpredictable ways. People use mobile devices for instance as music players and platforms to play games. A noticeable development is that mobile phones and networks, and desktop computers are growing together. Mobile phones become mobile computers. Positioning technologies are integrated in the device. As a result, mobile devices are used as interfaces to relate to physical places in a development called locative media. Following the approach of among others Gerard Goggin, I prefer to use 'mobile media' as a broader and more flexible term than 'mobile phone' (Goggin, 2006: 5-6). The second caveat is that mobile phones are not isolated from other media technologies that make up people's habitual media landscape. With the concept of 'media convergence', Henry Jenkins has pointed out that digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) are intertwined with old media (Jenkins, 2006). Not just as technologies but also in the media practices of active users or consumers. Throughout this thesis mobile phones are examined in interaction with other media. Mobile media in my approach are composed of four dimensions. (1) They are platforms on which we play games, and interfaces on which we play with the physical environment. (2) They are cultural artifacts that matter as material objects. (3) They obviously are communication technologies, and with the

mobile internet increasingly also information technologies. (4) They are part of a broader 'convergent' media culture that increasingly shapes our lives. This fourfold view of mobile media recurs throughout this thesis, and corresponds with the four 'play levels' proposed in section 1.5: play on, play with, play through, and play by the mobile. As a third caveat, the above question implies that mobile media technologies 'influence' or 'shape' identities in some way or ways. But how does this relation work? We need to take a brief look at some well-known approaches to technology and society/identity. After that, I highlight one of the defining qualities of mobile media: that they are 'mobile'. The concept 'mobility' is briefly introduced, followed by the question what actually is 'mobile' about the mobile phone.

1.1.2 Approaches to the relation between technology and identity

'Technological determinism' posits that changes in society and history are driven and caused by technologies (see Fischer, 1992; Flichy, 2002: 136; Webster, 1995). This view sees technology and the human domain as two separate spheres. It attributes technologies with inherent properties that cause certain effects. Although such reasoning is widespread in popular opinion, this reductionist view is no longer held in high esteem by researchers in the field of technology. They are sure to raise their eyebrows when they hear "technology X causes ..." or "the influence of technology Y on... (identity/society/culture/etc.)". Phrases like these suggest technology impacts society with a force of its own, instead of being part of society and in a way created by it. Sometimes technological determinism is cloaked in more elaborate formulations. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan for instance says that media technologies become 'cultures': press culture, mechanical culture, electric media culture. Via this detour he claims that each 'culture' brings about its own type of human and society (McLuhan, 1994).

The opposite of technological determinism is 'social constructivism', or social determinism, as its critics would say (Bijker & Law, 1992). In this view technologies have no inherent properties. It is the user who completely 'fills in' their uses and meanings. Such a perspective naturally highlights differences between and within technologies. A hammer can be a tool for driving nails into wood, or a murder weapon. The problem of this approach is that technologies are seen as blank slates devoid of any intrinsic qualities. Social constructivism is just as reductionist as technological determinism.

A dialectical two-way approach is often called 'mutual shaping' (Frissen, 1994). It implies we cannot just talk about "the influence of the mobile phone on identity", since it also works the other way around: people's identity practices shape how the

mobile phone is being constructed. But where lies the border? Moreover, this approach still conceptually separates technology from the human realm. The tension between 'are we shaped by the mobile phone?', and 'are we shaping the mobile phone?' is a recurrent one in this thesis. We encounter this tension in the two chapters about the mobile phone in Indonesia (chapter 2 and 3). Its forceful implications are addressed specifically under the heading 'play by the mobile' in section 5.4. There I advance the side-argument that the notion of play can be employed to less categorically oppose the technological realm and the human realm.

The 'affordance' approach takes a middle position between technological and social determinism, although it departs from medium-specific qualities (Norman, 1988). According to this approach, technologies have inherent properties that invite people to make use of them in a certain way. For instance, a ball invites people to kick it in order to make it roll. I argue that mobile media technologies have playful affordances, which after Kücklich I call their 'playability' (Kücklich, 2004). Still, this approach runs the risk of being a tautological way of reasoning. Because people use a technology in a certain way, it must have this type of use inherently built in. There is no possibility for deviant uses or understandings of these technologies, since anything goes (Ling, 2004: 26).

'Domestication' is an approach that sees the adoption of new items into the household as an uncertain process rather then a predetermined given. Igor Kopytoff, one of the inspirers of the domestication approach, says that commodities, like people, have a biography (Kopytoff, 1986: 66-68). Domestication originally was but one side of the design/domestication pair proposed by Silverstone and Haddon (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). Silverstone and Haddon take design broadly as composed of three interrelated dimensions: creating the artifact (the functional and aesthetic design of a product; this is design in a narrow sense), constructing the user (creating objects with certain people in mind), and catching the consumer (how products are marketed) (ibid: 45). Domestication also involves three steps in the adoption cycle of commodification (how objects and technologies emerge in the marketplace), appropriation (how people take these products home and familiarize themselves with them), and conversion (how people signal their active participation in consumption and innovation to other people) (ibid: 45-46) [15]. These are not necessarily sequential steps. They feed back into each other. In what is called 'double articulation', technologies are both artifacts charged with symbolic meanings and media that carry messages (ibid: 62). We will see how these stages each elicit their own form of play. Often, in studies about media

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[15] Confusingly, some authors speak of four steps: appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003: 14). Yet others even mention five steps: imagination, appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion (Ling, 2004: 28).

technologies the domestication perspective is taken on its own, without looking at the design process. Domestication alone solely focuses on the user side. It tends to neglect how technologies are produced, and strictly separates production from consumption. For instance, Kopytoff contrasts the homogenizing force of the economy with culture and the individual (Kopytoff, 1986: 87). In chapter 2 we see that the production of the mobile phone too is 'cultural', and infused with values and preconceptions.

This cultural view of design exists in the view that looks at the 'scripting' of products (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003: 7-11). This perspective focuses on the production side of technologies to account for the ways that uses and meanings are pre-inscribed. The textbook example is the gendered design of shaving apparatuses. Male shavers are black with shiny metal lining, have multiple knobs and handles to tweak settings, and look 'sharp'. Female shavers are pink or white, have only one button (on/off), and a curved 'cute' animal-like or anthropomorphic shape. This view takes the process of design and production as a human and cultural phenomenon too. Production is not one-dimensionally imagined as either evil capitalism at its worst, or perfectly rationalized and aimed at maximizing profit (and therefore not worth studying).

'Actor-network theory' takes the idea that humans and things are not so different and both have agency to a radical new height (Latour, 1998). Its basic assumption is that actor-networks like "society, organisations, agents and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials" (Law, 1992: 2). For instance, complex networks (a government) often come to look like single actors, while individual actors are often composed of so many different strands that in fact they can be seen as networks (Law, 1992: 2). In this view, technology and society are not static and diametrically opposed entities but coexist as dynamic and contingent 'actor-networks' (Goggin, 2006: 11). Applying this to the mobile phone, Steve Woolgar rejects a static essentialist notion of 'the technology'. Instead, he emphasizes contingency in constructing uses and meanings with the term 'interpretative flexibility' (Woolgar, 2005: 27). By this he means that "the technology *could be otherwise*" (ibid). This is interesting terrain for our to-be-developed play perspective on media technologies and identities. Woolgar's view suggests that technologies (also) exist in the subjunctive modality of the *as if*. Roger Silverstone well-captures this, when he speaks about media in general:

> The media experience is, in some significant and general sense... subjunctive. To be in the world but not of it. To be of it but not in it. To see the media as providing a frame for experience, but also to see the media themselves as transformed by experience.... To acknowledge that so much much of culture, our culture, our media culture, consists in the acceptance of the 'as-if-ness' of the world

(Silverstone, 1999: 59)

This subjunctive mode invites a playful stance towards the media. We return to Silverstone's groundbreaking explorations of play and media in section 1.4.

'Media convergence' refers both to the integration of technologies and services, and to changing user practices that span multiple media platforms. As early as 1983, Ithiel de Sola Pool writes about changes in the traditional mass media industries. These were forming new business ties with "the electrical industry" (Pool, 1983: 23). According to Pool, "[a] process called the 'convergence of modes' is blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone, and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, radio, and television" (ibid). This leads him to conclude that "the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding" (ibid). This point is taken up by Henry Jenkins and applied to developments in digital media (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins argues that new digital technologies do not replace 'old' mass media, as often claimed. Instead, "the emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways" (ibid: 6). Convergence does not mean simply stuffing more and more functions into a single apparatus [16]. At the device level there is just as much divergence. Convergence is a cultural phenomenon. Other than the time of electronic media about which De Sola Pool writes, convergence in the digital age does not consist solely of relationships between big media conglomerates but is user-centered. "Convergence doesn't just involve commercially produced materials and services traveling along well-regulated and predictable circuits. [...] It also occurs when people take media in their own hands. Entertainment content isn't the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms. Our lives, relationships, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels. Being a lover or a mommy or a teacher occurs on multiple platforms" (ibid: 17). In this converged world, the boundaries between various media, and between media and everyday life, have been blurred.

My approach to mobile media is not a strict version of either of these. Instead, for each of the four dimensions of mobile media - interfaces, cultural artifacts, information- and communication technologies, part of media culture - I take what I deem the most applicable perspective. The design/domestication approach is useful for understanding artifacts and media, the convergence approach to mobile media as interfaces and as media culture. Overall, I assume a mutual shaping perspective. Some elements of other approaches recur as well (and I shall explain why, when we reach those points).

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[16] With some irony Jenkins notes that as an early adopter his home is filled with ever more black boxes (Jenkins, 2006: 15).

1.1.3 What is 'mobile' about mobile media?

Mobile media are 'mobile'. But what is 'mobility'? Tim Cresswell defines mobility as "meaningful movement" (Cresswell, 2006: 2-3). Instead of being a mere displacement between point A and point B (and therefore wasted time), mobility itself is meaningful. Movement is the dynamic equivalent of location, a position in abstract space, while mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place, a location imbued with meaning and power (ibid: 2-3; Sheller & Urry, 2006). The question turns to what is 'meaningful', and to whom? Cresswell argues that mobility has become a root metaphor for our contemporary understanding of culture and society. Two opposing views of mobility exist: a 'sedentary metaphysics' and a 'nomadic metaphysics' (Cresswell, 2006: 26). Sedentary metaphysics involves an outlook on the world that takes fixed existence as the norm. It sees sedentary life as rooted, stable, safe, orderly, and rational. Mobility and nomadic people - gypsies, wanderers, and vagabonds - symbolize chaos, disruption, fear, and a threat to society's order. By contrast, a 'nomadic metaphysics' attaches many positive connotations to mobility. Mobility is progressive, exciting, contemporary, and anti-establishment. Rootedness, and all things static and bounded possess negative connotations, like being reactionary, dull, and of the past. Cresswell's emphasis on the rhetorical power of 'mobility' is a healthy antidote to entrapment in either celebratory or dismissive views of contemporary life as mobile [17]. Another theorist of mobility, John Urry, distinguishes five types of travel (Urry, 2007: 47). These are corporeal travel of people, physical movement of objects, imaginative travel of images via various media, virtual travel through real-time media, and communicative travel via interpersonal messages (ibid: 47). In chapter 3 we will see how the mobile phone shapes several types of mobilities. In chapter 4 we see how 'meaningful' mobilities occur on a location-based playground. Another notion forwarded by Urry is that of 'mobility systems' (ibid: 13). These are complex constellations of both technologies that enable mobility, and fixed infrastructures on which this mobility relies. Mobility systems enable and constrain movement, permitting "predictable and relatively risk-free repetition of the movements in question" (ibid: 13). Mobility systems increasingly rely on software code. Mobile media make up such a mobility system. For instance, they depend on coded operating systems, communication infrastructures, networks of production and logistics, distribution and repair, a pool of consumer outlets and information channels, third party service and content providers, and so on. Mobile media exist *in* and *as* a network of interdependencies (as described by actor-network theory). Mobile media then are characterized by flow as much as by fixity.

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[17] Examples of such extremes are Braidotti's praise of 'nomadic subjectivity', versus Bauman's mourning over the loss of stability in the age of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000; Braidotti, 1998).

What's in a name? Consider for a moment a number of terms for the mobile phone. In several countries, the common name for mobile phones is *handphone*. In Indonesia (the locus of chapters 2 and 3) this word is often abbreviated as *hape* or *HP*. In other countries derivatives like the German *handy* are in use. These terms foreground the relation between the device and the personal body. Handphones are portable, wearable and tactile instruments. They are small and lightweight, and easy to carry along when on the move. Handphones are wearable since they are taken anywhere and are often close to the body. Handphones are haptic devices that are grasped and interacted with by using particular gestures (see Hjorth, 2009: 248). This gives rise to new public postures and bodily positions centered around the object [18]. The word handphone suggests the device is always 'ready-to-hand' and useful to its individual carrier (Heidegger, 1967: 98; see also Nyíri, 2003a; Urry, 2007: 31). A second term used frequently is *cellphone*, a contraction of cellular telephone. In Indonesia, this word is commonly used alongside *handphone* (as *ponsel: pon* for phone, *sel* for *sellular*). This term stresses the relation to the infrastructure, and its untethering from fixed locations. Cellphones are wireless technologies that operate in a mesh network. Cellphone users are not tied to fixed locations but can roam around. With cellphones, online personalized services and environments can be accessed at any time and from anywhere [19]. At the same time, cellphones depend on the availability of networks and issues like signal strength, price plans for roaming, connection to and integration with other networks, data plans. The word cellphone underlines the dependency of mobile communication on fixed infrastructures and institutions, as part of mobility systems. The most common term is *mobile phone*. This word emphasizes the potential to use the phone on the go. People can access information, communicate, maintain social relations, consume and produce content while on the move. We can remain 'in touch' with others even while corporeally traveling.

Handphone, cellphone, and mobile phone emphasize different aspects of what is 'mobile' in mobile media: portability and wearability; its relation to the fixed network and the potential for accessing personalized services from anywhere; and maintaining (intimate) connections during corporeal travel. Whatever name is given, mobile media reconfigure how we relate to places, how we move, how we organize our social relations and our own life. Moving away from this semantic understanding, what actual mobility practices are sustained by mobile media? Mobile media are 'mobile' because they enable people to be mobile in various ways. Both in actual practice and

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[18] They might even contribute to new types of physical illnesses like RSI (repetitive strain injury) as a result of typing on tiny keyboards. See "RSI danger from excessive texting" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/5063364.stm.

[19] Services that are able to relay and distribute data are often called 'cloud computing'. Individual devices are merely 'cells' in a larger body or 'cloud' from which services can be accessed on demand.

because of their mobility potential (see Urry, 2007: 38-39). Before the rise of early modern transport and electronic communication technologies, physical travel and communication went hand in hand. If you wanted to talk to someone elsewhere you had to corporeally move [20]. Modern 'space and time transcending' technologies caused a rift between corporeal travel and communication. These were turned into separate realms. People corporeally traveling would be largely incommunicado. And people who were communicating did so at a specific place while physically at rest. With the development of wireless radio it became possible for ships and trains to have communication on board. But costs were prohibitive. Moreover, travelers still had to go to a specific place aboard, the communication room, and remained in position while communicating. These two mobilities thus obeyed separate laws of nature: physical mobility fell under the laws of gravity and acceleration, and communication under the laws of electronics. Initially, digital media technologies took this separation even further. Computer-mediated communication took place 'immobilized' behind a screen. Initially on centralized mainframes, and later on personal computers (PCs) behind a desktop. In the early days of the internet, 'cyberspace' was considered a realm apart from everyday reality. Later, internet research focused on relations between the online and physical world (Hampton & Wellman, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2000; Wellman, 2001). For example, people who were more active online also tended to be more active in their neighborhoods. The internet was seen increasingly not as a substitute of everyday life, but as complementary (see Urry, 2007: 164-165).

What makes mobile media unique, then, is that individual people - and physical objects - can now physically move, while at the same time they are able to communicate. They carry their own individual communication hub with them, without the need to sit still at a particular location. As a consequence, the domains of physical transport and 'virtual' communication edge towards each other, intersect, and merge. Mobile communication acquires physical dimensions. First, the materiality of mobile phones as artifacts matters. Their small form-factor makes it possible to use them in an unobtrusive, casual manner (Kato, 2005: 105-6), or even quasi-illicitly by students during class (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 162). They are objects that by their looks and tactile properties convey symbolic meanings to, and about its carrier. By virtue of their material presence and visibility, phones can be used to claim personal space during

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[20] Multiple technologies existed in pre-modern times to communicate without traveling: visual signals (e.g. smoke signals, light signals), sound (e.g. drumming, horn blowing). Additionally, techniques were invented in non-literate societies to overcome the temporal impermanence of face-to-face communication by 'recording' information, for instance incising tree bark, stacking stones, knotting cords, and so on. Other senses besides the eyes and ears are involved in communication, often on a more unconscious level, like smell and touch. Moreover, many cultures had (and have) some kind of belief in telepathy, visions, revelations, and so on, as forms of communication over large distances and/or in time without actual corporeal travel.

travel, or to engage in 'stage-phoning': pretending to make a call in public (Plant, 2001: 49). Second, the embodiment of the person carrying the phone matters. Mobile communication technologies are worn close to the body (Fortunati, 2002a). Not some fixed physical location but the human body is now the hub where flows of information and communication intersect. Wearability and fashionability matter, as mobile phones become part of the body's dress-up, postures, performances, and sense of security (Fortunati, et al., 2003; Ling, 2008: 133-134; Ling & Yttri, 2002: 164). Moreover, mobile media are not only carried by people but also embedded in traveling objects, for instance as *RFID* (radio frequency identification) tags. These are already widely used in logistics, and now start to appear more and more in everyday objects like public transport cards and (car) keys (Sterling, 2005). Third, physical contexts in which communication takes place matter. Mobile media are not used in a void, or in a single physical place (work, home). People make mobile phone calls in a wide variety of spatiotemporal contexts, or 'social situations'. The physical element of these situations tends to seep through in communication. For instance, background noises turn mobile phone calls into guessing games of "where are you?". And events happening in physical space are immediately captured, described, and commented upon via mobile communication devices and networks. The question "where are you?" has in fact taken over the former "how are you?". In chapter 4 we look at new developments that tie the exchange of information and communication to physical locations. With location-based technologies, 'place' is integrated even more into mobile media interactions.

1.2 The storytelling self: narrative identity

Numerous philosophers - both Anglo-American and European - have forwarded the idea that identity can be understood as narrative [21]. Certainly the most elaborate theoretical framework has been set up by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1992). In *Oneself as Another* Paul Ricoeur aims to overcome problematic aspects of earlier conceptions of selfhood (Ricoeur, 1992: 4-16). Descartes posited the

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[21] Philosophers who have written about narrative identity include Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1984: ch. 15), Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1989), Daniel Dennett (Dennett, 1992), and Marya Schechtman (Schechtman, 1996). Narrative has also been embraced by sociologists (Giddens, 1991), psychologists (Bruner, 1991; Gergen, 1998, 2000), and anthropologists (Fabian, 1983, 1991; Geertz, 1975b) to talk about culture and identities.

doubting *ego cogito* that was sure of one thing: it is *I* who doubts, and therefore I exist. But this *cogito* bears no relation to other people and is devoid of historical context. Nietzsche shattered this idea of ego. He argued that subjectivity is nothing but an illusion brought about by rhetorics. More recent attempts to solve the problem of identity - mostly in the Anglo-American analytic tradition - in the end all get stuck in conceptualizing *sameness* but not *selfhood*. Ricoeur's answer is a hermeneutics of the self. The self can only be understood indirectly by means of interpretation (*verstehen* instead of *erklären*). Self-interpretation is mediated by narrative. Narrative mediates three dialectics of personal identity. How can we reflexively talk about ourselves in the third person, that is, how does the *I* relate to the *self*? How does sameness over time and being identical to oneself (*idem*) relate to the experience of selfhood (*ipse*) and the potential for change? And how does the self relate to other people (ibid: 18, 21)? Since I take identity not only as personal but also as group identity, I have combined Ricoeur's first two dialectics in *sameness* versus *selfhood*, phrased his third in other terms as *difference* versus *similarity*, and added another one that I see as particularly urgent in technologically mediated identities: *freedom* versus *force*.

Elsewhere, Ricoeur writes that narrative mediates between three relations that make up our identity. "[Literary text] is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself; the mediation between man and the world is what we call *referentiality*; the mediation between men, *communicability*; the mediation between man and himself, *self-understanding*" (Ricoeur, 1991a: 27). These three relations inform my relational view of identity. However, I argue that the relation between man and the world is not one of mere referentiality (this is discussed at length in section 6.1). We not only speak about the world in referential terms, or think about it in representational symbols. We also interact with the world and actualize it, and ourselves, in the doing [22]. This constitutes one of my main arguments: our relation to the world and other people is not one of mere narrative referentiality to action but is better captured as playful interaction, in an oscillating movement between play and being played.

In true hermeneutic vein Ricoeur approaches his hard to catch prey by means of a complex detour. The first step in Ricoeur's movement involves analyzing the capacity of language for identification, or more precisely individualization [23]. Individualization means being able to refer to one specific thing among others. Its inverse is

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[22] This neglect of acting in the world is all the more odd since Ricoeur does pay attention to speech act theories by J.L. Austin and Searle. Ricoeur asserts all speech is action. True, but not all action is referential or representational speech.

[23] The word identification is ambiguous. It refers to the process of singling out the specific among the number ("that tall man with the blue jacket stole my wallet"), which is meant here, but also to the experience of belonging based on perceived similarity ("I am a Dutchman").

classification, which subsumes the singular (this girl) under a generalizing concept (women, people, etc.). Individualization occurs through the "individualizing operators" of language. Among these are definite descriptions (the first man to walk on the moon), proper names (Socrates), and identifying references (I, you, this, here, now) (Ricoeur, 1992: 27-28). It means answering the question *which* (which person are you talking about?), and even precedes the questions *what* and *who*. Individualization by means of semantics does not yet make a distinction between things and persons. Moreover, it emphasizes sameness but not yet selfhood. How do we get from here to a notion of identity as *selfhood* that is unique of persons, Ricoeur asks. Ascription of actions to persons offers a passageway. Identifying references attribute actions to an agent. They thereby designate a unique being in the world, someone with a specific body and mental events that belong to him (and not to someone else). In order to combine this third person perspective (the person as the object of identifying references) with a first and second person perspective (I and you as agents of an action), Ricoeur brings in the pragmatics of speech act theory and theory of action. Saying is always acting (Ricoeur means doing, not play-acting). When I say "the cat is on the mat" I am actually performing the statement "I affirm to you that the cat is on the mat". In saying this, it is I as a speaker who is directing an utterance at you as a listener. Uttering necessarily implies an other. Both I and you are implicated as acting subjects in speech acts. As soon as someone makes an utterance, the generic I (which could designate anyone) shifts to a specific I (the one who is speaking here and now). By (self-)ascription of actions through utterances, I can separate *me* and *you* from the world (ibid: 43, 49). The person as the semantic object of identifying reference in the world (third person) is now joined with the pragmatic subject as the world-limit (first/second person). "What ... distinguishes ascription from the simple attribution of a predicate to a logical subject is the agent's power to designate herself by designating her other" (ibid: 111).

1.2.1 Idem and ipse identity

This still leaves open the temporal dimension of the self as an agent with a history. How does the capacity to designate ourselves in signifying the world affect and change us? How can a sequence of actions be connected to an entire life? With this difficult issue of resolving permanence in time, the problem of personal identity is rephrased as the confrontation between sameness (*idem* identity) and selfhood (*ipse* identity). *Idem* points to sameness over time. *Idem* means being one and the same person quantitatively, being an indivisible person, and qualitatively, being consistent as a character. *Ipse* points to the experience we have of being a unified person, and to the

capacity we have of taking initiatives. These two conceptions of self combine two orders in which people live: the physical order of causality (*idem*) and the intentional order of motives for action (*ipse*). These two orders recur at various stages in this thesis, as I argue that the play concept focuses on a third order, the conditional order, that becomes ever more crucial in identity mediations via media technologies. Sameness (*idem*) is a relational concept, a "relation of relations" (ibid: 116). It compares two or more items (X is the same as Y). Sameness consists of a numerical component (quantitatively being one and the same), a qualitative component (extreme resemblance, e.g. two exact same suits that are interchangeable), a component of uninterrupted continuity (the sameness of a person's changing body and face over time), and finally permanence in time (the organization of a combinatory system into a structure) (ibid: 116-117). To illustrate Ricoeur's rather abstract formulation of this last point, we may (again) point out that even though most of the cells in the human body change every seven years, someone retains a sense of permanence in time as being and having one and the same body. This last element, permanence in time, opens up the door for identity as selfhood (*ipse* identity). How can a form of permanence in time be established that is irreducible to the question "What am I?" (a substratum like body cells, or substance like the cogito), but is a reply to the question "Who am I"? To this question Ricoeur forwards the theory of narrative identity.

In his earlier *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur already introduces narrative identity as a specific mode of temporal being (Ricoeur, 1988: 244-249). Narrative constitutes a 'third-time' that connects cosmological time (objective calendar time) and phenomenological 'lived time' (subjectively experienced time) [24] (Ricoeur, 1984: 86-87; 1988: 245). His argument is that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricoeur, 1984: 52). Since human time is narrated, there is no clear distinction between historical accounts and fictional narratives. On the one hand history is fictionalized. It depends on controlled imagination to move from the dated past to the reconstructed past to the refigured past, in order to invoke an illusion of vividness. Fiction, on the other hand, is historicized. The narrative voice recounts events *as if* it were the past for him (Ricoeur, 1988: 180-192). In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur succinctly sums up the argument in *Time and Narrative* insofar as it pertains to identity. "Self-understanding is interpretation. This interpretation of the self finds in the narrative a privileged form of mediation. Narrative borrows both from history and from fiction. This makes the life-

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[24] Subjective time has been understood quite differently by different thinkers. Where Augustine sees a collision of past and future into the eternal 'now' of the present, Heidegger - and Dilthey - speak of existential finitude and orientation towards death.

story a fictional history or historical fiction" (Ricoeur, 1992: 114 fn1). This claim is both an object of critique in this thesis and its starting point. Is narrative still the dominant medium we think with (has it always been so, and everywhere)? If our media culture and practices change, does narrative remain the privileged form of mediation? Or must we find another mediation that better suits contemporary identities?

1.2.2 Threefold mimesis

The realm of the imaginative *as if* is key to narrative mediation. Ricoeur forwards a threefold circular sequence of imitations, which he calls *mimesis1*, *mimesis2*, and *mimesis3*. First, we already have an implicit narrative preunderstanding of the world of action (everyday life). Ricoeur calls this *narrative prefiguration* (*mimesis1*). Action has structural, symbolic and temporal features. If narrative plot is an imitation of action, then an initial competence for identifying the *structure* of actions is required. The structure of actions consists of a conceptual network of goals, motives, agents, circumstances, and interactions with-. Precisely the stuff narrative is made of. Our narrative preunderstanding of the world therefore actualizes the practical field by giving signification to the disparate elements, and integrates the practical field by synthesizing the heterogeneous elements into a whole. Second, narrative preunderstanding confers 'readability' on actions by imbuing them with shared *symbolic meanings*. Action is "a quasi-text", because cultural symbols provide common rules for the interpretation of behavior. By 'reading' symbols we understand whether raising one's hand symbolizes greeting someone, hailing a taxi, or voting (Ricoeur, 1984: 58). Third - and this is the point around which *Time and Narrative* revolves - we recognize in action *temporal dimensions* that call for narration (ibid: 59). We connect the linear sequence of actions in cosmological time to subjective 'lived time' by applying narratives. Ricoeur summarizes: "[t]o imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics" (ibid: 64). Thanks to this prenarrative understanding of the practical field of actions we can express our experiences and actions in stories. Do we indeed preunderstand the world of actions and events as (solely) made up of stories? In section 1.3 I argue that various types of play are equally powerful 'mediating metaphors' for understanding the world, and our place in. Further on in this thesis I argue that mobile media contribute to a shift in our prereflexive understanding of the world in terms of a dialectic between free play and rule-governed games.

Second, actions and events in life are organized *as if* they were narrative. Composing a story means drawing a configuration out of a succession. We place separate elements into the structure of the plot, and turn ourselves into characters. Ricoeur calls this *narrative configuration* (*mimesis2*). Emplotment mediates between individual events and the story as a whole. The event gets meaning from its contribution to the story, and the story in turn organizes events into an intelligible whole. Emplotment mediates between heterogeneous events and the unity of the story. Plot also gives primacy to concordance over discordance (Ricoeur, 1991a: 22). This means that individual elements acquire their meaning inasmuch as they fit into the whole. This *concordant discordance* is the most important mediation of the plot, Ricoeur says, since it connects the practical field with the field of narrative fiction. The plot brings actions and events in a logical relation to each other, and connects them to the characters of the story (Ricoeur, 1984: 66; 1992: 141). Emplotment mediates between two modes of time: the linear chronology of episodic events and the configured temporal unity that is the story. Plot gives the story a beginning and an end, and an overarching point or theme. Narrative configuration does not only consist of writing but also of reading. The narrative scheme allows people to follow a story, retell it, and reflexively apply it to their lives. This scheme is embedded in cultural traditions. Traditions consist of genres (Greek tragedy), and of great key works (the Iliad). Tradition oscillates between sedimentation and innovation. Tradition offers lasting paradigms that lay down the rules for authoring and reading, and room for experimentation with these rules. Therefore, according to Ricoeur, even innovation is rule-governed. This is particularly apparent in new literary styles such as the anti-novel, where deviance has become the rule. Ricoeur himself poses the question whether such radical innovations entail the "death of narrative". However, he subsumes such deviance under paradigmatic change within narrative tradition itself (ibid: 69-70, 80). In my view this is a hermetic rather than a hermeneutic approach. Instead, I would propose that true innovation occurs outside the paradigm. To develop a new perspective on mediated identities we must step outside the rules of narrative, and play by other rules. Furthermore, I argue that mobile media communications as interactions are not neatly organized in a unified plot with a clear beginning and closure. For instance, mobile conversations tend to highlight discordant events. And instead of having clear openings and closures, mobile conversations between intimates are never-ending 'infinite games'.

Third, we reflexively reconfigure ourselves by applying narratives to our life and that of others. This is called *narrative reconfiguration* (*mimesis3*). At this stage the world of text and the world of the hearer/reader intersect. The narrative scheme and tradition of *mimesis2* contribute to a breaking down of the opposition between the

worlds inside and outside of a text. Narrative only acquires its full meaning "when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering in mimesis3" (ibid: 70). The "received paradigms" (i.e. the plotting scheme plus narrative genres) offer guiding rules how to read. They shape the expectations of the reader. And by the act of reading the story is actualized (ibid: 76). This 'reading' of the plot joins *mimesis2* to *mimesis3*. We reflect on ourselves and come to understand ourselves as readers and writers of our own life (Ricoeur, 1988: 246). A great advantage, Ricoeur asserts, is that narrative identity can be applied to the individual as well as to communities. Both the individual and the community turn narrative into an actual history in order to preserve self-constancy (ibid: 247). One question Ricoeur does not answer is to what extent individual and communal stories may differ and indeed clash (the difference - similarity paradox). Furthermore, he does not tell how an increasing number of people nowadays move between perhaps incompatible individual and shared 'imagined histories', and how these stories themselve travel via various media. We need a view that takes such mobilities into account, and offers a perspective on difference in relation to similarity.

1.2.3 Narrative identity: character and promise

According to Ricoeur, narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. Ricoeur admits that because of the emphasis in *Time and Narrative* on the relation between history and fiction, it lacked "a clear comprehension of what is at stake in the very question of identity applied to persons or communities" (Ricoeur, 1992: 114 fn 1). It is in *Oneself as Another* that he applies narrative most forcefully to identity. Narrative acts as a mediator between the pole of *character*, in which *idem* and *ipse* coexist, and the pole of *self-maintenance* or *promising*, which marks the gap between the permanence of sameness and that of the intentional self. Character is "the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (ibid: 121). Habitual dispositions that are distinctively mine (*ipse*) become character traits that make me recognizable as one and the same person (*idem*). The character of a person or a community is also made up of shared "identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, *in* which the person or community recognizes itself. Recognizing oneself *in* contributes to recognizing oneself *by*" (ibid: 121). Loyalty to shared values is internalized, and contributes to the fidelity of one's character. If the acquisition of habits entails a dialectic between innovation and sedimentation, identification is a dialectic between otherness and internalization. Character - composed of habits and identifications - is a largely stable component of personal identity. In character, selfhood presents itself as sameness. "[It is] the 'what' of the 'who'. It deflects the question "who am I?" to "what am I?" (ibid: 122). There is another model of permanence in time besides character (the generalized "what" of

identity). That is the promise [25]. Keeping one's word in faithfulness stands as a challenge to time. It provides self-constancy solely on the level of the particular: the 'who' of identity (ibid: 123-124). The promise marks Ricoeur's move from description to prescription. It stands out as an ethical imperative to which one should adhere. In addition to the givenness of character, the promise adds the element of choice to identity. Narrative thus not only mediates between *idem* and *ipse* but also between the two modes of maintaining permanence in time: character and the promise.

Still, the application of fictional narrative to life itself (*mimesis3*) poses some problems, Ricoeur notes. With the exception of autobiographical narrative, author, narrator, and character are distinct. Further, life itself has no clear beginning (who remembers his own birth?), nor an end that we can oversee. Life seems incomplete when compared to narratives that have openings and closures. Additionally, life consists of multiple and often incommensurable stories that are entangled with the histories of others. Finally, the application of narrative to one's own life seems to cover only the remembrance of past experiences to the exclusion of future anticipations (ibid: 159-161). Ricoeur tackles these objections one by one. He argues that only a naive conception of mimesis would make these arguments seem valid. Precisely because fiction is an imitation of life, it can be appropriated and applied to life. The problem of authorship then becomes part of the struggle between individual agency and playing a role in a play we did not write ourselves. (This is the closest Ricoeur gets to the tension between freedom and force). Life's incompleteness is not incongruent with narrative unity; rather, it is resolved with the help of fiction. We need to impose narrative beginnings and ends to our actions in life in order to retrospectively organize them. As for the entanglement of life histories, he goes on, doesn't the narrative with its different protagonists and references to other narratives offer an intelligible model to deal with this complexity? The final objection - applying narrative to life is only retrospective - neglects that the narrative, by looking back to the past, sows the seeds of future-oriented anticipations (ibid: 162-163). Ricoeur concludes: "literary narratives and life histories, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary, despite, or even because of, their contrast. This dialectic reminds us that the narrative is part of life before being exiled from life in writing; it returns to life along the multiple paths of appropriation and at the price of the unavoidable tensions just mentioned" (ibid: 163).

Several points are disputable (and will be provided with further argumentation in the final chapter). First, the idea that identities only exist as interpretations seems one-sided. In Ricoeur's view, identities come into being though interpretations "after the fact", to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geerz (Geertz, 1995). Even while he asserts

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[25] Ricoeur's *promise* is similar to the notion of *commitment*, which Charles Taylor sees as a central aspect of identity (Taylor, 1989: 27).

that narrative sows the seeds for future anticipations, each event has to pass through the interpretative cycle of mimesis to be fitted in (or discarded). It neglects a perspective of identities as performed actualizations in the here and now. Further, do we indeed still understand ourselves as characters in stories with the rise of mobile media technologies? It shall be argued that the interactivity of mobile media on multiple play levels gives rise to self-understanding as players. A third point that appears disputable is the strength of the promise nowadays. Considering the way many people flexibly organize their lives with the aid of mobile phones, this stable promising self seems to become a rarity. I argue that the focus shifts from *what* is being said to the conditions under which promising statements are made. Finally, the ethical imperative that we *should* be promising selves I find hard to accept. It favors stability, unity, and fixity over change, multiplicity and movement.

The ethical imperative in Ricoeur's work further shines through in his idea that human life is merely a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted. Following Socrates' maxim, he says life is only worthwhile when it is examined (Ricoeur, 1991a: 28). We can only know ourselves via the detour of the narrative. The narrative is the privileged form of mediation because we are most familiar with the various types of plot in stories as a way of cultural learning (ibid: 23). In Ricoeur's own words:

> The refiguration by narrative confirms this aspect of self-knowledge which goes far beyond the narrative domain, namely, that the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action and, among them, the narratives of everyday life. Narrative mediation underlines this remarkable characteristic of self-knowledge - that it is self-interpretation. The appropriation of the identity of the fictional character by the reader is one of its forms. What narrative interpretation brings in its own right is precisely the figural nature of the character by which the self, narratively interpreted, turns out to be a *figured* self - which imagines itself (*se figure*) in this or that way.
> (Ricoeur, 1991b: 198-199)

Narrative identity theory *can* account for the translatability, mobility and the multiplicity of cultural 'blueprints' for self-understanding, even while in my view Ricoeur pays too little attention to it. Narratives can easily be put in another language, although inevitably something gets lost in translation [26]. Narratives do not necessarily

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[26] This loss results both from the fact that each language has unique hard to translate expressions (German *Weltschmerz* and Portuguese *saudade* are typically forwarded as untranslatable), and because a certain background knowledge of a cultural context or narrative tradition is presupposed in the reader. Still, the accumulated reading of narratives from one narrative tradition may increase this background knowledge of elsewhere. In a very real sense, reading can give the reader a sense of nearness to a place he/she may have

rely on synchronicity or physical co-presence to be shared among people. They can be communicated across time and distance through various media technologies (books, radio, television, internet, mobile phones, and so on). Further, individuals and communities can apply multiple narratives with different origins to themselves, instead of founding their identities on a singular characteristic or essence. Narratives can even be folded into each other. This allows for onion-like layered identities that span across time and space. In this respect, narrative's explanatory power appears to fit well with both traditional identities based on physical proximity, and with modern 'imagined' identities. A sketchy meta-narrative of the concept of (western) identity illustrates this.

Socio-historical accounts of western identity describe a transition from "communities of life", with identity founded on shared space, to "communities of fate", with identity founded on shared ideas (see Bauman & Vecchi, 2004: 11) [27]. Identity in pre-modern times was firmly tied to a singular physical setting and social position. People often were born from parents hailing from one place. They lived in one village, worked one job. They occupied a rigidly defined position in a social hierarchy, and stayed there during their whole life. Narratives about the world descended from undisputed mythical sources. They described and legitimized the world order as it was. Everyday stories - gossip, parables, fairytales - served as valves to preserve the social order. With the birth of modern nation-states, identifications shifted to 'imagined communities' based on shared idea(l)s (Anderson, 1991). Supra-local organizational entities arose: the city, the monarchy or the republic, and indeed later the nation-state. These became time- and space transcending units for identifications with fellow citizens one did not even know personally [28]. Identification was no longer a given fact of life, merely confirmed by transmitted narratives, but had to be imagined and actively created through stories [29]. Supra-local and idea-based identities needed man-made 'grand narratives' that prescribed how society should be organized. The legitimacy of stories was no longer founded on their mythical origins but on the spirit of great achievement humans were capable of. And they were grand indeed, often starting with capitals: Enlightenment, Civilization, Imperialism, Nationalism. The expansion of idea-based communities peaked with nation-transcending, universalist ideas: liberal

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never visited physically.

[27] Some influential early sociological notions that capture this shift include Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*; Durkheim's *mechanical solidarity* to *organic solidarity*; and Weber's shift from charismatic and traditional societies to rational disenchanted bureaucracies.

[28] It should be added that already much earlier the monotheistic religions constituted imaginary bonds that transcended the local.

[29] Because of this, the need to define otherness and difference also became urgent. A well-known example is the emerging urban bourgeoisie, who in every possibly way sought distinction from the peasantry and lower classes. Multiple borders between *us* and *them* had to be erected, literally so in the case of nation-states.

democracy, communism, fascism, modernity, 'western world', 'non aligned nations', pan-Arabism. Then a second great rupture in the foundation of identity occurred (often placed in the mid-20th century, in the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War). Man-made grand narratives lost their legitimacy, at least in many western countries. They were debunked as potentially destructive, and regarded as repressing individuality. This became an era of growing individualism [30]. With the loss of belief in grand narratives and institutions, a new foundation of identity arose. As we have seen with Giddens, people now became responsible for their own biography. When the self turned into a radically reflexive project, the autobiography became the core of late modern self-identity (Giddens, 1991: 76). Surely this is a somewhat sketchy historical account of the concept of (western) identity [31]. The point is that narrative *can* account for multiplicity and spatiality in identity as a historically variable concept, even though Ricoeur does not pay attention to it. Narrative identity is a very powerful image of identity construction. It intuitively "feels right", at least to most western people, the majority of whom have been brought up in a thoroughly literate society.

However, the question emerges whether narrative, with its roots in oral and written culture, remains the most adequate medium to understand contemporary digital culture. Many authors argue that narrative indeed can and should be redefined to incorporate digital media storytelling that is characterized by qualities like interactivity and immersion (Aarseth, 1997; Bolter, 2001; Hayles, 2002; Murray, 1998; Ryan, 2001). The rise of computers, especially the World Wide Web with its typical form of the hypertext, has spurred postmodern critiques on the traditional narrative. Traditional narratives represent suspicious epistemological elements, like coherence, rationality, closure of narrative structures, and totalizing interpretation, Marie-Laure Ryan notes (Ryan, 2001: 7). Hypertext by contrast, with its interactive qualities and blurring of author and reader, supposedly entails a liberation from linear logic, logocentrism, arborescent hierarchical structures, and repressive forms of power (Ryan, 2001: 8). Hypertext provides a fertile metaphor "for the postmodern conception of the subject as a site of multiple, conflicting, and unstable identities" (Ryan, 2001: 7). Various literary scholars have identified play elements in narratives, and indeed suggest play is central to new forms of storytelling (Aarseth, 1997; Murray, 2004; Murray, 1998: 142; Ryan, 2001: 181-186) [32]. From the 'other side', that is new media studies, there have been fierce debates about whether digital media, especially computer games,

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[30] "The century of the self", to use the title from the brilliant BBC series. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/century_of_the_self.shtml.

[31] For instance, where exactly should the decisive breakpoints in history be placed? Have grand narratives truly lost their attraction? Isn't this an account from the perspective of the 'dominant class'? What about the narratives of the "people without history", as Wolf calls those (non-western) people who are denied a place in the narratives of progress (Wolf, 1982)?

should be understood as new types of narratives or indeed on their own terms as games (Juul, 1998; Raessens, 2006; Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan, 2004). Nevertheless, I am not interested in narrativity as such (nor in games or play per se), but in technologically mediated identities. Therefore, I shall not enter the debate whether digital media narratives are play, or whether games are narratives. When I discuss narrative and play, I do so in their capacity as identity mediations. Thus, my discussion revolves around Ricoeur's views of narrativity, since it is he who most elaborately formulates a theory of narrative identity. In my view, Ricoeur builds his theory on a rather traditional conception of narrative, in which temporal permanence, emplotment, coherence, neat openings and closures, and singularity are guiding principles. As a result, I see two possible routes to address the relation between digital media and identity. One is working from within narrative theory, stretching its boundaries in order to incorporate new mediations. The other is stepping outside narrative theory and using play as a wholly different lens, after which we try to reconcile narrative and play. I choose the latter route. Several points of critique have already been inserted along the way. They can be thrown into two baskets: the general shortcomings of narrative as a theory about identity; and the specific attack on narrative as the privileged medium for self-understanding in the so-called digital age. Both of them, I argue, can be fruitfully overcome by applying the concept of play and its associated terms.

1.3 In search of play

The research of play and games has yielded a considerable body of literature, primarily in the humanities, social sciences, literary studies, and - recently - game studies. Other disciplines, like economy, biology, and engineering, use a methodology called 'game theory' as a branch of applied mathematics. Moreover, there is a widespread tendency to invoke play notions in metaphorical ways, most notoriously in cultural studies trying to capture 'the post-modern condition'. In his aptly titled *The ambiguity of play* Brian Sutton-Smith points to the widely diverging ways various disciplines have appropriated play for their own agenda, in what he calls "play rhetorics" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 9-11).

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[32] Kendall Walton even recognizes imaginative play in more traditional literary narratives. He says fiction is a representational art and all representations involve make-belief (Walton, 1990: 4).

The sheer quantity and variety makes the question how play is conceptualized and applied in this study all the more urgent. As said, this not a study about play or games, but about playful identity construction shaped by mobile media. Therefore, I investigate the applicability of play and derivative notions, and work them into a framework for further inquiries. Point of departure is the classic literature used in today's game studies. Then a number of terms are presented that are useful for looking at digital media technologies. Since this is a study about mobile communications media, attention is given to the relation between play and communication. Finally, we see how play as a mediating metaphor informs how we understand life itself in playful terms.

1.3.1 Play and games: the classics

The bible of play and game studies remains the work *Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture* by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (Huizinga, 1955) [33]. In this work Huizinga tries to find the essence of play and expose how culture bears characteristics of play. One of its most important characteristics is that it is "free", in the sense of not being a need or task in order to achieve something else (ibid: 8). He summarizes play as "a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'" (ibid: 28). Notably, the word "fixed" means something else than the original Dutch "vastgestelde" (ibid: 29). "Fixed" suggests that spatiotemporal limits are pre-given and unchanging. "Vastgestelde" ("determined" would have been a more apt translation) suggests the active stance of the players themselves in erecting arbitrary boundaries.

Huizinga does not draw a sharp distinction between play and games, as video game researchers do [34]. Contemporary game studies often attribute to Huizinga the claim that play takes place within the confines of a 'magic circle' (most notably Salen & Zimmerman, 2003: 94-97). The magic circle supposedly separates play from ordinary life (Huizinga, 1955: 19-20). Entering this magic circle requires a voluntary submission

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[33] The original Dutch work was written in 1938 (Huizinga, 1951). It was based on Huizinga's 1933 oration, entitled *Over de grenzen van spel en ernst in de cultuur* ("About the boundaries of play and seriousness in culture"), and two subsequent lectures. In 1950 an English translation of dubious quality appears. The translation is often sloppy and on some points saliently different from the original. This starts with the translation of the subtitle. In his original foreword Huizinga stresses that his aim is to explore "the play element *of* culture" ("het spel-element der cultuur"). He does not want to study play as one of many cultural manifestations, but how culture itself bears the character of play, and originates in play. Nevertheless, I refer to the English translation unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

[34] Likely from a strategical point of view to carve out their own research field.

to the rules that count within the confines of this temporally and spatially bounded area. After Coleridge, it entails the "willing suspension of disbelief" (quoted in Ricoeur, 1992: 159 fn22; Ryan, 2001: 105). In fact, Huizinga remains ambiguous about the separation of play from serious ordinary life. The separation is gradual instead of a clearly demarcated division (see also Ehrmann, Lewis, & Lewis, 1968: 32). Huizinga stresses, at least for the 'savage mind', "the unity and indivisibility of belief and unbelief.... In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-belief breaks down" (Huizinga, 1955: 24-25) [35]. Only in the highly reflexive modern world these boundaries are solidified, while the play origins *of* culture are forgotten.

French philosopher Roger Caillois analyzes play and game with far more conceptual rigor than Huizinga (Caillois, 2001) [36]. Caillois feels Huizinga's definition is both to broad and too narrow. Too narrow because Huizinga focuses almost solely on competitive aspects of play. Too broad because Huizinga fails to delineate the sphere of play as a restricted universe, a "pure space" (ibid: 4-7). According to Caillois play is:

> 1. Free: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
> 2. Separate: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
> 3. Uncertain: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative;
> 4. Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;
> 5. Governed by rules: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
> 6. Make-belief: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life.
> (ibid: 9-10)

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[35] Again these erroneous conclusions stem from mistranslation. The English 'magic circle' is more passive than the Dutch *tooverkring* or *toovercirkel* (old spelling), words Huizinga uses at a few points only (Huizinga, 1951: 12, 21, 79, 218). 'Magic circle' suggests that players surrender to some inherent magical quality of playful activities. 'Toovercirkel' by contrast suggests the power of players themselves to imbue their activities with magic, since *toveren* is a verb that means 'to enchant'. The Dutch emphasizes the responsibility of players themselves to erect a circle around play activities.

[36] Originally published in French in 1959.

Some of these characteristics are defined negatively ("play is not ..."), and all of them breathe the strict opposition between play and 'real life'. This is debatable. Jacques Ehrman criticizes Caillois (and Huizinga) for opposing imaginary and gratuitous play to work, "the real" and "everyday life" (Ehrmann, et al., 1968: 32). Ehrman refutes the idea that play is an 'extra':

> [I]f play as the capacity for symbolization and ritualization is consubstantial with culture, it cannot fail to be present wherever there is culture. We realize then that play cannot be defined as a luxury.
> [P]lay cannot be defined by isolating it on the basis of its relationship to an *a priori* reality and culture. To define play is *at the same time* and *in the same movement* to define reality and to define culture. As each term is a way to apprehend the two others, they are each elaborated, constructed through and on the basis of the two others.
> (ibid: 46, 55)

Ehrman adds that it is illogical for Huizinga and Caillois to separate play from everyday life and call it gratuitous, in order to show that play is part of culture/society itself [37]. In chapter 4 we see that location-based play on mobile devices challenges precisely this boundary between play and real life, and in fact turns it into the central play element.

Caillois' definition of play as unproductive and involving the return to a previous situation is downright wrong. As we shall see in the analysis of mobile communications as an infinite cycle of gift exchanges, each gift transforms the status of the relationship (section 5.3). Performance theorist Richard Schechner stresses this transformative power of ritual play and theater. According to Schechner, a performance does not merely refer to, or stand for a transformation, it *is* the change (Schechner, 2003: 127, 129, 186). Play as an activity actualizes changes in relations and situations in ordinary life. Play then is never a return to a zero-sum equilibrium but an ongoing movement, permanently unstable. A similar view of play as movement is found with philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. He describes play as "to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end.... rather, it renews itself in constant repetition" (Gadamer, 2004: 104). Gadamer stresses that the subject of the play does not depend on the subjectivity of the person who is playing. "It is the game that is played - it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such" (ibid: 104). While stepping into a game may be a voluntary movement, once inside the play the subject is being played. If all play involves some form of 'mobility', can we make the inverse claim that the mobilities shaped by the

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[37] A good point, although not completely justified in the case of Huizinga, who stresses the "indivisibility of belief and unbelief", and criticizes the modern world for forgetting its play origins (see also Motte, 1995: 10).

mobile phone are playful? This claim is not self-evident (and can even be a logical fallacy). However, at various places in this dissertation I argue that the mobilities shaped by mobile media indeed are playful.

The true merit of Caillois' study is his classification of four play types and two play attitudes. The four play types are competition (*agôn*), chance (*alea*), simulation (*mimicry*) and vertigo (*ilinx*) (Caillois, 2001: 12). *Agôn* involves games of skill and contest. *Alea* involves games of chance such as playing dice or cards. They are opposites. "*Agôn* is a vindication of personal responsibility; *alea* is a negation of the will, a surrender to destiny" (ibid: 18). They also are a pair. Contrary to real life, *agôn* and *alea* create an ideal condition of pure equality for the player, a 'level playing field'. These types of play are "an attempt to substitute perfect situations for the normal confusion of contemporary life.... one escapes the real world and creates another" (ibid: 19). By contrast, both *mimicry* and *ilinx* are attempts to escape not the world but oneself. *Mimicry* involves the temporary acceptance of an imaginary universe in which someone believes or makes others believe that he is someone else (in the theater, or when wearing a mask). *Ilinx* involves the destruction of reality through a dizzying confusion of the senses (as in dance, improvised music, and speedy horseback riding). *Mimicry*, like *agôn,* is a controlled movement, whereas *ilinx*, like *alea*, is uncontrollable.

Cross-cutting this classification of play types, Caillois discerns two play attitudes. Suggestively opposing Greek poetics versus Latin solemnity, Caillois calls these *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* refers to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, carefree gaiety and laughter, spontaneous, impulsive, joyous, uncontrolled fantasy. *Ludus* on the other hand disciplines and enriches *paidia*, since it is absorbing, rule-governed, for its own sake and amusement, and involves skill and mastery (ibid: 13, 27-35). Although *ludus* and *paidia* occur in each play type, *agôn* and *alea* lean to the pole of *ludus*, while *ilinx* and *mimicry* tend towards *paidia*. "Vertigo and simulation are in principle and by nature in rebellion against every type of code, rule, and organization. *Alea*, on the contrary, like *agôn* calls for calculation and regulation" (ibid: 157). Caillois' play types and attitudes constantly return throughout this thesis. Hence the following scheme:

	agôn competition	*alea* chance	*mimicry* simulation	*ilinx* vertigo
paidia free play ↓ ↑ *ludus* rule-governed games	unregulated competition contests, sports	counting-out rhymes betting lotteries	illusions, masks theater, spectacles	horseback riding, dance, music carnivals, skiing, mountain climbing

Figure 1: Slightly adapted version of Roger Caillois' scheme of four play types and two play attitudes.
Caillois seems to contradict himself by giving examples of ludus in mimicry and ilinx, and paidia in agôn and alea (Caillois, 2001: 36).

Caillois acknowledges that these rubrics are ideal-types. They seldom exist in a pure state. Pairing the four game types yields six possible combinations. Caillois dismisses *agôn - ilinx*, and *alea - mimicry*. Rule-based control and losing oneself are incompatible. So are simulation and chance, since there is no point in deceiving chance (ibid: 72-73). *Agôn - mimicry* and *alea - ilinx* are viable but contingent combinations. A gambler can experience vertigo. Competitions often carry elements of a spectacle. Fundamental relationships exist between *agôn* and *alea* and *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Competition and chance are both strictly rule-based. Pretense and vertigo presume a world of improvisation without rules. Caillois emphasizes the dangerous potential of this combination of mask and trance [38]. Between these four viable pairs one is creative and active (*agôn-mimicry*) and the other passive and destructive (*alea-ilinx*). *Agôn* involves a struggle against and control over external obstacles. *Alea* means submitting to external forces. Similarly, *mimicry* entails active creation of illusion, while *ilinx* entails the intoxicating submission of the will and mind to external powers (ibid: 76-78). Pursuing Huizinga's attempt to understand culture itself as play, Caillois proposes that cultural history entails the transformation from primitive societies based on simulation and vertigo to civilized societies based on competition and chance. Superstition, magic and delirium have made way for a new social game defined in terms of birth versus

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[38] Game researcher McKenzie Wark suggests that Caillois saw *agôn* and *alea* as "the antidote to the Nazi's toxic mix of two other kinds of play - intoxication [*ilinx*] and spectacle [*mimicry*]" (Wark, 2007: 109, my additions in brackets; the number refers to section, not page), a view also forwarded by Roger Silverstone (Silverstone, 1999: 62).

merit, the triumph of the luckiest versus the best (ibid: 125). This is where Caillois goes wrong in my view. Caillois' attempt to formulate a sociology based on pairs of game categories is at best a highly selective view of societies. Leaving aside his simplistic and colonialist view of 'progress' across various societies (see Motte, 1995: 8-9), this model hardly accounts for the tremendous importance of *mimicry* and *ilinx* in modern 'civilized' societies [39]. As discussed below, *mimicry* underlies the notion of identity as theatrical role-playing (Goffman, 1959), while *ilinx* is central to the so-called 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). *Mimicry* make-belief, and to a lesser extent *ilinx* thrill-seeking, occur in (mobile) media practices and experiences too, as we shall see.

1.3.2 Game, play, playability and playfulness

Digital game researchers make extensive use of Huizinga and Caillois. They often use *paidia* and *ludus* to distinguish between play and game (Frasca, 1999), or free play and rule-bound play (Kücklich, 2004: 25). It should be noted that neither Huizinga nor Caillois oppose play and game like many game researchers do [40]. Play is usually differentiated from game as being more 'free'. Gonzalo Frasca makes a valuable addition to Caillois by saying that a game differs from play not because it is rule-governed but because it has a result (Frasca, 1999: 2). What matters to the player, what gives him pleasure, is not the material result of the play action but the idea that the game has been successful. Something is at stake (Huizinga too noted this: Huizinga, 1955: 50). Games have an end, in the double sense of an aim and an endpoint. This is an important difference from play. Play is not geared towards fulfilling a goal that would end it, but towards prolonging and extending itself. The goal-oriented finitude of games is incorporated in Alexander Galloway's working definition: "[a] game is an activity defined by rules in which players try to reach some sort of goal. Games can be whimsical and playful, or highly serious. They can be played alone or in complex scenarios" (Galloway, 2006: 1). Galloway continues: "*video games are actions*.... Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code" (ibid: 2). Obviously games exist outside their enactment. Chess is still a game, even when it is not played. It exists a a material object (the board), a set of constitutive rules, and an act (playing chess). Similarly, computer code is a scripted structure that enables the execution of the predesigned gameplay [41]. The compiled computer code can be downloaded or sold on a DVD as an instance of the game.

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[39] Nor does it support rational thinking in the belief systems of 'primitive societies' (a central argument in Evans-Pritchard & Gillies, 1976).

[40] Dutch and French have no distinct words for play and game (nor does Indonesian; Indonesia is the locus of the next two chapters).

Without the design embedded in code there would be no game action in the first place. Play and game thus can be *structure* (existing 'virtually', in the sense of potential, as a set of rules or code), *object* (the actual instantiation), and *praxis* (as an actual executed activity). Game leans towards structure, and play towards praxis, but this distinction is not solid. *Gaming* is an activity, while *a play* can be defined in structural terms.

In addition to being noun and verb, playful as an adjective describes the *quality* of something. Objects, people, and situations can have properties that elicit play ('affordances'). A ball invites people to kick it. A clown invites people to laugh and be joyous. A theater invites people to suspend disbelief and let themselves get enchanted. When computer code is executed as a program and appears on the screen it invites play. The game environment invites people to explore, compete, tinker, engage with other players, cheat, and so on. This property of inviting play can be called *playability* (Kücklich, 2004: 21). We will see how the mobile phone invites people to tinker and play with it.

The adverb playfully qualifies a subject's actions or subjective experience during play. In his research about happiness, psychologist Mihali Csikszentmihalyi describes so-called "flow experiences". These occur when people achieve control over their inner life during certain activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 6). For flow experiences to happen an optimal balance must be found between tasks that are too hard and induce anxiety, and tasks that are too easy and cause boredom. Sportsmen who have 'good legs' can reach a level of perfectly clear inner harmony with what they are doing, with themselves, and the world at large. In this state of mind a very difficult or heavy activity seems effortless (ibid: 74). Central to activities that induce flow experiences is that they are *autotelic*. They are done for their own sake and preferably for as long as possible (ibid: 67). The long-lasting and intrinsically rewarding nature of play, as opposed to game, is also central to James P. Carse's distinction between *finite* and *infinite games* (Carse, 1986). Finite games are defined by external rules, have the purpose of winning and thus ending the game. Infinite games are internally defined. They are played for no other purpose than to continue the game itself (ibid: 3, 8-9). We will see how mobile communication between intimates is such an 'infinite game' (section 5.3). Flow is but one of many possible play experiences. Play experiences reside anywhere in between the exhilaration of a roller-coaster ride or any other joyous 'free play' (pure *paidia*), and utterly serious concentration during a hazardous mountaineering maneuver or any other solemn dedication to rule-governed games (pure *ludus*).

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[41] The actual playing of a game can be different from what the makers intended, just like hacking the mobile phone entails alternative uses. This play with pre-given boundaries can be called "counterplay".

1.3.3 Communicative play

If playful *experiences* occur only during play, a playful *orientation* or *mood* is directed towards the play itself. Playful then refers to a frame of mind that is geared to playfulness. Obviously that is a circular definition (the clause that needs defining is part of the description itself). But with reason. Sutton-Smith sees playful as "a mood of frolicsomeness, lightheartedness, and wit" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 147). Crucially, he reserves playfulness for what he calls 'metaplay'. Metaplay "plays with the normal expectations of play itself, as does nonsense, parody, paradox, and ridiculousness. Playful would be that which plays with the frames of play" (ibid: 147-148). Playful thus is reflexive: it applies to the activity it is part of and relates to its own being. We find the same idea and formulation in Gregory Bateson's essay *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* (Bateson, 1972: 138-148). One day in the zoo, Bateson observed two monkeys engaging in combat-like play. Neither the monkeys, nor Bateson, took this behavior for combat itself. From this observation he concludes that the monkeys were capable of meta-communication. They exchanged signals that carried the message "this is play". In its expanded form meta-communication says: "[t]hese actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote" (ibid: 139). Bateson generalizes this to a double paradox of play:

> We face then two peculiarities of play: *(a)* that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and *(b)* that that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent.
> (ibid: 141)

Bateson identifies three types of communicative messages: (a) messages that are mood-signs; (b) messages that simulate mood-signs; (c) frame-setting messages that enable the receiver to discriminate between (a) and (b), by saying "this is play" (ibid: 146). Meta-communicative (c) type messages function as 'frames' in order to make judgments about the *conditions* for communication. We now reach fertile grounds for the study of communications media [42]. Earlier we saw with Huizinga, Caillois and Ehrman that culture and society bear play characteristics. We now see with Bateson that all play requires communication (transferring the message "this is play"). Inversely, a lot of communication involves play. Frame-setting messages articulate the conditions needed to make judgments about the status of communication. As Ehrman says:

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[42] Bateson himself notes: "[w]e therefore meet in play with an instance of signals standing for other events, and it appears, therefore, that the evolution of play may have been an important step in the evolution of communication." (ibid: 140).

> Just as culture is, in the last analysis, communication, so is play and game. Thus, any theory of communication (or of information) implies a theory of play and a game theory. And vice versa. [...] Play is articulation, opening and closing of and through language.
> (Ehrmann, et al., 1968: 56)

The *ludic* is a highly spontaneous, undirected, and potentially disruptive kind of playfulness. Ludic (and its derivative ludicrous) connotes parody, ironic commentary, unreasonable foolishness, and/or theatrical inversions of normalcy. Huizinga throughout his *Homo Ludens* uses the Dutch word *ludiek* as a neutral adjective ('playful'). However, our present understanding of the ludic is heavily influenced by the social protests of the 1960s and particularly the politically subversive Situationist legacy. The Situationists proposed to inverse normal situations (*détournement*), and promoted aimless activities (*dérive*), in order to challenge boundaries and pre-packaged meanings of the capitalist spectacle society (Debord, 1955, 1958, 2005). Ludic attitudes and activities are not completely detached from normalcy. They need to balance between relinquishing seriousness and all meanings, and engagement and even critique. The ludic always has an agenda. Through sheer madness it exposes the arbitrariness of what is perceived as normalcy. By its theatrical and reflexive display of not playing according to the rules, it is indeed a play with rules of everyday life. Contemporary phenomena like 'smart mobs' (political mobilizations) and 'flash-mobs' (silly and unexpected collaborative actions in public spaces) that are coordinated via (mobile) media, frequently carry this ludic quality (Rheingold, 2002). Still, in the case of flash mobs the question rises whether these are truly disruptive actions, or just a one-time only play 'spectacle' without lasting consequences.

1.3.4 Play as mediating metaphors: life as play

Play is used metaphorically in staggeringly diverse ways. I take these as 'mediating metaphors'. Caillois' four play types serve as more or less concrete thought-images by which we understand the world and our place in it [43]. Play metaphors not only 'transfer meanings' (the literal meaning of 'metaphor'). They actually produce them. They become media for self-understanding. This paragraph adds a historical dimension to the discussion so far. It shows that play as a mediating concept in fact is very old.

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[43] Katherine Hayles speaks about 'material metaphors' to foreground "the traffic between words and physical artifacts". An interactive relation exists between how material objects are shaped and the way we think through them about ourselves and the world (Hayles, 2002: 22; 2004). In this case, play types are not material artifacts as much as thought images.

Evolutionism is without doubt the most influential theory about life as *agôn* competition. It has come to influence our thinking far beyond biology. Huizinga himself exposes how law, war, art, education, and politics stem from competitive play. *Agôn* presupposes an enclosed system with scarce resources over which different parties try to gain control. Moderate, sophisticated ideas emphasize the human capacity to organize this competition. Garrett Hardin's influential notion of 'tragedy of the commons' describes the problem when multiple herdsmen let their cattle graze on common land. For an individual, the economic benefit of adding more cows outweighs the collectively shared ecological penalty of degrading the pasture. Political ideologies differ in opinion about the domain in which *agôn* takes place (economy? social class? 'race'?), to what extent a level playing field should be secured, and what institutions should govern as referees. Parliamentary democracy itself is structured around competition for scarce seats. Vulgar debasements of evolutionism - pejoratively labeled 'social Darwinism' - narrow human life to a "survival of the fittest" between individuals or groups [44]. In everyday parlance and popular cultural expressions, we commonly encounter such laymen 'Darwinist' views of life as a dog-eat-dog world in which the fittest player wins. *Agôn* also underlies modern notions of identity. We not only compete with others but also with ourselves by seeing life in terms of 'challenges' and 'achievements'. We attempt to control our psychological moods and our physical appearances. We formulate career goals and ideals about who we want to become. In this competition with ourselves, we set out the stakes and try to gain mastery over life in what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls "the trajectory of the self" (Giddens, 1991: ch.3). Competition widely occurs in mobile media practices, as will be shown, and accentuates a view of identity as achievement.

Alea chance informs our sense of life as an unpredictable play of higher forces outside our control. Once we were played by the gods. For many people the dices have been passed on to other invisible forces. Some are even more abstract and gruesome, like pure coincidence, devoid of any greater meaning. Sociologist Ulrich Beck calls our highly complex contemporary society a "risk society". Some of these risks we can control or minimize but there will always be events we neither can predict nor control (Beck, 1992). According to Giddens, the unexpected "fateful moments" over which we have no control act as dramatic junctions in life. These moments - a marriage breakup, an unexpected death, a crisis - are decisive in identity construction. They force us to reflect on who we were, and to decide where we are heading (Giddens, 1991: ch.4).

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[44] In evolution theory there are two parallel processes: random variation and natural selection. Social Darwinism entirely disregards random variation's inherent lack of purpose, and turns selection into a teleology of 'winning'.

Alea too occurs in mobile media practices, as we will see. The tension between *agôn* control and being played by aleatory forces partly informs the relation between media technologies and identity (section 5.4).

As said earlier, Caillois wrongly asserts that *mimicry* and *ilinx* no longer exist in modern societies. From Plato's cave allegory, and eastern spiritual traditions, to modern day escapism, *ilinx* intoxication and trickery of the senses underlies transcendental views of human life as one big deception. For some people the solution is reaching a state of enlightenment, here or in the hereafter. For others pursuing *ilinx* experiences is the solution itself. Taking drugs or seeking other thrills can bring one closer to reality or truth in this life. Or it can simply be an escape from life, however temporarily. Transcendence was a large part of the attraction of the internet in its early days (see for example Davis, 1998) [45]. The wish for escapism and distraction make up a big chunk of people's media consumption patterns today.

The most important mediating metaphor for my overall purposes is *mimicry*. It is long held that communication and social interactions consist of theatrical role-playing and make-belief, through which we construct our identities. Chicago School sociologist Robert Ezra Park well-phrases this view of life as *mimicry*:

> It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask [Latin *persona*]. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.
>
> In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves - the role we are striving to live up to - this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.
> (Park, quoted in Goffman, 1959: 19-20, my addition in brackets)

Theatrical playacting is an old mediating metaphor, perhaps even older than narrative (and more widespread cross-culturally). In the superb *The Fall of Public Man* sociologist Richard Sennett pays a great deal of attention to the *theatrum mundi* metaphor ("theater of the world", the world as a stage) (Sennett, 1974: 34-37). People have understood society, and themselves, in theatrical terms. Sennett describes how the theater metaphor has been subject to revisions over the course of history. The metaphor originated among the ancient Greeks and Christians, for whom humanity was in fact a puppet show *of* and *for* the Gods. It truly became a dominant thought-

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[45] See also the Cyberspace Salvations research project at http://www.cyberspacesalvations.nl.

image in the 18th century, when the 'audience' shifted from God/gods to other people and the idea of 'publicness' arose. Sennett argues that the *theatrum mundi* has continued to serve three purposes. First, to introduce illusion and delusion as fundamental questions of social life. That is, social life is performed and involves belief and illusion. Second, to detach human nature from social action. That is, *character* or *nature* is something else than mere observable behavior in role-playing. Third and most importantly, "the images of *theatrum mundi* are pictures of the art people exercise in ordinary life. This is the art of acting, and people who exercise it are playing 'roles'" (ibid: 35).

Ethnologist Van Gennep teaches us that even in pre-industrial societies belief in the illusory nature of social life is not a given but requires a willing suspension of disbelief (Van Gennep, 1960: 115) [46]. 'Rites de passage' (rites of passage) mark important transitional phases in people's lives. Initiates enter a phase of 'liminality' (*limen* means border in Latin). It is a period fraught with paradox. Candidates play with familiar rules by temporarily suspending or reversing them (ibid: 115). During rites, secrets and believe systems are exposed to be exactly that: just believe (ibid: 79). However, to complete the initiation one has to return to the practice of believing. After disenchantment follows re-enchantment. Anthropologist Victor Turner recognizes theatrical 'liminoid' play elements in modern (western) societies. Liminoid phenomena and settings, like the arts and universities, are characterized by individual choice, creation and continuous innovation in societal margins, and the results are enjoyed in leisure settings (Turner, 1982: 43, 53-54). Liminoid periods and spaces induce a subjunctive mood that opens up room for the *as if* in which one can reflexively look at oneself, whereas full-blown naratives give meaning afterwards, he says (ibid: 76). At the interfaces between the separate spaces of disorderly liminoid play and established cultural systems technological innovations occur, meaningful cultural symbols are created, and society is refreshed (ibid: 32, 41, 45). This too counters Caillois' idea that *mimicry* in modern societies has vanished.

Best known for the application of theater metaphors to social life is sociologist Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1959). In Goffman's view, role-playing is not confined to special times, places, and events. The symbolic interactions in which people engage by playing roles are the everyday rituals that tie society together. Performers playact in front of an audience. This communication process is an "information game" (ibid: 7-8). Goffman observes a fundamental asymmetry, whereby the performer is only aware of the impression he gives, while the audience is aware of both the impression that is *given* and the impression that is *given off*. Through 'impression management' the individual tries to restore the symmetry. Performances are given in the 'front region'

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[46] Originally published in French in 1908.

(ibid: 22, 106-137). The front consist of a physical setting that includes decors and material props, and is almost always connected to geographical location (under the influence of new technologies geographical location and settings for role-playing bifurcate, as we will see later). Front also consists of 'personal front': one's manner and appearances, and one's identifying physical items (ibid: 22-24). In the back region people can drop their guard and stop managing impressions. Here the impressions fostered by the performance are knowingly contradicted. While in the front region people often act politely and in formal ways, in the back they adopt a tone of familiarity and can behave rude or disinterested (ibid: 112). Goffman's unit of analysis in observing impression management is the 'team': a group of people who assist each other in playing a role together and are bound together by ties of reciprocity. An individual too can be a team. He can be his own audience, or he can imagine an audience to be present (ibid: 77-104). In performing a role, people move between total absorption or detachment. People can be completely taken in by their own acting, or they can detach themselves from their own performance and be cynical about it (ibid: 19-20). Members of a team must play their part with a certain measure of discipline and self-control. If they would let themselves get carried away, they might destroy a successful performance (ibid: 216). Role-playing involves a measure of self-conscious distancing, after which people internalize these roles again. Therefore, the self is double by nature. It only comes into being through this movement in a "cycle of disbelief-to-belief" (ibid: 20). In order to be convincing as a real person one must play. We see the same subjunctive reflexivity with Schechner, who says a performance is not just a doing but "a showing of a doing" (Schechner, 2003: 114-115). It *could* be otherwise.

Goffman's analytical framework opens up a view of how people relate to themselves through the movement of self-distancing and internalization, to other people as team members or audience, and to the world as a stage that includes objects as props for theatrical performances of the self. It is a view of social interaction and identity as innate make-belief. This anti-essentialist view renounces the idea that identity is some (material) property of people. "To *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto. ... A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated" (Goffman, 1959: 75). Identity is not a noun, a property or collection of properties one possesses, but a verb, something one continually does. Another point we can take from the above is that there is no clear separation between playspace and the everyday (as also argued by Ehrman). In fact, the everyday comes into being *through* mimetic play. A

further advantage of this perspective is that it firmly ties the expression and performance of identity to spatiotemporal situations and socio-cultural contexts. One of its main weaknesses however is that it does not address the question if and how people forge all those different roles into a coherent whole throughout their lives, which after all is the main purpose and strength of narrative theory. One of the main tasks ahead then is to explore if and how performative play may indeed create spatiotemporal coherence.

No clear singular meaning of play exists. Play can be viewed as structure, praxis, property, experience, attitude, and metaphor. Play thus is best understood as what Wittgenstein has called a "family resemblance", a cloud of overlapping meanings (quoted in Ryan, 2001: 177). But aren't we in danger of using a notion that is too broad to be of use? To avoid this risk, I turn to the question how media studies have taken up play. Building upon previous work will set us on the right path.

1.4 Connecting media and play

1.4.1 Media ambiguities

A number of authors have suggested that play might be a useful notion to understand digital media technologies (see Kücklich, 2004; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2008: 299-311; Raessens, 2006, 2009). One of the first authors to do so is Roger Silverstone, in a chapter called "Play" in his book *Why Study the Media?* (Silverstone, 1999: 59-67). Silverstone takes play as a key dimension of media. He forwards the idea that play mediates between several tensions intrinsic to 'media experiences':

> Play is central, or so it seems, to media experience. We find its source both in the specifics of genre and programming and in the activities of viewing and listening. Play involves, like rhetoric, mutual participation. Players and their audiences, and audiences who become, even at one remove, players, together are involved in discourses which the media claim and construct and which punctuate, and puncture, our daily lives.
>
> However, it is important to note, as Caillois does particularly, the tensions identified in play and games between 'contained freedom', 'secure creativity', 'active passivity', 'voluntary dependence'. There is nothing simple to be found

either in the sociology or anthropology of play, or in its mediation. Indeed digging deeper produces a sense of a more complex, psychodynamic reality, and one which relates play as an activity both to the construction of an individual's identity and to the mechanics of culture as a process and an achievement. Play is both a complex and precarious activity.
(ibid: 63).

Silverstone specifically addresses the following tensions:

[1] In the intertwining of media's meanings with our own, we are neither free not in chains. [2] Nor do we anymore engage, even if we ever did, with the products of the media in a rational or functional way. The spaces we live in, in our inner as well as our outer worlds, are complicated by the lives we lead and the press of media on our minds and souls. [3] Boundaries are there to be broken. Sounds to be remastered. Images to be refashioned. But meanings are there to be fixed, accepted, owned, if only for the moment.
(ibid: 57, bracketed numbers added by me).

This passage expresses some interesting ambiguities that apply well to mobile media. These can be termed 1) freedom versus force; 2) means versus end; 3) fixity versus flow. Similar to one of the identity paradoxes mentioned, people experience their mobile phone both as a blessing and a burden. Mobile media offer immense freedom to communicate but also place a burden on people to be available to others (section 5.4 specifically deals with this ambivalence). Mobile media are used as functional means and as ends in themselves. We develop affective relations to our devices, dress them up, and imbue them with symbolic meanings (discussed in section 5.2.). Mobile media enable people to cross spatiotemporal and social boundaries by constantly and rapidly switching between multiple contexts. Yet these boundaries must somehow remain understood as boundaries, as Silverstone suggests (analyzed in section 4.3).

How do play and new media come together? Here Silverstone remains somewhat vague, if not contradictory. Silverstone is not clear if and how media spaces are separated from everyday life. On the one hand he calls for "attention to play as a core activity of daily life" (ibid: 60). A bit further he says: "media have the capacity, indeed they entirely depend on that capacity, to engage an audience within spaces that are distinguished - marked off - from the otherwise relentless confusions of everyday life. There is a threshold to be crossed each time we participate in the process of mediation" (ibid: 61). In a critical review of the applicability of play for understanding new media, game researcher Julian Kücklich rightly points out that it is precisely the present-day ubiquity of the media that cause this "relentless confusion" in the first

place (Kücklich, 2004: 12). Further, in talking about 'the media', Silverstone does not specify if and how some media are more playful than others, or how different types of media relate to different kinds of play. I see it as a useful follow-up task to show how the mobile phone comes with its own particular 'playability', playful practices and attitudes.

Silverstone deliberately utilizes play's ambiguity to foreground the paradoxical workings of new media as a world apart yet intimately intertwined with everyday life. Life with media is characterized by continuous movements across boundaries, he says. Even though many postmodernism thinkers argue that boundaries have become blurred and indistinct as a result of the media, they do still exist and are recreated on a daily basis (Silverstone, 1999: 59).

> Play is part of everyday life, just as it is separate from it. To step into a space and a time to play is to move across a threshold, to leave something behind - one kind of order - and to grasp a different reality and a rationality defined by its own rules and terms of trade and action. We play to leave the world. But it is not the world. And we return.
> (ibid: 60)

In this passage we again see this 'subjunctive mood' of the media experience. The media experience is both real and not real, we believe in it and we don't, it is a realm apart yet connected, it matters and yet it doesn't. Indeed, central to the media experience seems that, again with Woolgar, it *could be otherwise*.

The tensions and ambiguities that Silverstone mentions - 'contained freedom', 'secure creativity', 'active passivity', 'voluntary dependence' - regularly recur in studies of (mobile) media technologies. Michael Arnold for instance argues that the mobile phone, like many technologies, is 'Janus-faced' (Arnold, 2003). Technologies are designed to do things in rational goal-oriented ways, but they often perform in ironical and paradoxical ways. The mobile phone is designed to offer mobility and liberation, yet wireless communication is dependent on fixed infrastructures and keeps us on a leash (ibid: 242-244). The mobile phone makes people independent and in charge, yet requires co-dependence on others to talk with and at times can make people feel vulnerable and insecure. The phone enables users to be always available but not present, to be distant yet connected (ibid: 245). The mobile phone enables people to have private conversations in public, to appear busy yet available, to manage and optimize time but also waste it (ibid: 247-249). Arnold proposes that studies of technologies should not try to capture their 'essences', and describe their 'influence' in terms of a singular direction (as either technologically or socially determined). Instead,

they should open themselves up to contingency, paradox and irony. I follow Silverstone's explicit and Arnold's implicit plea for play as a deliberately ambiguous heuristics to look at new media technologies.

1.4.2 Pleasure, humor, and joking

Pleasure and fun in media use have received little attention in our discussion so far. Yet I feel they are crucial to the mobile media experience. Kerr *et al.* note that pleasure is often advanced as a defining feature of new media, but seldom critically interrogated (Kerr, Kücklich, & Brereton, 2006: 64). In an overview of literature, they note that some authors focus on the (immediate or delayed) gratifications that consumers derive from media use, while others emphasize the creative pleasure people experience in 'productive consumption', and yet others look at the enjoyment of a 'play aesthetic' of new media. The authors themselves forward play as a compound term for "the unique pleasure experienced when control, immersion and performance are combined" (ibid: 70). Although it should be clear from our discussion that play is a broader notion than these authors suggest here, I agree that pleasure in media use merits further attention and indeed is one of its salient features.

Humor too needs special mentioning when we talk about (mobile) media. Neither Huizinga nor Caillois say much about joking and humor as a distinctive feature of play [47]. It is hard to place humor in Caillois' scheme of play attitudes and types. As a mode of spontaneous behavior and 'free' expression, joking leans towards Caillois' *paidia* attitude. However, rule-based genres of humor can bear *ludus* qualities, for example dumb blonde jokes, stand-up comedy, and internet 'memes' [48]. Humor and joking are equally hard to place as a *type* of play. They appear to be closest to Caillois' *mimicry* as illusory make-belief (clowning, making up silly stories, pretending, reversing the ordinary). However, elements of *alea* chance are present in funny unexpected occurrences and *Schadenfreude*, *agôn* in competition between being the funniest, and *ilinx* in total submission to tumultuous disorder. Humor frequently involves Sutton-Smith's *metaplay* as a deliberate play with the frames of play itself. Laughter can also be a way to cope with failures in role-performances, as Goffman notes (Goffman, 1959: 53 fn1). We will see how mobile telephony elicits joking and making fun.

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[47] Huizinga more so than Caillois. Huizinga for instance observes that humor is an integral part of court of law procedures (Huizinga, 1955: ch.4).

[48] These are inside jokes that suddenly gain popularity and rapidly spread online among a large number of people.

1.4.3 Media as playful learning spaces

Another aspect I deem relevant for the relation between new media, play and identity is that people learn through play and games. A great number of authors have focused on developmental play in children (for an overview and critique, see Sutton-Smith, 1997: chapter 3). The work of George Herbert Mead connects play, communication, and the development of identity, and in fact greatly influenced Goffman's symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead, 1934). Mead defines the self as reflexive ("the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself", ibid: 134). This reflexive self can be both subject and object to himself (ibid: 136-137). The individual can only become an object to himself through social interactions, Mead holds. "[H]e becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved" (ibid: 138). These interactions require communication, and communication arises in play. Mead identifies three developmental stages in the making of the self. In play children adopt roles - an Indian, a policeman - and become another to oneself (ibid: 151). Games are the second stage. Now the roles have an organized rule-based relationship to the roles of other children playing. A ball game involves multiple players and requires the child to take the roles of his teammates into account. "Each of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of the others who are playing the game" (ibid: 154). A complete self only comes into being in the third stage, when the individual takes on the attitude of the whole community towards a collaborative action, and applies this to himself. Mead famously calls this "the generalized other" (ibid: 154-156). From this developmental perspective on child's play and communication, we can perceive why Goffman but also Ricoeur consider identity as mimetic. To become a self we must first imagine ourselves as another. What Ricoeur does not take into account however is that this mimesis occurs first and foremost in play.

Now on to digital media. In a collaborative study Mizuko Ito *et al.* find that young people learn with new media by tinkering and exploring, in what they call "messing around" (Ito, et al., 2008: 20-28). 'Free play' with the media is autotelic and exploratory. Contrary to goal-oriented learning, "[i]t involves experimentation and exploration with relatively low investment, where there are few consequences to trial, error, and even failure" (ibid: 20). Play can be solitary but is social in nature when it involves the creation and sharing of content. Young people learn not only how to play *with* new media but also how to engage in social play *through* new media. Some of the young people under study actually made a livelihood out of their playful tinkering, as they grew up and became technology entrepreneurs. From engaging in new media play to becoming a 'serious' media professional appeared a gradual slope. The authors

conclude: "[p]articipation in the digital age means more than being able to access 'serious' online information and culture; it also means the ability to participate in social and recreational activities online" (ibid: 35). From the above we get the sense that the construction of identity involves a groping process, in which one learns about oneself by playing with oneself, others and the world. Media spaces are safe havens for experimentation and offer room for failure. (And then again they have real consequences, as Silverstone teaches).

1.5 Conclusion: outline of the play framework

It is clear that conceptually, play is extremely ambiguous. Play can involve competition and mastery but also chance and fate. Play can be effortless but also difficult and require skill. Play is relaxed and involves no strain but also competitive and intense. Play involves self-forgetful mindlessness but also self-aware performance. Play is belief but also non-belief, knowing and showing that it is only play. Play is entertaining and fun but also a solemn activity that requires full concentration. Play can be frivolous and just pretense but is also dead serious. Play has a childish and profane connotation but is also seen as sacred in for example ritual. Play can be make-belief yet also be very real in its consequences. Play is an autotelic end in itself that needs no players but also a means in order to achieve some external goal like winning. Play can be a solitary activity in which one plays against oneself but also a collaborative social activity. Play can erase individual consciousness but can also be a highly subjective experience. Play is mobile and arises from to-and-fro movements yet it also requires fixed elements like rules. Play creates order but it is also disruptive. Play crosses borders and transgresses boundaries yet at the same time it needs boundaries to separate it from ordinary life and activities and non-playful moods.

Now substitute the word 'play' with 'identity' in the above. This reasonably covers many tensions in how we construct our identities in relation to media technologies. Still this does not prove much. It only raises the question how we can use play as more than a fuzzy metaphor that covers some paradoxes of (post-)modern identities. Does play indeed act as the medium through which we interact with the world, other people and ourselves, and mediating metaphor through which we understand these relations? Do mobile media shape the modalities of our identities

(being - having - becoming a self) as playful and game-like? In order to claim that our present technologically mediated identities are 'playful', we need to declare how we are going to use this notion. I deliberately avoid a singular definition of play. The sole 'essence' of play is its ambiguity, as Sutton-Smith and Silverstone among others expose so clearly. This is precisely the power of using play as a heuristic to shed new light on technologically mediated identities. As a lens to look at media technologies and identities, play introduces coherence without imposing unification or attempting to repeal paradox.

In the ensuing analysis I use Caillois' four *play types* (*agôn* competition and mastery, *alea* chance, *mimicry* pretense, *ilinx* sensory delusion) as a guiding typology to identify playful elements in our interactions with mobile media, and in understanding ourselves. In addition, I propose that our interactions with mobile media exist on four 'play levels'. Each level entails a particular way of looking at mobile media mediations as playful. They zoom out from the most literal and concrete to the most figurative and abstract. The first, **play on the mobile**, takes mobile media as gaming devices and interfaces to engage in play. The second, **play with the mobile**, takes mobile media as 'playable' material artifacts that elicit play practices and playful orientations in our relations to the devices. As material artifacts, mobile media mediate our interactions with the physical environment, with other people physically present, and ourselves. The third, **play through the mobile**, takes mobile media as communications media that shape our relations to distant yet intimate others like an infinite game of gift exchanges. The fourth, **play by the mobile**, looks at how mobile media as part of 'media culture' in general evoke experiences of 'being played'. The last three levels already emerge in our analysis of mobile media in Indonesia (chapters 2 and 3). The first is given specific attention in the analysis of a location-based mobile playground (chapter 4). The four play levels are analyzed on their own in detail in chapter 5. The conclusions drawn from each of these levels return in chapter 6, where the outline of a theory of playful identities is formulated.

In order to make the step from playful interactions with mobile media to identity construction, I adopt the view of identity as role-playing performances. Identity does not solely arise from interpretation after the fact but is also something we actualize by *doing*. This doing consists of play on, with, through, and by the mobile phone. Furthermore, I argue that a great deal of our communication via the mobile phone is meta-communication on the conditional (c) level, which Bateson calls the frame-settings messages ("this is play", "is this play?"). In this conditional order, the ambivalences of boundaries that typically are foregrounded in mediated communication (near-far, distant-present, in-out, real-pretense) are explored and questioned. The performance perspective of identity brings in the much needed spatial

dynamics that I feel is lacking in Ricoeur's narrative theory. Yet it does not say how coherence is constructed between the multiple roles we play. Therefore, a structuring device is sought that acts in the way plot functions to create temporal coherence in narrative identity. I tentatively propose that this is the digital map (see sections 4.3 and 6.2). Two general conclusions shall emerge from this investigation into 'playful identities'. One is that the conceptual pair free play/game acts as a structuring principle in mediated identity construction. Mobile media open up a playspace for free play in our relations to the world, others and ourselves. At the same time they act as coded game spaces that delimit the bandwidth and prescribe the terms for these relations. The other is that we come to understand our relations to the world, others and ourselves as boundary play in the conditional order.

2. Entering the stage: mobile media and modernity in Jakarta [49]

2.1 Handphone mania in Indonesia

In the morning of June 13th 2007 thousands of Indonesians queue up in front of Hotel Grand Melia in the capital city Jakarta. Early birds have been standing in line since 2:00 am. Indonesia is the first country in the world where popular Finnish mobile phone manufacturer Nokia launches its new top-end-of-the-market E90 Communicator. Doors open at 10:00. A few hours later the whole stock of 1100 devices have found a new owner for the price of 10.9 million *rupiah* (about € 870 in 2007). The next day the E90 is on sale to the general public. Its price rapidly drops. Telset Magazine, one of the numerous Indonesian mobile phone glossies, extensively features this event [50]. In an interview with Telset, Nokia's director product management expresses his astonishment, saying there is no country as passionate about the Communicator as Indonesia. He further faces tough questions like why it only comes in two colors, why the casing cannot be changed, and what his solution is for people who despite its rich feature set are only going to use the E90 to send text messages (Hamzah, 2007). In her editorial, Telset chief editor Ratna Farida Daradjatun does not fail to notice the irony that thousands of people voluntary stand in line under the burning sun to get a mobile phone in a country where the average yearly income is two-thirds of its sales price. "Truly ironic indeed when we remember that at this same moment in other parts of Indonesia there are even far more people who have to queue up just to get cooking oil" (Daradjatun, 2007). She blames it on the cult of prestige (*gengsi*). These people think that owning a Nokia E90 Communicator is a symbol of status and success. She wryly concludes that whatever it is that these early buyers do for a living, it surely won't bear any relation to the scarcity of cooking oil.

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[49] The material presented in this and the next chapter is based on ethnographic field research done in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2007 and 2000.

[50] Telset Magazine, *edisi* 74 Juli 2007.

This case introduces a number of interlocking issues that feature in this chapter and the next. First, it shows how important the mobile phone is in Indonesian views of modern urban identities. Like elsewhere - but particularly so in the Indonesian context - the mobile phone is not just a medium for communication. It is also a cultural artifact infused with symbolic meanings that plays a role in the construction of identities, in what Silverstone and Haddon call its 'double articulation' (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996: 62). Many Indonesians customize their mobile phone according to personal taste. Large shopping malls in Jakarta are stuffed to the brim with shops that sell new, second hand, and reconditioned devices, colorful casings, leather pockets, danglers, ringtones, attractive phone numbers, and so on. That is why the Telset interviewer poses questions about the *looks* of the E90 rather than its functionality. The mobile phone does not stand in isolation but has rapidly become a prominent member of (popular) culture. A broad range of media specialize in the mobile phone, with multiple glossy magazines like Telset, but also cheap printed weeklies, tech-columns in regular daily newspapers, books about for instance hacking the phone, talk shows and items on radio and television about the mobile phone, and various mobile phone websites. The mobile phone also features dominantly in other expressions of popular culture, for instance in soap series, cinema and in the new genre of 'chick-lit' books.

Second, the case highlights the existence of a tension between an individualized consumer culture and the lagging state of development of Indonesian society at large. New technologies like the mobile phone play a pivotal role in contesting views of what an 'Indonesian modernity' ought to look like, at the level of the individual and at the national level, and also in relation tot he global [51].

Third, it draws attention to a number of 'handphone mobilities'. Linguistically there appears no basis for understanding the mobile phone in Indonesia in terms of mobility. The most common words for the mobile phone (as we have seen in section 1.1) are *handphone* (abbreviated as *HP* or *hape*) and *ponsel* (*telepon selular* = cellular telephone). Nevertheless, I argue that in addition to 'modernity', 'mobility' too is central to understand the mobile phone as part of urban life and identities in Indonesia. For instance, in a foreword to a book about the mobile phone, the general manager of Nokia Indonesia Hasan Aula states that "mobility truly becomes the keyword in this present Information Century" (Putra, 2004: xxiii, my translation). Bart Barendregt and Raul Pertierra write that "for urban southeast Asians, modernity has become equivalent to mobility" (Barendregt & Pertierra, 2008: 382). Still, it remains unclear what kind(s) of mobility they refer to, and to what 'modernity' for that matter.

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[51] Unless indicated otherwise I use the term 'modernity' as an *emic* notion, that is, according to the culturally specific ways in which people themselves use certain concepts, as opposed to *etic*: how someone from the 'outside' like a researcher uses theoretical concepts, often as universals.

My aim is to pursue this argument and ask how the mobile phone informs notions of modernity and mobility, and how this influences playful identity construction in urban Indonesia. With some imagination three 'handphone mobilities' can be distilled from the above case. The case also reveals tensions in Indonesian society. The first is *corporeal mobility*. Thousands of people voluntarily travel to an event to obtain a mobile phone, while those forced to wait in line for oil are literally immobilized because they have no choice. The second is *socio-economic mobility*. A relatively affluent class has risen of people who can afford an expensive mobile phone. Yet there is a huge gap between them, and those who have to queue up for oil. The third is *imaginative mobility*. Some people seek to increase their symbolic prestige by buying the newest mobile phone, while for others this is off-limits because they cannot afford an expensive phone (or want not). *Corporeal mobility* and *imaginative mobility* are terms from the scheme John Urry applies to travel (section 1.1) (Urry, 2007: 47). If narrative over-stresses temporal dynamics, Urry's scheme in my view overemphasizes spatial mobilities, at the expense of temporal and social dynamics in people's life trajectories, which are also understood in terms of 'mobility'. Adding *socio-economic mobility* highlights the fact that particularly in developing countries like Indonesia, the (potential for) personal and shared national development - 'moving forward' - is a highly relevant issue, as we shall see in chapter 3. These three mobilities correspond to practical issues many Jakartans face on a daily basis. How to manage corporeal travel in the terribly congested urban sprawl? How to raise one's own standard of living and build and maintain social ties in the metropolis, and often also with the place of origin? How to shape 'modern' urban identities in the changing contexts of the local, the regional, the national, and the global? By highlighting inequalities, the above case underlines that 'handphone mobilities' are not just naturally given and inherent qualities of the technology. These mobilities must be understood as cultural practices. Modernity and mobility thus are the prisms through which I consider the role of the mobile phone in the construction of Indonesian identities.

2.2 The shaping of modernity in urban Jakarta

What is the influence of the mobile phone on Indonesian urban identities? To answer this question we need to understand more about the social and historical context of Indonesia, and Jakarta in particular. By looking at Jakarta's urban layout and history, I describe how shifting notions of 'modernity' have informed post-colonial Indonesian society. I look at differences in the social makeup of Jakarta, and briefly introduce the cult of prestige (*gengsi*) and modern socializing (*bergaul*) as characteristic of Jakartan urban culture. These notions feature as defining elements in the shaping of identities by mobile media (section 3.1). This section shows the complexities involved in Indonesian identity construction in general, and already suggests that play is a useful notion to understand this.

2.2.1 Jakarta's metropolitan setting
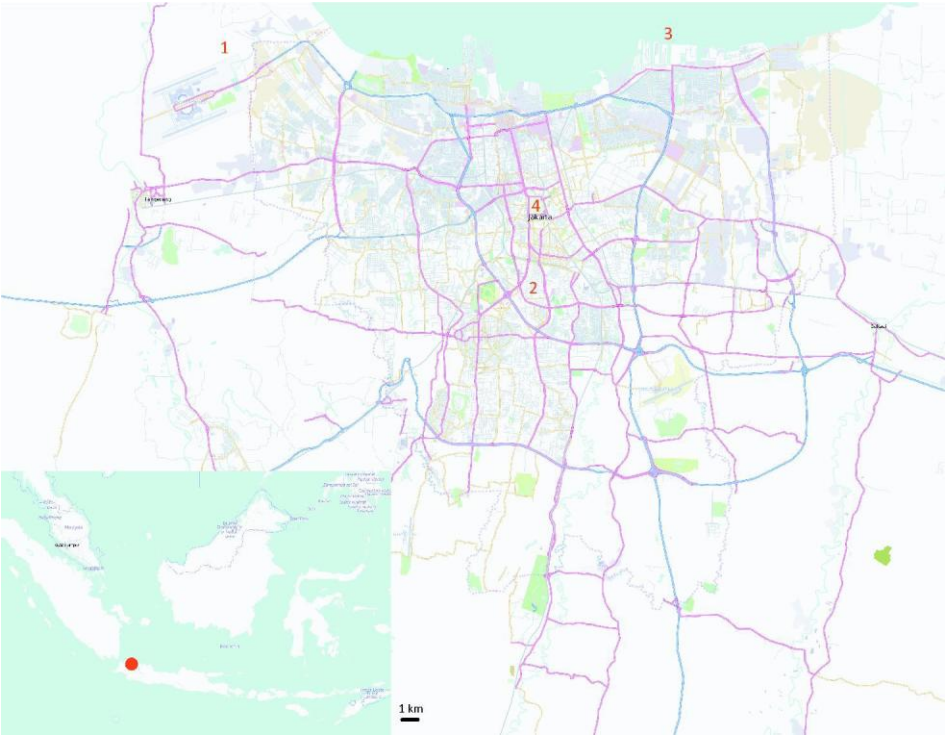
Figure 2: Map of Jakarta, Indonesia.
Legend: 1. Soekarno-Hatta airport; 2. central business district; 3. Tanjung Priok harbor; 4. Merdeka Square (ca. 1km2). Map source: OpenStreetMap.org.

Nobody knows exactly how many people live in Jakarta, the 'megalopolis' situated on the northwestern coast of the densely populated main island of Java, Indonesia. Estimates vary from an official year 2000 census of 8 million inhabitants, to a probably more accurate 15 million, and even over 20 million when the surrounding towns Depok and Bogor to the south, Tangerang to the west, and Bekasi to the east are counted in (Cybriwsky & Ford, 2001; Firman, 1998) [52]. Jakarta is called *ibu kota*, the "mother-city" and has the political status of a province with a governor and multiple mayors heading sections of the city. Jakarta stretches out over a huge area of some 6418 km^2 (Cybriwsky & Ford, 2001: 199). The main toll road is the city's aorta. It runs in a circle from international airport Soekarno-Hatta in the northwest underneath the central business district to Tanjung Priok harbor in the northeast and back, with several branches. Historically, Jakarta has mostly expanded along the north-south axis. Bordering on the Java Sea to the north lies the old part of town. Many remains from Dutch colonial times can be found here, often in a deplorable state, although recently city officials have started to recognize the cultural value and tourist potential of this colonial legacy. In the last few years, some historical areas and buildings have been renovated. The southern part of the old town is the Chinese quarter, rebuilt after having been set on fire in 1998 anti-Chinese riots and looting. This area is an important commercial center for consumer electronics.

Further south lies the vast Freedom Square, the symbolic center of the nation. In the middle of the square stands the huge needle-shaped national monument. The basement hosts a permanent exhibit that depicts the official narrative of Indonesia's national history. The regalia of the nation-state are found on the ground floor. All the way on top a gold-plated flame expresses the strength of Indonesia's people. Concentrically located around Freedom Square are the state palace, the immense Istiqlal mosque, the old catholic cathedral and protestant church, the town hall, various state departments, the national museum, and an army base. Further south, the economic heart of big business is pulsing along the main roads of an area called the *golden triangle*. High and mighty shiny skyscrapers reach up to heaven. Most residential areas are located south of the toll way. Many of the homes in elite neighborhoods like Pondok Indah are walled with spikes or broken glass, and have exuberantly decorated facades in blinding white, pastel or candy pink colors, while the other three sides are in grey concrete. Over the last few years the trend to build high-rise apartments has become more and more visible. These buildings are dotted all over Jakarta along its busy roads, and house young urban professionals. They are cities

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[52] A possible reason for these incompatible statistics is the huge number of poor and illegal migrants who often temporarily live in Jakarta. For the official year 2000 census, see the Statistics Indonesia website http://www.bps.go.id/tab_sub/view.php?tabel=1&daftar=1&id_subyek=12&notab=1.

within the city, incorporating many functions into one building, from parking garages and shopping malls in the basements, to saunas, swimming pools and fitness rooms upstairs. These very visible symbols of modern urban life cannot shield from the eye a completely different side of the city. On every busy street an army of hawkers and street vendors encroaches upon slow-paced travelers in their air-conditioned automobiles with tainted windows. Taking a turn off the main roads, the appearance of the city changes drastically. Gone are the shiny high-rise symbols of modernity. Hyper-urban Jakarta suddenly shows its other face as a collection of little villages (*kampung*). This Jakarta is made up of low concrete houses, wooden shacks with corrugated iron roof-plates, a mishmash of overhead electricity cables, open sewers, half-finished brick houses, small mosques in bright paint, little food stalls, narrow roads and alleyways where people can only go by foot or by motorbike, and where the business is done by push cart vendors. Many of these neighborhoods are quite tidy and have reasonable facilities, but some are true shantytowns. The vast majority of urbanites dwell in such *kampung*. For most people this is the everyday reality of living in Jakarta. A symbiotic relationship exists between the middle- and upper class neighborhoods and *kampung* housing the poorer folk. Each morning the same ritual repeats itself. The rich leave their upscale neighborhoods in air-conditioned cars to drive out to work downtown, while the poor flock in by public transport, by foot or on motorbikes to sweep houses, sieve dead leaves from swimming pools, weed gardens, cook dinner, do the laundry, baby-sit. At the end of the workday this movement is inverted. When darkness falls, the barricades that fence off the neighborhood are lowered and security guards sit outside all night on watch.

2.2.2 Jakarta as the center of the modern nation

Jakarta is the economic and political heart of the nation [53]. The capital is the place to be for almost all matters, from job opportunities, education, politics, to shopping and modern cultural life. This central position of Jakarta is clearly seen from the high density of media enterprises. Most of the national and commercial television stations, radio, written press, cinema and television producers, the music industry, book publishers and agencies, and other entertainment industries are stationed in the capital. Until Indonesia's reform period that started in 1998, media productions predominantly radiated outwards from the capital to Indonesia's remote regions, while influences from outer regions rarely seeped into Jakarta (Sen & Hill, 2000: 26). For

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[53] For example, during the mid-1990s 70% of the money in the Indonesian economy circulated here (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 6).

most Indonesians Jakarta is the undisputed center of 'modernity'. At the same time there has been, and still is, resentment among Indonesians from other regions against Jakarta's privileged status in politics, the economy, and culture.

In spite of its central position, Jakarta is not representative of the whole of Indonesia. Most provincial cities consist of one dominant ethnic group. Yogyakarta is a Javanese city, Bandung is a Sundanese city, Padang is a Minangkabau city, Medan is a Batak city. While the Javanese outnumber other ethnic groups and dominate Indonesia politically, Javanese culture does not dominate in the capital. Jakarta does not belong to any group in particular, although recently the indigenous 'hybrid' culture of *orang Betawi* is reviving [54]. Jakarta is arguably the most diverse city in Indonesia in terms of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and economic classes. Separate groups from within and from outside Indonesia to some extent occupy their own areas in the city and maintain their traditional culture among themselves. To a degree Jakarta then is Indonesia in small, a 'city-world' (see Augé, 2008: xii). However, Jakarta's urban culture transcends this mosaic of traditional cultures. Its image and the prevalent mode of interaction in public is not based on rules and prescriptions of one traditional culture. Instead it is based on a shared (though contested) understanding of a modern urban lifestyle. The dominant urban culture, especially among young people, is based on ideas about what it means to live a modern life in a 'world-city' shaped by global influences. Many elements of this modern urban way of life have spread to other Indonesian cities, notably the popular youth language and expressions (*bahasa gaul*). We will see how these ideas about modern life and identity are performed in practices of *gengsi* (status display, prestige) and *bergaul* (the art of modern socializing), and how the mobile phone shapes this (section 3.1).

What is understood by 'modernity' in Indonesia is crucial for understanding new technologies and urban identities. The notion has always been a contested one. The official version has been subject to a number of changes in the young history of the nation. Post-colonial Indonesian history is often chopped up in three phases: the Soekarno period (1945-1966), the Soeharto period (1967-1998), and the reformation era (1999-present) [55]. After the declaration of independence from the Dutch colonial regime on August 17 1945, 'founding father' Soekarno sailed a highly independent political course. He steered away from western capitalist democracy and, although distancing himself less from communism, sought a third way by collaborating with other newly decolonized 'non-aligned' countries. His politics of 'guided democracy'

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[54] *Orang Betawi* (people of Batavia) are the descendants of different Indonesian, European, Indian, Arab and Chinese people who for centuries have lived in the city.

[55] Indonesian modern history is obviously more complex, but this division suffices for our purposes to sketch the broad outlines of urban life and Indonesian media history in relation to the theme of modernity. Further, I use the old spelling of president's names (Soekarno instead of Sukarno).

depended on a highly centralized state. Almost all government institutions, as well as most big corporations and media institutions, were concentrated in Jakarta. Soekarno aimed to mold the immense scattered collection of islands into one unified and modern nation. No light task considering the fact that both 'subnational' local, as well as transnational frames of reference for identities have had far older histories than a shared national identity (Meuleman, 2006: 48) [56]. Soekarno developed a comprehensive and unifying ideology as the basis for a modern national identity. This ideology was rich in symbolism and fiercely anti-imperialist. The official motto of the Republic of Indonesia became *bhinneka tunggal ika*, Sanskrit for "unity in diversity" [57]. This phrase reflected the complexity of uniting very diverse internal and external historical influences into one nation. Under Soekarno the state ideology of *pancasila* was formulated, another Sanskritic word meaning "five pillars". Pancasila consists of 'universalist' values rather than local specifics: the belief in one supreme God; just and civilized humanitarianism; nationalism expressed in the unity of Indonesia; consultative democracy; and social justice (ibid: 52; Sen & Hill, 2000: 11). Soekarno promoted a societal ethics of *gotong-royong* (mutual help). Politically, he tried to integrate and appease the agonistic forces of nationalism, religion and communism, which each upheld a different view of how Indonesia should modernize. Soekarno wisely chose Malay, the mercantile lingua franca native to eastern Sumatra, as the basis for the national language *bahasa Indonesia*, instead of Javanese spoken by the dominant ethnic group (and to which he belonged). His large urban renewal projects in modernist Sovjet-style changed the face of former colonial Batavia, already huge at the end of the 19th century with an estimated population of 800.000 (larger than any city was in the Netherlands). Soekarno, who was trained as a civil engineer and architect, wanted to turn Jakarta into "the greatest city possible" (Cybriwsky & Ford, 2001: 203). He built new government buildings, department stores, shopping plazas and hotels, Senayan sport stadium for the 1962 Asian Games, and a new suburban residential district, all interconnected by a broad north-south avenue that boasted fountains and heroic

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[56] Indonesia consists of 17.500 islands and over 700 different languages. Mercantile, political, cultural and religious influences from elsewhere have always made a strong mark on Indonesia and often blended with local traditions. Indian traders brought Hinduism (which now only persists on Bali and western Lombok), and Buddhism, and founded great kingdoms; Arab traders brought Islam (now the dominant religion); European traders and colonial powers brought Catholicism and Protestantism; Chinese migrants brought cultural influences as well, but have a somewhat marginalized position and are often treated with resentment because of their perceived economical success.

[57] Literally, this phrase means "divided, yet one". The phrase was adopted from a 14th century poem in which Hindus and Buddhists were called to harmonious relations. The poem was written during one of several great Indonesian kingdoms (Meuleman, 2006: 48). Its reuse as a national motto is not only a 'functional' plea for national harmony but also a symbolic reference to Indonesia's own great historical civilizations demolished by outside (colonial) forces.

statues depicting the birth and pride of a new nation. He renamed the former central city square to Freedom Square, and commanded large-scale projects like the world's third largest mosque Istiqlal (notably built by a non-Javanese Christian architect). One of his last projects was the already mentioned national monument *Monas* (ibid: 203-204) [58].

Soekarno's modernizing projects were meant to raise the people's morale but did not fill their hungry stomachs. After an alleged communist coup attempt in 1965, power was seized by army general Soeharto, who not long after set Soekarno aside. Soeharto's dictatorial 'New Order' regime (*Orde Baru*) lasted until 1998 and favored economic development instead of nationalistic symbolism. Soekarno's nationalism was subdued of its mobilizing force by fixating it into state-monitored ceremonialism (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 24). Foreign investors and capital, kept at bay by Soekarno's revolutionary rhetorics, were now welcomed with open arms. Under the steady economic growth a relatively affluent urban middle class arose. Jakarta expanded mostly southwards with luxury housing estates, apartments and golf courses for the newly rich and many expats. In their slipstream followed many slums for the rural immigrants that came to try their luck in this city of new possibilities. Until the 1960s urban growth had been relatively slow, with some 1.2 million inhabitants. During the New Order reign population growth accelerated. Separate domains of work, education, living and leisure became part of an emerging modern urban lifestyle. Each have their own physical nodes in the city. The urban landscape became dotted with the landmarks of a new type of modernity: prestigious high-rise office buildings for big business and insurance companies; convention centers; countless universities, colleges, private academies and campuses; luxury apartment complexes, gated neighborhoods and estates where the rich could retreat; golf courses, tennis courts, sport stadiums, racing circuit Sentul, discotheques and bars, hotels and resorts, leisure theme parks Ancol, Taman Mini and Ragunan Zoo; all interconnected by broad (toll) roads, interchanges and overpasses.

Today, the most visible symbols of modernity from the Soeharto era are the many shopping malls littered throughout the city. Malls truly form a topography of their own. One does not need to know any street name, as long as one knows which mall is nearby. The interiors of prestigious malls are always spacious, with copious use of marble, shiny copper, steel and glass, little fountains, and air-conditioning. Inside one finds designer clothing from Paris, Milan and Tokyo, global brand sneaker stores,

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[58] Some typical examples of Soekarno's idealist-modernist architecture are the at that time massive Sarinah warehouse, and Hotel Indonesia along Jakarta's main artery. This heroic symbolism in Jakarta's architectural facade is challenged in typical Indonesian mild defiance through everyday speech. The Youth Monument, a statue of a large muscular man holding a plate with a flame with one stretched arm, is dubbed Pizza Man, while the *Monas* with its needle-shaped appearance is jokingly described as Soekarno's last erection.

interior design shops, trendy hairdressers, super- and hypermarkets, media shops selling laptops and mobile phones, (internet) cafés, game arcades, cinemas, food plazas, and in some malls even an indoor ice-skate yard. Many urbanites enjoy spending time in malls. Most people just window-shop without buying anything. They stroll around and sit down to "wash their eyes" on all the nice things and good-looking other people. They envelop themselves in the cool air and enjoy the relaxing environment, clean and safe inside. Malls are places to watch and be watched. They are reflective mirrors for self-conscious urbanites. These privatized 'inside' places are the beacons of the New Order modernity within the vast, chaotic, hot, polluted, and dangerous urban landscape. Under Soekarno, and initially also under Soeharto, the understanding of 'modernity' was mostly a shared ethics aimed at collaborative national development. In the later phase of New Order, this made way for another modern ethics that foregrounded personal development and individual prospering within a globalizing economy. Malls became the epicenters of a new modern culture of prestige (*gengsi*) (Leeuwen, 1997; Sastramidjaja, 2000).

In 1997 the Asian financial crisis struck. The monetary crisis (*krismon*, in the typical Indonesian tendency to create acronyms) hit Indonesia particularly hard. The rupiah plummeted to a low, dramatically diminishing annual per capita income and burning up middle class savings and investments. The rupiah went from 2000 to 17000 to the dollar, and slowly reestablished at 8000. Neighboring countries quickly recuperated but not Indonesia. Soeharto refused all financial aid programs. He continued an all-is-well course and got himself re-elected for the seventh time by a servile People's Congress. Only after much international pressure he bowed for IMF chairman Michael Camdessus and signed an aid program that demanded the sanitation of banks and institutions, which largely belonged to relatives and allies. The economic crisis unveiled a deeper crisis. The *krismon* was the last push for Soeharto's legitimacy, which was already waning with the death of his spouse and the many uncontrollable forest fires at that time, interpreted as divine signs of a crumbling kingdom. As earlier in Indonesian history, students assumed a heroic role as freedom fighters. They initiated a process of *reformasi* (reform) (Aspinall, 1993, 1995; Pabottingi, Nusantara, Putra, & Sudarmanto, 1998). They demanded more democracy and wanted to put an end to the double role of the army as both defensive and political power. They targeted the widespread corruption, collusion and nepotism, summarized in their slogan KKN (*Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme*). Small-scale protests on the campuses evolved into mass-protests on the streets, not just in Jakarta but all over Indonesia. After five students were shot at Trisakti University in west-Jakarta, the bomb burst. In the ensuing days massive looting took place, directed at New Order symbols like shopping centers,

hotels, gas stations, toll roads, banks, offices, and Chinese stores [59]. More than one thousand people died in the mayhem. Finally, after 32 years, Soeharto stepped down. The fall of the *Orde Baru* regime in May 1998 ushered in the beginning of a new reform era. Although the symbol of evil disappeared, the problems themselves did not. Student organization kept rallying against *KKN* and pro conviction of Soeharto and his cronies. After a brief transit period, during which former minister of technology and vice-president Habibie assumed presidency, the respected Muslim leader Abdurrahman Wahid (known as Gus Dur) became the first democratically elected president. He strategically appointed Soekarno's popular daughter Megawati as vice-president. In 2001 she took over from Wahid but failed to deliver economic improvement and political stability. In 2004 former army general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (commonly called SBY) became president. He was reelected in 2009.

2.2.3 Unity in diversity?

Under Soeharto, expressions of ethnic, religious, racial, and class identities were taboo. Local ethnic culture was folklorized in order to render it harmless (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 23). A good example of how cultural diversity was dealt with is the theme park *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* ("Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park"), located in south-Jakarta [60]. This brainchild of Soeharto's wife opened in 1975 and still today is a popular destination for domestic tourism. It showcases traditional houses and cultural artifacts from each of Indonesia's 26 provinces (now 33), and hosts copies of buildings for religious worship from the five official religions (Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism). Obviously all of these five major religions stem from outside Indonesia. Yet they are presented as indigenous. Taman Mini erases all historical references to outside influences, be it Indian, Arab, European, or Chinese. The indigenization and homogenization of cultural diversity is reflected in the spatial symbolics of the theme park. The material symbols of Indonesia's diversity are concentrically placed around a huge central pond with little islands, that forms a miniature map of Indonesia. A sky-lift cable car gives visitors an arial view of the whole scene. This spatial layout, and the fact that the park is located in Jakarta, absorbs regional diversity into homogenized and centralized national unity. Cultural selfhood and difference is subsumed under national sameness and similarity. The park further features a Disney-style 'children's palace', a science and technology center, an IMAX

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[59] The Chinese were seen as having the best jobs, and therefore close to the Soeharto regime.

[60] See http://www.tamanmini.com.

theater, and a mini train tour. Cultural identities thus are made into items to be consumed for playful enjoyment and family recreation (see also Sastramidjaja, 2000: 53-54).

In trying to contain ethnic, religious, racial, and class identities, New Order played them out against one another. This proved a dangerous strategy. A case in point is the transmigration policy, whereby many poor farmers from densely populated areas (mostly Muslims from Java) were more or less forcibly moved to outer islands (mostly Christian and animistic regions in Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Papua). The policy's stated purpose was to alleviate pressure on scarce farmland. It has also been interpreted as a deliberate strategy to weaken local separatist movements, and to spread nationalism by mingling populations. Transmigration lead to frequent tensions and violent clashes between different groups. New Order's attempts to safeguard national unity ironically resulted in the proliferation of 'primordial' communal identity categories, and gave rise to an ongoing struggle about the boundaries of these categories: what constitutes 'true' Islam, 'true' local Dayak culture, who are the 'true' indigenous Indonesians or Jakartans, why are the Chinese a privileged class? With the fall of the New Order regime this volatile mix was released. *Reformasi* set in a process of political, economic and legislative decentralization to accommodate anti-Jakarta sentiments in the outer regions. In its wake however followed corruption among local strongmen, an 'identity politics' by local groups seeking to shake off their former marginalized status, and frequent ethnic and religious clashes (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 12-31). Tensions in Indonesian identity construction (between diversity and unity, between primordialism and nationalism, between urban and outer regions, between different interpretations of modernity) played up with full force. In section 3.3 we see how moral concerns and disputes about the country's direction pivot around new technologies like the mobile phone.

It has been noted that ethnic protests tend to have a certain staged theatrical quality. They arouse great emotions in the heat of the moment and then quickly dim again (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 24). Theatrical metaphors are frequently involved both by Indonesians themselves and in studies about Indonesia, for instance in the portrayal of both Soekarno and Soeharto as pulling the strings of Indonesian society like a *dalang* (the master puppeteer in traditional *wayang* shadow plays), and in Indonesian politics in general as a puppet play (Amir, 2007: 288; Aspinall, 1993: 31;

1995: 27-41, 43; Erb & Adams, 2000: 2; Hidayat, 2002: 161) [61]. In the next section we see that pre-*reformasi* state-control over the information that was disseminated via mass media has fostered a thorough sense of suspicion and disbelief.

We can already discern some contours of 'playful' identity construction and expression in the Indonesian context, without even fully taking new media technologies into account. Social and cultural identities are the focal points in agonistic and competitive struggles for authenticity and recognition (*agôn*). At the same time, many Indonesians have the sense of being puppets played by greater forces over which they have no control (*alea*). This highlight the double paradox of freedom and force: taking control over one's own destiny (but driven by outside forces), or being objectified in a game played by higher forces (but being free of the burden to take matters into one's own hand). Further, mall-dwellers engage in self-conscious identity performances (*mimicry*). They express a unique individuality mirrored in a to-and-fro movement with other individuals. This theatrical play with difference and similarity also occurs among ethnic groups in their theater of ethnic protests. At the same time, in the Taman Mini theme park cultural diversity is subsumed under the umbrella of national identity and made into consumer items for playful experiences and leisure (coinciding with Caillois' *ilinx* sensory vertigo, in which 'experience' is central). This highlights the tension between difference and similarity (and its internal paradox): expressing difference in relation to other people who do exactly the same, and creating unity from differences. Further on we see how new technologies like the mobile phone play a role in this, and how they act as an arena where tensions about modernity and identity are played out.

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[61] Much literature exists about the relation between *wayang* theater and Indonesian social, political and cultural identities (e.g. Mrázek, 2005: 118-120; Weintraub, 2004: 11-12). *Wayang* plays have been understood as legitimizing the existing political order but also as subversive socio-political commentary (see Clark, 2004).

2.3 From old media to new media: a short media history of Indonesia

The mobile phone's influence on Indonesian urban identities cannot be isolated from the history of other media, and its place in a broader media landscape. We now look at transformations in the Indonesian media landscape in order to grasp how mobile media technologies are imbued with certain symbolic values.

2.3.1 From old media...

In their thorough work on media during the New Order regime, Krishna Sen and David Hill argue that mass media form 'sites of struggle' between on the one hand discourses of the unified nation-state, the homogenizing tendencies of cultural policies and the political hegemony of the regime; and on the other hand the aspirations, anxieties and dissident voices of Indonesian citizens and "various parochial regional, localized interests, histories and identities" (Sen & Hill, 2000: 1). Under Soekarno, cultural production and media were coerced into compliance with state ideologies and policies. Soeharto focused more on economic development and tried to maneuver expressions of culture to apolitical grounds. New Order demanded that media organizations support the cause of nationalism and help to legitimize the regime. "As the guardian of the Pancasila, the press was to be 'free but responsible', in contrast to the 'liberal' Western press, seen as libertine and 'irresponsible'" (ibid: 53). In its last decade New Order started to lose its grip on the media:

> For most of the New Order, the media appeared to be under the command of the government, controlled through layers of formal and informal censorship processes and, increasingly, through ownership. Overt political dissidence - expressed as textual or institutional practices - occupied only a very small space in the culture industries. ... In the last decade of the New Order, however, the state was losing control of media products in a more general sense, due to changes in media technologies and economies. ... What is common across the culture industries ... is the way what might be called 'media ecology' worked against the express policies of the New Order: where the policies wanted a single voice of national culture, the ecology produced diverse and hybrid forms involving national, global and local codes.
> (ibid: 12)

New Order saw internal ethnic diversity as a bigger threat to national unity than cultural influences from the outside (ibid: 16). With the exception of radio, which was granted a large measure of local flavor, the regime was much more lenient towards

'global' media influences than towards media that stressed regional differences and identities (ibid: 101). Regional cultures, even the dominant Javanese culture, had only a minority status in the media. In 1986 the government, eager to pursue new economic opportunities, declared an 'open sky' policy. This allowed satellite television reception through parabolic antennas. Privatization of television in 1988 opened the market for many new commercial TV channels (ibid: 111-117). Although these licenses initially were issued under the table through nepotism, Soeharto soon started to lose his grip on the media landscape. The eroding influence of the regime resulted in a much more varied landscape. Due to the increase in television channels the task of censorship became almost impossible. As the late-New Order grip on the media weakened, borders opened to 'global culture'. Indonesia sucked in not just 'western' cultural elements but also *dangdut* music from neighboring Malaysia (ibid: 174-181), Japanese *manga* comics (ibid: 31-32), Brazilian *telenovelas*, Indian Bollywood movies, and Caribbean reggae music. Ironically, the late-New Order media policies reinforced the influence of both global and local cultures instead of national culture.

For a long time Indonesians held a skeptical and even cynical view of the media because of its close ties to the prevailing order. Many felt they were kept 'stupid' by the media under New Order. Indonesian political history can be written as a story of believe and disbelief, and of attributing double meanings to media content. To a large extent, politics has centered around (mediatized) make-belief in order to generate and sustain a public facade of stability and order, and national unity. New Order was "a regime busy keeping up appearances" (Schulte Nordholt & Klinken, 2005: 6). As already said, this has led to a sense of politics as a game, both as a mimetic puppet play and as aleatory game of chance. A 'ludic' style of dissent and protest arose, which sought to inverse the New Order ideal of societal order and stability, by bringing chaos and mobility to the city streets (Lee, 2007). During the last days of Soeharto these protests became bigger, more frequent and more organized. And digital media technologies contributed to this.

2.3.2 ...To new media

In the second half of the 1980s Indonesian universities started to experiment with computer networks. It took ten years for the internet to take off. Initially, government institutions, universities, and research institutes were connected to the internet via the research network IPTEKnet. Not long after, the Ministry of Tourism, Post and Telephony (*Deparpostel*) started its own internet service provider (ISP) WasantaraNet. This ISP provided access to citizens via its infrastructure of post-offices spread all over the archipelago. In addition, a number of commercial ISPs started to offer internet access

to businesses and consumers. By the end of 1995 there were five commercial ISPs, in May 1996 already 22 (Hill & Sen, 1997: 73). In May 2000 the organization responsible for the registration of Indonesian domains IDNIC mentioned a total of 68 ISPs (De Lange, 2001: 46). The number of internet subscribers at the end of 1996 was estimated at 40.000, of whom 25.000 used commercial providers (Sen & Hill, 2000: 196). Lim gives a figure of 4 million users for the year 2001 (Lim, 2003: 276). Due to the widespread practice of sharing accounts, the actual number of people who had access to the internet was probably much higher.

Creating access to the 'information superhighway' was part of a prestigious series of policies devised by Soeharto's brilliant and faithful Minister of Research and Technology Habibie to guide Indonesia on the road to progress through high-tech developments (Sen & Hill, 2000: 195). Habibie had acquired a PhD in aeronautical engineering in Germany and was vice-president of a German aviation company for ten years. In 1974 he returned to Indonesia at the request of Soeharto to join his cabinet. Under Habibie, technological policies were tied to the project of modern nation-building and the formation of a national identity. Amir describes the emergence of a discourse of 'technological nationalism', in which spurring high-tech development and strengthening national pride hold each other in mutual embrace (Amir, 2007). Amir presents the case of Indonesia's domestic aviation industry, as "a vehicle that would enable the country to take off toward a brighter future" (ibid: 283). After decades of development, the Indonesian-built N250 airplane was ceremonially launched on Patriots Day (November 10, 1994), exactly 49 years after thousands of Indonesian freedom fighters died in Surabaya in a battle against former colonizer the Netherlands. The airplane was nicknamed Gatotkaca, a heroic flying character in Hindu-Javanese mythology (ibid: 288). During the ceremony, a choir chanted a national prayer of thanksgiving. President Soeharto poured flower-scented water over the airplane's nose from a jasmine-decorated pitcher, a Javanese blessing tradition. The use of symbolism had to suggest the revival of Indonesian civilization and its technological superiority. It turned a 'global' technology into an Indonesian technology. "[T]he embrace of modernity, as exemplified by the development of aircraft industry in Indonesia, does not necessarily mean that Indonesia is, or wants to be, fully Western. The technology absorbed from the West must be wrapped in a spiritual force that will strengthen it as an indigenous creation" (ibid: 288). The successful maiden flight of the N250 on August 10 1995 (exactly one week before the 50th birthday of the nation) meant a huge boost to the regime's legitimacy. August 10 was proclaimed *Harteknas* (*Hari Kebangkitan Teknologi Nasional* = national technology revival day) and is still annually celebrated in the presence of high-ranking officials. In the written press Habibie proudly declared: "the N250 successful flight enables us to walk tall and equal to any nation" (ibid: 290).

From this case we see how building a modern national identity is supported by, and expressed through high-tech developments. However, the technology has to be indigenized. Fortifying national identity by means of high-tech requires creative bricolage with indigenous symbols, in order to 'domesticate' and appropriate it as Indonesia's own technology. Further, we see from Habibie's declaration in the press that this modern national identity is constructed and expressed in relation to other nations. On a national level the same dialectic occurs as among the mall visitors, who mirror themselves to other people in order to become individuals. This is the paradox of difference and similarity at its clearest: difference derived from the overarching concept (an Indonesian identity mirrored by other nations), and similarity expressed as difference (standing equal to other nations by means of an indigenous airplane). Modern identities evolve from such ongoing circular movements: from inside to outside and from unicity to being like others, and back again. This is true for Indonesia as elsewhere; indeed I take such movements as a universal aspect of modern identities.

Opposed to the high-tech vision of an Indonesian modernity stands a vision that favors the development of inexpensive 'modest' or 'effective technologies' [62]. In this vision the development of new technologies should not be about aggrandizing personal or national prestige, but be foremost geared to improving conditions for laborers, farmers, fishermen, and to providing basic necessities like healthcare and education. Modest technologies need not come from abroad but can easily be developed at home. Technologies thus constitute both a defining force of modernity, as well as an arena for opposing visions about the direction the country should head. More about this later.

Initially there was a lot of uncertainty which government body was responsible for the distribution of licenses and policies governing the internet. It was unclear whether the internet were a broadcast mass medium similar to press, television and radio, or a narrowcast medium like post and telephony. The first category was under the firm supervision of the restrictive Ministry of Information (*Deppen*) [63]. Under New Order *Deppen* imposed self-censorship on press and television under the cloak of 'acting responsibly' and serving the interest of the nation (Hidayat, 1999: 363). *Deppen* saw the internet as a potential threat to the norms and values of Indonesian society, since it offered unlimited access to information from all over the world. Internet was

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[62] The Indonesian terms for such technologies are: *teknologi tepat guna* (effective/appropriate technologies), *teknologi sederhana* (modest technologies), and *teknologi dasar* (basic technologies). The special "teknologi tepat guna" page on the IPTEK website (Indonesian Center for Science and Technology) lists many examples: http://www.iptek.net.id/ind/warintek/?mnu=6.

[63] Indonesia was no exception to the rule that under restrictive regimes any governmental organization carrying the word "information" actually serves its exact opposite.

the accomplice of globalization and would induce foreign cultural penetration. The more economically oriented and more liberal Ministry of Tourism, Post and Telephony (*Deparpostel*) saw in globalization new opportunities for the economic future of Indonesia (Hill & Sen, 1997: 78-82). In the end *Deparpostel* became the responsible department for internet issues. This had profound consequences for the future of Indonesia. (More about the tension between the global and the local in section 3.3.)

The internet quickly grew into a free-haven for all things regular media could not publish. Dissident information and opinions could be expressed, shared, and found. The exchange of information occurred both inside Indonesia and with the outside. Student leader Anas Alamudi from the University of Indonesia (UI) recounted that from 1996 onwards, he and his politically aware student friends started to use email to communicate amongst themselves and with other student organizations they knew from a special trip to cities all over Java [64]. According to Anas, the politically active students were extremely paranoia about everything. Friends at the Technical University in Bandung (ITB) taught them how to employ encryption techniques such as PGP (*Pretty Good Privacy*). Of course not everybody had internet at that time. But in each student organization there were always three or four people who had access. They emailed information to each other and informed members of their own organizations. Emails were printed out, photocopied, and distributed, as had been done earlier via stenciled pamphlets. Anas believed these printed-out mailings were even more important than the internet itself in forming opinions. Anas noticed that he could influence people's opinions via IRC (internet relay chat). At that time he was the channel operator of two of the biggest Indonesian IRC channels on EFnet: *channel Jakarta* and *channel Indonesia*. One or two days before a planned demonstration he would set the topic to "demonstration there-and-there, be there!". The ensuing discussions in that channel would often turn to heated debates about politics (De Lange, 2001: 47-48).

People and networks from outside Indonesia also played a large part in the spread of free information. Very influential was the *apakabar* mailinglist ("how are you?", litterally: "what's the news?"), moderated from the United States. *Apakabar* grew into the main international forum for the dissemination of news and for discussion about Indonesian politics and society. Under New Order the centralized press filtered out most personal experiences and opinions in their news accounts, and always gave the last word to government officials. The internet enabled eyewitness accounts of protests, brutalities and casualties to reach the world news in an instant. It gave room to a rich palette of experiences and opinions, allowed people to compose

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[64] Source: interview with Anas Alamudi on May 6 2000 (see De Lange, 2001: 47-50; for a description of how networks between student journalists in multiple cities were forged, see Juliastuti, 2006: 140).

their own personal visions of events, and induced a sense of being heard by the whole world (Hill & Sen, 1997: 84-87). The internet was a two-way portal between Indonesia and the outside world. Local information and knowledge bypassed the national media and directly went global (Sen & Hill, 2000: 210). The world functioned as a guard dog that kept an eye on local misdeeds. Inversely, the global directly entered the local without being filtered through layers of state censorship. Via the internet, news accounts and opinions in worldwide media about the escalating political situation and student protests returned to Indonesia. Most international media portrayed the student movements and protesters as noble fighters for freedom and democracy against the brutal regime of dictator Soeharto. These outside reports imbued national events and actions with a tremendous sense of urgency and weight. Protesters who realized that the whole world was watching, considered this a great support and legitimization for their actions. They were making world news. They were steering the country onto the road towards freedom and democracy. And at the same time they wrote the headlines of the international press, played a leading role in the news reports of major television stations, and filled the websites of main news agencies around the globe (Hidayat, 1999: 358).

Initially, the internet was used primarily for the unhampered spread of dissident news and dissenting opinions directed against the Soeharto regime. After several newspapers and magazines payed attention to the *apakabar* mailinglist, the tone of voice and content of posts became more diverse and far more opinionated, according to Anas. The internet became a cross-section of society and its many different voices and truths. Individuals and groups engaged in information battles about events taking place. The underlying agonistic struggle was one about who represents the 'real Indonesia', and whose ideology would be best for the development of the country. On September 28 1999 a certain Frangkie from the *Moslem Brotherhood Association* sent an email to the *apakabar* mailinglist. Frangkie's email was titled "Watch out for minority group movements; the Semanggi Tragedy (2) September 24 1999" [65]. After some Quranic quotes, Frangkie noted that the demonstrations caused many victims and a lot of damage. He then asked what really happened, and pointed an accusing finger at the radical *pro-reformasi* movement. He wrote that the opposition were an extremist minority characterized by secularism and "Islamophobia". They were mostly Christians and their way of protesting was not democratic but anarchistic. He claimed the majority of students were Muslim and supported the official road to reform. They

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[65] During a protest at the Semanggi junction in Jakarta on November 13 1998, 14 protesters were shot, among whom eight university students, and more than 400 injured. On September 24 1999 a second incident happened at the Semanggi crossing, claiming nine lives. This email was a follow-up and revised version of a website by Frangkie (archived at http://www.bijt.org/scriptie/scriptie/Scriptie/links/Mewaspadai1.html). The email is archived at http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/1999/09/28/0041.html.

were "the pure students". Frangkie named a long list of media that allegedly supported the "extremist minority groups", and that portrayed the opposition as being tyrannized by the existing order. In his view the opposite was true:

> In reality it is the lefter-than-leftist *Forkot* student Anas Alamudi who deliberately and brutally drove his VW Safari through the barricades of the army apparatus, causing victims amongst the apparatus and journalists [66]. Yet the mass media, which are controlled by minority groups, turn around the facts to make it look like this Forkot student became the victim [67].

Anas himself recounted this event in very different words:

> After the fall of Soeharto we kept demonstrating against the double-role of the army and against the special meeting of the People's Congress, which we knew would elect Habibie as Soeharto's successor [68]. On the 11th of November we marched towards the parliament. I was to negotiate. I drove forward in my car. Then all of a sudden the students riding motorbikes were beaten by the soldiers. And the soldiers advanced and started to beat me. In an attempt to escape, I stepped on the gas and turned hard right. It turns out that nine soldiers were ran over. The official number was nine, although some friends in the army hospital say only two were actually injured. I remember clearly it was on Wednesday. On Friday a nicely printed newsletter was handed out to people who went to pray in the Al-Azar mosque, claiming that I was a member of Forkot, that I was a Christian, and that I had very leftist leanings. My friends joked that everything they said was wrong because I am not a member of Forkot, I am not a Christian, and I *am* leftist, not merely leftist leaning! [69]

2.3.3 Physical nodes of new media

Another element in the rapid and almost unhindered dissemination of information were the many *warnet* (= *warung internet,* internet shops) that since the mid-1990s started mushrooming all over the larger cities with a considerable student population.

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[66] *Forkot* stands for *Forum Kota* (city forum), or according to enemies like Frangkie "Forum Kommunis Total". Forkot was one of the more radical student organizations. Although it was not aligned to a specific university Forkot had many supporters from the Christian University Indonesia (UKI).

[67] Source: website archived at http://www.bijt.org/scriptie/scriptie/Scriptie/links/Mewaspadai1.html.

[68] The People's Congress consisted of carefully selected pro-government representatives from various groups and regions in the country, and included seats for the army. Habibie, who briefly succeeded Soeharto, was seen as part of the New Order regime, so most students kept demonstrating against Habibie even after Soeharto stepped down.

[69] Source: based on an interview with Anas Alamudi on May 6 2000 (De Lange, 2001: 50).

At that time, few Indonesians had a fixed telephone line at home. Internet cafés were much cheaper than internet access from a commercial ISP [70]. Warnets played an important role as physical hubs in disseminating information directed against the New Order regime. Merlyna Lim describes how warnets in Bandung pinned the notorious list of Suharto's wealth on their walls, and helped to print out and spread this information to non-internet users (Lim, 2003: 280-281). Around 1% of the Indonesian population at that time had access to the internet, but its reach was far greater because online information spread via other media, like print, fax, photocopy, and even word of mouth. Lim further writes that warnets adopted the physical appearance of traditional *warung*, public eating places where people congregate and chat while having a simple meal. Some warnets, particularly in Bandung, resembled the traditional eating style of sitting on the ground behind a low table. Warnets, like the *warung*, were simultaneously a point of commerce, a meeting place, and an information network (ibid: 277-278). According to Lim, globalization obsoleted the urban middle class habit of going to traditional *warung*. People preferred to frequent fast-food restaurants and shopping malls instead, commodified places that do not have the privacy to talk freely and meet others in dialogue. The warnet "has emerged as a reincarnation or contemporary form of the *warung*" (ibid: 279). Warnet were both an entry point to cyberspace, free from interventions of the state and the corporate economy that posed restrictions on social identities, and a civic space where people could meet, socialize, and engage in conversations. Thus, as also noted by Lim, the appropriation of new technologies cannot be understood solely from 'within' cyberspace but also in relation the physical spaces and culture (see for instance also Miller & Slater, 2000). This local specificity of ICTs (information and communication technologies) occurs even *within* Indonesia. Other than in Bandung, where indeed visitors often sit down on the floor, most warnets in Jakarta have a decisively modern office-like appearance. They have desks, office chairs and air-conditioning, a more polished and designed look, and some cater 'western' sandwiches and soft drinks to visitors; all more in line with the lifestyle of Jakartan urbanites. In my earlier study about the internet in Jakarta I concluded: "[t]he *warnet* is the place where the real world (*dunia nyata*) and the virtual world (*dunia maya*) come together and the border between them often seems to dissolve. ... If the mall is the well-lit *frontstage* for the performance of a consumer modernity, the *warnet* is the *backstage* setting for the new informational understanding of modernity" (De Lange, 2001: 63). This serves to illustrate a general point, to which we will return at length in chapter 4, namely that

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[70] In 2000 internet access at a *warnet* was anything between 2000 and 15000 Rupiah per hour with an average of 6000 Rp (€ 1 at that time). In 2007 the average price was 15000 Rp per hour (€ 1.20) in Jakarta, and 10000 Rp elsewhere.

social and cultural processes increasingly take place in both media spaces and physical spaces at the same time. This is particularly true for mobile media, as these are used in a wide variety of physical settings. Physical and digital spaces mutually influence and shape each other. As we see in chapter 4, they become 'hybrid spaces'.

2.3.4 New media's new modernity

So what does this "new informational understanding of modernity" entail? The internet appeared under a dictatorial regime that reigned firmly for decades. A few years later the regime fell. Coincidence? Or a direct cause? The answer lies somewhere in the middle, and it certainly was not the internet alone, as the media landscape in general had become more open in the last phase of New Order. The answer is less important than the question itself. By mere association digital information and communication technologies were tied to the fall of the regime and to the winds of change sweeping through the nation. The rise of the internet ran parallel to the societal revolution that took place at the dawn of the new millennium. In popular thought digital media technologies and modernizing developments became tied to each other like a Siamese twin [71]. Internet and mobile phones helped to coordinate student protests in Indonesian "smart mobs" *avant la lettre* (Nas & Sluis, 2000: 155-157; Rheingold, 2002) [72]. Using Castells' terms, the internet was initially used to forge a 'resistance identity' against the New Order 'legitimizing identity' (Castells, 1997: 8). It later united many Indonesians in a 'project identity' by bringing them together in their shared wish for *reformasi* and to become a modern nation.

After the fall of Soeharto and his clan the internet shed off its underground revolutionary feathers and became more mainstream and commercialized. Many new internet startups sprouted. Initially, these were mostly news and opinion websites. In 1998 Detik.com was launched, the online version of critical opinion magazine Detik, banned by Soeharto in 1994 along with two other critical magazines. Later, community and lifestyle-oriented portals arose, like Astaga.com, KaféGaul.com and Satunet (the last already perished). These were platforms for individual expression and breeding grounds for what early internet researchers call 'virtual communities' (Jones, 1995,

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[71] For example, this idea is expressed in the article "*Peranan Internet dalam Reformasi Indonesia*" (The Role of the Internet in Indonesian Reformation), originally published on July 10 1998. See http://www.bloggaul.com/leo_transparancy/readblog/73678/peranan-internet-dalam-reformasi-indonesia.

[72] Rheingold's analysis of the mobilizing and revolutionary potential of (mobile) media to oust regimes focuses on the case of Estrada in the Philippines. Rheingold claims that "[o]n January 20, 2001, President Joseph Estrada of the Philippines became the first head of state in history to lose power to a smart mob", after over 1 million Manila residents were mobilized by waves of text messages (Rheingold, 2002: 157-160). In my view this claim neglects the role of digital media in the earlier Indonesian revolution.

1997, 1998; Rheingold, 1993). E-commerce promised great economic prosperity for internet entrepreneurs. The internet radiated an aura of unprecedented possibilities and fortune: step into these developments now and the horn of plenty will surely be yours. In advertisements for expensive business seminars the internet was touted in rosy imperatives: "Go Internet or it's over", "e-business: the new wave of the future", "guiding Indonesia on the road to global convergence" [73]. Doing online business signified a new type of entrepreneurship based on flexibility and merit, instead of being tied to the olds ways of centralized planning, knowing the right people, and getting things done via KKN. Indonesians all of a sudden attained unprecedented freedom of speech. Universal human rights appeared on the political agenda. The promise of true democracy shimmered on the horizon. A broad civil demand arose for political and corporate transparency and responsibility. The market opened up further to global trade. And Indonesia became seriously infected by the worldwide hype surrounding the possibilities of information technology, new economy, and e-commerce (a hype known as the "internet bubble", collapsing in april 2000, and reincarnating into what later was called web 2.0).

The rise of digital media in Indonesia became embedded in a narrative of modernity that shaped how Indonesians used and understood these media technologies. This narrative partly stemmed from the (re)construction and interpretation of the historical events that took place, and partly was deliberately produced by new media entrepreneurs, journalists, NGOs and so on. It imbued new media with symbolic values and the capacity to *do* things. The internet supposedly was a "liberator" from political oppression (see Hidayat, 1999: 368); it was a global platform for the expression and spread of free information and personal opinions; and it was a juggernaut of new economic opportunities for businesses big and small. Under Soeharto the discourse of modernity transformed from an ideology of symbolic nationalism to being framed in terms of economic progress, national stability, and individual consumer culture. With *reformasi* the discourse again shifted. We have seen from the case of Indonesia's aviation industry that voicing modernity in terms of technological developments was not typical of the *reformasi* era. But the new values embodied by digital technologies were. With *reformasi* 'technological modernity' was no longer solely about acquiring international prestige and breeding nationalism. It now involved freedom of speech, personal liberty, individual development and opportunity, and political and corporate transparency and responsibility (*bertanggung jawab*). An illustration of this new ethics is the fact that president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (known as SBY) gave out his private cellphone number to the public (Barendregt, 2006a: 3). We must situate the rise of the mobile phone in this context.

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[73] See some of these advertisements: http://www.bijt.org/scriptie/scriptie/Scriptie/links/Seminar1.html.

2.4 The 'production' of the handphone

In the final section of this chapter, we investigate how various parties and stakeholders produce the mobile media landscape in Indonesia, as opposed to how the mobile phone is 'consumed' (the focus of the next chapter). This does not mean that production and consumption are separate spheres and processes. On the contrary, production is profoundly cultural. Employees bring in their own cultural backgrounds. And most businesses have some kind of corporate philosophy. Moreover, in the so-called 'digital age' consumption is not the endpoint of the chain (if ever it was), but feeds creative processes back into the circle. Digital media contribute to a breakdown of the boundaries between production and consumption by enabling and stimulating creative productive practices, in what is generally known as 'user generated content' by 'prosumers' or 'professional amateurs' [74]. The tension between production and consumption is in fact an old theme. In the 1940/50s, critical theorists Adorno and Horkheimer argued that culture became commodified in the hands of a few capitalist culture industries. While making claims to originality these industries actually produced standardized commodities and thereby fed mass consumer culture and 'pseudo-individuality' (see Holmes, 2005: 24-25; Negus, 1997: 72-77). Here again we see the paradox of difference and similarity: expressing difference through mass-produced commodities. Cultural theorist Negus argues against this simple dichotomy. "Production does not take place within a completely separate sphere but in relation to the broader social contexts of consumption" (Negus, 1997: 102). If Marxist theory is too one-dimensional in its cynical view of the hegemony of production, cultural studies in my view often tend to uncritically laude the creativity involved in consumption. As seen in section 1.1, Silverstone and Haddon attempt to overcome the production-consumption dichotomy by introducing the design/domestication pair (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). Focusing only on domestication without design neglects the production side of technologies. As a result, it is hard to maintain a critical perspective on how the supposedly creative consumption of technological artifacts may in fact be

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[74] User-generated content, consumer-generated media, web 2.0, professional amateurism (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004), hacker ethic (Himanen, 2001), networked participation (Russell, Ito, Richmond, & Tuters, 2008), remix culture (Lessig, 2004), wisdom of the crowds, and so on, are all terms that signify profound changes in the ways cultural content is being produced, spread, and consumed. The people formerly known as consumers are no longer passive recipients of products, services, and content. They have taken the means of production and distribution into their own hands, thanks to cheap and readily available access to technologies, software and networks, growing media wisdom, and participation in online communities and e-culture. In addition, systems of collaboration and recommendation - often based on reputation - change the organization of knowledge and expertise. According to some controversial critics like Andrew Keen, this "cult of the amateur" has lead to an abundance of "user-generated nonsense" that destroys the distinction between the trained expert and uninformed amateur (Keen, 2007).

purposively built into 'the design' at large [75]. In this section and in the next chapter, I take production as 'design', and consumption as 'domestication' in the broad and dynamic sense of Silverstone and Haddon. This enables us to see production in cultural terms, and consumption as (at least partially) designed. Starting the analysis of the mobile phone in Indonesia with 'production' (with an emphasis on 'catching the consumer', by looking at branding and advertising) by no means suggests that consumers are passively lured into a prepackaged message. In my view the social production of the mobile phone is just as much a reflection of existing values and aspirations as it is a way to make money.

2.4.1 Market and numbers

The earliest types of cellular telephony in Indonesia based on pre-GSM analogue standards, were introduced between 1984 and 1992 [76]. In 1993 state-owned telecommunications operator PT Telkom announced the start of a trial project based on the digital GSM standard in the free-trade Riau islands Batam and Bintan. One year later PT Satelit Palapa Indonesia (Satelindo) launched the first commercially available service in greater Jakarta, after having acquired a nation-wide GSM 900/1800 Mhz license, a satellite telephony license, and an international telephony license. In 1995 Telkomsel, a daughter company of PT Telkom, became the second commercial mobile telephony operator in Indonesia. Telkomsel grew into the biggest operator, with a market share of 50% in March 2009 (although shrinking from 53% in 2007) [77]. In 1996 PT Excelcomindo was the third company to launch its mobile phone services, initially in the three biggest cities on Java: Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. Excelcom was born out of a collaboration between national and foreign investors, among which corporations from the USA and Japan, and the Asian Infrastructure Fund by the Asian Development Bank. In 2005 Telekom Malaysia (84%) and Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (16%) took over XL. Under pressure of the IMF and the Worldbank Indonesia liberalized many former state led companies. Privatization and internationalization also occurred with Telkomsel and Indosat. State-owned PT Indosat

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[75] Consumers are continuously 'being played' by a multi-billion dollar advertising industry that tries to seduce the consumer through branding and product positioning. Branding strategists have thankfully appropriated former subversive and anti-consumerist tactics of 'guerilla marketing', 'culture jamming', 'logo mashups', 'flash mobbing', and 'viral campaigning' associated with internet culture; yet another illustration of the fact that production and consumption are deeply intertwined.

[76] This paragraph is largely based on Budi Putra (2004) *Planet Seluler: ketika teknologi bergerak mengubah kita*. pp. 96-108, and on a report by IPTEK, the Indonesian Center for Science and Technology (IPTEK, 2006).

[77] Source: company profile at http://www.telkomsel.com/web/company_profile. Accessed December 20 2007 and May 2 2009.

took over Satelindo in 2002. At the end of that year the government divested 42% of its shares to foreign Singapore Technologies Telemedia. State-owned PT Telkom still holds 65% of Telkomsel, while the other 35% are owned by Singtel Singapura.

Indonesia at that time was a promising country for telecom investments. It knew reasonable economic growth, apparent political stability, a large population of over 200 million, and low penetration of fixed telephony at home. The New Order government was very generous in supplying licenses to companies that wanted to operate a cellular network. As many as twenty-one national and regional licenses were given off, many of which remained in the drawer as the 1997 monetary crisis hit. The *krisis moneter* grinded developments to a halt. Telecom infrastructure investments paid for in dollars outpaced the eight-time inflation of the rupiah. Middle class buying power evaporated, post-paid subscriptions declined. Telkomsel was the first operator to introduce an upgradable prepaid (*prabayar*) card as an alternative strategy to post-paid (*pascabayar*) cards. Prepaid turned out to be a huge success. It was rapidly adopted by other companies and saved the industry. Up to this day prepaid remains by far the most common type of subscription. Estimates are over 90% of Indonesians use prepaid cards (IPTEK, 2006: 27-28; Putra, 2004: 98). After virtually no growth in 1998, numbers again grew exponentially (see figure 3). Indonesia's amazing boom in mobile phone subscribers is considered among the highest in southeast Asia. In 2002, 55 out of 1000 Indonesians had a subscription, in 2007 353, and in 2009 almost 700 [78].

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[78] Source: ITU statistics at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx.

Number of mobile phone subscribers in Indonesia between 1994 - 2009 in millions
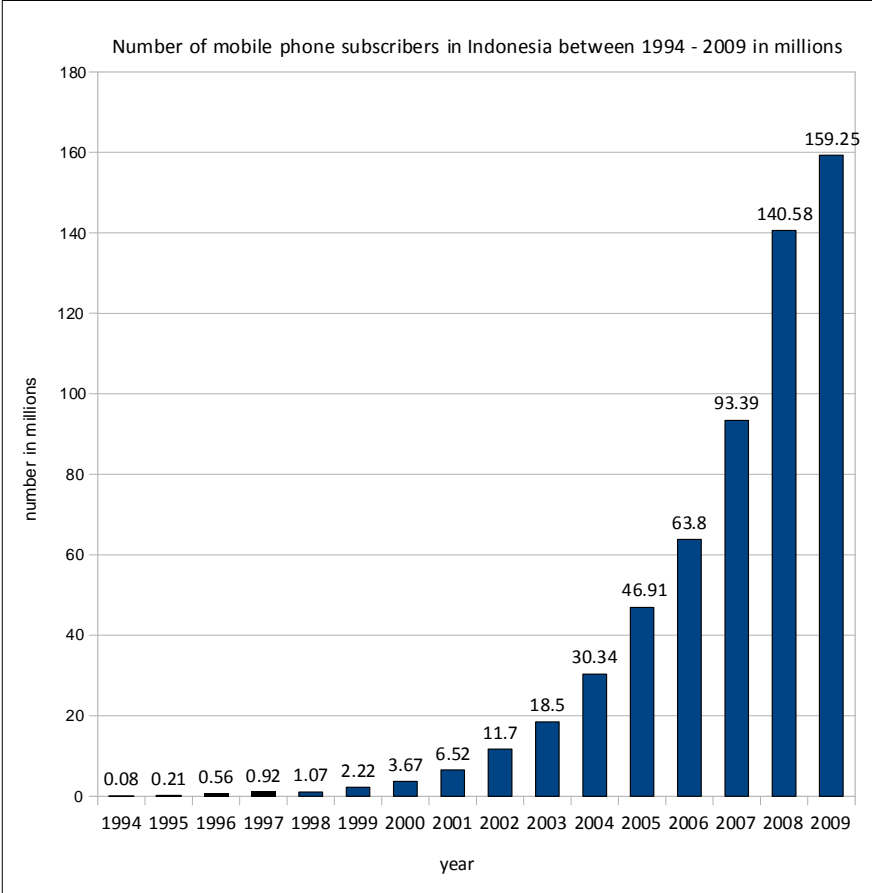
Figure 3: Number of mobile phone subscribers in Indonesia 1994-2009 in millions [79].

2.4.2 Wartel as precursors to mobile telephony

How come the mobile phone rose so quickly in Indonesia? First of all, landlines in Indonesia have never been widespread. The state-led telco PT Telkom Indonesia was notoriously slow and unreliable in providing landlines to the home. Actual delivery could take months, or even years. In the 1990s the situation improved somewhat. Still it would take three or four months to get a landline. In 1993 there were less than 2

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[79] Source: ITU statistics at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx (rounded off to 10.000 people; Indonesia's total population in 2009 was 229.96 million). As often, these numbers may either be too high or too low in representing actual access and use. Too high because many Indonesians have multiple subscriptions (for instance both GSM and CDMA), and a considerable number of subscriptions are 'zombies': no longer in use but still counted. Too low because particularly among poorer households multiple people may share one subscription.

million fixed telephone lines in Indonesia, one per 100 inhabitants. In 2000 there were more than 6.5 million fixed lines, 3.25 per 100 inhabitants [80]. Compared to other Asian countries Indonesia ranked among the lowest (IPTEK, 2006: 8). To fill the gap public telephone shops sprang up all over Indonesia: so-called *wartel*, an abbreviation of *warung telpon* (telephone shop). Every neighborhood had one or more wartels that served the communicative needs of the local community. In the early 1990s there were 25,000 public phones and 800 wartels in the country (Sen & Hill, 2000: 197). This rose to 116,445 coin/card pay-phones and 228,863 public wartels in 2000 (IPTEK, 2006: 15). Especially in Jakarta wartel presence was high with 3.19 per 1000 inhabitants in 2005 (the national average was 1.65 per 1000 inhabitants; ibid: 13-14). Wartels were mostly operated by small private entrepreneurs. With an initial investment of just US $ 1000 one could start a telephone kiosk with two telephone booths and a computerized billing system. The telecom sector in Indonesia has since long offered opportunities to small entrepreneurs to start their own business. This has been true for both wartels and warnets.

Many Indonesians thus were accustomed to go out and travel short distances in their neighborhood for their communicative needs. In this sense, telecommunication was already 'mobile'. Enters the mobile phone. It provided an increasing number of Indonesians with a personal communication device. People could now communicate with others from anywhere instead of traveling to a wartel. More importantly, they could now be reached directly by others. Wartels are fine if you wish to call someone. But what if someone else wants to call you? People could now be addressed as individuals (of course only by virtue of belonging to social networks). It is tempting to think that the spread of the mobile phone has obsoleted the 'corporeal mobility' of traveling to wartels. This has not happened. Although growth flattened, wartels continue to exist. Telecommunication is not necessarily a substitute for corporeal travel, as for instance proponents of teleworking have hoped. In Indonesia, as elsewhere, various types of mobilities tend to reinforce and modify each other rather than being substitutes (see Mokhtarian, 2002; Mokhtarian & Meenakshisundaram, 1998).

2.4.3 CDMA technology: bridging high-tech and low-tech

Obviously, the lagging state of fixed telecommunications only partially explains the explosive growth of mobile telephony in Indonesia. After all, countries with well-developed landline infrastructures have witnessed similar spectacular growths. A

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[80] Source: ITU statistics at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx. These numbers include public pay-phones.

second reason is its affordability even by the standards of a developing nation. The three biggest telecom operators have diverse brands under their wings, each targeted at specific customers [81]. In addition, several smaller operators have sprung up that offer cheap CDMA based communication. CDMA is the new kid on the block in Indonesia. It is rising fast in popularity [82]. CDMA is a wireless technology incompatible with GSM that uses local 'fixed line' numbers. CDMA is much cheaper than GSM. Many Jakartan urbanites now carry two handsets, and use their CDMA phone for local communication exchanges [83]. Young kids who enter the mobile market - from age 12 onwards – often opt for CDMA deals, offered incredibly cheap by new telecom providers like Fren (www.mobile-8.com), Esia (www.myesia.com), and Smart (www.smart-telecom.co.id). In 2007 a CDMA-only handphone from Esia cost 200.000 rupiah (€ 16). CDMA call rates are as low as 45 Rp/minute (= 2700 Rp/hour, less than € 0.25) within the same network and area. Comparing, GSM starts at 250 Rp/minute. So these are truly low prices, even for Indonesian standards, where the average income is less than 1 million rupiah a month (ca. € 80). Students and young workers who frequently move residence often use CDMA-based wireless internet as an alternative for going to warnets, or using internet at university or work [84]. The mobile internet is believed to become the most important way to access the internet in Indonesia. For instance, the online version of Tempo Magazine reported that the development of the fixed internet in Indonesia is losing out to cellular technology [85]. Similarly, Budi Putra writes that wireless technologies are not just for rich western consumers. Instead, "via cellular technologies the web will truly become worldwide" (Putra, 2004: 16).

Mobile communication technologies, and CDMA in particular, bridge the divide sketched in the previous section between global high-tech and affordable 'effective technologies' that fit local domestic needs. On the one hand Indonesians perceive mobile media technologies as 'global' and 'high-tech' [86]. When I asked people what

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[81] Differentiation is based on prepaid or post-paid, tariffs for local/national/international calls, roaming options, access to GPRS/3G internet services, validity of credits.

[82] Indonesia is said to be the third biggest CDMA market in the world after China and India. Source: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/07/10/telecommunications-moving-21st-century.html.

[83] A limited number of dual mode phones exist that are capable of accessing both GSM and CDMA networks. They are not really popular in Indonesia, since there is little choice in choosing a model and therefore, in terms of domestication, limited potential for 'conversion': showing that one is part of consumer culture.

[84] Wireless internet in Indonesia can be accessed via GSM standard Edge and WCDMA networks, and increasingly also via the cheaper CDMA 2000 1X and faster EV-DO (Wimode). In addition, many upscale coffee bars in Jakarta like the worldwide chain Starbucks sell Wi-Fi internet access cards.

[85] Source: online article published on September 1 2007 at http://tempointeraktif.com/hg/nusa/2007/09/01/brk,20070901-106709,id.html.

[86] The Indonesian word most often associated with new technologies such as the mobile phone is *canggih*, which means 'sophisticated' and 'advanced', but also 'artificial' and 'complicated'.

they saw as typical about the mobile phone they often gave answers like: "it is a global technology that enables people to connect to the world at large". In the Indonesian blogosphere, many bloggers express their sense of being connected to the world at large via the handphone [87]. In an article about a remote village on Sumatra that was connected to the internet via CDMA, Budi Putra concludes: "I think that is what telecommunications means: When everyone, even those who come from rural areas, can communicate and connect to the world easily" [88]. We have seen in the Nokia Communicator case that many Indonesians were attracted by the newness of its features. As will be discussed in further detail, the mobile phone as high-tech exerts prestige both on its individual bearer and on the country as a whole. The mobile phone stimulates 'technological nationalism', a sense of national self-pride derived from the adoption of new technologies. On the other hand the mobile phone is perceived as a useful 'effective technology' that brings potential and real benefits to people, especially those in the lower echelons of society. As elsewhere, ICTs in Indonesia are heralded to bring opportunities to agricultural producers (in the African context, see Donner, 2005; Overa, 2008). Earlier this happened with the internet. In a special year 2000 report on the internet, critical opinion magazine Tempo joked that thanks to the internet farmers from the village of Njuwok could now sell their produce directly to New York (Idayanie, et al., 2000). Similarly, the mobile phone is expected to make everyday life easier and more efficient in realms like household, public services, education, health, work, and leisure (Putra, 2004: 121-125). It is a technology that is "appropriate for the current day and age" (Putra, 2004: 7). CDMA challenges the older GSM network and is touted to 'democratize' mobile communication by making it affordable to a wide audience [89]. CDMA operator Esia wants to bring low-cost telecom services to the masses, According to its director "[t]he telecommunications service provider business is not merely about the latest state-of-the-art technology. It's about fulfilling what consumers really need" [90]. This points to the remarkable quality of mobile media technologies to represent and act upon 'global' and 'local' levels of identification (and intermediate levels; see section 3.3).

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[87] This blogger for instance calls the mobile phone "the connection to my outside world" http://www.herdianto.web.id/2007/06/penghubung-dunia-luarku.html.

[88] Article published on August 11 2006. Source: http://asia.cnet.com/member/budip/blog/?v=post&id=3938973.

[89] The marketing strategies of these new CDMA operators in for instance newspaper advertisements are markedly different. Instead of emphasizing technological features they stress simplicity and low costs, and depict ordinary people rather than trendy urban young people, as GSM operators commonly do.

[90] Source: http://asia.cnet.com/member/budip/blog/?v=post&id=61955482.

2.4.4 The 'design' of the mobile phone

A third reason for the mobile phone's popularity is the influence of active branding strategies and the visual omnipresence of the mobile phone. Mobile phone businesses are concentrated in specific places in the city. In Jakarta these places tend to be shopping malls. High-end official brand stores in prestigious shopping malls only sell new mobile phones and accessories. Mid- to low-end bazars (like ITC Roxy Mas, Roxy Square, Mall Ambassador, and electronics centers in the Chinese quarter) house a myriad of small shops that sell a far greater range of mobile phones and items. ITC Roxy Mas is a not very prestigious looking building in a poor and somewhat off-track though populous neighborhood, some two kilometers west of the central Freedom Square. Its building and location convey the message "best deals" rather than luxury [91]. This is handphone heaven. Entering ITC Roxy Mas truly is a dizzying *ilinx* experience. Roxy has five stories and is filled to the brim with mobile phone shops mostly owned by small entrepreneurs. There are shops that sell new, second hand (*bekas*), and/or reconditioned mobile phones (*rekon*) made from 'cannibalized' old parts (see Barendregt, 2008: 165); shops that sell colorful SIM and credit upgrade cards from various operators, with continuously changing prints to be made into collector items [92], and "beautiful numbers" (more about this in the next section); shops specialized in accessories like casings, holders, danglers, chains, stickers, and so on; official customer and repair centers for the most popular mobile phone brands; unofficial phone repair shops that also provide other semi-legal services like phone unlocking; little shops that sell mobile phone ringtones (a booth with someone behind a PC loaded with mp3s from which one can choose a song); and shops that sell books, magazines, and newspapers about mobile phones. Noteworthy is the number of publications that explain how to hack the mobile phone, for instance turning it into a dual-SIM phone, or adding additional functions.

Many of the people working in the shops are young, somewhere between 16 and 25. The majority are female. William, one of the many shop owners of Chinese descent, makes a profit of about 100.000 rupiah (€ 8) on each mobile phone sold [93]. He must sell around ten phones a day to make a reasonable profit. He pays a steep rent of 15 million rupiah per month for his store space, which is why many of his colleagues go bankrupt. Much depends on his supply lines. He imports most phones from foreign countries. Compared to Taiwan and Malaysia, countries he knows well, William

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[91] The same is true for Mall Ambassador, located in the upscale southeastern quadrant of Jakarta's central business district. Mall Ambassador used to be a high-end mall with many brand stores. With the mobile phone boom, it has transformed into a bustling bazar with many small shops.

[92] A new SIM card usually costs 10.000 or 15.000 Rp; upgrade cards come in denominations from 5000 to 100.000 Rp, while some CDMA operators sell cards as low as 1000 Rp (less than € 0.10).

[93] Source: interview with William on August 2 2007.

believes that Indonesia is the biggest market for high-end handphones. In the mall, most visitors wander around in groups of friends, going from store to store. Sometimes they ask a shop tenant about features and price. It seems most handphone shoppers have prepared themselves in advance to make a well-informed choice before they buy. They wander around with one of the cheap handphone newspapers rolled up in their hand, and sometimes have with specific models encircled with a pen. These tabloid-sized weeklies list the latest market prices for almost any phone on sale, and mention the cheapest places to buy in a number of large cities in Indonesia. Especially in the secondhand and *rekon* market there is room for bargaining, so it pays to have a sense of the prices and shop in different places.

Mobile phone commerce is not confined to the mall. Mobile phone advertising is omnipresent in physical urban space, as a very visible element of everyday life. Everywhere in Jakarta one finds roadside stalls and hawkers on foot selling mobile phone credit. Many roadside stalls, pushcart eating places, and smaller shops display advertisements for mobile phones or telecom operators. Busy streets, large intersections, pedestrian crossings, busses, and sometimes entire facades of buildings have neon advertisements or huge billboards plastered all over them, boasting the newest phone models or the best network carrier. Branding is also flourishing in the media. This occurs through various channels: via television, radio, in print and online, via the mobile phone itself (SMS advertisements), through sponsorship of sports and events, and product placements in popular television soap series. Advertising parties are telecom operators, mobile phone manufacturers, and sometimes a coalition of both telco and manufacturer. Other commercial parties that engage in media advertising are shops selling devices or related items, businesses offering third party mobile phone services (ranging from downloadable ringtones, mobile games, and sexy or funny wallpapers to SMS services for dating, sports, restaurant guides, horoscopes, future-telling, sexual advise, and so on), a multitude of mobile phone glossies and newspapers, calls for media and technology exhibitions and shows in convention centers, private individuals selling second hand phones or 'beautiful numbers'. Even banks and insurance companies advertise with gifts of free mobile phones if one joins [94]. The content of advertisements is equally diverse. Most businesses place their bets on multiple horses. Some ads emphasize functionality (good network signal; low cost; features). Many ads position the mobile phone, the network, and accessories as part of a modern mobile and 'global' lifestyle. They use visual or linguistic references to other countries, depict 'young urban executive' models, and place the phone along other material items indispensable for a modern lifestyle, like sunglasses, organizers, and

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[94] One of the bigger banks LIPPO even set up its own mobile phone operator LippoTel, which has already been taken over by Malaysian telco Maxis.

new cars [95]. Lifestyle branding sometimes is targeted at the professional business market. More often it emphasizes playful qualities of the mobile phone as part of a leisure life, for instance by portraying young people who listen to music on their handphone, dressed-up models striking a bizarre pose, or depicting the mobile phone as part of an outgoing lifestyle of clubbing and nightlife. Lifestyle advertisements emphasize the capacity of the mobile phone to aid in the construction of an individual identity [96]. Other advertisements congratulate the Indonesian people with actual events, like Islamic fasting month Ramadan or Indonesia's Freedom Day. All big telecom companies actively promote an image of corporate social responsibility. They advertise about their involvement in building new schools for remote regions, or announce that they donate a portion of their income from calls and text messages to special projects. Finally, telecom companies actually communicate with their customers by responding to written complaints sent to newspapers. National newspapers publish letters from readers on a daily base. They invariably demand 'responsibility' from some company or government institution because it failed to deliver on its promise. The next day, companies and institutions will actually put on the hair-shirt and express repentance in a written response in the same newspaper. The power of this ritual is hard to underestimate in a country where not long ago these roles used to be completely inverted, and where the media had to be 'responsible'.

In short, the mobile phone is omnipresent in both physical and media spaces. In a competitive and largely prepaid mobile phone market customer loyalty is low. A new or extra SIM card is easily bought. The Indonesian consumer has to be seduced on a daily base. Operators regularly advertise with temporary deals, like cheap calling rates on certain days and hours, or free gifts with the purchase of a new device or upgrade card. During Ramadan, when many Muslim Indonesians go on pilgrimage, operators tumble over each other with special international calling rates to and from Saudi Arabia. Operators regularly organize lottery games for loyal customers with considerable prizes, such as brand new Mercedes cars, cash money, laptops, and new mobile phones. Handset manufacturers too give out prizes, like the chance to win a vacation for two to Paris for new Nokia buyers. Operator XL employs a promotion team asking people on the streets in a ludic clown-like fashion whether they are with XL and

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[95] This symbolic connection to 'modernity' also occurred in fixed telephone marketing. Claude Fisher describes how in the beginning of the 20th century the landline telephone in the USA was branded as an emblem of "being modern" (Fischer, 1992: 243). Of course the difference lies in what this 'modernity' entails.

[96] Some examples: Nokia (in Indonesian): "Me, my life, my music. Three things that cannot be separated. I am Nokia N-series"; Samsung (in English): "Imagine the most unique phone is mine. Samsung is mine"; Sony-Ericsson (in English): "I love [using the round SE symbol somewhat resembling a heart] freedom to create". This ongoing repetition of unicity might drive a more cynical onlooker back to Adorno & Horkheimer's 'pseudo-individuality'.

giving away free 500.000 Rp credit and a new phone to lucky winners (and in turn used for a TV commercial) [97]. From the perspective of mobile media producers, 'catching the consumer' is an infinite game.

2.5 Conclusion: four play levels

We have seen several reasons for the explosive growth and popularity of the mobile phone in Indonesia: the lagging state of a personal fixed telecommunication infrastructure, its affordability, and the role of advertising and corporate communication in making the mobile phone a ubiquitously visible part of everyday life. By far the most important reason however is that the mobile phone offers people rich new opportunities for the construction and expression of identities. In the next chapter we see how mobile media shape identity construction, and how this is playful. At this point, three of the four play levels introduced in section 1.5 have emerged. The first level, play on the mobile, has not been given much attention (but will be in chapter 4). The second is play with the mobile. The mobile phone is an artifact that invites people to creatively tinker. We have seen this in the 'dressing-up' of the artifact with various accessories, and in customizing the phone with own wallpapers, ringtones and applications (more about this in 3.1). A more advanced stage of play with the mobile phone consists of hacking the phone. The mobile phone also is an artifact played with as a prize in lottery games. The third level is play through the mobile. The mobile phone is a communications medium through which people can express their identity in playful performances (more in 3.1 and 3.2). The fourth level is being played by the mobile. Many people, in Indonesia as elsewhere, feel not only masters of the technology but frequently its slave too. Relentless branding and design for rapid obsolescence traps people in an infinite game of having to express (pseudo-)individuality by continuously acquiring new consumer goods. Moreover, always-on communication may overshoot into tyranny of availability, loss of privacy, and disruption of public space. Interestingly, few Indonesians seem to worry about

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[97] This TV commercial is cached at http://www.bijt.org/indo/070816_iklan_XL_gratis-pulsa.mpg

these issues [98]. However, they have other fears and uncertainties. These revolve around the question how to integrate the mobile phone with a modern life and with culturally specific values (as we will see in 3.3).

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[98] This supports the argument for a culturally specific view on 'mobile phone modernity'.

3. Playing the stage: mobile media, mobility and identity in Jakarta

3.1 From *gengsi* to *gaul*: how to become a proper handphone user

In the beginning of chapter 2 I cited Barendregt and Pertierra in agreement, who say: "for urban southeast Asians, modernity has become equivalent to mobility" (Barendregt & Pertierra, 2008: 382). I questioned what modernity they refer to, and what mobility or mobilities. In the current chapter this question is picked up in full, by asking how the mobile phone informs the notion of 'modernity' (section 1), how it informs 'mobility' (section 2), and by discussing contesting views of modern identities (section 3).

3.1.1 Handphone gengsi

The already mentioned term *gengsi* is one entry point to understand the mobile phone's shaping of identity. *Gengsi* means prestige or status and originally connoted family standing and class. With New Order's economic boom the notion has shifted from an inherited property to an image achieved by outward appearances. Appearing prestigious involves the possession and display of material goods that symbolically convey progress and cosmopolitanism. The notion regularly recurs in descriptions of Indonesian consumer society in general (Leeuwen, 1997; Sastramidjaja, 2000), and Indonesian technological culture in particular (Barendregt, 2008: 164; De Lange, 2001: 19, 36, 82). People rarely use *gengsi* to describe themselves, but frequently ascribe *gengsi* to others, or use the term to point to the general Indonesian obsession with conveying impressions through status symbols. The moral attitude towards *gengsi* is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand it is synonymous with consumptive materialistic hedonism, and treated with mockery, contempt or concern. On the other hand it is a sign of progress that defines what it means to live a modern life, and seen as a source of pride and self-worth (Sastramidjaja, 2000: 51).

Mobile media technologies have quickly become an indispensable part of this prestigious way of life. First, prestige can be conveyed by the mobile phone as an artifact. The device rubs off its prestigious qualities on the individual bearer. Technology journalist Budi Putra explains: "Indonesians like to possess prestigious

devices. Technical specifications are not important. The phone is used to express oneself, to make one feel higher. I'd say for 80 % of people the mobile phone is about *gengsi* and at most 20 % really knows and uses the technology" [99]. According to two editors of Telset magazine, "the mobile phone has become a kind of benchmark of the individual. The mobile phone is an object you carry with you all the time and can put on display at any moment. It is seen as part of someone's social status. Someone who doesn't have a mobile phone is thought of as backward" [100].

After choosing a particular brand and model, the device has to be customized from a generic stock item into an extension of someone's personality. Many people 'dress up' their phone to give it life. Girls and young women like danglers and handphone sleeves. Some guys wear their handphone in (fake) leather pockets. Changeable colorful fronts are also popular. A very common way to personalize the phone is by choosing a special telephone number, a so-called *nomor cantik* (beautiful number). Regular SIM cards sell for 10.000 Rp (< €1). A 'beautiful number' usually costs at least 125.000 Rp. Exceptionally beautiful numbers sell for 3 million Rp or more (€ 250 in 2007). A website devoted to selling *nomor cantik* explains: "*Cellphone number is your prestise* [sic]", because "*your number already introduce yourself first, who you are, before you introduce yourself fully. What people think with the owner phone number of 99999999? The owner must be not a common people, he must be an important people*" [101]. *Nomor cantik* can be easy to remember numbers, carry a specific personal meaning (e.g. one's date of birth), and/or a cultural significance (see Barendregt, 2006b: 329; 2007; De Lange, 2001: 65-66; Li, 2007). A female student from the Javanese city Yogyakarta, who appears in Bart Barendregt's documentary about the mobile phone *Generasi Jempol* ("thumb generation"), tells that the number 7 has the shape of a "slim number" while the number 8 is a "fatty number" (Barendregt, 2007). A mobile phone salesman says that in Javanese the word for 4 is *papat*. This sounds like *pati* (death) and therefore has a negative connotation. The number 7 is *pitu*, which sounds like *pitulungan* (help, support). Higher numbers are more popular. Even the sequence of numbers can be meaningful. Going up (789) is preferred over going down (987) [102]. Adi, a young marketing sales manager at Telkomsel, explains another way

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[99] Source: interview with Budi Putra on August 3 2007.

[100] Source: interview with Telset's managing director Walid Hidayat and editor Nurhamzah on August 10 2007.

[101] Source: website www.perdanacantique.com (now offline), accessed April 17 2008.

[102] The large Chinese minority in Indonesia (who mostly live in the cities) attach different kinds of meanings to numbers. For them the number 8 is a lucky number and very much in demand. The Indonesian-language website devoted to selling *nomor cantik* explains that eight is pronounced "fa" in Cantonese, which is a homophone for fortune, or "getting rich" (source: website www.perdanacantique.com, now offline, accessed April 17 2008). And in a comparative study of Chinese and Korean practices of "lucky numbers", Li explains

mobile phone numbers can express *gengsi*. Post-paid is held in higher esteem than prepaid, because it is not for everyone. In a low-trust economy like Indonesia, post-paid customers are thoroughly checked by telecoms to make sure they are credit-worthy and have a steady income. Telkomsel *kartuHALO* post-paid numbers start with the combination 0811. Such numbers reveal that one can afford a post-paid subscription, and that one is with what is considered the best and most expensive operator [103].

Physical contexts matter too in handphone related signifiers of prestige. Adi one day shows me around the Telkomsel office and customer area in Wisma Slipi, a tall building in west-Jakarta. He explains that Telkomsel's "high value customers" come here to get personal assistance. The customer area is designed to make customers feel more important. Telkomsel recently moved to a new building and redesigned its interior in a style called "futuristic". The customer area has lots of shiny metal and glass, curved lighting units, furniture and help-desks in shapes inspired by science fiction movies, and product booths with touch-screen interfaces. The space has a sterile 'cool' quality that is diametrically opposed to Jakarta's chaotic, hot and dirty streets. Even queuing up can become part of the display of prestige, Adi continues. He explains why it is so quiet in the new building. People now have to specially stop by at Wisma Slipi and cannot be seen by others. When Telkomsel's customer service was still located in nearby Mall Taman Anggrek (one of the biggest and most luxurious shopping malls in Jakarta) customer desks were always busy. People had to wait in long queues and could be seen by other people passing by. Many did not have real questions for the service desk, Adi confides, but just wanted to be appear to belong to Telkomsel's customer base.

As Adi and I have a coffee in a small café downstairs near the exit of the building, he talks about office culture in Jakarta, not without a touch of irony and self-reflection. Adi points me to the people walking in and out of the building, many with a communicator-type handphone clung to their ears. He confides there are many aspiring "*eksekutif muda*" ('yuppies') who act as if they are very important, and who wish to look like a successful businessman. According to Adi, the majority are only pretending. Adi uses the phrase "*hanya main-main*" ("only play"). This phrase regularly recurs when it comes to the prestigious qualities of the mobile phone. Telset editor Nurhamzah for instance suggests that many people use the internet on their mobile phone "only for play" [104]. Motor courier Raoul, whom we will meet later, also says that

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that 6 sounds like the word for "to flow", connoting "everything goes smoothly" (Li, 2007).

[103] Source: interview with Adi on August 24 2007. 'Adi' is a forged name.

[104] Source: interview with Telset's managing director Walid Hidayat and editor Nurhamzah on August 10 2007.

for many Indonesians the mobile phone is just for play [105]. Game-theorist Caillois calls this imitative pretense of "playing as if" *mimicry* (Caillois, 2001: 19-23). Theorists like Erving Goffman have long pointed out that everyday interactions are characterized by theatrical play (Goffman, 1959). The work domain is a stage for theatrical *as if* performances of being a successful businessman, with the handphone as one of the main props. Mimesis resides not in narrative storytelling 'after the fact' but in the doing itself.

In what is called 'appropriation' in the domestication approach, personalizing the phone quite literally changes its character from being an undetermined 'wild' object to a 'domesticated' companion tailored to a person's preferences. Further, in what is called 'conversion', this personalized phone becomes a symbolically charged object that 'speaks' for its owner. It tells others who they are and conveys the message that they take care of their 'image'. A tamed device also is a tangible everyday reminder to owners that they are in charge over their own lives. Many Indonesians are acutely aware that they live in an underdeveloped nation. They reflexively see themselves though the eyes of others. Here we see again how the *emic*, that is, culturally specific meaning of 'modernity' coincides with its *etic* universal meaning. Reflexivity, or "the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself", is often forwarded as the distinguishing feature of modern identities (Mead, 1934: 134) [106]. In the eyes of many, *reformasi* has failed to deliver on its promises. People commonly describe the state of the country as "chaos", and say Indonesia is "still running behind" or "not advanced" [107]. Many feel that the country as a whole is hardly a source of self-pride. Showing that one is capable of at least exerting control over one's own life by taming technological artifacts offers the individual a much-coveted sense of pride and prestige. *Gengsi* through the mobile phone is not just a sign or signal of individual progress, it actualizes it. It *is* the progress. Through *gengsi* people distinguish themselves from 'backward people', and distance themselves from the deplorable general state of the country. Technological prestige is not only a centrifugal force. It can also be a way to identify with the larger social group. In the opening case of this chapter we saw that Indonesia was the first country in the world where the high-end Nokia E90 Communicator was launched (a strategic business decision, no doubt). 'Being the first' made people feel more proud about their country and certainly added to the popularity of the device. Quite explicit about the potential for technologies to represent the modern face of the nation is Elnar, a young woman of 23

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[105] Source: interview with Raoul on August 25 2007.

[106] For instance, Cooley's 'looking-glass self' evaluates himself through his apprehension of how other perceive him (see Turner, 2009: 205). Mead's 'doubled self' is an object to himself and only exists by applying the views of his social community - "the generalized other" - to himself (Mead, 1934: 154-155).

[107] Some even long back to the Soeharto era when the appearance of stability and prosperity was held up.

years old. Elnar likes to chat online and get in touch with other people on international chat channels. Foreigners often ask her whether Indonesia has many slums. She feels that they are under the impression that Indonesia is a poor and backward country. Elnar then tries to explain "it is modern here too. We also have factories, our own airplane, and the internet" (De Lange, 2001: 78).

3.1.2 Handphone gaul

The mobile phone is not just a symbolic prop used for aggrandizing personal prestige, a 'cultural artifact in the pocket', as Budi Putra calls it [108]. It is of course also a profoundly social communication medium. Knowing how to use the mobile phone to socialize is part of the practice of *bergaul*, which can be loosely translated as the *savoir-faire* of modern socializing (Barendregt, 2008: 164, 166; De Lange, 2001: 30-31; Sastramidjaja, 2000: 67-74) [109]. *Bergaul* consists of creative play with language. *Bahasa gaul* (*gaul* language) is the trendy language spoken by young people in Jakarta, and has spread out all over Indonesia (see Saxby, 2006). It borrows words from various languages spoken in the capital, notably *prokem* (Jakartan lower-class vernacular), English and Chinese. Rather than consisting of a fixed vocabulary, mastery of *bahasa gaul* entails continuously inventing new words and contractions, and creatively reusing existing expressions in unexpected humorous ways, often in reference to topical events and well-know figures. *Bergaul* is a dynamic collection of meta-rules that inform not only what to say, but also how to say it and to whom, how to move around town, which places to go to, and what stuff to buy, eat and wear. One must know how to present oneself and have an own opinion. *Bergaul* means knowing what is 'now'. Moreover, it is showing the knowing through speech and demeanor. It is reflexive social play in continuous flux: an infinite play with its own rules. If *gengsi* departs from individuality and exclusion, *bergaul* departs from social interactions and inclusiveness. Mild competition in one's self-presentation and the expression of originality should never overshadow connecting with other people and playing together. Someone who is too competitive and uses *bergaul* to only increase *gengsi* is seen as arrogant. As we have seen, Jakarta's social and cultural heterogeneity causes social interaction not to be based on more or less stable regional cultural traditions, but on negotiating a modern urban lifestyle. Newcomers to Jakarta, like young students from all over Indonesia, must quickly familiarize themselves with *bergaul* in order to connect and participate with their peers. Young people consider someone with the wrong accent, choice of

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[108] Source: interview with Budi Putra on August 5 2007

[109] The prefix *ber-* turns a noun or adjective into a verb that applies its properties to oneself. *Bergaul* thus means to engage oneself in *gaul*: to socialize, to associate. The word also has a sexual connotation as 'intercourse'.

words, topics, and manners automatically as a backward person [110]. Such a person is seen as standing still, unable to catch up [111]. *Bergaul* is an essential social skill for upward mobility and successful life. It is the ability to move oneself with ease and confidence in any situation, and to build up a useful network of people. Although the appearance of pure sociality must never be pierced, there is in fact a fine line between *bergaul* and *berkoneksi* (networking) (Sastramidjaja, 2000: 70). It is a well-considered strategy to present oneself and make friends with people who might be useful in the future. "You never know how things look in the future, that's why it is handy to know many people who can help you when they do well. Initially, you have to present yourself as favorable as possible, make jokes, and make sure you keep it light and easy-going", a former housemate explained the basics (De Lange, 2001: 31).

There is a lot of *bergaul* talk *about* the handphone. People share information on the best models and providers among each other and talk about their personal relation with the phone. Late night television shows hosted by trendy young women invite viewers to call in and chat about 'have you ever broken your handphone?'. A popular bloggers 'meme' at some point was writing down "ten things about my handphone" and pass these questions to blogger friends. These were questions about phone brand and type, special number, what wallpaper, last SMS, where do you wear your phone, and so on [112]. Besides being a researcher's goldmine, this shows how the mobile phone is caught up in reflexive *bergaul*. One cannot just carry any phone. One should be able to explain why one has this brand and not another, and that specific wallpaper and ringtone. The self-conscious relation to the device informs the relations with others and oneself.

As a topical artifact but also as a communication medium the mobile phone is central to *bergaul*. Especially texting offers rich possibilities for connecting, socializing, self-expression, and linguistic play. This is a text message an Indonesian girl (25 years) sent to a male friend:

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[110] The common adjectives for a backward person is *kampungan*, 'from the village', or *masih bodoh* (still dumb). Not tradition but this static backwardness is the real opposite of the savvy urban modernity actualized through *bergaul* (De Lange, 2001: 31-32; Sastramidjaja, 2000: 68-69).

[111] The extent to which movement and fluidity are engrained in ideas about modern urban life was illustrated by one of my housemates, who liked to poke fun at other people's accents. He said about another housemate, who had just moved to Jakarta, "his accent is still syrupy" (*logatnya masih kental*). In other words, it is thick and does not flow nicely. Such a person is "*kuber*": *kurang bergaul*, insufficient in *bergaul* (De Lange, 2001: 31).

[112] See for a few examples: http://endhoot.blogspot.com/2007/08/hapekuh.html, http://miramarsellia.com/2007/08/15/hape/, http://blog.abepoetra.com/?p=279.

Gw g taw,,c iwan jg g taw.lo cb dtg lgs di graha mobicel jl.mampang prapatan gw taw lg dah,,rabu gw lbr.ikut dunkz [113]

In English this says:

I don't know. Iwan also doesn't know. Please come directly to Graha Mobicel, Mampang Prapatan road. I do know something else though. I am free on Wednesday, so come along!

In this short message we discern several elements of mobile communication *bergaul*. First, this message is an ad hoc invitation to socialize and join in without applying too much pressure ("Please come directly to Graha Mobicel") [114]. Second, the message is a prelude to a possible physical encounter. Yet Dewi is not very precise about a specific hour and location and keeps the options open ("I am free on Wednesday, come along!"). This suggests that at least a few more messages will be exchanged to fine-tune the actual time and place for a meeting, if it will take place at all. Third, the message jumps into an ongoing conversation that involves multiple people ("I don't know. Iwan also doesn't know"). Fourth, the message makes creative use of abbreviated SMS language, leaving out vowels and seeking shorter alternatives for common words, and sometimes using words from other languages like English [115]. Although surely an example of mobile phone *bergaul*, this example has many similarities to mobile communication practices observed elsewhere. In the context of Norwegian teens, the use of the mobile phone to organize and coordinate future physical meetings - often in sequences of increasingly precise communicative exchanges - has been called 'micro-coordination' (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 139, 142-146). In addition to its instrumental use, mobile communication often involves an expressive dimension of self-presentation and a social dimension of group discussion and agreement, particularly among young people. This has been called 'hyper-coordination' (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 140, 147-166). The use of abbreviated language in texting has also been widely described in diverse contexts (see for instance Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2004: 226; Ling & Yttri, 2002: 162; Plant, 2001: 80; Taylor & Harper, 2003: 290, 294).

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[113] Source: interview with Dewi (forged name) on August 25 2007. I had asked her to show me 'a typical text message'.

[114] Dewi uses the words "try to come.." (*coba datang*), a polite way to phrase an imperative in Indonesian.

[115] In English, the c in "c iwan" would be pronounced "si Iwan". In Indonesian, *si* is a definite article used in front of the names of people one is familiar with.

If the elements in this example have universal parallels, then what is typically Indonesian about it? The answer is, predictably, that it is Indonesian because its language, content, and context are Indonesian. It is an Indonesian expression of individual and group identities. This needs further explication. In *bahasa gaul* this message may be written out as follows:

> Gue nggak taw, si Iwan juga nggak taw. Lu coba datang langsung di Graha Mobicel, Jl. Mampang Prapatan. Gue taw lagi deh. Rabu gue libur. Ikut donk!

In official *bahasa Indonesia* the message may be rendered as:

> Saya tidak tahu. Si Iwan juga tidak tahu. Kamu mencoba datang langsung ke Graha Mobicel, Jl. Mampang Prapatan. Saya tahu lagi. Hari Rabu saya libur. Ayo ikut!

Two steps of 'encoding' occur in composing this message. First from standard Indonesian into *bahasa gaul*, and then from *bahasa gaul* into abbreviated SMS language. Almost always the national language is used in text messages, often interwoven with English words, rather than regional languages. One of the reasons is that particularly Javanese has an intricate way of establishing and expressing status. Not particularly handy when you try to cram a message into 160 characters. Another reason is that *bahasa Indonesia* and international languages are considered more modern (Barendregt, 2006c: 145-146; 2008: 166). Some young people say they even mix in Japanese and French words in their text messages (Barendregt, 2007). Writing down spoken *bahasa gaul* itself is a creative play with language. People must make up their own transcriptions. There is no written standard and *bahasa gaul* rarely features in 'official' publications like newspapers, books, film and television subtitles. Written *bahasa gaul* thrives in informal media where there is a place for the voices of young people themselves: internet blogposts, text messaging, email, and youth magazines that publish letters from readers [116]. These (new) media spaces boost *bergaul* as an alternative system of communication to carve out a distinct space for youth identities (Saxby, 2006). The mobile phone contributes to the formation of such play spaces for experimenting with identities. Many young people now own a personal communication device that enables them to bypass parental or institutional surveillance. Their use of *bahasa gaul* as well as abbreviated SMS language erects further boundaries. Even to non-Indonesian speakers it is clear that the difference between the text message and the transcription in official Indonesian are considerable. The potential to communicate

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[116] On how the internet promoted informal speech in other Indonesian media, see Sen & Hill, 2000: 147.

outside the purview of parents by using the mobile phone has also been noted by Ling and Yttri (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 152). This development however is far more urgent in Indonesian society, which (in somewhat generalized terms) is characterized by strong family ties and social hierarchies. Not surprisingly new liberties cause reactions of deep moral concerns. As we will see in section 3.3 these reactions often focus on the perceived bad influence of the mobile phone on young people.

The receiver on the other side also must be able to 'decode' the message. Encoding/decoding is not just a way to hide the content of the message from the prying eyes of parents or school teachers. It is a meta-communicative message by which both sides 'perform' to one another their knowledge and versatility in playing with the rules of *bergaul*. Not just what you say but how you say it is part of the message. Both in form and in content *gaul* text messages convey reflexivity towards one's self-presentation. The 'rules' of *bergaul* prescribe an individual should be knowledgeable and have a personal opinion. Dewi apparently broke this rule when she started with "I don't know". But then she retook herself by saying "I do know something else though", which negates her earlier statement and can be interpreted as a reflexive comment on the rules of *bergaul* itself. In terms of theater theorist Schechner this is a performative "showing of a doing" (Schechner, 2003: 114).

Further on it is argued that a theory of playful identities takes this reflexivity towards the utterance and the medium into account. From theatrical performances of the self in *gengsi* to the social play in *bergaul*, mobile media technologies are used in the construction and expression of 'modern' personal and social identities. The paradox of difference and similarity resurfaces. *Gengsi* highlights how the consumption of mass-produced goods fosters individualism and highlighting status differences, while *bergaul* shows how differences are played out in collectives based on similarity. In the last section of this chapter we will see how the mobile phone shapes even larger identities on regional, national, and global levels, and how these identifying categories become the stakes in agonistic struggles. But first we take a closer look at how the mobile phone influences 'mobility'.

3.2 Three handphone mobilities

Up to this point the focus has predominantly been on the notion of 'modernity' in Indonesian identity construction, and the playful qualities of mobile media. As said, mobility is another crucial notion in the construction of Indonesian identities. In this section three cases are presented that show how different types of mobilities are shaped by the mobile phone and how this informs identity construction.

3.2.1 Corporeal mobility

Jakarta is chronically congested with traffic. It can take one hour to bridge five kilometers. A slow-moving queue crawls forwards and emits thick black fumes that tarmac the lungs of tens of thousands of street vendors on flip-flops who try to scrape together a few daily rupiah by selling almost anything from food to mobile phone credits. Many Jakartans commute daily. For some traveling *is* their job. One of them is Raoul (male, 21 years) [117]. Raoul has a most peculiar job. He drives around on a scooter to buy human hair from barbershops. He resells this hair to salons to be used for extensions. Raoul proudly confides that many celebrities wear extensions from hair he provides. Raoul gets paid per delivery. When he finds good long pieces of hair he earns more. Raoul receives around one call a day on his mobile phone from his boss. They communicate about whether he has found any new hair, where he has to deliver, or where he can pick up new goods. On his scooter Raoul covers the entire city and even the neighboring towns. Raoul bought his second hand mobile phone two years ago. He paid for it in cash. Too many people buy things on credit, he says, including mobile phones. He does not like to be stuck in a loan. It is not really an advanced device, he admits, but it does have a handsfree set and a camera. He is reasonably happy with it. Most important for him is that he can make calls and send text messages. In addition Raoul really likes the mobile phone camera. "I takes pictures of special places I visit, mostly leisure places like the Zoo, or special moments, for instance when I meet a foreigner like you", he says. He prints out these pictures and pins them on his wall at home. With a broad weave of the arm Raoul indicates he has a wall full of pictures to remember his travels through the city. On my question why he does this, he answers: "I do it for my own personal pride. Since I have my mobile phone and make pictures all the time for a hobby, I feel I have become some kind of artist". Too many people own a mobile phone just for prestige, Raoul adds. He knows people who have two phones but don't need them for work. He thinks that for them the mobile phone is only for prestige: "it is not a life's necessity but just to play around". Only when your work is

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[117] Source: interview with Raoul on August 25 2007. Raoul is a forged name.

mobile, a handphone is truly a necessit, he says. In the days before he had his handphone, he just had to go to all the shops and ask. But now it is much easier to coordinate.

How does the mobile phone influence corporeal mobility? Are people moving differently in urban space? Does the experience of the city change? Clearly Raoul's mobile job would have been much more difficult before the mobile phone. The mobile phone enables the kind of 'micro-coordination' that is needed to fine-tune supply and demand (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 143). One of the biggest changes the mobile phone brings is that corporeal mobility and communication no longer exclude one another. Raoul does not need to stop moving when he wants to communicate or is called. Travel time and communication time have become "travel partners" (Urry, 2007: 179). With the mobile phone Raoul's 'image of the city' changes. Urbanist Kevin Lynch famously argued that people move through the city by 'reading' the cityscape. They orient themselves by composing 'mental maps' of the urban environment (Lynch, 1960: 1-13). These mental or cognitive maps are made up of publicly visible and generally recognized items, like paths (routes people take while moving through the city), edges (boundaries and breaks in the continuity of the urban landscape), districts (areas characterized by common characteristics), nodes (strategic focus points for orientation like squares and junctions), and landmarks (external points of orientation, usually an easily identifiable physical object in the urban landscape) (ibid: 46-48) [118]. By contrast, Raoul's movements in the city are no longer based on commonly shared cognitive maps. His way of relating to the urban landscape is far more private (as opposed to public), personal (characteristic of one individual, idiosyncratic; as opposed to commonly shared), and creative (in the sense of active construction rather than passive reading). Raoul's travels are coordinated by means of the mobile phone. This way of orientation is invisible to other people and brings him to places others might never even notice. By taking pictures during his travels of what he sees as special places, Raoul's notion of 'place' has become a very personal one. Instead of merely 'reading' the city as a passer-by, the mobile phone camera allows him to 'write' the city with his own personal experiences through the photographs he takes for his private pleasure (for a discussion of how mobile media enable people to 'write' the city, see Greenfield & Shepard, 2007). The mobile phone opens up the city for playful exploration and creative production through everyday movements. For Raoul play is not a separate domain of leisure time after work. Instead, creative play is part of his everyday working hours, and what makes it fun. This is a different kind of play than "just playing around", which is how he perceives most people use their mobile phone.

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[118] More about Lynch and mobile media in the urban environment in chapter 4.

It has long been held that ICTs are 'post-urban' and 'placeless' (see Graham, 2004: 3-29; Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005: 8-13). Digital technologies would eliminate the need for people to live close together in a specific place, since information and communication could now travel with the speed of light to the other end of the world. Mobile media technologies by contrast enable people to (re-)establish all kinds of relations with urban places. These relations can be visual, as in this case of Raoul taking photographs of special places with his mobile phone camera. Or they can be auditory, for instance when people listen to music on their portable device and augment their travels with a personalized soundtrack (Bassett, 2005; Bull, 2005; Du Gay, 1997). Mediated relations with the urban environment need not be personal only. Mobile media also mediate relations to places in social ways. Locative media, media that can pinpoint someone's exact location, enable people to share experiences of places with other people. This happens for instance via geotagging: the annotation of digital objects like photos with geographical information acquired via GPS (global positioning system). An Indonesian example is FireAnts. This is a collaborative location-based service that uses the mobile phone to warn Jakartans in real-time about traffic jams and to suggest detours by using information people themselves provide through the FireAnts application [119]. In a way, this is a case of play on the mobile. The mobile device is used to 'interface' with the physical environment. It turns the city into a playing board in order to 'conquer' obstacles like traffic jams, and achieve an external goal (reaching one's destination) through strategic decision-making. Place-based usage is even inherent to some mobile wireless technologies, as in the case of CDMA networks that favor local communication, or in the case of Bluetooth networking based on immediate proximity. More about play on mobile media and the relation to urban place in chapter 4.

What makes this case typical of an Indonesian 'mobile modernity'? The 'social production' of the city has long been a centralized top-down project. Bottom-up city 'writing' was limited to erecting illegal slums, organizing protests against land expropriation for golf courses (Aspinall, 1993: 18-19), or mildly defying authority by giving mock names to urban landmarks. In the 1980s, pedicabs were banned from the main streets of Jakarta. This turned corporeal mobility into the prerogative of the car-owning elite, at least when they did not get stuck in a traffic jam (Sidel, 1998: 160-161). The mobile phone gives urbanites an instrument to shape and act upon their environment through corporeal mobility. This can be in poetic ways, as in Raoul's case.

[119] Source: interview with Dien Kwik on August 23 2007. See also http://dienkwik.com/blog/2008/12/16/avoid-traffic-jams-in-jakarta-know-where-they-are/ and http://bebasmacet.ning.com/page/about-us.

It can be in highly political ways, using the mobile phone to coordinate collective action ('smart mobs') against the regime (Nas & Sluis, 2000: 156; Rheingold, 2002). Or it can be in functional ways, as in the case of FireAnts.

3.2.2 Socio-economic mobility

Ida (female, 20 years) is a domestic worker in my house with rental rooms for young workers and students [120]. Ida was born in central Java. Like so many other Indonesians from rural areas she moved to the capital in search of work. In Jakarta she can make far more money than back home. She has not permanently settled in the metropolis but only seeks temporarily employment, like many temporary workers in large Asian metropolises. Most temporary work migrants travel back to their native village once in while, often to celebrate Idul Fitri, the end of Muslim fasting month Ramadan. Ida however hasn't been back to her village for at least two years to save up money. In fact, Ida hardly ever leaves the house in Jakarta. With her first earned money Ida has bought a mobile phone. Her mobile phone is a very important possession to her. She often strokes it lovingly and keeps it close to her even while she is cleaning the house. Ida tells she only uses her mobile phone to make calls to her family in her village once in a while. Although Ida hasn't been back to her village in two years, these ties remain very important to her.

How does the mobile phone influence socio-economic mobility? 'Vertical mobility', as it if often called in Indonesia, signifies (the potential for) moving upward on the social ladder and raising one's standard of living. Corporeally Ida is immobilized to the domestic sphere of the house. But through the mobile phone she maintains a sense of proximity with her relatives far away. The mobile phone makes it bearable for her to work in a place where she is confined to the house and where she has no relatives or friends. Thanks to the mobile phone, migrant workers from rural areas and with little education or social capital can seek opportunities and employment elsewhere while maintaining the backup of family within reach. The phone functions as a security rope for climbing the socio-economical ladder, an 'umbilical cord' to the family [121]. The mobile phone is not only a functional item in managing Ida's position as a worker away from home. It also expresses her newly acquired status as a female worker who makes her own money in the city. Socio-economic mobility sustained by the mobile phone occurs elsewhere too (about migrants workers in southern China, see Law & Peng, 2008; and Qiu, 2009). It may also involve trans-border migration

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[120] Source: interview with Ida on August 4 2007. Ida is a forged name.

[121] This metaphor is a recurring one in literature about the mobile phone (see Castells, et al., 2004: 176; De Gournay, 2002: 201; Fox, 2001; Townsend, 2000: 93).

(about Filipinos working overseas, see Paragas, 2005). Being away from home is managed and made bearable by keeping in touch via the mobile phone. The mobile phone itself provides economic possibilities too. As we have seen, small-scale entrepreneurs have embraced the mobile phone as an opportunity to start their own businesses. There are those who rent a space in shopping malls. Some sell prepaid cards in roadside stalls. Others hawk the city streets to sell phone cards.

Socio-economic mobility occurs not just by means of the mobile phone. It is also involves acquiring knowledge about the mobile phone. Consumers first must educate themselves in order to make the right buying decisions (brand, type, network operator, subscription plan, etc.). Then they must learn how to operate the mobile phone on a technical level. And they must gain knowledge how to use the mobile phone for their own benefit. We have seen that learning how to engage in mobile phone *bergaul* helps to create and maintain social networks needed for potential career opportunities. As with the adoption of all new technologies people must follow a path from initial motivation for use, to actual access, to acquiring operational skills, to acquiring knowledge how to benefit from using technologies (Dijk, 2003: 13). The mobile phone contributes to the formation of 'network capital', by increasing access to networks and facilitating the development and maintenance of network ties (Rettie, 2008; Wellman & Frank, 2001). One further step can be added, and that is the capacity to see through and expose the hidden ideological presumptions and rules of media technologies. This step involves a reflexive mentality towards the media and mediating processes themselves, and is often called 'media wisdom' (Raad voor Cultuur, 2005, 2008).

In addition to climbing the socio-economic ladder, the mobile phone informs another type of mobility in the social sphere. Popular Indonesian television soaps frequently employ the mobile phone as a dramaturgical device. A dominant theme in soap series is romantic love. Choosing one's own boyfriend or girlfriend often causes trouble with the family, fueled by daddy who disapproves of the relationship. Young people use the mobile phone to keep in touch with the forbidden friend anyway. In these soap series tensions are played out between loyalty to the family and choosing one's own life, while trying not to completely break with one's background. The mobile phone mediates in this tension and appears to tilt the balance to the latter. The mobile phone offers more individual freedom of movement, at least in soaps (although in Indonesia too soaps are as much a reflection of reality as the inverse).

3.2.3 Imaginative mobility

Dewi (female, 25 years) lives in one of Jakarta's poorer neighborhoods [122]. She was born in Jakarta. At the age of one she was sent to Bandung to live with her grandmother because her mother could not afford to raise both her and her little brother. After finishing school Dewi moved back to Jakarta. She recently found work at a call center for a credit card company. From her first savings she bought a shiny new Sony Ericsson 950 Walkman edition, with 4GB of memory to store her music. It is by far the most expensive item she possesses. She deliberately chose this model to express her love for music. Her mobile phone is an expression of her "true self", she says. "When other people see me with my mobile phone, they say: oh, apparently she loves music". Dewi wants to be different from other people, "a trendsetter, so that other people follow me". This is why she hates Nokia. "Everyone has one, they quickly fall out of fashion, and then you are no longer modern". Her Walkman phone makes her feel ahead of others instead of a follower. "I always want to be the first". When I ask what kind of music she likes, Dewi decidedly states she likes western music more than Indonesian music. She has customized her phone with a R&B ringtone and a self-made wallpaper. She also gave a personalized name to her phone instead of the default name [123]. She owns two handsets: her new Walkman phone, and a CDMA phone to make cheap calls. Before finding a job, Dewi did not care much about the brand of her mobile phone. She expressed her identity via clothing. She believes most Indonesians buy mobile phones not for function but for prestige. People who carry expensive looking mobile phones "are upgrading themselves". Because Dewi works in a call center, her boss pays half of her post-paid subscription bill, around 500.000 rp/month (ca. € 40). She mostly uses her mobile phone for texting and calling with family in Bandung, friends, and with customers. She sees no problem in using the same number for private and work-related calls. While traveling to work Dewi puts in her earbuds as a kind of self-defense. A girl alone in the big city has to be careful, she adds. Dewi calls herself a career girl. She wants to be independent from others and choose her own way of life. She does not see this job as a permanent endpoint but as a phase. Later she wants to become a teacher. Dewi tells that not long ago girls of her age should already get married. She firmly states she's not going that way. She first has to choose a "fitting candidate". Dewi further stresses her independence by smoking in public, which is not really considered 'proper behavior' for Indonesian girls.

How does the mobile phone influence 'imaginative mobility'? Urry uses this term to describe how media technologies allow people to 'travel' elsewhere by imagination (Urry, 2007: 169). Although Urry is mostly concerned with the spatial

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[122] Source: interview with Dewi on August 25 2007. Dewi is a forged name.

[123] Networking over Bluetooth requires the device to be given a name.

imagination of other places, I extend the term to highlight the 'mobile' character of identity construction. The notion of identity has shifted from describing some innate and timeless essence of a person or group to identity as a never-ending task of self-interpretation and expression through the imagination. Identity is a 'historical fiction' or 'fictional history', and oriented towards future anticipations, Ricoeur says. The role of the 'imaginative' has been theorized at the level of the individual, for instance in narrative identity based on mimetically imagining oneself as a fictional character in stories; and at the level of the collective, for instance in Anderson's well-known description of national identities as "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991). Close to Urry's point, the present exchanges and interrelations between people, objects, systems and ideas on a worldwide scale - commonly labeled 'globalization' - make these imaginative identities more mobile. Most people are confronted on a daily base with images from elsewhere to which they must relate in some way (even ignoring is an active choice). New media technologies contribute to 'imaginative mobility' in identity construction. Dewi explains how she uses the mobile phone as a medium for self-expression and impression management, and to construct a sense of self. This two-way imaginative movement is directed outwards and inwards. Dewi expresses her self to other people through the mobile phone, and internalizes this perception by reapplying it to the self. Now that she has a job Dewi finds herself in a new life-stage. She adopts the associated role as a successful working urbanite. Her carefully chosen mobile phone expresses her "true self", as she calls it. This outward movement is from an internally constructed private self to an external presentation. Dewi also uses her mobile phone to perform "an image" in front of other people and then reapplies this image to herself. She 'wears' her mobile phone deliberately like a fashion item to show off who she is to others (see Fortunati, et al., 2003: 5, 9). This performative aspect is similar to what has been called "stage-phoning", to describe the way people are "enjoying and exploiting the presence of third parties as a unique opportunity to put something of themselves on display" (Plant, 2001: 49). Her awareness of the impression she makes with her mobile phone as a 'stage prop' signals a self-conscious reflexive movement inwards. External public perceptions thus inform one's self-image. Which of these two movements comes first is a chicken and egg question. One cannot exist without the other. The mobile phone not only mediates Dewi's relation to other people, it also shapes her life trajectory as an imaginative movement. Living a modern life means becoming an independent girl with a career in the big city, and working for a modern type of business. The mobile phone acts both as a necessary instrument for her job, and as a symbolic medium that reflects her achievement. In fact, it *is* the

achievement. With her new mobile phone Dewi has 'moved out' of her poor neighborhood, and closer to a generalized image of modern life, at least on an imaginary level.

The mobile phone has become emblematic of a 'mobile modernity' (Barendregt, 2008: 163). In this modernity individuals are free to move corporeally, socio-economically, and imaginatively. This stands in stark contrast to earlier times. During Soeharto's New Order regime stability and normalcy were maintained in the pursuit of economic development. Any kind of public mobilization was repressed. Expressions of political and cultural plurality were marginalized in order to promote national unity (Kleden, 1999: 12-13). About the sole legitimized mobilities were the circulation of capital, the rotation of people in high offices who become too powerful (Sidel, 1998: 162-163), forced transmigration of farmers from over-crowded Java to outer islands, and the cultivated societal ethics of 'reciprocal assistance' (Marzali, 2005: 155-163). The ensuing reformation period fostered a mobilization of Indonesian society as whole. Student movements mobilized large protests, initially on campuses and later on the streets. They wrote in student tabloids with names like "On the Move!" and demanded political and societal reforms. Reformation ushered in a phase of initial optimism with unprecedented freedom of speech, decentralization of political power, and far more room for cultural diversity. Change and mobility acquired positive connotations. But they have also fueled new uncertainties, fears and disputes. Formerly suppressed tensions in Indonesian identity construction awoke. In the final section of this chapter we see how media technologies like the mobile phone act as an arena where discussions about modern mobile identities are played out.

3.3 Moving forward: contesting modernities

Under Soeharto's New Order regime the media served to represent and strengthen national identity. Identity categories other than national identity were considered potential threats to national stability and order. It was taboo to publicly debate these topics. The acronym SARA, which in itself merely sums up a number of identity categories (*suku*, *agama*, *ras*, *antargolongan* - ethnicity, religion, race, political factionalism), was a word imbued with the frightening power of the bogeyman.

Internal cultural differences were contained and rendered harmless by turning them into folklorized entities for leisurely consumption, as we have seen in the case of Taman Mini. After Soeharto, the media landscape acquired both a more global and a more regional, even local character (Arps & Van Heeren, 2006: 290; Sen & Hill, 2000: 13-17). Mass media and emerging ICTs could now present a far wider scope of information, and give access to a plurality of opinions instead of the singular voice of state propaganda. This has brought Indonesians new freedoms, in the double sense of freedom from superimposed homogenized national identity and solidified identity categories, and freedom to explore and engage in different identifications [124]. Digital media technologies like the mobile phone offer young urbanites ample opportunities to construct and express 'modern' personal and cultural identities on their own terms. Yet in the dialectic between freedom and force, media technologies also pose new identity problems. Many Indonesians - particularly young people, including those who outwardly appear to play the game of *gengsi* and *bergaul* - feel burdened with the task to decide whether and how to fit the mobile phone and other ICTs into their daily lives. They are faced with a confusing array of choices for identifications. What's more, the question "to which identity category do I belong?" now shifts to "what are the definitions of the categories?". Solid boundaries around identity categories become flexible, or in Baumann's terms, 'liquified' (Bauman, 2000) [125]. At the same time new boundaries are erected. In this section we see how ICTs shape Indonesian identities on multiple spatial levels, and what identity problems arise from this.

3.3.1 Conceptualizing place: locality and the global

In discussions about the role of ICTs in shaping identities, 'the global' is often opposed to 'the local'. Various authors have argued that in actuality the global and local fold into each other, in what they call 'glocality' (e.g. Meyrowitz, 2005; Wellman, 2002). I agree, but to better understand how this occurs in Indonesia - and what tensions this evokes - we must briefly pause to look at these terms. An analysis of 'the local' (and *mutatis mutandis* 'the global') offers a sharper view how ICTs shape Indonesian identifications on multiple spatial levels, and are central to place-based identities.

Let's start by defining 'place'. John Agnew distinguishes three elements of place: (1) *Location*: a specific position or area. This is geographical metric place. (2) *Locale*: the material setting in which social relations are constituted. This social meaning of place can also be called social situation. (3) *Sense of place*: the local "structure of

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[124] These two notions of freedom have been forwarded by Isaiah Berlin (Berlin, 1958).

[125] Baumann uses the term "liquid modernity" to describe the dissolving of boundaries around formerly clear-cut identifying categories like class (Bauman, 2000: 7).

feeling". This is the subjective and emotional experience people have of place (Agnew, 1987: 28). A sense of place needs not be restricted to the local level but can span wide geographical distances. We thus have geographical, social, and phenomenological (or mental) place. These are related and mutually influence each other (ibid: 28; Lefebvre, 1991). Agnew emphasizes that places are not fixed but historically contingent processes (Agnew, 1987: 32). Places are constructed differently by different people, and also vary in time depending on the hour, season, historical context, and so on. Practices of 'place-making' are part of people's identity constructions and expressions. In Cresswell's words, "place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world" (Cresswell, 2004: 11). People identify with particular geographical *locations* or areas, and call them theirs. As individuals ("this house is my home"), and/or as a group ("this territory is our country"). People play social roles and identify with *locales*, and derive a sense of self from these settings ("I like frequenting the Hardrock Café nightclub in Sarinah"). People apply a *sense of place* to who and what they are ("I am a Jakartan" coincides with young people's self-descriptions as modern urbanites). In place-making and identification the three dimensions of place are hard to separate. Further, place-based identities are only in part a matter of individual choice. Someone's identity is frequently ascribed by other people based on one's birthplace and lineage. Many Indonesians consider people to be 'true' Jakartans when they were born in Jakarta (and/or from a *orang Betawi* family). People remain Jakartan, even when they no longer live in the city. People from other regions who have moved to Jakarta and have been living there for decades may still be considered non-Jakartan, although less so among young people. Moreover, place-based identities often are 'politicized' when they are defined as exclusive ("our country, not yours"). Place becomes the focus of contesting views about who belong 'here' and who do not, who has the right to inscribe place with particular meanings and narratives, or who are allowed to perform in certain ways at particular locations [126].

'Local' and 'global' have geographical, social, and experiential dimensions too. However, these are often conflated. First, as a geographical notion the local indicates an absolute point in space, a particular *location*. This geographical notion of the local is a measure of distance: near versus far. Second, as a social setting localness refers to a concentration in space. Localness describes physical or imagined proximity to objects and people in a *locale*, as part of a social situation. This dimension of the local is a

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[126] Spatial definitions of identity are not absolute but constructed contextually. Only when students from the former colony of the Dutch east-Indies traveled abroad to the Netherlands for higher education, met fellow countrymen from different regions, and learned about Europe's own recent nationalist struggles, the idea of an independent unified Indonesian *nation* could develop (Anderson, 1991: ch.7). Some trendy young women who would not want to be found dead in local traditional *kain* and *kebaya* dress when they are in a shopping mall, very much enjoy wearing these clothes at a wedding.

measure of scale: presence versus absence. Third, as *sense of place* localness refers to the feeling that one originates from and belongs to a certain place, or multiplicity of places. This experience is crucial for people's personal, social, and cultural identities. This is a measure of scope: what fits in my outlook, and what does not belong to my sphere?

The global also has these three dimensions. As a geographical notion it refers to what is from far away (either with or without a known point of origin). As a social notion it often means 'worldwide'. It refers to cultural practices, consumer goods, systems and institutions, that are shared by a wide variety of people all over the world. As an experiential notion the global is often invoked as the negation of local scope, a residual category of alien cultural artifacts, images, and practices that do not (originally) belong to 'here'. One can sense the different moral connotations in these formulations. These three dimensions underly frequently forwarded yet divergent criticisms against globalization, from the progressive 'left' to the conservative 'right'. First, the flows and mobilities of globalization cause the end of distance. Labour and produce formerly rooted in *location* become footloose, the environment is impacted, and new inequalities arise [127]. Second, globalization is a homogenizing force when *locale* becomes a worldwide scale. Globalization, it is argued, obliterates the former mosaic of cultural heterogeneity. Third, globalization is an alien outside force that penetrates and disrupts local *senses of place*, and makes people feel disoriented. I hasten to add that the global now seems to be phrased rather negatively, but need not be valued as such. In fact, this is precisely what the term 'glocality' aims to capture. The global and the local cannot be separated. They are intertwined in a circular movement, whereby people from the localness of their experience appropriate 'the global' and introduce it back into their local situations (Meyrowitz, 2005: 21-23). At least, that is the ideal.

How do ICTs fit into this? Before the advent of transport- and communication technologies the geographical, social and experiential dimensions of localness largely overlapped. With 'space- and time-transcending' technologies our sense of distance, scale, and scope changed. Different dimensions of place grew apart. Mass media pushed this process further. In *No Sense of Place*, Joshua Meyrowitz argues that where you are no longer defines who you are (Meyrowitz, 1985). Electronic media lead to the dissociation of physical place and social situations (*location* and *locale*). When people's social roles no longer depend solely on physical places but increasingly take place in social situations shaped by the media, people lose their *sense of place*, his argument

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[127] Doreen Massey calls this "the power geometry of time-space compression" (Massey, 1993: 62; 2004: 11); Castells calls this the 'space of flows' of the globally mobile elite versus the 'space of places' for the rest of the people stuck in their locations (Castells, 1996: 378).

goes. Identities become 'placeless' (ibid: 308). A problem with this argument is that it confuses the particular concept of location for the general concept of place. Meyrowitz rightly redefines *locale* ('social situation') from being rooted in geographical *location* to include mediated and distant social interactions. But why doesn't he redefine *sense of place* too, to include mediated mental experiences of places? By contrast, other authors point out that media technologies, instead of being 'placeless', indeed constitute new mediated social settings (*locales*) and help to foster an imagined *sense of place* by for instance establishing 'virtual communities' (Jones, 1995, 1997, 1998; Rheingold, 1993) or promoting 'reimagined communities' (Morley & Robins, 1995: 37-42) [128]. And we will see in the next chapter that location-based media even reintroduce geographical *location* in mediated interactions and experiences. Media technologies do not substitute but modify place-based identities.

3.3.2 Spatializing identities

This frame offers a sharper look at how (mobile) media technologies shape identifications with- (and rejections of-) along spatial dimensions, and how definitions of identity themselves become questioned. Mobile media are local in a geographical sense because of certain technical specificities. Local CDMA networks work within a certain range. With the integration of GPS in mobile devices information and communication is tied to locations. The mobile phone also fosters practices that are local in a social sense. *Gengsi* and *bergaul* entail the theatrical display of prestige in front of other people, the frequenting of certain material settings, and the exchange of local knowledge in social interactions. ICTs are also used in the expression of a local sense of place. For example, Elnar liked to show people from all over the world that Indonesia is a modern nation too. At the same time these types of 'localness' are profoundly tied to the global. The technical protocols of CDMA and GPS are established by international institutional bodies. *Gengsi* is about self-presentation by often using prestigious 'global brands'. *Bergaul* is the opposite of *kampungan* (being from the village). As knowing what is 'now' and showing it, it is decisively cosmopolitan in scope. And Elnar's experience of 'technological nationalism' is displayed in front of a global audience. Information- and communication technologies feed an imaginary sense of tapping into 'the global'. This can be an inclusive sense of participating on a worldwide scale. ICTs connect individuals and remote communities to the outside world in a two-way movement. The protests against the Soeharto regime were fueled by information

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[128] That digital media spaces establish new *senses of place* is perhaps most strikingly voiced by one of Sherry Turkle's respondents, a heavy internet user who spent most of his time in online environments, who said real life is "just another window" (Turkle, 1995: 13). Turkle however has been criticized for suggesting that online worlds and 'real life' exist as separate *locales*.

exchanged via international mailinglists such as *apakabar*, and by heroic depictions of student resistance in worldwide media. Digital media have come to represent the new *reformasi* values of modernity, which are seen as universal values: freedom of speech, human rights, political transparency and corporate responsibility, room for individual development and mobility. Young people often use English in mobile phone communication, and even Japanese and French words. This perception of participating in a global modernity stems from the historical developments that have taken place in Indonesia. It is thus partly constructed on a 'local' level. This illustrates the point of 'glocality'. ICTs however are also perceived as 'global' in an exclusive sense of distant otherness. Further on we will see how ICTs are valued negatively as an alien influence incompatible with local values.

ICTs contribute to practices and identifications on regional and transnational levels. *Reformasi* has brought far greater room for the expression of identities based on regional cultural traditions and ethnicity. Mass media now give attention to regional culture. National newspapers like Kompas regularly publish about the consequences of political decentralization. This has turned local politicians into veritable cultural entrepreneurs who actively market regional cultural heritage to attract tourism and business. Outer provinces like Papua (formerly called Irian Jaya) and Aceh now regularly appear in newspapers and on television. Hand in hand with reports on their economic importance, attention is given to regional culture [129]. Indonesians from Chinese ethnic descent are much more visible in the media. Calls for participation for a Chinese song contest are broadcasted on television. Newspapers write about Miss China-Indonesia elections. ICTs are part of this changed media landscape. Below we see that CDMA telecom operator Esia – with its purposively chosen name - caters to various cultural and religious identifications, by offering a range of thematic mobile devices. Mobile technologies are connected to an Asian modernity. Not the USA is the frontrunner but Japan, according to Budi Putra (Putra, 2004: 34). Japanese companies like DoCoMo have pioneered technological advancements that soon will become part of what Japan has to offer to the rest of the world, in addition to *sumo*, *sushi* and *geisha* (Putra, 2004: 37-39). Young Chinese people in Jakarta wear their clamshell phones on a colorful neck cord, like their peers in Singapore, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. They often adorn their phones with little danglers, such as the Chinese lucky cat, or the cute Japanese Hello Kitty. Korean handset manufacturer LG ran a television advertisement for a new high end fashion phone. The 30-second ad opens

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[129] There are fears that some outer provinces, which are of huge economic importance to the nation, want to separate themselves politically, as East Timor did in 2002. Without much exaggeration, for the first time Papua is acknowledged to have its own culture in the first place. Many Indonesians consider Papuans as primitive uncivilized people without culture, hardly human even. One of my former roommates for instance used to make monkey noises when talking about Papuans.

with an aerial night shot of Malaysia's modern capital Kuala Lumpur, instantly recognizable by its landmark Petronas Towers. The footage is played at high-speed, blurring the lights of car traffic and suggesting an accelerated urban metabolism. Accompanied by a synthesizer tune a pretty (light-skinned) woman with vaguely Asian features holds up an LG phone that radiates a bright light. With the phone in her hand she sashays over a spotlessly clean boulevard, her over-the-knee evening gown seductively swaying from left to right, towards the Petronas Towers in the distance, which emit a bright glow. The ad ends with the payoff "LG - Life is good". The advertisement portrays a desirable image of a hypermodern Asian city, and of life that is to be enjoyed. Despite the Indonesian-Malaysian love-hate relationship, many Indonesians look up to their "Asian Tiger" neighbor as a role-model [130].

The idea of neatly compartmentalized identities becomes questioned. From August 24-26 2007, the three-day Urbanfest festival for contemporary urban culture was organized in theme park Ancol in north-Jakarta. Kompas Gramedia, the largest media group in Indonesia, was one of the main organizers. In addition to 'global' expressions of urban culture and identity (indie music and hip-hop, street games and sports, graffiti art), the festival prominently featured elements of Asian popular culture like Japanese drumming and dancing, and a Japanese Harajuku cosplay competition as one of the evening's highlights [131]. During the festival many of the young people were continuously using their mobile phones and photo cameras to capture a sense of 'being there'. One of the performing acts was an Indonesian-language hip-hop act from Yogyakarta. They invited a female *dangdut* singer (a popular genre in Indonesia with Malay, Arabic and Hindustani influences) on stage to sing some songs together. After the evening prayer, an indie ('independent') rock band appeared on stage yelling "*Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh!*" (full version of the Islamic greeting) and asked if everybody had done their evening prayer. After finishing their set they thanked all the sponsors of the festival and shouted "indie forever". These may seem unlikely combinations: Indonesians dressing up as Japanese comic figures; hip-hop meeting *dangdut*; overtly Islamic young people playing western-oriented rock music; an indie band that does not shun commercialism. Indeed exploring cultural hybrids and identity boundaries was precisely what the festival was about. According

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[130] The two countries have almost the same official language, their cultural histories overlap, many Indonesians share a Malay ethnic background, both are large Muslim countries. Several bigger and smaller political clashes have occurred. Indonesians perceive Malaysia as arrogant because of Malaysia's rude treatment of Indonesian migrant laborers and students.

[131] Cosplay (costume play) is a Japanese youth subculture whereby people elaborately dress up like characters from popular culture like anime, manga and video games, and engage in role-playing. Its epicenter is the Tokyo neighborhood Harajuku.

to one of the festival organizers, the festival was meant as an antidote to recent conservatism. There are no genuinely Indonesian cultures, he said, since the country has long been open to foreign influences [132].

3.3.3 Contesting mobile media modernity

There is a downside to these new freedoms for identifications and fluid boundaries of identity categories. Many Indonesians feel uncertain about the compatibility of new technologies with their cultural and religious values. When it comes to the mobile phone, the majority of Indonesians are hardly bothered with issues playing in western countries, like loss of publicness, tyranny of availability, or deterioration of language. Their bewilderment and fears center on the alien side of the mobile phone in the process of constructing a modern identity. Anxieties about the uncanny come in many guises, as Barendregt notes: from the use of mobile phones as detonators in Islamic extremist terrorism, to alleged occurrences of the supernatural via the phone; from its presumed role in causing the general loss of moral values and cultural traditions, to promoting pornography in particular (see Barendregt, 2006a, 2006c, 2008; Barendregt & Pertierra, 2008).

Until mid-2007, the second-largest telecom operator Indosat ran an advertisement campaign via posters, print and television commercials with the slogan "*Hari gini nggak punya handphone?*" (Still today you don't have a handphone?). One of the commercials depicted a group of kids who enter a shopping mall. A security guard searches them, standard practice after a number of bomb attacks shook the capital over the last few years. All of them take out their mobile phones. Except one boy. He hesitantly dips into his pocket and pulls out a banana. As this fruit in Indonesia too bears a familiar anatomical connotation, the message conveyed was that someone who does not yet have a handphone must be a real loser [133]. This may seem like a funny and playful way of advertising. But in a country where for many people the possession of consumer goods is one of the main sources of status and self-respect, advertisements like these do have a serious impact. In May 2007 a female teenager killed herself

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[132] See article "Indie festival to mix up city's melting pot" in Jakarta Post, August 23 2007: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2007/08/23/indie-festival-mix-city039s-melting-pot.html-0; and "Gairah 'Indie' di Panggung Licin Globalisasi" ("Indie" passion on the slippery stage of globalization) in Kompas, August 24 2007 p.1 and 15.

[133] In this blogpost about the advertisement "The boy without a handphone" the connotation is explicitly made, saying the guy in the ad is meant to look like a 'dick' (*tolol*): http://daunlontar.blogspot.com/2005/07/lelaki-yang-tak-bertelepon-genggam.html (Indonesian), published on July 2 2005.

because she could not afford a mobile phone and felt rejected by her peers [134]. In face-to-face conversations, and in the Indonesian blogosphere, the advertisement provoked critical discussions about the downsides of a modern way of life that is defined by consumer goods and new technologies. Some of the issues mentioned were harmful peer pressure, social inequality, loss of respect for parents and elders, loss of religious discipline and morals, individualism, hedonism, and the superficiality of the cult of prestige with its obsessive fear of being regarded as backward [135].

Especially common are discussions about the compatibility of media technologies with a pious life. On the 'study Islam' mailing list somebody with the nickname *antoniobandalem* wondered whether Muslims are allowed to use products that are made by non-Muslims:

> As far as I know, we as Muslims are not allowed to use any products or goods made by non-Muslims [*kaum kafir*]??? Because it is said this is *haram* [not permitted by Islam], can you please clarify this?? Islamic teachers in my village often say that one becomes polluted [*diharamkan*] if one uses or consumes goods that are produced by non-Muslims. The dilemma also is that on the one hand the Islamic community [*umat islam*] wants to commit itself to the Islamic law [*syariat*], however on the other hand we are also still dependent on non-Muslims like America and its allies. [136]

He received several responses from people on the list who say it is all right to use *kafir* products. Most used religious argumentation. They referred to sections from the Quran or religious fatwas by (self-proclaimed) imams that justify consumption of such goods. One of most active people on the list, an IT specialist with the nickname *Chandraleka*, gave a more pragmatic reply:

> Wow, don't be too extreme! As long as the product itself is *halal* [permitted by Islam] it doesn't matter who produces it. This idea would make modern life

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[134] Several people brought this case to my attention. This blogpost published on February 19 2008 mentions the case: http://cefil19.blogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html#1067191792759757311 (Indonesian).

[135] Some examples of critical blogposts about the campaign: "Literary science to stimulate social sense", posted February 10 2008 at http://cefil19.blogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html#1067191792759757311 (Indonesian), in which the author criticizes consumer culture and makes a plea for literary studies to increase media literacy; "Peer Pressure", posted on May 30 2006 at http://yovindra.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_archive.html (Indonesian, no longer accessible), in which the author rejects the uncritical following of social trends; and "Marshall McLuhan and Cellphone culture", posted February 17 2005 at http://jovinworks.blogspot.com/2005/02/marshall-mcluhan-and-cellphone-culture.html (English), one of the few critical notes on the ethic of constant availability.

[136] Source: "study Islam" mailing list, posted May 18 2006: http://www.mail-archive.com/assunnah@yahoogroups.com/msg08382.html.

nearly impossible: you cannot drive a car, cannot use a computer, cannot use light bulbs, cannot use a mobile phone... One of the causes of extremism is ignorance about Islam. That's why it is important to study religion. Muslims are allowed to use *kafir* products, thank God! It makes this life much easier!" [137]

This case is emblematic for debates among (young) Indonesian Muslims about whether one should reject or accept technologies as part of one's religious life. In this case technologies are understood as consumer goods. In other discussions technologies are considered as media. This leads to question like: "Is it allowed to divorce via SMS?", or: "Does the exchange of 'crazy' emails, SMSes, and phone calls count as adultery?" [138]. In such discussions about technologies the boundaries of Islam are questioned. The way *antoniobandalem* formulated his question (interspersed with religious terms) is not "am I a good Muslim when I use *kafir* products?", but "is Islam capable of incorporating the use of these products?". A term like *haram* underlines the perceived alien nature of such products as polluting not just the individual Muslim but Islam as a whole. Further, *antoniobandalem* connected his religious identity directly to issues on a global scale. In terms of we versus them, he referred to the worldwide Islamic community and the political dominance of America. Not just the identity category on itself is questioned, but the relation between Islam vis-a-vis other entities. The above case further shows how new media technologies are used to question and bypass traditional authorities on cultural and religious matters. This can swing both ways. It can either lead to a broadening or a narrowing of perspectives. Antoniobandalem's Islamic teachers from the village profess one cannot use *kafir* products, but thanks to the answers he gets on the mailing list he now knows one can. By contrast, Frangkie from the Muslim Brotherhood (the case discussed in chapter 2) seemed to use the internet to dig himself into a trench in his opposition to any student group that wasn't "pure". In both cases media also (re)solidify boundaries.

Muslims who call themselves modern have no qualms about using technologies per se, but question certain media practices they perceive as alien to their cultural values [139]. During fasting month Ramadan national newspaper Republika, the voice of

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[137] Abbreviated and translated from the "study Islam" mailing list, posted May 20 2006: http://www.mail-archive.com/belajar-islam@yahoogroups.com/msg00092.html.

[138] Sources: "Question: Divorce via SMS" posted April 24 2007 http://www.mail-archive.com/belajar-islam@yahoogroups.com/msg00231.html (Indonesian); and "Question: do email, SMS, telephone contribute to adultery?" posted April 5 2006 http://www.mail-archive.com/belajar-islam@yahoogroups.com/msg00071.html (Indonesian).

[139] To avoid confusion, I use the word 'modern' here to refer to an attitude of self-awareness rather than referring to the so-called 'modernist Islam' in Indonesia, as opposed to the 'traditionalist Islam'. These qualifications are often given to the two largest Islamic movements in Indonesia, the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

the nationalist Islamic majority, published an article titled: "Technology can disturb the fasting" [140]. The article acknowledges that ICTs make the lives of modern people much easier. However, technologies act as a double-edged sword because of their potential to threaten religious life. The article introduces Fathurin Zein from the faculty for religious studies at the State University Jakarta to give his expert opinion. According to Zein, ICTs have changed the former social ways of life of the Indonesian people. The tradition of reading the Quran together with fellow Muslims or the family after Ramadan evening prayer is waning as a result of technological progress. People have become more individualistic. One of the "nasty impacts of technology" is a new type of behavior. "Nowadays after the evening prayer father is watching the news, mother is watching soap series, and the children are each engrossed with their own X-Box, internet computer or handphone". Zein fears that technology, which is increasingly "without control" and "met with an inexperienced attitude", will weaken the Islamic majority in Indonesia. This becomes "a new challenge", he says. There are three points parents must take heed of. First, the western propaganda of absolute freedom of expression without borders of new media clearly contradicts universal Islamic teachings. The freedom given to mankind has limits set by the Islamic law. The problem of ICTs is that the unlimited freedom of expression includes besmirching the prophet Muhammad. Second, the problem of ICTs is the unhampered spread of defamation, gossip and scandals. People no longer feel ashamed but are even proud about it. Third, the back-and-forth information streams in the ICT cosmos often do not have any standard measures of truth and credibility. Its consumption may lead people who have insufficient awareness of religion on the path of deviation, thus says Zein.

It would be a mistake to see such a religiously inspired view that promotes the curbing of free speech and dissemination of information as the antithesis of 'modernity'. What we see here is an example of an Islamic modernity. The question how Islam and (technological) modernity go together would merit a study of its own. Therefore I limit myself to the point that a religiously inspired attitude towards new technologies is not antithetical to modernity but entails the search for an alternative modernity. Modern Muslims acknowledge that one's identity as a Muslim no longer comes naturally but must be actively constructed in relation to oneself, to God, to other people and the outside world [141]. This modern Islamic identity is in constant movement too. It tries to balance between building an economically prosperous and

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[140] In *Republika*, September 19 2007, page 5. Online cache: http://www.infoanda.com/linksfollow.php?lh=WAsAV1FTU14E (Indonesian). The article is freely translated and abbreviated.

[141] Another typically modern attitude mentioned earlier is looking to oneself through the eyes of others. This too has spatial dimensions. Some worry that other Muslims closer to Mecca - and thus closer to the origins of Islam - do not see Indonesians as true Muslims. Others self-consciously plead for an Indonesian Islam instead of trying to emulate an Arabic version that is alien to southeast Asian culture.

intellectually developed nation, and adopting an attitude of critical engagement towards consumption and technological culture that is in accordance with religious values. It tries to reconcile local pre-Islamic cultural traditions and 'global' Arabic-Islamic influences into a national Indonesian Islam, while voicing global political solidarity with the *umat* (worldwide Islamic community). Rules for living - even if considered universal - are no longer unthinkingly followed. They must be self-imposed in an active and reflexive manner. Zein rejects "an inexperienced attitude" towards the role of technologies in life. Instead he calls for increasing awareness. In true modern vocabulary, living a modern religious life with technologies is "a challenge".

The above cases exemplify a key tension between different factions in Indonesian society. For some 'global technologies' are connections to the world, while for others they are a Trojan horse that infiltrates local culture and society, and destroys them from within. For most they are both at once. This is largely a generational conflict. Young people use new media as play spaces, for instance to explore their sexuality. This causes older people to react with moral panic. On February 13 2000 newspaper Republika dedicated a whole page to the increasingly popular Valentine's Day (February 14). One descriptive article was juxtaposed with several other articles that had headlines like: "This is not our culture", and: "This is cultural colonialism [142]. A letter to the editor said: "This leads to free sex". "Free sex" is the catch phrase for all sexual activity outside marriage. Like many other concepts in Indonesia it is Janus-faced. Publicly, it has become *the* label for perfidious western cultural influences that lead to immoral, un-Indonesian behavior and spoil the young. Behind the screens, "free sex" exerts huge attraction and the promise of excitement for many young people. Other letters warned: "Don't follow", and: "Follow the example of the prophet". Some letters associated Valentine's Day with Christianity, and pointed to the Quranic saying: "if you adopt the culture of others (those who are not Muslim) you will become one of them". The Republika page pushed the message that Valentine's Day neither roots in the values of Islam, nor in "our" Indonesian culture. As this was published one day in advance, and appealed to the reader in terms of an 'inclusive us', it seemed a call for action instead of being informative [143]. In the same issue of the newspaper, the chairman of the "society for family-friendly media" criticized the ubiquitous availability of pornography on the then popular carrier VCD (Video CD). Like drugs, the danger is that it young people who watch pornography will need more and more stimulants, he wrote [144]

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[142] Republika, February 13 2000, p. 3.

[143] Indonesian is unique in that it knows two words for we/us/our. Similarity and difference are built into the language itself. *Kita* includes the addressee (we, including you), *kami* excludes those spoken to (we, not you). *Kita* was used in these articles.

[144] Republika, February 13 2000, p. 14.

Bart Barendregt has written extensively on how the mobile phone is connected to fears about pornography (Barendregt, 2006a, 2008). A multitude of scandals have appeared in the media whereby the mobile phone camera was used to record sexual acts. Such scandals involved soap actors, pop singers, and politicians, and - more worrying - ordinary students and schoolgirls and boys (Barendregt, 2008: 168). These recordings spread via the internet or pass from hand to hand, for instance via Bluetooth file exchange. As a reaction, the movement "Don't go naked in front of the camera" was founded to dissuade young people to succumb to the temptations of mobile phone pornography. Ironically the group uses the same media technologies it considers potentially dangerous: it has a website and a Facebook group [145]. Their website lists a selected overview of "naked before camera" cases, including juicy details like the age and number of people involved, place, duration, and type of act. Fear and pleasurable thrill-seeking seem to touch each other. One of the 'commitments' this movement formulated is: "to be critical of policies that always prioritize the availability and access of information technologies, which consciously or unconsciously ignore the availability and quality of content and messages that are child-friendly, family-friendly, and improve education and empowerment of the Indonesian people" [146]. On the forum Mypulau.com (my island), a website maintained by telecom provider Telkomsel, a member provided a number of "Tips for super-safe sexual affairs" with the help of the mobile phone [147]. The post opened with the sentence "Still today you don't have an affair??? You're probably not very trendy!!", a playful reference to the Indosat advertisement "Still today you don't have a handphone?". Advise included: "delete all SMSes from your phone immediately, otherwise your suspicious girlfriend or boyfriend might find out!", and: "Buy two SIM cards, or better, buy two telephones: one for your girlfriend and the other for your affair". The tong-in-cheek *gaul* joke was not appreciated by everyone on the forum. Among the many negative reactions one commenter likened adultery to addictive drugs and said "it is only a virtual pleasure, the real pleasure is found in heaven soon".

3.3.4 Reconciling differences

Despite frictions and struggle, for most a technologically defined modernity and religious and regional cultural identities go well together. More than 20.000 Indonesians have joined the Facebook group "SOS Internet Indonesia", founded to

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[145] See their website at http://www.jbdk.org, and http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=63425608697.

[146] Source: organization's website and Facebook page.

[147] Source: http://www.mypulau.com/news_view.php?newsentry_id=899.

oppose national government plans to censor new media content [148]. Telecoms actively cater to the reconciliation of ICTs and different identities. During the fasting month many operators and mobile phone producers advertise with special offers, like Islamic ringtones and cheap calling rates from/to Saudi Arabia. CDMA operator Esia introduced an 'Islamic' mobile phone called the *Hape Esia Hidayah* ('divine guidance phone') with a Quran, prayer time warnings, and the chance to win a pilgrimage to Mecca [149]. The *hidayah* became a big success. Esia claims to have sold almost 500 thousand phones in one year since its launch in August 2008 [150]. Following its expansion to other islands with different cultural traditions and religions, the company made a Hindu-Balinese mobile phone *Hape Esia Bali* with a Hindu calendar; a Chinese phone *Hape Esia Fu* with *fengshui* and fortune cookies applications and 50% discount on calls to China, Hongkong and Singapore; and a Christian phone *Hape Esia Kasih* with a bible and Christian ringtones. People who do not wish to express ethnic or religious difference can buy the patriotic *Hape Esia Merdeka* ('freedom phone') with symbols of Indonesian national unity. If none of these 'old' identity categories seem appealing, one can always opt for the *Hape Esia Slank* with special content from one of Indonesia's most popular rock bands Slank. Founder of critical Tempo Magazine, and one of Indonesia's main public intellectuals, Goenawan Mohamad succinctly describes the reconciliation of religious and cultural identities with modern life. He notes the apparent tension between religious or moral values and (capitalist) modernity. At the same time he witnesses its nullification. He gives the case of a film star friend, who for his birthday is offered the choice between a handphone or an *umroh* (pilgrimage to Mecca outside the *hadj* month). Both product (handphone) and communal religious ritual (*umroh*) are by now commodified as matters of individual choice, Mohamad concludes [151].

At stake are the three identity tensions identified earlier. Can people maintain their traditional values and stay the same in the face of technological changes, or do they have to adapt and redefine selfhood? Do these technologies impose a 'global' homogeneity on everyone, or offer room for people with different cultural backgrounds to mold these technologies in accordance with their lives? Do people play the media in freedom or are they forcibly being played by the media? Many Indonesians have the sense that the mobile phone and other ICTs inescapably draw them into an infinite game. The stake in this game is identity itself. Whether it is the competitive pressure to possess the most prestigious handphone, remain up-to-date,

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[148] See http://www.facebook.com/tolakrpmkonten.

[149] See product website at http://www.myesia.com/hidayah_web.

[150] Source: Bakrie Telecom press room, published on August 12 2009 at http://www.bakrietelecom.com/bakrie-telecom-pelopori-lagi-hape-islami.

[151] Article "Handphone", February 7 2000 http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/caping/2000/02/07/mbm.20000207.CTP111488.id.html.

and engage in ongoing socializing, or the task to actively resist the mobile phone's seductions; new media continuously burden people with unavoidable choices that affect their sense of who and what they are. People must respond to this pressure through long-term strategies and ad-hoc tactics. They must create their own rules that prescribe how to use media technologies in accordance with themselves, and self-impose these rules. Indeed, life with mobile media technologies becomes 'a challenge'. This burden makes up the fourth level of play: being played by the mobile.

3.4 Conclusion: four play types

In these two chapters we have seen how Indonesian identities are shaped by the mobile phone. Two main points have been made. First, changes in identities are too 'rich' and complex to be the direct result from media technologies. By taking a contextual perspective that involves spatial, social and cultural dimensions, the relation between media technologies and identity construction is understood in terms of a 'mutual shaping'. We have seen that mobile media do not exist in isolation but are part of a broader media landscape, which has developed in a specifically Indonesian context. Similarly, identities are constructed in relation to historical, social and political developments. We have described this particular context in terms of a 'mobile modernity'. Second, evidence from the Indonesian case supports the argument that play is a fruitful way to look at technologically mediated identities. Following the conceptualization of the play framework outlined in chapter 1, four *levels* of play have been recognized. These have been summarized at the end of chapter 2 and reappeared in chapter 3. In addition, four *types* of play have emerged. We have seen elements of competition and mastery (*agôn*) in the practice of increasing *gengsi* through mobile phone related signifiers, and in the display of social know-how through *bergaul*. We have seen elements of chance and luck (*alea*) in the practice of lucky numbers and in the lotteries held by telecoms. We have seen elements of pretense and illusion (*mimicry*) in the imitation of being a successful young businessman or woman, in Dewi's reflexive performance of having achieved a desirable new position in life, and in the creative joking of *bergaul*. We have seen elements of thrill-seeking and disorientation (*ilinx*) in the exchange of illicit mobile phone pornography, and in the dizzying experiences that stem from the overabundance of mobile phone

customization items in shopping malls, and the confusing myriad of identities that the media landscape as a whole has opened up. Further, we have seen how mobile media shape the construction of modern identities in a dialectic between opening up new play spaces for free play, and setting new stakes in rule-bound games. Most attention has been paid to the play levels of play with, play through and play by the mobile. Play on the mobile has received less attention. It is to this level we now turn.

4. Locating the media: mobile media and urban plays [152]

4.1 In search of locative media

In this chapter we look at locative media, a development that integrates positioning technologies in mobile media. This development is analyzed as case of play on the mobile.

4.1.1 Location-based technologies

> The principal factors in media impact on existing social forms are acceleration and disruption. Today the acceleration tends to be total, and thus ends space as the main factor in social arrangements.
> (McLuhan, 1994: 94).

For a long time information and communication technologies have been understood as 'placeless'. The dominant vision was that ICTs weaken or even obliterate the importance of physical place (*location*) in general and the need for spatial concentration in cities in particular (Downey & McGuigan, 1999; Graham, 2004), as well as social relations and identities based on proximate face-to-face interactions in social situations (*locale*) (Meyrowitz, 1985: 308). This 'paradigm' has been captured in the phrase "anyplace, anytime, anywhere" (see Graham, 2004: 4; Kuitenbrouwer, 2006: 56). As late as 1998, 'virtual community' researcher Steve Jones claimed:

> cyberspace hasn't a "where" (though there are "sites" or "nodes" at which users gather). Rather, the space of cyberspace is predicated on knowledge and information, on the common beliefs and practices of a society abstracted from physical space.
> (Jones, 1998: 15)

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[152] Many themes and ideas addressed in this chapter were shaped through collaborations with researcher Martijn de Waal, with whom I founded the project The Mobile City (www.themobilecity.nl), and locative media artist Esther Polak, with whom I participated in a locative media project called NomadicMILK (www.nomadicmilk.net). However, all omissions or mistakes are entirely mine.

In response to this 'old' new media paradigm, recent work shows that mobile media practices in particular are frequently tied to physical places and physically co-present social situations. And via mobile media the internet too. Instead of being placeless, mobile media indeed contribute to "a sense of place" (Nyíri, 2005: 17-18). A few examples from literature illustrate this. Many people start a mobile phone conversation by asking "where are you?" in order to 'situate' the other person (Arminen, 2006: 320; Laurier, 2003; Licoppe, 2004: 138; Plant, 2001: 29, 61; Townsend, 2000: 87; Wellman, 2001: 239). In what is called 'micro-coordination', the phone is used as a prelude to actual face-to-face meetings that take place somewhere (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 139). Most people are very aware of which situations are appropriate for making a mobile phone call, and what kind of topics are acceptable in that particular setting (Höflich, 2005: 160). Mobile phones are used as audio players, and add an aural layer to one's experience of physical spaces one is dwelling in or passing through. They offer an intense experience of one's environment through sound (Bassett, 2005: 175; Bull, 2005). Many migrants call and text with family and friends overseas, and thereby maintain a sense of 'home' (Paragas, 2005: 241). The mobile phone also helps to create an imagined sense of nearness with other people (called co-presence). Familiar people are "always in the pocket" (De Gournay, 2002: 201-204; Fox, 2006: 13).

Mobile media technologies are considered part of a broader class of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Nevertheless, from the outset they have been conceptualized as distinctive from computers and the internet precisely because of this relation to physical context. In a comparison of (early) internet studies and mobile media studies, Mizuko Ito notes that mobile communications studies have "foregrounded sociocultural diversity in a way that was not, at least initially, evident in Internet studies" (Ito, et al., 2005: 5). Indeed, edited volumes about the mobile phone almost always present studies from a wide range of cultural contexts (examples are Castells, et al., 2004; Katz, 2008; Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2004; Ling & Campbell, 2009; Ling & Pedersen, 2005; Nyíri, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Ito further says that by using terms like 'cyberspace' and 'virtual reality', early internet studies "focused on the ways in which the new media seemed able to constitute spaces or places *apart from* the rest of social life ('real life' or offline life)" (Ito, et al., 2005: 8). Mobile communication studies emphasize how the mobile phone integrates online and physical worlds (ibid: 8). Another difference she notes is that internet studies have looked at the mediation of social relations as 'virtual communities' that are formed between strangers and sustained online, while mobile communication studies look at communication between

intimates who already know each other in relatively small circles [153]. Mobile phone ethnographies focus on how the mobile phone is being used in actual physical places, Ito continues. "*Keitai* [the mobile phone in Japan] users are characterized by their attention to and immersion in the physical environment and social order, even as they increasingly maintain contact with distant personal relations through an intimate portable device. The *keitai* both colonizes and adapts to the structures of exiting practices and places" (ibid: 13, my addition in brackets). Finally, Ito notes that the mobile technologies have moved computing away from the desktop and into everyday settings. The mobile phone can be considered an instantiation of visions about "ubiquitous computing" (more about this below). She proposes: "[a] crucial emergent area of inquiry is the need to theorize the layering of different forms of social and physical presence and to study interactional practices for managing simultaneous presence in multiple social situations" (ibid: 13). I pick up this suggestion in the current chapter.

By contrasting mobile media to other ICTs, Ito primarily focuses on mobile phones as communications media. Two other dimensions receive less attention. Unlike the personal computer that tends to be tucked away under the desk, the mobile phone is tied to everyday physical settings as a visible material artifact [154]. We have seen how Indonesians use the mobile phone as a prop in the display of *gengsi*. Anthropologist Alex Taylor observes that for teenagers "the phone's physical presence - its *materiality* - in everyday talk enables it to provide a means to manage and organize topic" (Taylor, 2005: 153). Its taken-for-granted presence among young people makes the phone an easy target to divert attention to as a non-awkward topic. And Fortunati *et al.* analyze how the mobile phone is integrated with the human body as a fashion object (Fortunati, et al., 2003: 1-11). Second, and of chief concern in this chapter, mobile devices and networks are increasingly equipped with location-based technologies, like GPS (global positioning system), cell tower positioning, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity, i.e. a wireless networking protocol), RFID (radio frequency identification), compasses, accelerometers and proximity sensors. Location-based mobile media not only (re)establish a *sense of place* by being tied to physical *locales*, they also connect digital information and communication to actual *locations*. From a technological point of view location-based media are characterized by a convergence of portable media, wireless networking technologies, and positioning technologies. GPS uses satellite signals to establish a receiver's absolute geographical position with fair accuracy (up to

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[153] This is culturally specific too. In Indonesia for instance it is much more common to exchange handphone numbers amongst strangers than in Europe, north America or Japan. In various print media young people - boys and girls alike - publish little personal announcements to seek new friends.

[154] Visions about the future of computing envisioned its embedding in everyday settings, yet the aim was to make the device *disappear* into the background (Weiser, 1991; Weiser & Brown, 1996).

30 cm accurate under good conditions). Assisted GPS (aGPS) uses carrier network signals to establish a quick but less precise position, based on signal strength to the nearest unique cellular tower or triangulation between multiple towers. Internet users have IP numbers that reveal someone's physical location with surprising accuracy. Other technologies like Bluetooth, NFC (near field communication) based on RFID, and WiFi, depend on the relative position (or proximity) of a device to another device or the network. Many recent smartphones house an accelerometer, a compass, and a proximity sensor, to measure how the device is being held, to which direction it points, and whether it is near to another object.

NFC/RFID: < 0.2 m, 424kbit/s, < 0,1 sec

Bluetooth: 10/100 m, 2,1 Mbit/s, 6 sec

WiFi: 30-60 m, 11/54/100 Mbit/s, 3-10 sec

UMTS/3G: 1-1,5 km, 1,5 - 7,2 Mbit, 5-10 sec

GPS: worldwide range, no data up, 10 sec - 2 min
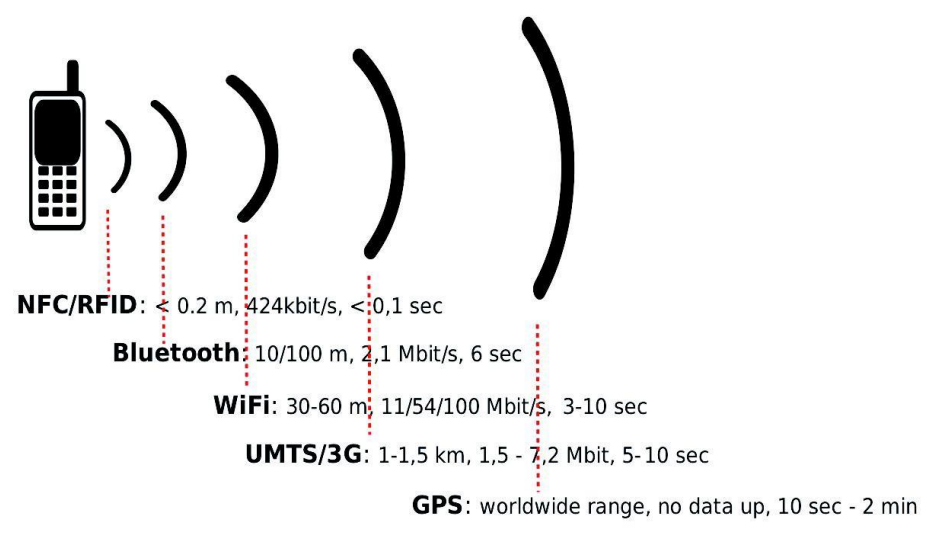
Figure 4: Various location-based technologies (protocol, range, transfer speed, access time).

4.1.2 Locative media practices

On top of these technologies a multitude of applications and services are developed that use geographical positioning. Location-based developments thus are partly technologically driven, and partly consist of transdisciplinary practices in and between the digital media arts, research and development in 'ubiquitous computing', urban research and design, 'pervasive gaming', telecom industries searching for new services and business models, and an academic fascination with digital media and the 'revenge' of locality. This diversity is reflected in the many names that are given to overlapping developments in location-based and context-aware computing. They are variously called 'locative media', a term coined in the digital media arts (Albert, 2004; Bleecker &

Knowlton, 2006; Chang & Goodman, 2006; Galloway & Ward, 2006; Lemos, 2009; McCullough, 2006; Norman, 2006; Pope, 2005; B. Russell, 2004; Shirvanee, 2006; Tuters & Varnelis, 2006); 'urban computing', 'urban new media' and 'urban informatics', terms rooting in urban studies (Foth, 2009; Graham, 2004; Greenfield & Shepard, 2007; Williams & Dourish, 2006); 'pervasive computing', 'context-aware computing', 'ubiquitous computing', the 'internet of things', 'ambient intelligence', terms originating in computer research (Aarts & Diederiks, 2006; Bell & Dourish, 2006; Berg, 2009; Bleecker, 2006; Crang & Graham, 2007; Greenfield, 2006; Hinske, Lampe, & Carsten Magerkurth, 2007; Kranenburg, 2008; Moran & Dourish, 2001; B. Russell, 1999; Sterling, 2005); and 'location-based services' (LBS) and 'geospatial web', the preferred labels in telecom and internet industries (Rao & Minakakis, 2003; Scharl & Tochtermann, 2007). For practical reasons I stick to the name 'locative media' in this chapter [155].

Digital media artists have been quick to engage in the development and artistic uses of locative technologies (Paul, 2008; Tuters & Varnelis, 2006). The term 'locative media' was coined for a 2003 media art workshop in Latvia [156]. Subsequently, artists and researchers started exploring the potential of this emerging domain and tried to stake out a 'locative media' field in a number of publications [157]. Some of the recurring themes in locative media arts are depicting the spatial dimensions of economic and social relations; representing a sense of embodiment through media; narrating place-based identities; visualizing the poetics of mobility; exposing layman geographical knowledge and experience; and critically questioning the omnipresence of wireless technologies, surveillance issues, and the politics of place (Albert, 2004; Bleecker & Knowlton, 2006; Galloway & Ward, 2006; Nold, 2009; Norman, 2006; Pope, 2005; Sant, 2006; Sharpe, 2006; Shirvanee, 2006). Locative media artists invariably use cartography as a visual medium. Using maps raises issues of representation (as in reflexive modern art the medium itself becomes scrutinized). What is included and what is left out? Who represents? It has been argued that the 'universalist' Euro-centric Cartesian maps that are often deployed as backends in locative projects (for example Google Earth/Maps) favor an abstract, rational spatial knowledge aimed at control (Fusco, 2005). Moreover, GPS originated as a US military technology. It was only opened up for civilian use in the year 2000. GPS is "inextricable connected to military complexes and its increasing commercial ubiquity" (Galloway & Ward, 2006). Still, artists have embraced subjectivity in mapping people's own experiences of space and places. Examples are the projects

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[155] Mainly because my introduction in this field started with a collaboration with a locative media artist.

[156] See workshop website at http://locative.x-i.net/intro.html.

[157] Notably in Mute Magazine, numbers 28 (2004) and 29 (2005) (http://www.metamute.org) and in a special issue of Leonardo Electronic Almanac, vol. 14 issue 3-4 (2006) (http://leoalmanac.org).

Bio Mapping (2004) by Christian Nold, and *Amsterdam RealTime* (2002) by Esther Polak and Jeroen Kee at Waag Society [158]. In *Bio Mapping* participants went out for a walk in their neighborhood. They wore a specially crafted device that measured their 'galvanic skin response', an indicator of emotional arousal, and a GPS device that logged their movements. Upon their return, an 'emotional map' was compiled with three-dimensional spikes at points were people felt aroused (like busy junctions). In *Amsterdam RealTime* a cross-section of Amsterdam urbanites were given a GPS receiver and a mobile internet-enabled device. As they moved around town, their GPS geo-coordinates were directly uploaded to a central server. At the exhibition space the GPS data were visualized as individual traces of participant's corporeal mobilities in the city and could be viewed in (almost) real-time. In the course of the two-month project a recognizable map of the city of Amsterdam emerged from the cumulative movements of all participants. On an aggregate level the movements followed predictable and logical patterns. The busy main arteries of the city were very visible, while residential areas remained almost dark. On an individual level however it appeared the majority of the participants did not venture very far from their neighborhood. In the week they carried the device they only traveled between a small number of places. This countered the idea that people nowadays live a hyper-mobile 'nomadic' lifestyle. Locative media mappings thus can expose what normally remains hidden. As we have seen, urbanist Kevin Lynch argues that people make cognitive maps of the (urban) environment in order to orient themselves. In this chapter we explore how people relate to their environment, to other people, and themselves, and what the role is of digital cartography in making this visible.

Locative media can be traced back to vision of ubiquitous computing. Xerox Parc researcher Mark Weiser famously begins his 1991 article *The Computer for the 21st Century* with the words: "[t]he most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it" (Weiser, 1991). Weiser pictures a future in which computing technologies will be a constant background presence. Location and scale are crucial, as computers have to invisibly and seamlessly integrate into the everyday world. "[U]biquitous computers must know where they are. [...] If a computer merely knows what room it is in, it can adapt its behavior in significant ways without requiring even a hint of artificial intelligence" (ibid). Weiser speculates that when computers make relevant decisions for us without standing in our way, they can overcome the problem of information overload. Since his influential article, much has been written about 'ubicomp' as the

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[158] See Bio Mapping website at http://biomapping.net, and Nold, 2009; Amsterdam RealTime website at http://real-time.waag.org.

third big paradigm in computing, after the mainframe and the personal computer [159]. A trend is observed towards: "[n]umerous, casually accessible, often invisible computing devices; [f]requently mobile or embedded in the environment; [c]onnected to an increasingly ubiquitous network infrastructure composed of a wired core and wireless edges" (Moran & Dourish, 2001: 87). Various authors argue that this fairly accurately describes the mobile phone (Bell & Dourish, 2006; Moran & Dourish, 2001). Already in 2001, Moran and Dourish write: "[c]ell phones are really networked computers. The distinction between communication and computational [*sic*] is blurring, not only in the devices, but also in the variety of ways computation allows us to communicate, from e-mail to chat to voice to video" (Moran & Dourish, 2001: 88). Bell and Dourish propose that ubiquitous computing is already 'here and now' (Bell & Dourish, 2006). "Arguably [...] our contemporary world, in which mobile computation and mobile telephony are central aspects not just of Western commercial endeavors but also facets of everyday life in the developing world, is already one of ubiquitous computing, albeit in unexpected form" (ibid: 135). Mobile media are not only communications media (the C in ICTs), but increasingly also informational media (the I in ICTs) [160]. Other than personal computers at home or at work, mobile media are embedded in a myriad of social situations.

The omnipresence of mobile media has also risen to attention in the field of urbanism. Anthony Townsend explores how "mobile communications devices will have a profound effect on cities as urbanites weave them into their daily routines" (Townsend, 2000: 85). He poses the question what happens to urban space and place, and the activities of urbanites, when information and communication is freed from fixed locations. Townsend proposes that the mobile phone is a decision-making tool that allows everyday life information management in real-time. Real-time and personal time-management leads to a speed-up and a modification of the 'urban metabolism'. Quantitatively, the amount of (potential) interactions between urban inhabitants increases dramatically. Qualitatively, modes of organization shift from being organized around schedules and fixed locations to being organized into decentralized networks. This permits "the withholding of commitment to a set course of action until the last possible moment, always holding open the window for better information" (ibid: 98). Location-sensitive information "will add a new level of improvement to this on-the-fly decision making" (ibid: 98). The acknowledgement that ubiquitous computing is already among us and influencing cities worldwide has spurred a hybrid research

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[159] See for instance a special edition about "context-aware computing" in the Human-Computer Interaction journal (2001) vol. 16, issue 2-4.

[160] According to the New York Times, in 2009 the amount of data in text, e-mail messages, streaming video, music and other services on mobile devices surpassed the amount of voice data in cellphone calls in the USA. Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/technology/personaltech/14talk.html?_r=1&hp.

agenda about "cybercities", "urban computing" or "urban informatics" that investigates the interplay between (mobile) ICTs and the city (Aurigi & De Cindio, 2008; Foth, 2009; Graham, 2004; Williams & Dourish, 2006). Urban computing is deployed in actual projects. Eric Paulos and team executed a project in Accra, Ghana with mobile devices to measure and visualize the city's air quality. Participants were given a mobile device with GPS and an air quality sensor to measure and log locations with high carbon monoxide concentrations and other gasses. At the end of the day results were collected to produce a 'heat map' of air pollution (Paulos, Honicky, & Goodman, 2007). Paulos *et al.* reconceptualize the mobile phone from a personal communications device to a "networked mobile personal measurement instrument" that can be used for "participatory urbanism" (ibid). In this chapter I specifically deal with the urban context by analyzing how locative media shape the experience of the city, social relations between urbanites, and urban identities.

Pervasive games use mobile media as platforms to play location-based games. Pervasive games are digital games that use media interfaces and simultaneously take place in- and relate to the physical environment. An early example is Pacmanhattan (2004), a game that used the grid of New York City's streets as the maze of the well-known computer game Pacman [161]. One player was dressed as Pacman and had to run the city streets to collect virtual points. He was being chased by four other players dressed as ghosts, who tried to capture Pacman before all the points were collected. Players worked in teams of two: one on the streets and one behind a computer. Street players constantly updated their position via the mobile telephone to their teammate, who registered the player's positions in a networked computer program. Pacman was allowed to ask the teammate where the ghosts were. The four ghosts could not ask their co-player where Pacman was. The game was over when a ghost spotted Pacman, or when Pacman had 'eaten' all the dots (see for a description: Chang & Goodman, 2006; McGonigal, 2007: 225-228). Pacmanhattan used a primitive form of location-awareness via manual updates. More recent location-based games use (a)GPS-based positioning to automatically pinpoint a player's location (de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2008).

Mobile device manufacturers, telecom providers, and (third party) application developers have recently taken up location-aware technologies. A popular service is Foursquare. The makers describe the service as a cross between a friend-finder, a social city-guide, and a game that rewards players for doing interesting things [162]. Foursquare uses special location-aware software for the mobile device that allows people to 'check-in' at certain physical locations (restaurants, bars, clubs, shops, etc.). Foursquare

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[161] See the Pacmanhattan website at http://pacmanhattan.com.

[162] See the Foursquare website at http://foursquare.com/help.

users can attach tips and to-dos to a geographical location relevant to that physical context ("do try out the shrimp salad at restaurant The Happy Seagull"). Tips can be shared with friends on Foursquare, or on other online social networks like Facebook and Twitter [163]. Foursquare has competitive game elements. One can earn points by checking in, receive badges for tagging places, get listed on the Foursquare 'leaderboard' when one is very active, and become the 'mayor' of a place if one is the most frequent visitor.

4.1.3 Locative media classification

As often, it seems useful to make a classification of a newly developing field to get a feel for its scope and aims. I propose a fivefold typology of locative media, based on the primary criterion by which digital media technologies are purposively 'reconciled' with geographical location. After all, new technologies are not just 'there'. They are actively developed and deployed by people with particular aims. This typology is by no means absolute, as new developments undoubtedly take place. Nor are the categories very strict. They often overlap. So they must be seen as ideal-types that highlight one particular aspect of location-based technologies. Locative media technologies are used (i) for navigation and orientation in wayfinding; (ii) to measure and visualize what is otherwise not visible; (iii) to annotate physical locations with digital information; (iv) to organize social interactions; (v) for pervasive games. In addition, I argue that play not only occurs in pervasive games but informs the other categories as well. Furthermore, in all categories locative media induce us to reflect on ourselves in spatial terms.

i. Wayfinding

Locative media are used to reach a specific destination and/or to orient oneself to one's environment. In navigation, the endpoint is known but the route is not. Navigation services assist in reaching a location according to predetermined criteria: in the least amount of time, via the shortest/most beautiful/safest/cheapest route. A number of commercial car and pedestrian navigation services exist, like TomTom, Garmin, Google Maps, Nokia Maps. In orientation, neither route nor endpoint are known beforehand. Locative technologies are used for orientation on locales. Typical location-based services enable people to find a nearby Italian restaurant by using their GPS-enabled mobile phone, and to judge it based on online recommendations (perhaps via a reputation-based social networking component) [164]. Compared to navigation, orientation offers more room for playful surprises, since people may

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[163] Many 'web 2.0' social media networks have an open API (advanced programming interface), the protocol used to store and retrieve information. This allows third party applications to access this information.

diverge from their paths when something interesting nearby is encountered. A projected next step is that objects or services in urban space will actively announce themselves ("I am the best Italian restaurant around here!"). In public places like bus stops, advertising campaigns offer free downloads if people enable the Bluetooth function on their mobile phone and accept a commercial message [165]. Such services are hampered because telecom laws prohibit unsolicited spam. 'Proximity marketing' is often about nearness rather than a unique geographical location. An intriguing question is whether we retain our capacity for spatial orientation when we outsource this to our navigation devices [166]? People often literally loose sight of the road. Stories abound of people who steer their car into the ditch because their navigation device told them to, or unsuspectingly end up in Rio's most dangerous favela [167]. Another issue is often called 'the end of serendipity'. If we 'optimize' our movements through the urban environment via informational wayfinding devices, do we loose the spontaneity of running into an unexpected place or person by chance while looking for something else? We return to this question later in this chapter.

ii. Sensing and visualization

Locative media are used to capture and visualize what is otherwise not visible. Visualizations frequently rely on aggregated datasets and invariably use some kind of mapping. Cartographic visualizations can reveal people's physical or communicative mobility patterns, either individually or as a group. The BBC television series *Britain From Above* (2008) visualizes various mobility systems using aggregated (GPS) data [168]. The series shows physical mobility systems, including train travel, ship movements in the North Sea Channel, taxi flows in central London, and airplane circulations above Heathrow airport. Normally invisible informational and communicative mobility systems are shown too, like internet traffic and transnational energy logistics. These visualizations are a perfect illustration of Urry's point that our present-day mobility systems are co-dependent on ICT-based systems (Urry, 2007: 14). A case of exposing

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[164] Foursquare does orientation via social networking. A Dutch example of a location-based service is restaurant finder http://m.iens.nl.

[165] Dutch examples: http://www.Bluetoothreclame.nl and http://www.proximity-marketing.nl.

[166] The introduction of new technologies is frequently understood as an 'extension' of the human body as well as an 'amputation' (McLuhan, 1994: ch.4).

[167] See "£96,000 Merc written off as satnav leads woman astray": http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23389219-details/£96,000%20Merc%20written%20off%20as%20satnav%20leads%20woman%20astray/article.do; and "GPS guides Norwegian tourists into trouble in Rio": http://www.reuters.com/article/oddlyEnoughNews/idUSTRE4AO6G720081125.

[168] See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/britainfromabove.

individual physical mobility is Dopplr, a locative service for frequent travelers [169]. Dopplr registers members' travels, and combines this with a social network of other globetrotters. At the end of the year members get a personal visual report. The report shows where they have traveled, the total amount of kilometers spent, who they are closest to in terms of travel patterns and places, their average velocity, the amount of traveling by all people in their network, their carbon footprint, and more. Well-known blogger and co-founder of the Creative Commons project Joichi Ito is such a frequent traveler. In a blogpost he reflects on his own travel patterns [170]. In 2008 Ito traveled more than half a million kilometers, almost one and a half times the distance to the moon. Not without a sense of guilt he confesses that his carbon dioxide emissions equal those of six Hummers: three times the US citizen average. Ito promises to weigh the necessity of future trips against their environmental footprint. Visualizations often bring to light the geographical dimensions of ICTs. The project *New York Talk Exchange* by MIT's *Senseable City Lab* shows the geography of information and communication. The worldwide exchange of information is visualized in real-time as volumes of long distance telephone and IP (Internet Protocol) data between New York and other cities [171]. Projects like these counter the idea that ICTs are placeless. Instead, they show that information- and communication networks and practices are rooted in, and dependent on geography and urban environments. They also reveal that contemporary cities are not self-contained places. Cities consist of fragmented networks that are tied to multiple other (urban) locales via ICT-based infrastructures that bypass the national and directly go global, in what Graham and Marvin call 'splintering urbanism' (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Cartographic visualizations are further used to organize digital data. As data sets become increasingly large the problem arises how to order and display data in meaningful ways [172]. Sensing projects measure environmental variables and visualize results by using maps. An example from the Netherlands is *Geluidsnet* [173]. This project engages citizens in measuring sound levels around airports. Volunteer citizens living near the airport place microphones on their roofs to measure sound levels of passing airplanes. An embedded computer running open source software sends the data to a central server. Aggregated sound levels are displayed in real-time on a web-based map. A consideration is whether visualizations can show how people subjectively experience their environment. Often in these projects, movements and spatial experiences are aggregated and reduced to abstract maps. It is hard to get a

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[169] See http://www.dopplr.com.

[170] See blogpost at http://joi.ito.com/weblog/2009/01/21/2008-dopplr-per.html.

[171] See http://senseable.mit.edu/nyte.

[172] Media theorist Lev Manovich argues that culture can be mined and visualized as cartographic information, in what he calls 'cultural analytics'. See: http://lab.softwarestudies.com/2008/09/projects.html.

[173] See: http://www.geluidsnet.nl/en/geluidsnet.

sense of the city as a lived space. These visualizations are not neutral in their language. They often convey a spectacular high-tech futurism instead of more mundane everyday practices. We may also wonder whether visualizations alone can induce behavioral changes in people? Will Joichi Ito really travel less when he sees he has burned up six Hummers worth of fuel?

iii. Annotation

Annotative projects enable people to 'write' physical places by adding their own personal experiences to locations via 'geotags' [174]. Geotagging means adding locational information to any multimedia 'object' (photos, video, audio) to display the geographic context of that object. Some applications and services overlay physical space with digital information that can be accessed on the spot via mobile media devices. An example is the Wikitude 'augmented reality' platform for mobile devices [175]. Depending on where one is (GPS), and where one points the mobile phone camera at (compass and accelerometer), the Wikitude application displays information about physical points of interest from online sources like Wikipedia. It projects this information over the camera view on the screen. Users themselves can contribute geotags and points of interest to the Wikitude.me platform [176]. Such services depart from a geographic position in physical space ('reality') and add extra layers of digital information. This is why they are called 'augmented reality' (see Manovich, 2005). Other than 'virtual reality', which tries to supplant the everyday experience with an immersive virtual experience (see Müller, 2009), augmented reality's ideal is to blend virtual information more or less seamlessly into what people are normally seeing. Augmented reality has evolved from clunky head-mounted displays, to glasses, to even integration in contact lenses. Most augmented reality services project information on the most ubiquitous screen we carry with us all the time: the mobile phone. Other geotagging services depart from the other end of the physical-digital spectrum. The geotagging feature on photo website Flickr.com shows where and at what time a photo was taken, thereby contextualizing digital informational objects with geographical (and temporal) information. A consideration is how in an ever-growing torrent of digital informational objects like geotags one can filter on 'contextual relevance' [177]. An example of how human intelligence instead of artificial intelligence can be queried and harvested is the

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[174] Tuters and Varnelis make a distinction between 'annotative' and 'phenomenological' locative media projects (Tuters & Varnelis, 2006).

[175] See http://www.wikitude.org.

[176] See http://www.wikitude.me. A similar application is the Dutch Layar: http://layar.com.

[177] How machines can understand meaning and 'context' is the main question in the development of what is called the 'semantic web'.

use of 'micro-blogging' service Twitter.com as a 'context-aware' search engine, whereby people's text messages themselves act as geotags [178]. A search for #vondelpark returns the most recent Twitter messages mentioning this park in Amsterdam. This likely yields better contextually relevant information than a standard search engine does (how is the weather there now? is it currently busy in the park? who are present at the moment? what has been going on there in the last few hours?). Another consideration is that as a practice geotagging is unevenly distributed. A small number of people contribute far more than the majority [179]. Whose sense of place is represented? Who is 'authoring' the city? In the third section we explore how the experience of the city changes through geotagging practices.

iv. Social networking

Locative media can be used for social networking. Most locative applications, like the mentioned Foursquare, aim to let people find out where their friends are. Some locative projects take that typical urban phenomenon of the stranger as their focus. The *Familiar Stranger* project (2003-2004) was executed by the Urban Atmospheres group (part of Intel Research) to explore the subtle relations most urbanites have with strangers [180]. The project was inspired by social psychologist Stanley Milgram, who describes city life in terms of living among strangers we regularly observe but do not interact with (Paulos & Goodman, 2004: 223). Familiar strangers are people who recognize each other but mutually agree to ignore one another. A mobile phone application was developed to use during commutes. It scanned and logged the unique Bluetooth identification numbers of other devices nearby. As time progressed, the presence of familiar strangers was mapped [181]. A locative media project that promoted the actual meeting of strangers is Fallen Fruit [182]. Fallen Fruit encouraged people to survey their neighborhood and create an online map that depicts fruit trees accessible to the public and indicates when the fruit is ripe to be picked. It often happened that people who went out to pick fruit met the owner of the tree and started talking to each other [183]. A recurring question is whether (mobile) media technologies help to consolidate strong ties with the familiar in-group, and/or can help to maintain weak

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[178] On Twitter people post short 140 character text-based messages, emphasize certain key terms by using hashtags (#), direct messages at other Twitter users using a @, upload photos and locational information, and follow each other.

[179] The same happens with the collaborative online encyclopedia Wikipedia (Kittur, Chi, Pendleton, Suh, & Mytkowicz, 2007).

[180] See: http://www.paulos.net/research/intel/familiarstranger/index.htm.

[181] See: http://www.urban-atmospheres.net/Jabberwocky/info.htm for a full project description and technical details.

[182] See: http://www.fallenfruit.org.

ties, meet strangers, and organize some form of 'publicness' [184]. According to Rich Ling, the mobile phone strengthens relations between people who are already close (friends, family) at the expense of weak ties and strangers, in what he calls 'bounded solidarity' (Ling, 2008: 159, 182). By contrast, online social networking typically supports many weak ties. Location-based social networking therefore might work differently than mobile communication. As a type of mobile computing, locative media support not only strong ties through interpersonal communication but also weak ties through one-to-many or many-to-many dissemination of information (for a lucid exposé of these two ideal-types of communication, dialogue versus dissemination, see Peters, 1999b: 33-62). It has been argued that mass media as well as urbanization have contributed to a shift from physical co-presence to imagined co-presence as the dominant mode of social interaction (Urry, 2002). Locative media reconcile mediated communication with awareness of other people's physical locations. In the analysis of locative playground Bliin in section 4.3, we ask how social locative media influence 'co-presence', our sense of nearness to other persons.

v. Pervasive gaming

Finally, locative media are used to turn the physical context into a gameboard. Pervasive games explicitly aim to introduce play in everyday settings [185]. Other than games that have a predefined goal and possible outcomes, the play-element in pervasive games resides in the uncertainty about their status as games. Pervasive games blur the spatial boundaries between digital and physical spaces. They blur the temporal boundaries between being in and out of the game. They blur the social boundaries between presence and absence, and who is playing along. And they blur the boundaries of the self between player identities and 'normal' everyday identities. Pervasive play is reflexive because it raises questions about its own status as an activity: "is this a game?", "am I playing?", and "who are my co-players?" (McGonigal, 2007). We return to these issues in section 4.3.

Locative media in general stimulate playfulness, as they tend to challenge these same boundaries. In the third section of this chapter we look at Bliin as a case of 'play on the mobile'. Bliin is a location-based playground that combines wayfinding, annotation and

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[183] Source: keynote talk by Christian Nold at The Mobile City conference, February 27-28 2008. See: http://www.themobilecity.nl/conference-reports/keynote-talks-video/christian-nold/.

[184] Granovetter hypothesizes that people tend to have strong ties when their social networks overlap, whereas the relation between people with few shared acquaintances is likely to be weak (Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

[185] Many pervasive games hark back to Situationist practices, like *dérive* (aimless drifting, improvisation) and *détournement* (reversal, counterpoint) (Chang & Goodman, 2006; Debord, 1955, 1958).

social networking. Bliin is not a pervasive game in the strict sense but a playground that opens up the city for playful explorations and interactions through one's mobile interface. Further, locative media stimulate us to reflect on ourselves. A number of locative media projects, especially artistic ones, induce us to rethink our position in-, and subjective experiences of the world [186]. In the *MILK project* (2004) by Esther Polak, GPS devices were used to trace and map how milk from Latvian cows is turned into cheese, sold in Dutch markets, and taken home by customers [187]. At each stage in the process, participants were shown their own traces and invited to reflect on their personal role in their relation to the produce. Because of this feedback movement locative media technologies came to act as a storytelling tool. Stories about the origin of cheese collided with personal stories of participants. They got a better sense of their own mobilities and their place in transnational economic chains. Normally invisible everyday routes, relations with places, and interactions with other people were exposed and contemplated upon. In section 4.3 we see how Bliin induces self-reflection. What are the implications of locative media developments for the three mediated identity domains: people's relation to the world, to other people, and to themselves? In chapters 2 and 3 I looked at mobile media in the cultural context of Indonesia, and particularly its capital city Jakarta. In this chapter I focus on locative media in the urban context at large. We therefore must take a closer look at the city itself.

4.2 The city and the media

In this section I address the following questions: what is the city, what is its relation to media technologies, how can we conceptualize the interplay of ICTs and the city, and why do I pay attention to the urban context in the first place?

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[186] This is similar to what Tuters and Varnelis call 'phenomenological' use of locative media (Tuters & Varnelis, 2006).

[187] See: http://milkproject.net. The project was shown at international art fairs, like the "Making Things Public" exhibition organized by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, and won the 2005 Prix Ars Electronica 'Golden Nica' for Interactive Art.

4.2.1 What is a city? Three approaches

The city has been variously conceptualized (i) in spatial terms as a dense spatial concentration; (ii) in social terms as composed of highly segmented social roles and life among strangers; (iii) and in cultural terms as giving rise to reflexive subjectivities and heterogeneous (sub)cultures. Moreover, 'the urban' is invoked as a discursive term to conjure up images of 'modernity'. As "a site of the new", the city is opposed in spatial terms to the rural and in temporal terms to traditional (premodern, agricultural) societies (Savage, 2000: 34). 'The urban' is a container notion for typically modern elements, like novelty, fluidity, transience, shock experience, contingency, mobility, alienation, anomy, reflexivity, and so on. I try to avoid this use due to its lack of precision.

A number of interrelated tensions regularly recur in literature on urbanism. They are weaved through the ensuing discussion, because they are important for understanding urban identities. One tension is between a systems view of the city as an organism, a closed space to which people adapt in certain ways, versus a constructionist view in which the city offers urbanites the room to move and shape their lives and identities through 'place-making' and meeting. A second tension is between a 'sedentary view' of the city in which the most meaningful urban places - home and public space - are seen as relatively static, versus a 'mobile view' in which fluidity, transience and movement are constitutive of the city. A third tension is between the city as a homogeneous singular entity, versus the city as a heterogeneous entity that stands in networked relations to other locales.

i. The city as a spatial concentration

The city has been understood as a human settlement that concentrates functions in a built environment. Many urban historians follow this approach. Lewis Mumford traces urbanism back to the settlements of prehistoric cave dwellers. Before the advent of the metropolis, the city acted as a sanctuary, a village and a stronghold where people gathered for ritual, trade and safety (Mumford, 1961: 5-28). In later phases, urban concentrations functioned as cities of power ('courttown'), cities of market exchange ('commercetown'), and the industrial city ('coketown') (Hannerz, 1980: 98-99; Mumford, 1961: 446-474). According to Lopez, urbanism has transformed from the fortified 'stockade city', where only political and religious leaders lived, to the 'agrarian city', where feudal landowners started living, to the 'market city', where trade became the main activity. In Braudel's view, urbanism developed along political lines from an 'open town', which stands in close relation to the countryside, to a 'town closed in on itself', where merchants became the leaders, to 'subject towns' that were disciplined

by emerging nation-states and where the court was in control (see Hannerz, 1980: 89-90). Problematic in views of urbanism as functional concentrations is at what point in time ceases a built settlement to be a town and does it become a city? Also, such historical labels emphasize one main function at a time instead of understanding the city as a complex ensemble of functions. Further, city-as-container views tend to draw strict spatial boundaries around the city. The city as a *locale* tends to be equalled with the city as *location*. Cities had, have, and no doubt increasingly will have intricate relations with other cities in national, transnational and global networks, as well as with rural areas. Some theorists argue that cities all over the world increasingly look like one another. They have evolved into 'global cities' with identical economic infrastructures and services (Sassen, 1991), into a 'virtual metacity' of interconnected metropolises that offer access to external cultural sources (Virilio, in Augé, 2008: xii-xv), and into 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1998: 239), 'non-places' (Augé, 2008: 63), and 'generic cities' (Koolhaas, 1995: 1248-1264) as opposites of places rooted in history and cultural identities. At the same time, the city is a heterogeneous compilation of global influences. Juxtaposing these two views of world-city and city-world, Augé remarks "every big town is a world" (Augé, 2008: xii). We have seen this in our discussion of Jakarta as simultaneously 'Indonesia in small' and as 'center of modernity' connected to the global 'space of flows'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chicago School sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess described the city as a closed ecosystem, an organism in which people competed for space and scarce resources. A multiplicity of functions sprouted from the city's social diversity. People who belonged to the same 'species' tended to cluster together in the same neighborhood. This led to the formation of specific functional urban zones [188]. Park and Burgess phrased urban social relations in biological terms like dominance, symbiosis, and succession (see Hannerz, 1980: 26-30). In the context of rapid urbanization Chicago School sociologists zoomed in on the many deviant urban subcultures that sprung up. Many of these 'footloose' subcultures were corporeally and socially extremely mobile. This was considered a possible disruption of the social order. High turnover rates of successive newcomers to the city led to deterioration of neighborhoods, and consequently severe social atomism, anonymity and moral decay (Hannerz, 1980: 25, 46). Despite their keen eye for heterogeneity and the 'mobile' character of urbanism, their ecological framework was founded on a rather 'sedentary metaphysics', in which 'a sense of place' ideally meant engaging in long-term social relations tied to fixed locations. They are not alone. "Human life swings between two poles: movement and settlement", Mumford writes, clearly taking

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[188] These zones could then be captured in maps, as Burgess did in his famous diagram of Chicago (see Hannerz, 1980: 29).

the city as the extreme end of the sedentary pole (Mumford, 1961: 5). More recently, Richard Sennett laments the decline of the American suburb. Increased labor mobility and ICTs profoundly change the character of the suburb, from being a bedroom community to an anonymous place where "no one in them becomes a long-term witness to another person's life" (Sennett, 1998: 20-21). Urbanism as a form of permanent settlement contrasts the city with mobile lifestyles. Mobility is considered a threat to the social cohesion amongst citizens (see Jensen, 2009: 141, 147). Concomitant with this view, as discussed below, is that transport and communication technologies are naturally understood as disruptive, and causing 'the death of the city'.

Kevin Lynch (1960) takes a social constructivist view of the city. Lynch presented his work as an agenda for urban designers. In his opinion urban elements should not be hermetically designed but offer room to urban inhabitants to actively shape their own 'image of the city'. Lynch studied how people orient themselves in three different American cities (Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles). He compared these cities on the basis of their 'legibility' (alternatively called 'imageability' and 'visibility') as the extent to which the cityscape can be 'read' (Lynch, 1960: 2-3). People moving through the city need to be able to recognize and organize their environment into a coherent pattern. Urbanites orient themselves by constructing mental maps. In chapter 3 we have already seen that these mental maps consist of five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (ibid: 46-48). Paths are especially important for the organization of corporeal mobility. Clear mental maps of the urban environment counter the always-looming fear of disorientation and bring a sense of emotional security. According to Lynch mental maps frame communication and conceptual organization, and heighten the depth and intensity of everyday human experience.

System views of the city assume space to be an abstract and absolute geometrical entity encompassing everything: 'Euclidian space'. 'Place' in this vision means a unique position in space. Inversely, constructivist views hark back to the tradition of understanding space in relative and subjective terms. Place in this vision is subjectively experienced as 'lived space'. Some seek to bridge objective and subjective views, by emphasizing the performative and political character of space and place. Henri Lefebvre developed a 'unitary theory of space' that combines physical, social, and mental spaces (these coincide with Agnew's three dimensions of place) (Lefebvre, 1991). Space is always socially produced, a product of political powers, he argues. Lefebvre proposes a conceptual triad of (1) spatial practice: how space and places are produced and reproduced; (2) representations of space: how space is conceptualized and ordered in knowledge, signs, and codes; (3) representational spaces: how space is 'lived' and imagined through its images and symbols (ibid: 11, 33, 38-39). Michel De Certeau put the idea of place as 'lived space' upside down by considering space

'practiced place' (De Certeau, 1984: 117). Everyday movements are the 'tactics' by which urbanites create new spaces for themselves out of places produced by the 'strategies' of institutions. These theories emphasize that cities are sites of agonistic struggles. Mobility is not an adaptation or a threat to urban life but constitutive of it.

ii. The city's social heterogeneity

In 1938 Louis Wirth forwarded a sociological definition of urbanism, in which the city is a particular way of organizing society. Unhappy with the crude ecological views of his Chicago School contemporaries, he sought better criteria to define "the peculiar characteristics of the city as a particular form of human association" (Wirth, 1938: 4). This definition should include essential characteristics all cities have in common and respect their variations (ibid: 6). He came up with this formulation: "[f]or sociological purposes a city may be defined as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (ibid: 8). Wirth proceeds with a more detailed treatment of size, density, and heterogeneity. The size of a population makes it impossible for urbanites to know each other personally. Competition for space leads to specialization of functions in particular areas, and consequently to a mosaic of social worlds. This causes segmented and utilitarian human relationships, and gives rise to a typical urban mentality:

> Characteristically, urbanites meet one another in highly segmental roles. They are, to be sure, dependent upon more people for the satisfactions of their life-needs than are rural people and thus are associated with a greater number of organized groups, but they are less dependent upon particular persons, and their dependence upon others is confined to a highly fractionalized aspect of the other's round of activity. This is essentially what is meant by saying that the city is characterized by secondary rather than primary contacts. The contacts of the city may indeed be face-to-face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental. The reserve, the indifference, and the blasé outlook which urbanites manifest in their relationships may thus be regarded as devices for immunizing themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others.
> (ibid: 12)

High density causes urbanites to develop a sensitivity for material artifacts more than for other people, as kind of avoidance strategy. The presence of different personalities and ways of life produces a relativistic perspective and tolerance for differences, but also agonism in "a spirit of competition, aggrandizement, and mutual exploitation" (ibid: 15). Social heterogeneity produces a heightened mobility of the individual, as he

moves between various social contacts and settings. He acquires memberships in diverging and internally fluctuating groups, however without putting them in hierarchical order. As a result the urbanite tends to accept instability and insecurity as the norm. This adds to his sophistication and cosmopolitanism (ibid: 16-17).

Wirth's definition of the city has been heavily criticized. Often one or more of his factors are undermined. For instance, in some European countries the biggest village is bigger than the smallest city, and rural densities on Java surpass urban densities in Zambia or some US cities. Yet these criticisms are unjust in my view, since Wirth stresses the interdependency of these factors. More problematic is that size and density are demographic factors. They do not necessarily warrant sociological consequences like heterogeneity. The causal relations between the three factors are unclear. If size and density result in heterogeneity, as Wirth seems to suggest, doesn't he return to the ecological definition he tries to shun? Wirth further remains quite vague about what he means by heterogeneity. Does he mean class differences or ethnic differences (Hannerz, 1980: 68-69, 68 fn5)? According to urban anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, Wirth assumes that people can only maintain a certain level of social involvements. Despite stressing heterogeneity, Wirth appears to depart from generalized sameness, wherein urbanites have a fixed and limited amount of social 'energy levels', which leads to superficiality (ibid: 71). Besides, as Hannerz also notes, many social relations in cities are not at all "impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental" (ibid: 71). As a last point, Wirth oddly fails to elaborate on the word 'permanence' in his definition. If he means that the physical shape of the city is permanent, he relapses into a spatial container view of urbanism. If he means that human dwelling in cities is permanent, he is not only empirically wrong, but also undermines his own argument about the fluidity of urban social relations. And indeed, while Wirth adopts a highly 'mobile' view of urban life, he too regards mobility not as univocally good. "The distinctive features of the urban mode of life have often been described sociologically as consisting of the substitution of secondary for primary contacts, the weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighborhood, and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity" (Wirth, 1938: 20-21).

Despite his half-hearted break with the ecological perspective, Wirth's ideas have proven incredibly influential and to this day inspire many social theorist of the city. Hannerz adopts Wirth's density and role segregation as defining elements of urban life. Hannerz calls the city "the maximal adjustment to human interdependency" (Hannerz, 1980: 80). Combining ideas from Wirth and Goffman, Hannerz says the social fabric of urban life is constituted through 'purposive situational involvements'. Situational involvements take place in a range of social domains like household,

provisioning, recreation, neighboring, and traffic (ibid: 100-102). Urbanites adopt roles depending on the situation. Together, these roles form their 'role repertoire'. The aggregate of individual role repertoires makes up a 'role inventory'. Cities typically have very large role inventories. Maneuvering carefully between the classical sociological opposition of structure and agency (similar to what we have termed freedom and force), Hannerz acknowledges that roles are partly constructed in freedom but also partly ascribed on the basis of someone's 'role discriminatory attributes'. Hardcoded attributes such as age, sex, and ethnic background, together with social mechanisms of normative control, structure people's situational involvements (ibid: 150-152). Hannerz underlines the importance of anonymity of urban life. Most interactions in cities occur between people who hardly know anything about each other's biography. We shall return to this point because it is another important argument *against* the dominance of narrative identity theory. This lack of knowledge fosters unpredictability in encounters and uncertainty, Hannerz continues (ibid: 112). He concludes: "serendipity, discovering one thing by chance when one was looking for something else, may be built into city life to a peculiar degree" (ibid: 118).

Numerous other approaches of the city zoom in on that typically urban phenomenon, the stranger. Georg Simmel says that the urban mentality of individuation and differentiation arises from performing before an anonymous metropolitan crowd (Simmel, 1997a: 181, 183). Elsewhere, he analyzes the stranger as a mobile person outside of the group who is both near and remote, and to whom urbanites relate in an abstract objective way. He observes that urbanites frequently are surprisingly confidential in their revelations to strangers (Simmel, 1971b: 143-145). Jane Jacobs distinguishes cities from towns based on the fact that cities are places full of strangers. "To any one person, strangers are far more common in big cities than acquaintances" (Jacobs, 1992: 30). She describes how people in the same neighborhood are often strangers to each other, yet together keep a surveilling eye on the streets and contribute to a sense of social safety (ibid: 38-39). While not forming full-blown communities, urban strangers inhabiting the same neighborhood are often on "excellent sidewalk terms" with each other (ibid: 62). Stanley Milgram notes that in each city there are 'familiar strangers': individuals who regularly observe each other and mutually agree not interact (Paulos & Goodman, 2004). Richard Sennett famously defines the city as "a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet" (Sennett, 1974: 39). Symbolic interactionists like Erving Goffman and Lyn Lofland zoom in with microscopic detail on everyday ritual interactions as a way to deal with the omnipresence of strangers (Goffman, 1959; Lofland, 1973). All acknowledge that

interactions with strangers constitute actual relationships, and that these are a defining element of social life in the city. The city requires its inhabitants to deal with heterogeneity and diversity.

iii. The urban mentality

We have already seen with Wirth that urbanism is understood in terms of shaping particular experiences and subjectivities. Early modern thinkers conceived of the metropolis as a complex organism to which urbanites can only relate via mediations. In his seminal 1903 *The Metropolis and Mental Life* George Simmel argues that the rapid ongoing impressions of city life leads to an "intensification of nervous stimulation" (Simmel, 1997a: 174-185) [189]. This creates the psychological basis of a typical metropolitan individuality. Socio-technological systems like the money system and time schedules turn the city into a structure of the highest impersonality. At the same time they promote a highly personal subjectivity (ibid: 178). The typical urbanite is someone who adopts a blasé attitude and is socially reserved (ibid: 175, 178, 179). The blasé individual takes an objectifying and devaluating stance vis-a-vis the external world. Socially reserved, he or she treats strangers with indifference and even a slight antipathy. These are protective measures in order to preserve one's autonomy and individuality against overstimulation of the nerves, and the anonymizing and generalizing forces of urban life. To non-urbanites this may seem cold-hearted. But Simmel counters: "[w]hat appears in the metropolitan style of life directly as dissociation is in reality only one of its elemental forms of socialization" (ibid: 180). Two decades later another *chroniqueur* of the modern metropolis, Walter Benjamin, took interest in the way media like script, photography and film mediated people's perception of urban life (Benjamin, Jennings, Doherty, Levin, & Jephcott, 2008). Benjamin describes how media technologies change our way of seeing and bring about a visual culture. He argues that the modern city is increasingly dominated by 'script-images'. Texts in public advertisements acquire image-like qualities. "Script - having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence - is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos" (ibid: 171). Text flashing up as an image causes instant shock experiences (*Erlebnisse*). Rapidly alternating sequences of text-images induce *montage* experiences of the metropolis, like in cinema. Similarly, close-ups in photography and film expand space, and slow motion extends movement. Through the camera, "individual perceptions of the psychotic or the dreamer can be appropriated by collective perception" (ibid: 38). Benjamin calls this change in visual perception the "optical unconscious" (ibid: 37). Both Simmel and Wirth influenced Stanley Milgram.

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[189] Originally published in 1903 in German.

Operationalizing Wirth's definition of the city, Milgram applies system analysis to the experience of living in cities. The psychological experience of urban life is an adaptation to sensory overload caused by life among large numbers of heterogeneous people in high densities. The idea of sensory overload explains why urban behavior is different from town life, in aspects like the segmentation of social roles, norm of non-involvement, cognitive adaptations like the blasé attitude, and competitiveness for scarce resources (Milgram, 1970: 1462-1466). In short, urban life produces particular psychological and behavioral adaptive responses in individuals.

At odds with this rather reactive presumption of urban mentality as mere 'adaptation' stand constructivist views of the city as a 'space of potential' for individual exploration and development. The city boasts a tolerant open culture that offers great room for the expression of individual and cultural differences. This cultural imagery of the city as an open space is profoundly 'mobile'. Urban identities are about becoming rather than being adaptations. Urbanites are not marked by pre-given identity categories, fixed imprints ascribed by birth, one's environment, or by other people (see Massey, 2005: 155). They can, they *must* choose to experiment, construct and perform their identities in ongoing movements of self-description. Self-chosen identities may even vary per social context (at day a politician in suit and tie, at night a leather-clad gay in ties). In *Soft City* (1974) Jonathan Raban phrases this plasticity of the city, while not losing sight of the fact that we are also shaped by our environment:

> ...the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or worse, it invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, *like a position on a map* fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them.
> (quoted in Hannerz, 1980: 249, my emphasis) [190]

The adaptation view departs from structure, and easily descends into environmental determinism; the constructivist view departs from agency and easily slips into social determinism. However, they have in common that urbanites must make their city smaller, either by blocking out impulses or by molding their environment to their liking. In both views the city can also be a place full of dangers where loneliness, deceit and alienation loom.

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[190] The reason for italicizing these words becomes clear in the next section, where I argue that the lack of biographical knowledge among urbanites makes mapping a more prominent mediation than narrative emplotment.

There is one cultural imagery I want to highlight. The notion of play has been central to (western) thinking about the city. From Baudelaire and Benjamin's passionate yet distanced flâneur (Baudelaire, 1964; Benjamin, et al., 2008), Simmel and Goffman's approach to the city as a theater for role-playing (Simmel, 1971a, 1997b; Goffman, 1959), Constant Nieuwenhuys' proposal for *New Babylon*, a nomadic town for creative play in constant flux (Nieuwenhuys, 1974; De Mul, 2009), Guy Debord's critique of the city as a commodified 'spectacle' (Debord, 2005) and the Situationists' ludic interventions in urban space (Debord, 1958), De Certeau's walker engaged in playful spatial tactics (De Certeau, 1984), Baudrillard's view of Beaubourg and Las Vegas as parodies of mass culture (Baudrillard, 1994: 61-72), to contemporary discourses about the 'creative city' (Florida, 2004) and the 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999); the city has since long been conceptualized in playful terms (De Lange, 2009b). In fact, in many of the approaches to urbanism discussed above we can discern Caillois' four types of games. *Agôn* underlies the ecological view of the city life as competition for scarce resources. *Alea* is present in the view of urban life as serendipitous. *Mimicry* informs the view of urbanism as social role-playing. *Ilinx* occurs in metropolitan life as characterized by rapid impulses, sensory delusions and shock experiences. In our analysis of urban playground Bliin in the next section, the question is raised how play on the mobile informs a playful understanding of our urban environment, our relations to other people, and to ourselves.

4.2.2 The media city, or the death of the city?

The relation between cities and media technologies stands in a long tradition. Early modern thinkers question how (at that time) new media technologies change city life. Despite their differences, for Simmel and Benjamin media technologies and the city are dialectically connected (Simmel: money, time schedule; Benjamin: script-image, photography, film). Media technologies are understood in the context of an emerging metropolitan capitalism; and urban life is taken as mediated experience. Obviously both authors distinguish between media technologies and the city [191]. Nevertheless, media and the city are not radically disjointed realms. In fact they both take the city itself as a medium through which urbanites experience life. Simmel: "[a]n enquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life ... must seek to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the supra-individual contents of life" (Simmel, 1997a: 175). Media and the city constitute one another. Urban life *is* a mediated life.

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[191] Benjamin for instance laments the disruptive influence of the telephone on the household and family life, as it moved from the back hallway into the central living room (Benjamin, et al., 2008: 77-78).

If for analysis' sake we *do* want to separate ICTs and the city, we can fruitfully employ Mokhtarian's analytical scenarios (in fact we have already done so at previous points) (Mokhtarian, 2002: 45-46; Mokhtarian & Meenakshisundaram, 1998: 3). Originally intended to describe the possible relations between communication and physical travel, this model applies equally well to ICTs and the city. She proposes to see this relation as *substitution* (one replaces the other), *generation* or *complementarity* (one stimulates the other), *modification* (the character of of one or both changes), or *neutrality* (there is no influence) (ibid). Most urban theories discussed above fall in the *neutrality* scenario. They say nothing about media technologies and urban life. Simmel and Benjamin are primarily interested in the *generation* and *modification* scenarios. Ironically, their sensitivity for media technologies – and especially Benjamin's attempt to develop something like a media theory - induces their successors to study media as a realm of 'its' own (indeed often taking media as a singular entity). The *substitution* scenario becomes dominant (Graham, 2004: 9). Media technologies and the city are taken as distinct, even as opposing forces. Media technologies supposedly exercise an external influence on the city. In deterministic terms, they 'impact' society. A mild case is Ithiel de Sola Pool's *The social impact of the telephone* (1977). De Sola Pool at once sees the city and the telephone as *substitutes*, and as 'mutually shaping' or *modifying* each other. Avoiding too deterministic terms De Sola Pool calls the telephone a "facilitating device". The telephone (and the car) "were responsible for the vast growth of American suburbia and exurbia, and for the phenomenon of urban sprawl. [B]ut there is also truth to the reverse proposition that the telephone made possible the skyscraper and increased congestion downtown" (Pool, 1977: 141, 302). Other authors are more one-sided in painting the impact of new media technologies on the city. According to McLuhan the city will unavoidably implode under the influence of electric media:

> Before the huddle of the city, there was the food-gathering phase of man the hunter, even as men have now in the electric age returned psychically and socially to the nomad state. Now, however, it is called information-gathering and data-processing. But it is global, and it ignores and replaces the form of the city which has, therefore, tended to become obsolete. With instant electric technology, the globe itself can never again be more than a village, and the very nature of city as a form of major dimensions must inevitably dissolve like a fading shot in a movie. (McLuhan, 1994: 378-379)

Likewise, Paul Virilio argues that corporeal travel is substituted by the real-time virtual travel of objects. He describes this process as "[a] movement that is today intensifying due to remote control and long-distance telepresence technologies that will soon land

us in the ultimate state of sedentariness where real-time environmental control will take over from the development of the real space of the territory" (Virilio, 1997: 25). Substitution scenarios actually consist of multiple arguments. Each is directed at one of Agnew's dimensions of place. But often these arguments are conflated. First, ICTs supposedly diminish our dependence on (urban) locations. The assumption is that being in a place no longer matters, since ICTs enable people to communicate with anyone and find information from anywhere. In this view, the city as a location for accessing services and for face-to-face social interactions is obsoleted by 'placeless' media technologies. Downtown bookstores will disappear because of online shopping at Amazon.com (for a critical discussion, see Dodge, 2004). Second, ICTs supposedly weaken the city as locale by supplanting physical co-presence as the sole basis for social interactions. Physical nearness in locales will be traded in for imagined nearness of 'virtual communities' (Jones, 1995, 1997, 1998; Rheingold, 1993). Third, in utopian views ICTs will enable us to transcend our parochial sense of place, or in dystopian views cause its loss and lead to loneliness and alienation [192].

In recent years there has been a resurgence of the *modification* scenario. Thinkers increasingly realize that ICTs and the city are intimately intertwined, and even constitute one another. Mid- and late 1990s studies turn away from seeing the internet and cities as separate realms [193]. As it becomes increasingly clear that the mobile phone is used in everyday 'real life' situations, the *modification* scenario further gains weight and momentum. Possibly the most comprehensive attempt to date to collect and expose work on the close ties between ICTs and the city is the *Cybercities Reader* (2004) by Stephen Graham. Graham argues that ICTs and the global city are not substitutes but complementary, and often modify each other in qualitative new ways (Graham, 2004: 4). He challenges two related ideas that dominated between 1960 and 1990. The first is that the physical domain of cities and the digital domain of ICTs are largely separate realms. The second is that ICTs are a substitute for urban life, and undermine the city. Graham distinguishes four strands of 'post-urban' thought. First, there have been utopian visions of 'cyberspace' as a parallel universe that would overcome the ballast of 'filthy' material reality. Second, ideas existed about the 'death of distance' and 'friction-free capitalism' thanks to ICTs, in which cities no longer played a significant role. Third, the disembodied hopes of Cyberlibertarians predicted ICTs

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[192] Examples of utopian views are the October 1996 *Wired Manifesto* at http://yoz.com/wired/2.10/features/manifesto.html and Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway, 1991). In section 3.3 we have already discussed Meyrowitz' argument about "no sense of place".

[193] Examples that cover the three dimensions of place are: Castells & Hall, 1994, about economic concentrations of ICTs in urban centers; Hampton & Wellman, 1999, about ICTs and social relations in an urban community neighborhood; Miller & Slater, 2000, about the internet and Trinidad national culture and identity.

would create inherently democratic and egalitarian communities without the restraints of (urban) geography. Fourth, visions of new kinds of transparent citizenship and telepresence existed, in which the 'city of atoms' would be replaced by the 'city of bits' (Graham, 2004: 6-9; Mitchell, 1995). Graham forwards a number of weaknesses in "anything-anywhere-anytime dreams" about ICTs as transcending urbanization. They are empirically wrong since they ignore actual trends of global urbanization and mobility. They ignore the material geographies of ICTs, which consists of real wires, servers, satellites, towers, etc., and the unequal spread and socio-economic organization of ICTs throughout the world. They overgeneralize the 'impact' of technologies as being the same everywhere. They overstretch the binary opposition between ICTs and urban life by granting ICTs too much power for change, while underestimating existing physical practices of co-presence. Ideas about the city influence our perceptions and use of ICTs, just like the inverse. On a political level, utopian visions of the liberating capabilities of ICTs act as a cover-up for neoliberalism and the proliferation of global inequalities. Not everyone benefits from ICTs. Rather than equalizing geography, (corporate) ICTs often exploit differences between places and regions. These ideas imply that transformations of urban life are more a technical matter than a political one. The potential for policy innovations at urban, regional or national levels in shaping and harnessing ICT developments is underplayed (Graham, 2004: 11-22).

4.2.3 Mobile media as interfaces to hybrid space

So how can we conceptualize this new ICT-based city, these profoundly urban ICTs? Graham proposes that 'cybercities' nowadays are 'hybrid forms' made up of 'recombinant spaces'. The recombination approach takes "a highly contingent, relational perspective of the linkage between technology and social worlds", as composed of multiple heterogeneous networks (Graham, 2004: 69). This makes it far less clear what a city actually is (ibid: 113). The definition of the city becomes blurred in two ways. First, cities are saturated with various ICT networks:

> Urban actions thus have their electronic shadow. Every physical movement has its computerized trace. Every urban landscape crosscuts, and interweaves with, multiple and extended sets of electronic sites and spaces. Most of these remain invisible. Many are simply unknowable. Increasingly, then, cities and urban life can be seen, at least partly, to be computerized constructs.... Separating the city from the cyber is thus increasingly untenable, and, indeed, pointless.
> (ibid: 113).

This 'cybercity' is no longer a visible, physical place. It is a hybrid of physical and digital infrastructures and practices. Second, cities now exist on multiple geographical scales, ranging from the local to the global. Cybercities have become 'global cities' (Sassen, 1991).

To underline that there is no longer a clearly demarcated urban essence, Graham makes frequent use of terms like multiplicity, heterogeneity, complexity, diversity, hybridity, and so on (Graham, 2004: 113-114). True as this may be, I feel such abstract notions are hardly illuminating for understanding 'cybercities'. Such obfuscating notions widen the theoretical gap between an understanding *of* cybercities, and an understanding of urban practices *in* the cybercity. I am therefore more sympathetic to the approach taken by Mizuko Ito *et al* (2009). In their view people use portable objects to 'interface' with urban space and locations. Mobile communication infrastructure intersects with the physical infrastructure of the city. Ito *et al* do not look at the mobile phone on its own. Instead, the phone is but one of the portable objects that are 'interfaces' to the city. These include media players, books, keys, credit- and transit cards, and identity- and member cards. Combined, they comprise "the information-based 'mobile kits' of contemporary urbanites" that are used to navigate the city, and to sustain social relations with other people (Ito, Okabe, & Anderson, 2009: 67) [194]. The authors present different types of urban interfacing: *cocooning*, *camping*, and *footprinting*. Cocooning is the practice whereby people in public settings shield themselves off from external impressions. Using portable media players, books, laptops and mobile phones, they create an invisible bubble of mobile private space around them. Camping is the practice of finding a nice spot in town - often in coffeehouses - and doing information related work there with laptops, mobile phones, etc. This can be for work and private affairs (often both). Camping can co-exist with cocooning when people shield themselves off from physical social interactions through portable media objects. Footprinting describes the various customer transactions and loyalty schemes through which people leave traces in a particular location. It is "the process of integrating an individual's trajectory into the transactional history of a particular establishment, and customer cards are the mediating devices" (ibid: 79). Interestingly, the authors find that behaviors vary only slightly between the three cities in which they have done research (Tokyo, Los Angeles, and London). Why do I find this interesting? First, the mobile device as 'urban interface' highlights its relation to place. It underlines that mobile phones are used in physical situations and often act as bridges between the physical and the digital. Second, the mobile phone does not exist in isolation but as part of a larger array of informational objects that

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[194] Julsrud and Bakke make a similar point about the research bias towards studying singular technologies (Julsrud & Bakke, 2009: 160).

people carry along with them to manage urban life. Consequently, our implicit view of the mobile phone shifts from intruding the urban life that supposedly once was (with *agora*-like public space, face-to-face interactions, village-like neighborhoods, serendipitous encounters and discovery, etc.), to a pragmatic view of the mobile phone as an everyday necessity of urbanites. Third, this approach does not try to define the 'essence' of mobile media. Instead it opens up room to see how mobile media technologies are used in context: as one of the prime means to interact with daily (urban) life. Fourth, Ito *et al* connect changes in the urban experience to changes in displaying identity in public spaces. This point receives scant attention in their chapter, but is very important indeed. It emphasizes that for many people the experience of urban life is viewed through the prism of their mobile devices. Inversely, we appear to other people and to various urban informational infrastructures through our mobile devices. More about this in section 5.4.

Early internet research was founded on two ontologies that were mutually exclusive, the *real* and the *virtual*. Much current (mobile) media research questions this separation. Mobile phone 'virtualities' are embedded in 'real life'. Inversely, 'real life' is encapsulated in 'virtual' communication practices. For this reason I prefer to use the more neutral terms physical and digital. The intertwining of physical and digital spaces give rise to a third type: 'hybrid space' (Graham, 2004: 22, 113, 156; Kluitenberg, 2006: 38-49; de Souza e Silva, 2006). Hybrid space abrogates the distinction between physical and digital through "the mix of social practices that occur simultaneously in digital and in physical spaces" (de Souza e Silva, 2006: 265). This is not simply a matter of adding digitally distributed information to physical situations. That would imply a mere quantitative step. Lev Manovich talks about 'augmented space' when elements from digital space are added to physical space (Manovich, 2005: 4). De Souza e Silva convincingly argues that 'augmentation' suggests that one type of space is the primary space, which is painted over with a veneer of the secondary type, and that it presupposes their separate existence (de Souza e Silva, 2006: 265). 'Hybrid space' by contrast points out that mobilities, social interactions, and experiences now often take place in both spaces at the same time, *and cannot exist in either space alone*. But what exactly does this hybridity entail? Hybridity in itself does not explain much. Like in identity studies, where the term 'hybridity' has been used for quite some time to indicate the fact that people can have more than one group affiliation, it has to be made clear how two or more components relate to each other. Should hybrid space be understood as a seamless blend of the physical and the digital? Or rather as composed of separate entities that somehow intersect? What happens to our experience of the boundaries between the physical (the 'real') and the digital (the 'virtual')? These questions are addressed in the next section. I propose that hybridity is not a perfect

solution of the digital and physical. It is not a mix of black and white into grey but a specific composite in which the distinct elements are still visible. I argue that the playful experience of the city, of relations with other people, and ourselves, revolves precisely around this point.

4.2.4 Why the city?

Why look specifically at the city to study technologically mediated identities? First of all, statistics claim that since 2008 over half of the world's population, 3.3 billion, lives in cities. This is predicted to grow to 4.9 billion in 2030, some 60%. The world's rural population - in spite of worldwide population growth - will decrease by 28 million between 2005 and 2030 (UNFPA, 2007: 6). This is not to say that ICTs do not have an impact on rural areas. They do, profoundly even [195]. In fact, the sharp distinction between the urban and the rural itself is waning. The countryside becomes increasingly urbanized. Access to services, modes of production, social organization, and cultural characteristics previously deemed typically urban have spread into areas formerly classified as rural. Many cities in the world maintain complex relations not only with other cities in the world but also with their hinterland. As we have seen in the case of Ida in chapter 3, mobile workforces from rural areas temporarily move to the city in search of employment. These migrants use media technologies to keep in touch with family and friends 'back home', regularly travel back and forth, and often establish villages within cities along the lines of local and regional places of origin (Qiu, 2009) [196]. Second, the interplay of media technologies and the urban environment stands in a long theoretical heritage. I like to follow in this tradition with this study. Third, and most important for my overall purposes, cities have been the classic settings for highly reflexive identity constructions and expressions. According to Simmel, the city's heterogeneous social makeup makes people acutely aware of their differences as individuals and groups. They perceive the need to distinguish themselves from others by developing unique identities (Simmel, 1997a: 174-176; 1997b: 152-154, 159). Ulf Hannerz notes that cities are places full of strangers who meet each other in highly segmental roles. They hardly know anything about each other's biographies (Hannerz,

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[195] According to Fisher, the landline telephone, at least initially, had a far greater influence in rural areas than in the city (Fischer, 1992: 98). The consequences of spatial dispersal and being removed from centers of information, communication and entertainment, were felt to a much greater extent. The mobile phone too is widely adopted in rural areas, particularly in developing countries where fixed infrastructures are often weak. Farmers and fishermen can now communicate directly to their potential markets and increase their bargaining power (Donner, 2005, 2006; Ling, 2004: 3).

[196] Inversely, planners and architects long been fascinated by the idea that the industrial city could be infused with 'rural qualities' like clean fresh air, gardens, spaciousness, and communal living (see Hall, 1988: 88-139; Mumford, 1961: 474-478).

1980: 112). In the urban context a *narrative* identity therefore seems less important. By contrast, identities tend to be played out as 'roles'. Much has been written about identities in either physical spaces or virtual spaces. What happens when both domains - urban spaces and digital spaces - intersect? As the overarching question of this dissertation concerns the role of mobile media in identity construction, the hybrid city seems a logical setting to study.

This section - one may have noticed - looks like Wirth's city: of considerable size, high density, and heterogeneity. I have not offered the definitive answer to the question *what is a city*? My aim has been to show how the city is conceptualized on various planes (physical, social, experiential) and at once made up of *location*, *locale* (or better, a complex of locales), and *senses of place*. So where do I stand? In spite of the critique raised against Wirth's definition, I appreciate his broad understanding of urbanism as a constellation of a physical structure, a mode of social organization, and typical attitudes, ideas and personalities. While relinquishing Wirth's adaptive perspective and his attempt to capture the essence of cities, I embrace his holistic view of the city. It is to technological mediations in these three domains I now turn to: the urban environment, social relations, and the self.

4.3 Bliin: A locative playground in hybrid space [197]

4.3.1 A playground for boundary play

Bliin is a locative media platform that allows users to share their geographical location and movements, and their personal experiences of places and travels online [198]. Users need a phone capable of receiving GPS signals. They install an application on their device that automatically sends GPS position coordinates to the Bliin server in real-time over a wireless data connection. Bliin's main interface is a map. Other users can see someone's location and travels as a moving circle on the map (figure 5). Bliin users can capture photos and video with their phone camera, attach descriptions and keywords, and upload them to the Bliin server. GPS coordinates are automatically

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[197] An early version of this section has been published as De Lange, 2009a.

[198] See Bliin website at http://www.bliin.com.

attached to content, which appear as geographically positioned items on the map. Such a geotagged image or video is called a 'share'. Via the interface users can see shares and other Bliin users in the vicinity, and can comment on each other's shares. The creator of the share receives an instant notification of any new comments made, allowing conversations to take place around shares. There is a feed to see the latest shares posted. Users themselves decide whether their position, movement, and shares are publicly visible, restricted to friends, or private.
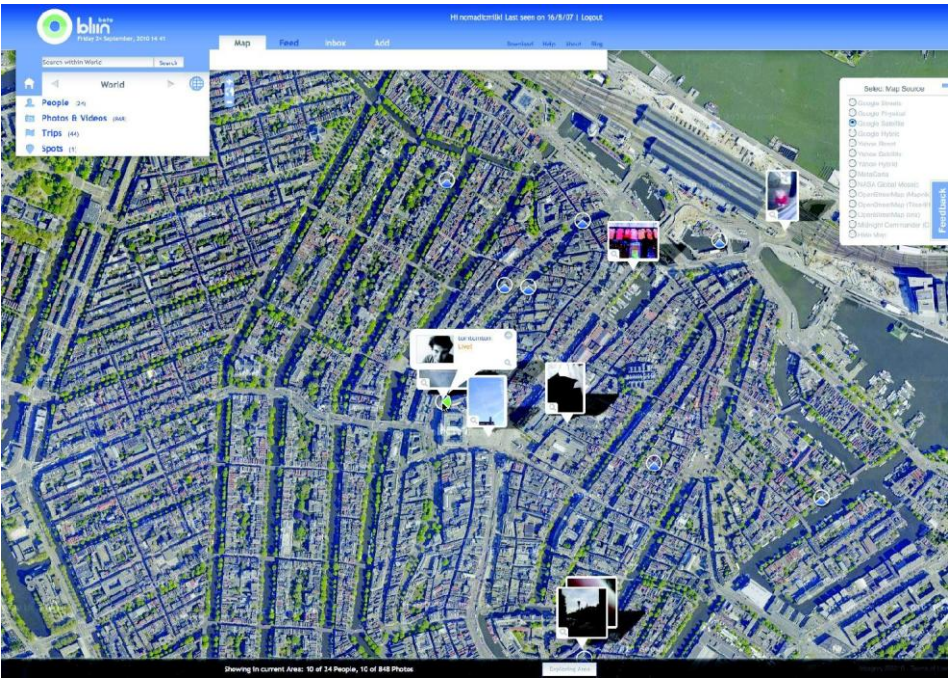
Figure 5: Screenshot of Bliin web interface.

Is Bliin a game? We have seen that *play* and *game* are used as synonyms of Caillois' *paidia* and *ludus.* Frasca points out that a game differs from play not because it is rule-governed but because it has a result. Games can be won. Play (*paidia*) has no predefined winning plot. Yet as soon as a player defines a goal for himself it becomes a *ludus* (Frasca, 1999: 2, 6). In some respects Bliin is similar to location-based social software or recommendation services. Other than these services that have a predefined purpose ("find the best restaurant in my neighborhood based on ratings by my friends"), there is no specific goal in Bliin besides the one(s) users create for themselves. Bliin is not strictly a *ludus* but tends towards *paidia*. Therefore I call Bliin a 'playground'. What makes up the play element? To Huizinga the claim is attributed that

playing takes place within the confines of a 'magic circle'. This involves a voluntary contract between players that certain activities limited in time and space are called 'play' and exist separately from ordinary life (Montola, 2005; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). It has been argued that play, and pervasive games in particular, blur the boundaries of this magic circle (Montola, 2005; Nieuwdorp, 2005; Rodriguez, 2006). According to Montola, pervasive games expand the spatial, temporal and social boundaries of the game. "[A] pervasive game is a game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play socially, spatially or temporally" (Montola, 2005: 3). Nieuwdorp says that as game interfaces shift from static screen space to more mobile interfaces, clear-cut boundaries between non-play and (free) play, and between play and games, are transformed into "porous membranes" (Nieuwdorp, 2005). Rodriguez points out that in experimental game design "[t]he location of the magic circle is no longer taken for granted; it becomes the very subject of the game" (Rodriguez, 2006: 6). Bliin is not a game in the strict sense, although on this playground little games may occur. Still, Bliin has all three features identified by Montola. Bliin expands spatial, temporal, and social boundaries. These boundaries are not completely discarded, however "porous" the "membranes" may have become. They remain discernible. Jane McGonigal writes that in pervasive or locative games the 'seams' have to be visible for the game to be fun (McGonigal, 2007: 66). Following Rodriguez' and McGonical's suggestion, I propose that the play element in Bliin revolves around these boundaries. The relationships that players engage in with their environment, with other people, and with themselves are playful because of the ambiguities of boundaries.

4.3.2 Playing with spatiotemporal boundaries

How does play on this locative platform shape the way people playfully interact with their environment? The argument is that Bliin enables playful movements across the boundaries between physical and digital space. Bliin involves playing with inscriptions of places by not only 'reading' the city but also 'writing' urban places. The social character of the platform turns these inscriptions into collaborative narratives. Bliin opens up a playroom (*Spielraum*) for metaplay: exploring and defining what is 'hybrid space', what is the city, and who writes it.

Bliin is an interface to 'hybrid space'. From the perspective of what goes on in physical space, Bliin augments locations and corporeal movements with additional digital layers of information. Participants share their physical presence (I am close to you), mobility patterns (I am going this direction), and personal experiences of locations (I am seeing this) as digital information via the platform. They receive

background information of each other's whereabouts by sharing multimedia content. Conversely, the exchange of information and communication in digital space is contextualized with physical locations and temporal details, and traces of corporeal movements. 'Real world' information and experiences are added to digital space and made accessible via the web interface or via the application running on the mobile phone. What goes on in Bliin coexists in both spaces at the same time.

Places too become hybrid. They multiply and are far more mobile than physical places were before. Hybrid places exist as *senses of place*, *locales*, and *locations. Sense of place* has always been mobile, insofar it is based on the imagination. Who never fantasizes about faraway places and pictures what life would be like elsewhere while reading books, gazing at images on postcards or in encyclopedias? With transport technologies people could travel more and to locations farther away. Asynchronous media like print, photography, film, and audio recording transferred renderings of other places and allowed people to open up their horizons to places they never corporeally visited. With real-time telecommunication media, like radio (initially a two-way medium) and the telephone, people were able to participate in social situations (*locales*) at a distance. People could be 'tele-present' at their child's birthday a hundred miles away through a call. Fixed telecommunication connected two distant locations in real-time and turned them into social settings in which people could interact. Telecommunication also constituted a third locale in itself with prescriptions and rules that governed communicative behavior in a calling situation (for a discussion of fixed telephony as social situations, see Schegloff, 2002a, 2002b). Mobile communications technologies enable people to combine communication and corporeal travel, and be 'present' in multiple social situations at once. The shift in definition of locale and sense of place is particularly salient in public situations when someone makes a mobile phone in the physical presence of bystanders. If both parties are in a public situation, at least five locales fold into each other. The physical situations of the caller and receiver are connected and a shared third in-between locale created like in fixed telephony. Additionally, audiences on both sides overhear the conversation and are implicated in redefining the social situation (see Bassett, 2005: 39; Ling, 2008; Ling & Campbell, 2009). Public phone calls differ from calling in the privacy of the home or office by reconfiguring front stage and back stage. According to Ling, people who make a call in a public setting have to manage their performance on two front stages at once: the setting of the call and the public physical setting (Ling, 2008: 65, 95, 113). Members of the audience are drawn onto a 'quasi-front stage', as they have to manage a pose of civil inattention (ibid: 69).

New about locative media is that they mobilize geographical *location*, in addition to *sense of place* and *locale*. Positioning data is attached to digitized objects. These geotags can be transferred, accessed over networks, copied, searched, commented upon, and reconfigured by people elsewhere. People can 'virtually travel' to geographical locations by browsing and searching. Their corporeal movements through the city leave tangible information traces. These are composed of geotagged locations that can be acted upon and (re)used (Greenfield & Shepard, 2007: 13). As discussed, Urry distinguishes five types of travel (Urry, 2007: 47). These are: physical travel of objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel, communicative travel, and corporeal travel of people. All five types occur in Bliin. An example. On my way to the Erasmus University in Rotterdam I shot and shared a picture of a Surinam eating-place along the road. The geotagged image became an informational object that was encoded into digital bytes and physically traveled to the Bliin server in the form of electrons. A Dutch Bliin user, who was in Japan at that moment, noticed through the interface that I shared an image of this food stall. She made a few comments on my share, saying she felt like eating *roti* (Surinam food) after all the *sushi*. Although she was physically somewhere else, her simultaneous dwelling in digital space apparently triggered reminiscences of the Netherlands. She was making an imaginative movement to the Netherlands. She also made a virtual movement on the platform by going to my share via the interface. Her comment that was addressed to me - typed in Japan and reaching me in the Netherlands in an instant - is a case of communicative travel made possible by the digital messaging system of the platform. The fifth type of mobility is exemplified by another Bliin user, who actually corporeally moved to the eating place I photographed, tried something out there, and commented via the platform that it was indeed good food (figure 6).

Figure 6: Mobile interface of a share on Bliin.

As we have seen, people relate to their urban environment by reading the city and creating mental maps (Lynch, 1960). Locative media profoundly change this process. Hybrid places become writable. Instead of merely reading an urban environment produced by others (e.g. professional architects and planners), urbanites can now 'write' the city with their own subjective experiences [199]. With their GPS-enabled

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[199] Creative Commons founder Lawrence Lessig calls our contemporary remix culture a read/write culture (Lessig, 2004). This idea has been adopted by people in the field of urban studies, like Adam Greenfield, who sees the contemporary city as a "read/write city", in which "the city's users are no longer bound to

mobile phones people create text, images, video, and add geographical coordinates and a timestamp to this content. They share these personal inscriptions of space with other people. Authorship and ownership of the city are redefined. Cartography used to be a specialized field of knowledge. Now mapping has opened up to the public, much in the same way that online encyclopedia Wikipedia opens up the production and sharing of knowledge by non-specialists. Lynch was talking about elements of the city that were publicly visible to everyone. Locative media inscriptions only appear through an interface, and remain invisible to those who are not active on this platform. A new logic of orientation arises, no longer based on publicly visible 'objective' urban elements but on more idiosyncratic subjective elements. These remain hidden from the general view, and often are shared within small circles. Mental maps change from being composed of static visible urban elements that are navigable (paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks), to far more dynamic, idiosyncratic and contextualized elements that are searchable.

At the same time, locative media make things visible that were not visible before. They expose the temporal dimensions of places as dynamic processes, as opposed to common perceptions of places as static entities. Every so many seconds, Bliin logs and uploads a unique geographical location (for example 52.360555° latitude, 4.925945° longitude). The accumulation of these logged locations are visualized as a trace on the map interface. Such traces show that place as location exists not just as a discrete entity but in a sequential relation to other locations as part of people's routes. The multitude of digital inscriptions (geotags) accumulated over time, especially of frequently visited places, expose the wide variety of social situations that can take place there. It reveals that place (as locale) is the setting for a range of social behaviors and interactions. For some a public park may be a place to relax. For others it is a place to work or meet. The park might be a friendly place at daytime, but considered dangerous at night. This is reflected in its inscriptions. Different people tell different stories about their different senses of place. Locative media thus act as narrative tools, albeit unlike the traditional 'plotted' narratives that Ricoeur speaks of. Inscriptions of locations travel faster than before. Places are under continuous revisions. When geotagged shares are created, uploaded and commented upon by others, places become events, certain moments or 'happenings' in time (about place as event, see Cresswell, 2004: 40; Massey, 2005: 140). Stories evolve around places as events. These are not unified stories with coherent plots but a myriad of 'micro-narratives' (Hjorth, 2005). Popular locations have many geotagged shares. These expose a wide variety of

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experience passively the territory through which they move but have been empowered to inscribe their subjectivities in the city itself... that those subjectivities can be anchored in place and responded to by those who come after" (Greenfield & Shepard, 2007: 13).

uses: at night, during festivals, different weather conditions, while under construction, and evoke different comments. Locative media dynamically record and reveal the multiple little histories and meanings attached to places.

This storytelling is social in character. Bliin stimulates ongoing active engagement with one's surroundings, and with each other's inscriptions of places. Social interactions stem from the combination of the platform's technological possibilities (*Spielraum*), the opening up of hybrid space as a space of possibilities, and people's 'willing suspension of disbelief' in adopting a playful attitude. McGonigal argues that ubiquitous games are "transforming everyday objects and places into interactive platforms", and "activate players by making them more responsive to potential calls to interaction" because of "previously unperceived affordances" (McGonical, 2007: 236). New users who set their first steps in Bliin are greeted by older users, and their shares get comments. This raises expectations of reciprocity. Once 'in', one is expected to keep contributing. After players make a willing step into the playground they are summoned to play. Over a longer period, players create sequences of photos, descriptions, and (recurring) mobility patterns. Sequences grow into collaborative little stories that make up a player's social identity. Bliin becomes a platform for interactive self-publishing. Players tell who they are by their ongoing contributions and their involvement with others. Mildly competitive games of spatial conquest and social prestige may arise in storytelling. Who is the most mobile user? Who makes the nicest shots? Who is the first to share a new place? Who can still add something interesting about well-trodden places like Amsterdam? Users judge the quality of each other's photos.

Writing the city has a political dimension. Players engage in 'spatial tactics'. De Certeau uses this term to describe the various ways people appropriate places on their own terms by a "clever utilization of time", as opposed to prescriptive "spatial strategies" that try to establish a singular timeless place from above (De Certeau, 1984: 34-39). He contrasts the *voyeur* who takes an elevated birds-eye view of the city space to the *walker* who finds himself on the ground. Their sheer act of walking is an everyday practice that creates space (room) out of produced place (De Certeau, 1984: 92-94). An example is the 'elephant trail' (or 'desire line'), the worn out little paths in the grass made by people taking cutoffs outside the paved pathway designed by the park architect or maintainer. By creating shortcuts people defy the dominant spatial planning strategies that prescribe how places should be used. Hybrid space offers read/write possibilities beyond the initial legibility and official reading of a site. Nevertheless, this is not always a 'liberating' spatial tactics against the hegemony of spatial strategies. Someone on Bliin shared a picture of a marihuana plant growing in a pot, presumably in his own backyard since he posted many shares in the vicinity. Of

course the picture had exact geo-coordinates attached. Although in the Netherlands possession of a few plants for home use is allowed, he received a comment by one of the older members who half-jokingly warned not to make it too easy for "uncle law". Instead of being a tool for 'liberation' locative technologies can easily turn into surveillance instruments.

4.3.3 Playing with social boundaries

Telecommunication alters co-presence, the experience of sharing a social situation and being 'close' to each other (as in both near and intimate). Co-presence changes from being based on corporeal proximity to being complemented - not substituted- by imagined and virtual nearness. Kenneth Gergen calls those technologies that enable people to feel the presence of others even while they are physically absent "technologies of absent presence" (Gergen, 2002: 237). Always-on technologies like the mobile phone create a temporal sense of co-presence. Familiar people are always available. In potential because at any moment contact can be made via the portable phone; in actuality by the exchange of calls or text messages. Licoppe calls the interweaving of physical co-presence and mediated communication into a "seamless web" of ongoing communicative exchanges 'connected presence' (Licoppe, 2004). What happens when location-based technologies like Bliin mediate co-presence? The argument is that by adding location to the available information about someone else's situation, location-based technologies add a spatial dimension to co-presence. Co-presence becomes even more pervasive. Information about each other's whereabouts continues to be available in the background and can be easily revisited, not just in actual communication. Ongoing interactions rather than a thoughtful reading of each other's biography characterize social behavior on this locative playground.

Locative technologies contribute to a spatial sense of co-presence. Wherever others are, they are always visibly 'there' on the map. Always-there technologies, as they may be dubbed, allow people to pinpoint others and trace their movements and experiences. Bliin exposes and visualizes the traces of other users' past and current presence as a kind of digital graffiti. By following or revisiting other people's 'digital trail' players become aware of what others are doing, what mood they are in, where they are heading next. There is even the possibility of physically bumping into nearby Bliin users, friends as well as 'familiar strangers'. On this locative platform weak ties seem to prevail over strong ties. Players easily make comments on each other's shares, without actually knowing each other from face-to-face meetings or sharing the same

friends [200]. Computer games create new points of view, since one's own game avatar can be seen from different camera perspectives (Rhody, 2005). Bliin offers a similar over-the-shoulder perspective but then of other people. One's own seeing becomes publicly visible by publishing and sharing images online, and so does the seeing of others. This sharing of perspectives creates a strong sense of nearness: "I see what you see now". Co-presence emerges not only when potentiality turns into actual communication but as an ongoing actuality in the background. There is no need to interrupt one's own activities to get in touch. A quick glance on the screen suffices to know what someone is up to. If hybrid places become more mobile and fleeting, the inverse seems to happen with people. People become more fixed and pinpointable. As always-on and always-there converge, a doubled mediation of imagined nearness arises. We might call this connected background presence (in a pun on Gergen) 'present presence'.

Locative media change the 'narrative' reading and writing of each other's lives. Bliin presents an ongoing stream of real-time information about other people's locations and movements, their senses of place, and their interactions with other people. The exchange frequency of narrative events is much higher and happens in the background. It needs little active involvement. Co-players become glancing witnesses of each other's lives. Representations of events are mostly visual (photos, videos), although they have text in their names, keywords, and comments. We may say in narrative terms that the reading of each other's lives bears the qualities of a 'stream of consciousness' novel rather than a carefully composed textual plot that ties events together in a coherent structure (Ricoeur's narrative mediation of identity). In narrative emplotment, as well as in earlier genres of visual storytelling, actions and events in people's lives are provided with 'context'. Traditional plots frequently knot particular and personal events around greater events that involve more people and situations (often a crisis that makes up for 'drama'). Similarly, the postcard and the holiday photograph as genres portray commonly known properties of places (In Egypt we visited the pyramids...), and subsequently recount personalized stories in photo subscriptions or on the back of the postcard (... and poor uncle Joe fell off a camel!). They need the spectacular, the beautiful, the lasting as the context for smaller personal narratives. Such stories remain within small groups. The postcard is even targeted at a specific audience. In such narratives, the general inscribes meaning to the particular. Bliin follows the inverse route. Geotagging captures the particular and uses digital

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[200] Like in the city, online interactions between strangers can quickly become surprisingly candid and intimate. Although people who interact online in this way share no connections within their social network (Granovetter's criterium for 'strong ties'), these interpersonal relations might indeed be described as 'strong'. Hypothetically this could also occur on location-based social networks, although the fact of knowing each other's location might be a prohibitive factor.

mapping as a social practice of sharing. Unique personal experiences (This is what I am seeing now...) are continuously made public to the outer world as shares on the map (... and you may look too!). Instead of trying to convey a deep essence of a place or event by tying it to a generalized plot, users often share the odd, transient, sometimes ugly or even banal side of their everyday experiences. Collages of textualities (names, tags, descriptions, comments, nicknames) and visuals (photos, videos, avatars, screen interface) do not create coherent and representative 'grand stories' that are meant to last. Rather, these 'micro-narratives' are fragmented, highly mobile, and self-referential. Bliin shares often refer to other shares, just like many videos on the popular online video website Youtube refer to videos posted by others. Many people have photographed their own laptop screen while displaying one of their own shares in a browser. They turn their sense of place into a self-referential expression (I share this share), which is only meaningful to other participants on Bliin. Context is provided by performative social interactions rather than by narrative emplotment.

4.3.4 Playing with boundaries of the self

Although this case is presented as an example of 'play on the mobile', it also acts on the other play levels: play with the mobile, play through the mobile, and played by the mobile. Participating on Bliin involves interacting *with* locative media as interfaces to hybrid space; interacting with other people and the environment *through* the platform; and being played *by* locative media as new mechanisms of dominance, surveillance and loss of privacy. I propose the play element of Bliin involves boundary play. Spatial, temporal, and social segmentations between normalcy and being at play are constantly pierced. Spatiotemporal boundary play consists of exploring the thresholds between physical and digital spaces and places, and between being in and out of the play. Exploration of these thresholds involves playing with the possibilities of this interface to hybrid space. The play element does not reside *inside* game space as much as in the continuous movements *between* the technologically mediated play world and everyday life. The act of participating in Bliin would be meaningless if one of the components of hybrid space were to fall away, or if hybrid space itself were to fade into grey. Part of the fun is derived from doing something out of the ordinary, apart from everyday 'normalcy', something that previously had not been possible. Participating in Bliin involves dragging physical world experiences into the play world, and experiences from the play world into the physical world. Everyday normalcy becomes part of the play, and vice versa. Bliin stretches the boundaries of spatiotemporal confinement that characterizes 'traditional' games. Hybrid play is never really over. It is infinite. Social boundary play consists of exploring digitally mediated and physical interactions anew

through this locative media platform. The play element arises from exploring the seams between physical and mediated interactions, and between distance and presence, and from questioning who fellow players are in the same play world. Who am I actually playing with? The distant yet present people who are participating on the same playground? Or the 'real' people in my vicinity who probably are unaware of what I am doing on this locative platform? The locative platform affords the mobility to continuously step through the porous membrane of the magic circle. These are not binary switches between now I am in/now I am out. They remain transitions. People must define and remain conscious of boundaries between physical and digital space, between being in and out of the play, and between who is playing and who is not, in order to set their activities apart from normalcy. People also are being played by the platform. They are dragged into the play, seduced to publish private information - among which location - and this data is stored indefinitely on the Bliin servers out of one's own hands. New members will likely not read through the full terms of use. It is not entirely clear how the makers of Bliin earn money but they do strike deals with commercial parties like beer magnate Heineken for advertisement campaigns. Players then are turned into figurants for the benefit of corporate marketing purposes. The platform can also act as a tool for surveillance. Both burghers and burglars can see where you are. Identity management to some extent is taken out of people own hands. Once 'inside' players are not in full control over their profiles. They depend on what other people publish about them, and what the makers of the platform intend to do with it. Boundary play at this level involves stepping over a threshold and giving up a measure of privacy. All people can do is draw a line around what to publish and what not. Still, leaving without a trace will be impossible (more about this in section 5.4).

Again, Caillois' fourfold play classification allows us to further specify play elements in Bliin. Part of the pleasure in play resides in the sense of *agôn* mastery over hybrid space. People can cross the border from normalcy to play at will, but can also easily suspend the play if they want to, or need to concentrate on some other task. Further, they have the power to inscribe places with their own personal experiences. Part of the fun of playing lies in *alea* uncertainties like chance encounters with fellow players and surprising inscriptions of places. In *mimicry* the boundary play is shown most clearly. There is pretense involved in the presentation of the self in shares and comments before an audience. Indeed all social interactions have this theatrical *as if* quality, even in 'normal' everyday situations, as Goffman argued. The platform opens up another play space that is both intertwined with everyday situations and separate from it. People bring their private backstage experiences to the front stage through self-expressive publishing. It is not certain whether the stage is the physical world augmented with digital expressions as props, or the digital platform augmented with

physical world experiences. It is unclear who 'reads' the performance (viewing shares), and who are participating in the play (engaging in collaborative storytelling). Bliin foregrounds questions that usually remain hidden in everyday normalcy, questions about the *conditions* of the performance: What stage am I playing on? What are my stage props? Who are my audience? Who are the members of the team? Finally, rapid movements between physical and digital spaces, an ongoing stream of geotags, uncertainty about boundaries between who is in and who is not, contribute to *ilinx* confusion of the senses.

How does boundary play shape the relation people have with themselves as selves? I propose that locative media emphasize an oscillation between a 'centered self' and a 'distributed self'. On the classical Cartesian map people have to locate themselves. Their position is but one among many possible locations. Locative media mapping by contrast is subject-centered. It puts individuals always in the center of the map. People see themselves as the pivot around which the environment revolves. With a simple click or press the digital map adjusts itself around the individual. Further, individuals are endowed with the power to write places through their portable devices with their own personal experiences. They are no longer simply readers of their environment but writers who create and publish their sense of place. These two factors favor the establishment of a 'centered self'. This is selfhood that gravitates towards unified *sameness*. Yet Bliin is also profoundly social. The platform cultivates a culture of sharing little personal experiences with other people. These micro-narratives do not present a singular coherent image of the self. Bliin enables people to interact, to follow and comment on what others are seeing and doing. Other people's comments on shares turn personal experiences into collaborative little stories. People find out that others before them have inscribed places with a multiplicity of experiences. The pervasive sense of co-presence that is sustained through locative media erodes the (western) narrative idea(l) of an atomic and unitary self that exists independently as whole in itself (Gergen, 2000: 140, 156). As mentioned, mobile media have been described as umbilical cords (Castells, et al., 2004: 176; De Gournay, 2002: 201; Fox, 2001; Townsend, 2000: 93). Individuals depend on others. What's more, their individuality only emerges in social interactions with other people and their other-ascriptions. In terms of Goffman, people operate as a team (even the individual is a team). They play together. As social platforms, locative media foster this 'distributed self', a relational interdependency that comes into being through continuous interactions with others and encounters with diverse places. Kenneth Gergen writes: "If it is not individual 'I's who create relationships, but relationships that create the sense of 'I,' the 'I' cease to be the center of success or failure, the one who is evaluated well or poorly, and so on. ... [O]ne's place in the games of life may always be filled by other

players" (Gergen, 2000: 157). People thus are faced with a dilemma. Do I seek a centered self characterized by recognizability, homogeneity, singularity, and stability? Or do I seek a distributed self by opening myself up to heterogeneity, difference, multiplicity, and change? Locative media induce people to explore the boundaries of selfhood in ongoing movements between these poles.

Playing with the boundaries of the self raises questions that pertain to identity paradoxes at large. Do locative media favor similarity by a dwelling in the known? Do they function as invisible fences around what *de facto* are 'gated communities' based on likemindedness and shared preferences? We have seen that urbanites make their city smaller. They impose self-made rules and make mental maps to cope with the sensory overload caused by the size, density, and heterogeneity of the city, and to maintain a sense of coherence of the self. Do locative media function as blocking mechanisms to dwell in small circles and solidify identities? Or do locative media act as meeting media that open up the city for new impressions and encountering difference? Can they form quasi-public agoras, stages for encountering, interacting and identifying with others? Will these media technologies smoothen and optimize our experience of the city as a friction-free place, or will they insert unexpectedness and new tensions into urban life? The irony - and this again is the paradox of freedom and force - is is that they work in both directions. People use technologies to make the city smaller and define their own place in it. Yet at the same time technologies become what Gergen calls 'technologies of social saturation': they expand the possibility to be present in more than one place at a time, and the range and variety of relationships (ibid: 49, 55). According to Gergen, such technologies 'populate the self' with a great number and wide variety of potentials for being. However this can easily spiral downwards into 'multiphrenia', as the state of total *ilinx* confusion and sense of defeat (ibid: 69, 73). The technologies that people use to playfully construct and express their identities now come to play them.

To some extent 'centered self' versus 'distributed self' coincide with two views of what identity *does*. Does identity function as a means or as an end in itself? Identity can be a means toward achieving external goals in an ego-centered 'politics of the self' or in group-centered 'identity politics', whereby people claim a space for themselves in the name of emancipation [201]. In this case, identity is a means to solidify and close the

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[201] Proponents of 'identity politics' based on gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, nation, and so on, will claim that one first has to define a space for oneself in order to meet the other as an other. This is true, but in practice these movements are frequently founded on essentialist and static ideas of what selfhood and sameness, and otherness mean. Moreover, 'identity politics' movements require that individuals or groups 'like me/us' *should* define themselves as different. They then claim the right to represent them. Those who do not wish to go along are easily set aside as traitors. The odd logic of such movements is to minimize internal difference to face an 'outside' as different.

circle between the self and others, between the in-group and outsiders, based on some a definition of selfhood as sameness. Or is identity an end in itself, whereby heterogeneity and differences are seen as enrichments in the ideal of continuously developing oneself? In this case identity is an end without an endpoint, infinitely evolving by constantly opening up and stepping through boundaries. It is hard to say to which pole identities mediated by locative media gravitate, although in the last paragraph I make an argument that it contributes to the opening up of horizons. The newness of this field prevents any definitive answers (and admittedly some of the above is somewhat speculative).

I want to highlight the role of the map. Digital cartography is not just a tool for visualizing increasingly large and complex datasets. It is becoming a 'medium to think with' as the reincarnation of the mental map [202]. Marxist thinker Fredric Jameson takes Lynch' idea of the mental map and applies it to how people understand the complexities of the post-modern globalized world (Jameson, 1991: 51-54). He makes a plea for cognitive mapping as a new political aesthetics or art "which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system ... in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralised by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (Jameson, 1991: 54). Sybille Lammes notes that new media technologies increasingly enable people to organize the spatial dimensions of their lives with the aid of digital cartographies (Lammes, 2008: 94-95). I suggest mapping comes to act as a medium to create coherence in identities along spatial lines. Narrative identity theory focuses predominantly on the self as a temporal structure. Plot creates temporal unity with a beginning and an end from seemingly discordant actions and events. Play on the other hand has an ambiguous relation to time. Games are often clearly delimited in time. Free play is an activity oriented towards its own continuation, it is 'infinite' (Carse, 1986). Free play flees from closure. The map is a better medium to describe play experiences than narrative plot. As Henry Jenkins notes: "[w]hen gamer magazines want to describe the experience of gameplay, they are more likely to reproduce maps of the game world than to recount their narratives" (Jenkins, 2004: 122). I suggest that the map is the spatial equivalent to the temporal plot in narrative. What plots do for narrative identities - providing structure to agency - maps do for playful identities. They serve to define what belongs to the play and what does not, to aid people in orienting themselves, and to organize their movements and place them in a meaningful structure. Mapping can be narrative. Benedict Anderson for

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[202] This is similar to Lévi-Strauss' dictum that artifacts are 'objects to think with' and Turkle's 'evocative objects' (see Frissen, 2008: 22-23).

instance describes how chronologically ordered maps constitute 'political-biographical narratives' about national territories (Anderson, 1991: 175). Similarly, narratives can be spatial. De Certeau talks about 'spatial stories'. These organize movements and produce "geographies of actions" (De Certeau, 1984: 115-116). In this case we have seen that collaborative micro-narratives are written about spatial experiences and places. These stories are less temporally structured in an overarching plot than spatially ordered by using maps. Mapping, like emplotment, is descriptive as well as prescriptive. It orders and represents past events and events occurring elsewhere. It also opens up a space of potential and sets out future directions in which to move. Locative media externalize the mental maps people create to orient themselves in life. People then reflexively reapply these maps to themselves. Similar to narrative emplotment, the map functions as an external medium through which people can look at themselves as selves, and understand their place in space. This matches Ricoeur's three mimetic movements. *Mimesis1*, the implicit preunderstanding of the world of actions and events as narrative, corresponds to the phase of creating metal maps as "precartographic operations" (Jameson, 1991: 51). *Mimesis2*, the construction of actions and events into narrative plot, corresponds to writing and publishing spatial stories on locative media platforms. *Mimesis3*, the reflexive process of understanding oneself as a character in a narrative plot, corresponds to the step of reapplying maps to the self. (This process is elaborated in section 6.2, and reworked into *play1-2-3*). Despite structural similarities between emplotment and mapping there are also differences. Already mentioned is the movement in locative media inscriptions from the particular to the general. Locative media mapping practices are more performative than emplotment. They involve expressive self-publishing before the eyes of (imagined) others, while narrative reconfiguration (*mimesis3*) tends to be an inward process. This performative play in identity construction is, again, a showing of a doing.

4.3.5 One more thing: the end of serendipity?

When I myself tried out Bliin, I wondered whether it would take away some of the spontaneity and exploratory character in relating to place and other people. It may seem so at first. Bliin's location-based multimedia, tags, descriptions and comments pre-inscribe hitherto unknown places with other peoples' experiences. This makes us constantly aware that almost every place is infused with human experiences and stories, and that discovering unknown places is nothing but a romantic myth. The realization that places are constituted through generations of collective and sedimented memories may leave less room for a uniquely individual instant experience. Yet there is another side to the coin. Other Bliin users offer surprising new

perspectives of places, breaking open places thought to be known. Further, Bliin induces spontaneity by stimulating users to divert from fixed paths, routes and plans. As the Surinam food stall example shows, users may let their mobility be guided by a playful mood afforded by the platform. Users may unexpectedly stumble upon someone's share or somebody in the vicinity. Moreover, an exciting sense of newness is reinforced by the 'double articulation' of locative media. Both its actual use and the emergent discourse about the potential of location-based services turn ordinary spatial experiences into extraordinary ones. Finally, Bliin adds a playful element of conquest. Earth can be mapped all over again. Not geographically but in a 'geosophical' way, as J. K. Wright proposed (Wright, 1947: 9; see also Cresswell, 2006: 21). Wright, who was a geographer, realized that by the mid-twentieth century the whole earth had been mapped and was 'known' to geographical science. He made a plea to stretch the definition of what constitutes geographical knowledge. Artistic practices and local folk knowledge are different but also valuable ways to understand places, he proposed. This is certainly what happens when locative media are used to map experiences of places and mobilities. Location-based platforms like Bliin almost naturally bring alternative 'geosophical' knowledge to the fore. Users can inscribe their physical and digital environments with their own routes and experiences and get absorbed in playful ways of place-making while in the enduring company of other people. Locative media open up possibilities for mapping unknown territories, and at the same time create new *terrae incognitae*.

4.4 Conclusion: playing the boundaries

In this chapter we have looked at a particular development in mobile media technologies called locative media. Mobile media with positioning technologies have been considered as platforms for play, and interfaces to the urban environment. Mobile media, instead of being 'placeless' technologies, are intimately tied to physical place. We have looked at locative playground Bliin as a case of 'play on the mobile'. It has been argued that location-based play on the mobile involves playing with boundaries: spatiotemporal boundaries, social boundaries, and boundaries of the self. In the next chapter we separately analyze the four play levels: play on the mobile, play with the mobile, play through the mobile, play by the mobile.

5. Playing the media: the playful qualities of mobile media

5.1 Play on the mobile

In chapter 4 we have seen that the mobile device is used to play on the mobile. In chapters 2 and 3 the other three play levels have already emerged: play with the mobile, play through the mobile, and play by the mobile. In this chapter these four play levels are analyzed in greater detail. Each play level comes with its own understanding of mobile media. Play on the mobile takes the mobile device as a play interface. Play with the mobile takes mobile media as technological artifacts. Play through the mobile takes mobile media as communications media. Play by the mobile takes mobile media as part of media culture at large. Since play on the mobile has been discussed in chapter 4, this level is only briefly addressed in this section. A distinction can be made between three types of 'play on the mobile'. The first are 'casual games', small solitary games that are played on the go. The second are 'pervasive' location-based games that interface between digital and physical game-spaces. The third involve the use of portable electronic devices not as platforms for gaming but as interfaces for (musical) play.

5.1.1 Casual games

The market for computer games is a multibillion industry. It caters hundreds of millions of players worldwide. Early research on game environments focused on multi-user domains/dungeons (MUDs and MOOs) (Turkle, 1995). Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) like Word of Warcraft, and role-playing games such as Second Life have been widely studied as well. Less research has been done on casual games played on mobile devices (a notable exception is Juul, 2009). An increasing number of people play little games on mobile devices. The annual report by the American Entertainment Software Association (ESA) states that 36% of heads of household report playing games on wireless devices like mobile phones or PDAs (personal digital assistants), up from 20% in 2002 (ESA, 2008) [203]. Research group In-

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[203] Source: http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2008.pdf.

Stat reports that mobile gaming in the USA by October 2008 was already a $1 billion industry. In-Stat predicts that continued momentum in the global mobile gaming market may lead to revenues topping $6.8 billion by 2013. This report includes results from an earlier survey, in which 29.5% out of 2000 respondents say they have played games on their mobile phone [204]. Another report by research and marketing group ComScore from January 2009 says that from November 2007 to November 2008 the number of mobile game downloaders in the USA grew by 17%. 8.5 Million American people (3.8 % of mobile subscribers) downloaded a game to their mobile device. The number of people who use a smartphone to download a game has increased sharply in this period with 291% [205]. According to ComScore, smartphones like the iPhone and BlackBerry have replaced cheaper low-end phones as the most popular gaming platform. The high numbers of iPhone users who download games is not really a surprise. Manufacturer Apple has successfully integrated its device with the so-called AppStore as a one-stop shop for easy downloading of games and applications. Games are the most popular download category in the AppStore [206]. Remarkable is the mentioning of the Blackberry as a popular gaming device. The Blackberry used to be targeted at enterprise professionals. The rise of gaming on the Blackberry appears to support the often forwarded claim that the boundaries between 'serious' work and 'playful' leisure become increasingly less sharp (e.g. Meyrowitz, 2003; de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2008: 448). Notably, mobile gaming has a different demographics than console-based gaming. According to Juniper Research, mobile gaming attracts more older and female players than the traditional male gamer in the age of 12-25 [207]. By far the biggest market for mobile gaming is the Asia Pacific region, with Japan and South Korea leading (Juniper, 2008: 4) [208]. Games for mobile devices are delivered by manufacturers, telecom operators, and third party providers. Many mobile phone manufacturers preload their products with simple games and offer games for sale via their own gaming platforms. Telecom operators too sell games through their own portals. A range of third party content and entertainment providers offer their products via various channels.

Qualitatively, the way games are played change too. Casual games offer a different gaming experience than console-based games (IGDA, 2006; Juul, 2009). Console-based games typically require one's full attention and are often played for

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[204] Source: http://www.instat.com/press.asp?Sku=IN0804316MCM&ID=2394. For comparison, research agency Gartner predicts a global revenue that reaches 6.3 billion in 2011: http://www.informationweek.com/news/mobility/business/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=208801005.

[205] Source: http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=2711.

[206] Many of the top-10 free and paid apps in Apple's AppStore are in the category 'games'.

[207] Source: http://juniperresearch.com/shop/viewpressrelease.php?pr=16.

[208] Source: http://juniperresearch.com/shop/viewpressrelease.php?pr=16.

prolonged periods of time together with other people. Portable games are typically played solitarily during short in-between periods, and played more casually, for instance while traveling or waiting. In 2008 a comprehensive study appeared about media consumption and learning by young people in the USA (Ito, et al., 2008). Ito and Bittanti distinguish five genres of gaming practices: killing time, hanging out, recreational gaming, organizing and mobilizing, and augmented game play (ibid) [209]. Especially the first type (killing time) is done on what these authors call "nomadic devices":

> Certain forms of gaming have long provided opportunities to fill small gaps in the day or longer stretches of waiting time. [...] These are the practices in which people engage with play and gaming to procrastinate or fill gaps in the day. With video games, it happens mostly through nomadic devices such as portable consoles (Nintendo DS, Sony PSP), mobile phones, and laptops. [...] Games are often used while waiting for relevant things to happen, as a filler between more structured events. Although we found that a wide variety of kids engaged in killing time forms of gaming, these practices tended to skew toward either younger or less experienced gamers, or for times when more sustained gaming was not an option.
> (ibid)

This genre of gaming is largely a solitary practice, although more recently there has been a shift to online multiplayer mobile gaming. Notably, many casual gamers are female [210]. Contrary to more hardcore gaming practices, this genre of gaming does not foster the formation of very distinct gamer identities (ibid). Because of this casualness and lack of immersion, mobile games are often not radically separated from ongoing social processes in the physical world. People can easily cross the border between playing the game and engaging in everyday activities. Katz and Acord reach a similar conclusion. "Mobile gaming... 'throws the ball out of bounds' by conflating games and everyday life" (Katz & Acord, 2008).

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[209] The term "augmented game play" is somewhat confusing, since the authors do not use this term in the usual sense of digital media that establish an "augmented reality" (creating an informational space that overlays the 'real world'). Instead their term describes a deep involvement with games, for instance through customization, cheat codes, and hacking practices.

[210] A report by the Casual Games Association states that women account for 51.7% of casual games players, and 74% of paying players (CGA, 2007).

5.1.2 Pervasive games

The second type of mobile games problematizes the distinction between a separated game space and the ordinary world much more radically. As we have seen, mobile media technologies act as platforms for emerging location-based 'pervasive games' embedded in the physical environment. These are no longer played on a static screen but taken out on the streets on mobile devices and played in relation to physical localities. Other than solitary casual games, these games are profoundly social in nature. Since we already paid attention the case of Bliin I will not go into this type any further here.

5.1.3 Mobile play interfaces

A third type of 'play on the mobile' uses the mobile device as a play interface. A small but lively electronic music scene exists of people who reuse old Nintendo Gameboys and other portable (game) computers not for gaming but to compose and perform what is called "chiptune" music [211]. These devices have a very basic audio chip that processes audio with only 8-bit precision. This gives a retro lo-fi sound [212]. Developers found out how to access the internal hardware of these devices, and wrote sequencing applications to compose and perform music with. Chiptune musicians typically perform with only two Gameboys or other portable devices, and a small mixing panel. They probably are the most 'mobile' of all electronic musicians. Instead of carrying large amounts of gear they can easily bring their whole setup in a small bag or briefcase. Mobile platforms are increasingly employed by 'regular' electronic musicians as interfaces for controlling software instruments. One advantage of such mobile play interfaces is that they enable musicians to divert their attention away from screen space and instead engage more with the audience and fellow players. It combines the principles of casual games and pervasive games in its search for integration of digital devices into the physical situation of a stage performance.

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[211] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiptune and audio examples at http://www.8bitcollective.com.

[212] Entry-level audio interfaces today use at least 16 bit audio processing, more professional interfaces 24 or even 32 bits for higher precision.

5.2 Play with the mobile

On the second level, 'play with the mobile', we look at medium-specific qualities of mobile media as artifacts, and the ways we interact with them. In order to avoid a deterministic view, I emphasize from the outset that the 'playfulness' in interactions with the device works both ways. On the one hand mobile devices have certain properties that elicit play. On the other hand user practices and attitudes towards mobile devices are playful. These devices are being approached and constructed as playful toys. In a two-way movement of 'mutual shaping' the device's playability meets the users' playfulness. To organize the ideas in this section I use Caillois' four play types. Different types of 'play with the mobile' are sometimes hard to squeeze into one category. Furthermore, the distinction between mobile phones as artifacts (the view of this section) and as communications media (the view of the next section) cannot always be neatly drawn. In this section we see that people communicate by means of the artifact. And in the next section we see that communication through the phone involves exchanging gift 'objects'.

5.2.1 Toys

In his essay *Toys* Roland Barthes argues that child's toys prefigure the adult world by shrinking and reducing elements from adult life (Barthes, 1993: 53-55) [213].

> There exist ... dolls which urinate.... This is meant to prepare the little girl for the causality of housekeeping, to 'condition' her to her future role as mother. However, faced with this world of faithful and complicated objects, the child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it: there are, prepared for him, actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy. He is turned into a little stay-at-home householder who does not even have to invent the mainsprings of adult causality; they are supplied to him ready-made: he has only to help himself, he is never allowed to discover anything from start to finish. The merest set of blocks, provided it is not too refined, implies a very different learning of the world: then, the child does not in any way create meaningful objects, it matters little to him whether they have an adult name; the actions he performs are not those of a user but those of a demiurge [214]. He creates forms which walk, which roll, he creates life, not

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[213] Originally published in 1972.

[214] A demiurge is "an autonomous creative force or decisive power" (Merriam-Webster online); "a being responsible for the creation of the universe" (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2nd Edition) (my footnote).

property: objects now act by themselves, they are no longer an inert and
complicated material in the palm of his hand.
(ibid: 53-54).

This quote is insightful for at least three reasons. Ever critical of the bourgeois norm as "the essential enemy", Barthes evokes a very powerful (and somewhat romantic) image of play (ibid: 9). Toys should enable children to learn through creative play. Play entails acquiring a sense of mastery and control. Simple building blocks "appeal to the spirit of do-it-yourself" (ibid: 53). Plastic urinating dolls by contrast turn children into 'consumers' and 'users', not creators. This 'DIY spirit' is an oft-mentioned characteristic of new media technologies. Through play the child enters a realm of exploration in which fantasy reigns supreme. He is playing God of the universe. At the same time, play connects the child's world to the world of "adult causality". Barthes points to the ambiguity of play as both fantasy and reality. Play is "half-real" (Juul, 2005). Or better, it is double real: infusing reality with an extra layer of play. Second, Barthes' essay prefigures what others developed into theory. Good toys - Barthes states a preference for toys made from Vosges wood - are not static and passive objects. They act by themselves and quite literally come to life. Toys too become players and blur the line between playing subject and played object. We have seen this idea in both Kopytoff's notion of biographies of things, and in actor-network theory's assertion that (technological) artifacts have a large degree of agency. It also features in recent technological development paradigms (or more moderately, thought concepts) briefly touched upon in section 4.1. "The internet of things", "spimes", "blogjects", "ambient intelligence", and so on, attribute agency to objects to do things by themselves in a more or less 'intelligent' fashion (Aarts & Diederiks, 2006; Berg, 2009; Bleecker, 2006; Greenfield, 2006; Kranenburg, 2008; Pesce, 2000; Sterling, 2005). Third, there is a political undercurrent in Barthes' critique. Play risks subjugation to industrial capitalism that spits out plastic prefab dolls and leaves nothing to the imagination. Such toys discipline children to be proper subjects (a mother, a consumer) [215]. In lieu of seeing play as a separate realm (e.g. of creativity), we must remain aware of the fact that play is constantly being drawn into the economic and political domain. Media industries produce, distribute, and market their products through play.

Barthes' criticism of pre-scripted toys may have held some truth in the time he wrote this. It only describes one side of how we use digital toys today. In Barthes' essay the old cliché is conjured up that toys are just playthings for kids. If this were ever true (how many adults quasi-secretively play with electric trains in the attic?), it certainly no

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[215] This critique of capitalism rings a familiar bell of another highly critical work from about the same period, Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" (Debord, 2005). Barthes, like Debord, is counted among the neo-Marxists, yet his essay reads as a plea for investing life-like 'fetish' qualities in objects through play.

longer is the case. By contrast, many authors emphasize the creative potential of digital media technologies. Digital technologies are said to turn users, child and adult alike, into 'prosumers', 'professional amateurs', 'hackers', and allow them to create 'user-generated content', engage in 'remix culture', and so on (Himanen, 2001; Leadbeater & Miller, 2004; Luders, 2008: 693-694). Even if we skim off the rhetorics about the powers of digital media to liberate us from the old top-down organized culture industries, there are enough reasons to take these toys seriously.

5.2.2 Mobile agôn: mastery, competition and pleasure

Complex technological devices like the mobile phone both require learning, and aid in learning through play (Raessens, 2007). In a Swedish study it was investigated how children between 10 to 12 years play with the mobile phone and acquire new skills in an unsupervised "casual play setting" (Jarkievich, Frankhammar, & Fernaeus, 2008). Almost all kids had been given phones by their parents. The researchers observed that in a game called 'cops and robbers', kids worked in teams to catch each other, and used video calling to show each other where a competing peer moved. Sometimes they employed ringtones to find out where an 'enemy' was hiding. In another competitive game called 'photo war', girls competed against boys to get as many opponents as possible sharply in one mobile phone photograph. Children also shared multimedia content together in creative ways. "To make a tune play louder, two children did for instance experiment by playing it on two devices simultaneously, where a challenge became to synchronize the sound of the two music players. The effect of the music playing slightly off beat seemed to annoy and amuse the children at the same time" (ibid: 377). Notably, the observers did not find that kids with more advanced phones were more popular in the group. Neither did they observe children playing single-player games in the company of other children. They conclude that the mobile phone has a dual function as a serious communication tool with parents, and a playful resource to act locally among a group of children. The research shows that children display skills in integrating mobile technologies into existing games, and craft new games around the many functionalities of the mobile device. "We also observed several ways to overcome, and even make use of, the technical limitations of the devices. This suggests that children at this age put much value into the freedom of creating their own play scenarios, as a way to make meaningful use of the technologies at hand" (ibid: 378). Play with the mobile - at least for these children - alternates between playing with the toys at hand, and challenging their boundaries in metaplay: playing with the playability of these technologies.

Jarkievich *et al* did not encounter competition based on the type of phone, only in the games children play with it. Elsewhere, and in other age groups, competition based on brand and type does occur. In chapters 2 and 3 we have seen that many Indonesians voluntarily queue up for hours to be the first to buy a prestigious new communicator phone. In status-aware Indonesia the mobile phone is used in competitive display of prestige. In the Jamaican context Horst and Miller describe how school children engage in little cellphone rivalries about who has the coolest facade and ringtones (Horst & Miller, 2006: 62). In Italy, Fortunati observes "what has begun to give users prestige is knowing how to use the mobile phone with ease" (Fortunati, 2002a: 54). People should not use their phones in too exaggerated ways, to avoid being accused of vulgarity. One should use the phone discretely, show that one is not anxious about being constantly available, and thus win tacit social approval, she concludes.

Acquiring skills is a source of pleasure in itself. It is a potentially rewarding competition with oneself. Designer and anthropologist Victor Papanek observes that for many fishermen the fun in trout fishing was lost when a manufacturer put a slingshot on top of the fishing reel to make it easier to let the dry-fly skim across the water. There was no longer any skill needed for fishing and thus no sense of achievement (Papanek, 1995: 156). In terms of Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' model, the play experience lost its optimal balance between being too easy and too difficult. In the same vein, people spend endless hours tinkering with their newly acquired phone to master the device. Many young Indonesians try to learn how to use the many functions of their telephone with the help of magazines, weeklies, books, and online fora. We have seen that it is popular practice to customize the mobile phone with danglers, colored fronts, and ringtones, as a way to show one is in control over life. In the Italian context Fortunati notes that wearing the mobile phone as a fashion item or jewelry is not meant to please others but a source of personal pleasure. The attraction of wearing mobile devices lies not in its exclusivity and the preciousness of materials used but in the fact that "they represent the latest development of vertical knowledge" (Fortunati, 2002a: 59-60). This observation can readily be transposed to *bergaul* as a reflexive and pleasure-oriented performance of possessing social know-how. Here, the mastery of skills in mobile *agôn* touches the creation and display of illusions (to others or oneself) in mobile *mimicry*.

There are multiple dimensions to *agôn* play with the mobile. It is a way to distinguish oneself from other people through competition, a way to display mastery over the device, and a source of pleasure in the display of knowledge and in caring for the device. Papanek recounts how a rifle manufacturer approached him - in vein - with the idea to develop a self-cleaning gun-cabinet. Cleaning a gun after use is a dirty and boring job. Yet this is part of a process beloved by sportsmen, says Papanek:

"eliminating this stage would impoverish the enjoyment rather than adding to the fun" (Papanek, 1995: 156). Caring for our devices is part of the fun experience. Just like sportsmen have to take care of their gear, we must groom our phones once in a while by cleaning the phone of unnecessary programs and old text messages that clog up the memory (see Fortunati, 2002a: 47). There is pleasure in boring and dirty work [216].

Some take the game of mastery, competition, and fun far more seriously. They 'jailbreak', 'root' or 'hack' their mobile phone, and flash it with new firmware to install 'mods' (customized modifications) or programs that cannot be installed otherwise. Hacking the mobile phone is very popular in Indonesia. The shelves of bookstore chain Gramedia are filled with hacker literature and the topic regularly receives attention in newspapers. Glossy magazine *Indonesia Handphone* explains how to add extra memory on your Sony-Ericsson handphone by modifying the phone's firmware that puts an artificial limit on internal memory [217]. Various tabloid print media have special pages with detailed descriptions and electronic flow charts of the innards of different phone models. An article in newspaper Kompas reports about a big pan-Asian hacker festival organized in Jakarta called PANHAC2 (Pazia Acer National Hacker Competition) [218]. One of the contestants described hacking as "fooling around a bit". But it is also a matter of competitive prestige between hackers. Hacking is an activity that is fun to do, gives a sense of personal achievement, and is a source of prestige within a group by being the best. Being able to play with, and subvert pre-programmed rules is considered a valuable asset in Indonesia. In a country that lived under the strict rules of New Order for 32 years, challenging boundaries is considered cool. Katz and Aakhus aptly summarize the 'folk framing' (popular discourse) of the mobile phone, which applies every bit as well to Indonesia. "Individuals who master these devices are shown as people who control their destiny" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002: 7).

In a cat-and-mouse game hackers attempt to circumvent limitations imposed by manufacturers. Each software update closes security holes, after which the challenge starts again. The way a particular iPhone crack was announced is a fine example of the multiple dimensions of *agôn* playfulness. On December 31 2008 the iPhone Dev-Team put up a picture of a cryptic looking object with the word *grail* on their website's front page, accompanied by the text "The Dev-Inci Code: your iPhone will never be the same" [219]. The team of 'Devs' (developers) made a humorous reference to a globally

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[216] The daily caring routine of connecting the phone to the battery charger even gets a medical connotation in the colloquial Dutch expression "to give the phone intravenous therapy" (De mobiele telefoon aan het infuus hangen).

[217] Source: Indonesia Handphone #51 2007, p. 76.

[218] Source: Kompas August 6, 2007 p. 33.

[219] Website at http://blog.iphone-dev.orgs, accessed December 31 2008; see also this blogpost at: http://www.mobilecrunch.com/2008/12/31/iphone-dev-team-posts-cryptic-message-what-are-they-up-to/.

recognizable symbol of puzzle and mystery, the tremendously popular book "The Da Vinci Code" by Dan Brown. The announcement was accompanied by a blogpost containing nothing but ones and zeros (01110110 01110100 etc.) [220]. Geeky readers were instantly able to recognize this as binary code and transpose this into ASCII text: *vtaber 61060174*. Then they would have to find out that this apparent meaningless message was a simple cryptographic puzzle according to the most common key ROT-13 (each letter rotated 13 times). This yielded *ignore 61060174*. The original blogpost URL had a similar string of numbers in it (67687499), which had to be substituted with the new one. And behold, a page appeared with the text "The man from DelMonte - He say Yes! [sic]", with an image of two cans of Delmonte pineapple with labels "sliced/crushed PWNAPPLE", and unlocking instructions for the iPhone [221]. To be *pwned* is gamer and hacker jargon for being completely defeated or loosing control over one's machine, and Apple of course is the iPhone maker that tries to keep its product tightly sealed like a tin can. The Dev-team had created a cryptic puzzling game wrapped as an intricate nerdy joke full of metaplay to show off they had skillfully beaten Apple. Or at least this round...

Finally, the mobile phone plays a role in agonistic conflict situations. Many studies find that a large segment of the population find other people's ringtones and calling in public annoying (although in my experience this is less so in Indonesia) (De Gournay, 2002: 198-200; Gopinath, 2005; Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002: 97; Monk, Fellas, & Ley, 2004; Puro, 2002: 24; Various, 2006). Public space has become an arena for contesting norms about proper behavior starring the mobile phone. In Japan, older men have lost hegemony over the streets to high-schoolgirls, who engage in '*nagara* mobilism' (Fujimoto, 2005: 80-81, 86). This is a very visible mobile phone culture that has incubated among young girls, and is spreading to people in their thirties and forties. It involves "using the mobile phone while doing something else", like walking, bicycling, taking the train, and so on [222]. This new mode of behaving outdoors has lead to a generational conflict between young and old (ibid: 80-81, 86). In some cases the mobile phone is used to coordinate protests and mobilize large masses against political regimes, in what Rheingold calls "smart mobs" (Rheingold, 2002).

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[220] Source: http://blog.iphone-dev.org/post/67687499.

[221] See: http://blog.iphone-dev.org/post/61060174.

[222] Interestingly, this often mentioned 'casual' use of the mobile phone stands in stark contrast to McLuhan's view of the fixed telephone as demanding our full attention and involvement of the senses (McLuhan, 1994: 295-296).

5.2.3 Mobile alea: fate, chance, and surprise

Alea chance is completely opposite to *agôn* control over one's destiny. The mobile phone inserts a strong element of the unexpected in everyday life, because of the slumbering potential to be summoned at any moment. Chance and surprise also exist in our relation to the artifact and the network. It will be familiar experience for many: a phone that loudly rings in an awkward situation, an incoming call at an inconvenient moment, a text message about something you'd rather not know, a battery that unexpectedly goes flat, sudden loss of connection during an important call, an application that stops working. Research has shown that many people experience uncertainty and loss of control over life as a downside of the mobile phone's potential for limitless communication and liberation from spatiotemporal constraints (e.g. Katz & Aakhus, 2002: 8; Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002: 99-100). Chance need not be seen as negative only. We have already discussed mobile *alea* in the Indonesian practice of beautiful numbers (*nomor cantik*). As described in *chapter 3*, many Indonesians place high value on lucky telephone numbers in the hope that this brings them fortune. Of course they know that rationally speaking this is nonsense. Yet still... Mobile *alea* can also been seen in the popularity of mobile phone lotteries. Indonesia's largest telecom operator regularly publishes page-wide advertisements in newspapers and magazines promoting lotteries. Prizes include automobiles, cash money, laptops, and new phones. Another type of mobile *alea* in our relation to the device is what Katz calls "random reinforcement". Like gamblers, 'CrackBerry' addicts keep checking their phone day and night for new messages in a constant crave for the occasional reward (Economist, 2008). In this case *alea* chance approaches *ilinx* thrill-seeking. We return to the aleatory experience of mobile communication in section 5.4.

5.2.4 Mobile mimicry: creativity, pretense, fun; and the conditional order

Mimicry involves the creation of illusory make-belief. A focus on the phone as artifact shows how it acts as a stage prop, and is tied to local situations and physically co-present others. Let us take look again at Bateson's threefold scheme of communicative messages: (a) messages that say something; (b) messages that simulate to say something; (c) frame-setting messages that enable the receiver to discriminate between a and b (Bateson, 1972: 146). On a superficial glance Bateson's scheme appears to presuppose two ontological dimensions: (a) the real as truth, and (b) the illusory as false, with messages of type (c) as a way to distinguish between these domains. This is highly problematic, as we will see below [223]. On closer inspection, we

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[223] The issue resurfaces in the final chapter, where I criticize Ricoeur's narrative identity theory for being founded on an ontology of truth.

see that Bateson's scheme only pertains to the level of discourse, not ontology. It does not say anything about a reality apart from how we communicate about it. Bateson's scheme fits in a longstanding tradition of understanding 'social reality' as made up of collaborative illusions which we treat *as if* they were real, and therefore are real in their consequences [224]. Social cohesion, national identity, public life, and so on, are "imagined": based on our shared beliefs in made-up rules and symbols that come into being through communicative interactions. For founding sociologists and anthropologists like Durkheim and Van Gennep, shared beliefs become 'social facts' through communal ritual interactions: special events with a 'liminal' status that are separate from ordinary life. Symbolic interactionists like sociologist Goffman recognize the ritual qualities embedded in everyday interactions. For him there is no 'real' or ordinary beyond the illusory. Or more precise, that which we call the real is constituted by the make-belief we all continuously create through every day play-acting (for a discussion of ritual, social interaction and the mobile phone, see Ling, 2008: ch. 3 and 4).

It is a widely accepted view - and close to a truism - to say that even on level (a) - the level we usually think of as 'reality' - we are all players who collaboratively create one big social game of make-belief according to rules arising from our interactions. The mobile phone then has become a new prop in everyday play-acting. Dewi, whom we met in chapter 3, said she uses her Walkman phone in public transport to avoid talking to strangers. Appearing occupied with one's personal device in public situations is a commonly understood avoidance ritual that indicates one wishes to be left alone. Sadie Plant describes how women in several cities use their mobile device "as a phone-shield against unwanted attentions" (Plant, 2001: 62). Businessmen reported to her that they use their phones to deliberately absent themselves from their environment and keep other people at bay. One entrepreneur said: "[i]f I arrive at a meeting where I don't know anyone, I play for time and composure by doing things with my mobile" (ibid: 62). Ling describes how women who arrive early at a bar alone and do not wish to be chatted up by anyone sit down and take out their phone. Often this is enough to ward off others. In these examples mobile mimicry does not consist of communication *through* the phone with distant yet familiar people as members of what Goffman calls the 'team', but of communication *with* the phone in front of physically present strangers as 'audience'. In play with the mobile the materiality of the artifact matters for the situated performance. While the aim is avoidance, it *is* a communicative type of social interaction. As Ling notes: "[t]he pose of using a mobile phone is a *request* for civil inattention" (Ling, 2008: 106, my emphasis). By using headphones instead of the

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[224] What is known as the 'Thomas theorem' in sociology upholds that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (see Merton, 1995: 380).

phone speaker, by not setting the volume too loud, by being careful not to come too close to others while making a call; people *show* that they acknowledge the presence of others. From these examples we see how rules come into being through mimetic interactions. Nowhere is it written that one cannot talk to someone wearing headphones or fiddling with the mobile phone. Nor are there clearly spelled out social sanctions for a breach of this rule. People imitate each other in using such strategies - and inversely in leaving such a person alone - and this turns into generally accepted practice (and real in its consequences).

If mimetic play on level (a) involves more or less unconsciously playing along with the make-belief that constitutes social life by imitating others, level (b) involves a deliberate mirroring of 'the real world' by creating illusions. Traditionally, play is understood on this level as the opposite of reality. Sadie Plant describes how people use the phone in play-acting:

> Some mobile users tend to make a virtue of the lack of privacy, enjoying and exploiting the presence of third parties as a unique opportunity to put something of themselves on display by **stage-phoning**. On a train, for example, a mobile can be used as a way of broadcasting a great deal of information to a pretty much captive audience. In some contexts, even the presence of the mobile can be used to inform the audience that this is a person with a life, a person of the mobile world.
> (Plant, 2001: 49)

The Swedish children who play 'cops and robbers' pretend to be real cops and robbers. Absorbing as such games can be, no one involved would take them for actual cops and robbers. The boundary between play and reality is clearly demarcated. Surely the children realize that real cops and robbers do not chase each other armed with mobile phones (or are ten to twelve years old). The fun is derived from creating this shared illusion: a mobile phone that could be gun, a teammate who could be a cop or a robber. Under the influence of various media something odd happens with this referentiality of the play world to the 'real world'. Presumably, these children have never seen a 'real' robber, or many policemen in active chases, except on television as actors who play cops and robbers. This is a perfect illustration of Baudrillard's idea of the 'simulacrum'. Media images generate illusions that refer to one another ('simulacra') instead of referring to an 'original' based in reality. The circular movement of self-referential illusions that imitate other illusions constitutes a 'hyperreal' (Baudrillard, 1994: 1-3, 79-81; De Mul, 2010: 136). Baudrillard identifies three steps in this increasingly self-referential process of mediatization. First, media communicate about reality. We now learn what actual cops and robbers look like. In the second

intermediary phase, media start to represent reality rather than merely referring to reality. In McLuhan's dictum "the medium is the message" (Baudrillard, 1994: 81-82; McLuhan, 1994: 7). In this phase not just children but 'real' cops and robbers too start to act like the cops and robbers they see in the media [225]. Third, media generate reality to the extent that there is no reality outside of the media sphere. We can no longer speak of 'real' cops or robbers. These roles are completely absorbed by media representations that refer to other media representations. All acting refers to other acting.

Simulacra cast doubt on the ontological separation between reality and illusion. If there is no longer an original reality to which mimetic play refers as pretense, what is the basis of distinguishing between (a) messages that say something, and (b) messages that simulate to say something? What separates play from non-play? If everything is pretense can we still make a meaningful distinction between (a) and (b) at the discursive level? Yes we can. Meta-communicative frame-setting messages of type (c) provide us with cues about the conditions under which something is communicated. They enable us to distinguish *this is play* from *this is not play*. Or do they? We have seen how in Indonesia white-collar workers ostensively flaunt their mobile phones while walking in and out of the office building to convey an image of being a successful businessman or woman. They queue up in front of the Telkomsel help desk to pretend they are important customers. Ling notes that women sometimes pretend to make a call when they feel intimidated, for example when alone at night in the city (Ling, 2004: 44-45) [226]. In these examples, people deliberately try to erase the boundary between (a) and (b). They pretend that what is communicated is real, while knowing it is not.

There is thus play that clearly announces itself as play, and play that intentionally tries to erase the line between play and not play. Should we add another type of message to Bateson's scheme? If frame-setting (c) messages enable us to distinguish between (a) and (b), messages of type (d) would mask the distinction between (a) and (b), by pretending to be (c). Such messages can truly be called illusions in the etymological Latin sense of *in-ludere*, against play or 'counterplay': a play with the rules of play. Now consider a Jakartan businessman who wants to use his handphone when he walks out of the office. He knows that there are people who use their handphone to pretend they are businessmen. He must find a way to act like a businessman so as not to appear like someone who *acts* like a businessman and tries to make his acting not look like acting... An infinite regression of self-referential meta-communicative play looms, in which acting increasingly refers to other acting instead of

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[225] Examples abound of such feedback loops, like 'real' criminals who adopt nicknames from Hollywood gangster movies.

[226] Something I have also heard in informal conversations with Dutch women.

an original. But now we are relapsing into the ontological view of reality versus illusion. This problem of regression only occurs when we look at the status of communicative messages on their own, as little packets that ideally unambiguously transfer information from A to B. If we look at the situation as the unit of analysis the problem vanishes. For the outcome of the situation it does not matter whether women alone on the streets at night make real or fake calls. However 'phony' the act, it works for them. The sense of security it brings to women is very real. And it deters others. Only if others do not find the performance believable it fails. Pretense runs the risk of failure:

> Calls can be invented for the purpose, in which case the mobile can communicate even when it is not in use. On the elevated train in Chicago, a young man talks on a mobile in some style. He's discussing an important deal and at the same time trying to impress a group of girls in the same part of the train. It all goes well until disaster strikes: his phone goes off and interrupts him in mid-sentence, and his fictional deal is exposed. At least the mobile itself is quite real: several young men in Peshawar talked of friends - never, of course, themselves - who had carried fake mobiles for these purposes of performance and display.
> (Plant, 2001: 49)

These then are two radically different perspectives: an 'inside' view in which the ontological status of the message is interpreted as either real (and thus true) or illusory (and thus false), and an outside view in which the ontological status of the message is completely irrelevant and only looks at what the message *does* for the overall situation. For the first the 'real' is a fact, for the second the 'real' is an effect. If the first sees communication as action, the second sees communication as *interaction* (and even assumes that all communication is pretense). How are these perspectives connected? In my view it is unnecessary to capture regressive meta-play in message types of their own. Bateson himself points out that in more complex (c) type frame-setting messages the assertion "this is play" can also be inverted: "is this play?" (Bateson, 1972: 141). Both messages aimed at distinguishing real from illusion *and* messages aimed at masking belong to type (c), as do all the regressive meta-communicative messages. Bateson's frame-setting messages exist in the *conditional order*. They set the conditions under which a performance can be believed or not, irrespective of whether the messages are real or pretense. They create the conditions for *believable* communication: to be accepted or rejected *as if* real in its consequences. They also set the boundaries for any other variant of communication: for a message to be debunked as pretense, to be mistaken for real or pretense, to be believed despite knowing it is not real, to be seen as incredible even while knowing it is real, and so on. In this conditional order frames are both set and questioned. Like play necessarily involves

metaplay in order to recognize it as play, communication as interaction requires meta-communication. People must identify a threshold and step over it. Should I believe what she says? Mobile phones foreground this conditional order. In physically co-present interactions they are props used in intricate games of make-belief. As communications media in distant interactions they lack visible informational cues. This foregrounds the need to establish shared conditions for believable communication, as we will see further on. Play on, play with, and play through the mobile gravitate towards the edges in the setting and questioning of frames. Mobile media interactions invite boundary play. In section 5.4 we see how the media at large increasingly draw us into this conditional order, and what the implications for identity are.

In summary, the mobile phone increases the number of situations and range of possibilities for play-acting; media in general create simulacra that destroy the referential nature of play-acting as the imitation of real world roles; communicative interaction more and more takes place on meta-communicative levels; our awareness of these processes feeds a frame of mind in which one constantly doubts the status of communicative interaction: *is this play?*

5.2.5 Mobile ilinx: disorientation, thrill-seeking, and escape

Caillois describes *ilinx* (vertigo) as destroying the stability of perception. It involves a shock-like alteration of the sensory perception of reality, often through movement (Caillois, 2001: 23-26). The mobile phone contributes to sensory alterations in what can be called mobile *ilinx*. People often use their phone as a Walkman during travel or while waiting. Listening to music is a way to alter one's perception. In part, this is a willing sensory deprivation of environmental input. One can block out other people's conversations, and to a degree stop paying attention to the environment. In part, mobile *ilinx* is also about the augmentation of experience. Listening to music adds an extra aural layer to the experience of traveling (Bassett, 2005; Bull, 2005). Michael Bull describes how users of iPods dwell in their own privatized sound 'bubble' and get an "illusion of omnipotence" (Bull, 2005: 175). One respondent says she feels "as though I can part the sea like Moses"; another respondent says "I feel like I'm the star of my own personal movie, strutting along to the theme song of the moment"; while someone else says "I see people like I do when I watch a movie... there is a soundtrack to my encounters... music to accompany my thoughts about others. It dramatizes things a bit, but it fills the silent void" (Bull, 2005: 175). Similarly, making photos and videos with the mobile phone can alter one's sensory perception of the environment. *Shoot-n-Share* (2008) is a documentary made by two students at the Erasmus

University Rotterdam, Lieke van Pruijssen and Bieke Versloot [227]. It portrays five inhabitants of the Dutch city Rotterdam and their relation to the mobile phone camera. Thom and Osama are two young guys (both 16) who get kicks from exploring exiting urban places and filming each other [228]. At some point they film each other while trespassing on a building (a hotel or office under construction?). In a quasi-spontaneous way they prowl around the corridors, pushing elevator buttons, and looking for thrills. All of a sudden one yells: "this is definitely going to be on Youtube!". They interweave their perceptions of physical space with the perspective of performing in an online Youtube video. Their 'immediate' actions in the here and now are already filtered by the camera and the online sharing platform. They are looking upon their own actions as if they were acting in a Youtube movie. This also goes for another participant in the film, Hans, who confides that normally he is very shy. When he uses his mobile phone camera he dares to take pictures of the "small things that you suddenly notice". For both Thom and Osama, and for Hans, the mobile phone camera is a protective shield as well as a lens that opens up new perspectives on the physical environment. Capturing the city in pictures or video adds an extra dimension to moving through the city. First it puts a lens in front of people and the environment, a layer of mediation that uses the visual language of movies and photographs. Second, it enables people to look back almost immediately on what has just been experienced. The experience of a city through the camera acquires an additional reflexive layer. It enables people to distance themselves from their own immediate experience by viewing it again through the eyes of a bystander, like an being an audience to their own actions. These examples therefore involve a generous dose of *mimicry* as well: imagining oneself playing in a movie or as having superpowers.

Sensory stimulation and giddiness most clearly occurs in what can be called informational *ilinx*. The mobile phone is part of a whole array of media that continuously beckon us into distractions. Digital media technologies offer a dizzying array of possibilities for temporary ecstasy. Whirlwinds of datastreams on the flickering screen, rapidly alternating pixelated images, thuds and squeaks of digital noises, the endless oceans of texts and images and video; this vast digital world all accessible in only a few clicks. New media offer a sensation of total access to the world - or is it escape from the world? - sitting on top of the world - or being abducted by it? We can totally lose ourselves in the sensory overload of constantly being in touch, constantly acting and reacting to new informational stimuli. This is digital vertigo. According to some psychiatrists, ADD (attention deficit disorder) is the new medical condition of

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[227] Watch the movie at http://www.archive.org/details/DocumentaryShoot-n-share.

[228] See the following Youtube accounts: Osama (osama015) and Thom (jump266); together they operate under the nick osamathom1991.

today (see De Mul, 2008: 181). We are not good at multitasking but increasingly have to, both for work and in our free time. Why do people find this tsunami of media impulses so attractive? Why do people keep their mobile phones on 24-hour a day? Why do people put their phones next to their beds, even take the phone to the toilet (and often drop it in the bowl)? Why can't we just pull the plug? I believe the answer is the attraction of distraction: escapism in mobile *ilinx*.

One of the shortcomings of narrative identity theory is that it ignores how we relate to the medium itself (argued at greater length in section 6.1). By contrast, the point of 'play with the mobile' is to show that we not only relate to the world, others, and ourselves, *through* technologies as media, but also relate to media technologies themselves as artifacts. Our relation with mobile media is a playful one. As artifacts, mobile media technologies are not fixed entities but can be continuously adapted in what Woolgar calls 'interpretative flexibility'. They open up a playspace in the subjunctive mode for a potentially infinite range of creative interpretations and alterations. A mobile phone *might* be used as a telephone, obviously, but also as a sexual toy, a bomb detonator, a torch light, a beer bottle opener, an object in throwing games, and so on. Engaging with the artifact is not merely an instrumental means but a self-rewarding end in itself. Tweaking and hacking the mobile phone becomes an *autotelic* activity. Still, technologies at the same time are 'scripted' and 'designed'. In the chapters about the mobile phone in Indonesia we have seen the forces at play prescribing that people should relate to the artifact as emblems of modernity [229]. Play with the mobile opens up a view on ourselves as beings who play. Mobile technologies are great playmates, for children and adults alike. Competition, chance, creative tinkering, role-playing, and sensory delusions are part and parcel of everyday life. We not only relate to the world by telling stories about it. We also interact with the world through play.

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[229] Again, this is not meant to suggest that production is pure force and consumption is pure freedom. Items may be designed for openness; users may exert force on each other through sedimented practices.

5.3 Play through the mobile

On the third level, 'play through the mobile', we look at the playful qualities of mobile technologies as communications media. Caillois' play types again shine through. To avoid repetition I choose to focus on one overarching type of play through the mobile: mobile exchanges in gift circles [230].

5.3.1 From Kula to mobile gifting

A gift never comes for free, Marcel Mauss says in his classic cultural-anthropological essay *The Gift* (Mauss, 2004) [231]. The exchange of gifts is a type of symbolic economy (ibid: 94). Gift giving abides by three rules: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate (to give in return). Initiating a gift is an invitation. It opens up the possibility for an enduring relationship of exchange. The exchange of gifts serves to strengthen the bonds between individuals and groups. We recognize the same principle in mobile phone use. In France managing one's telephone number is guided by trust and expectations of reciprocity (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001). This stimulates the formation of social ties between people who answer and call often. "Reciprocally, the mobile phone becomes a token of trust; its distribution is a small-scale pragmatic drama in which the status of social bonds is renegotiated and forms of trust asserted" (ibid: 102).

Mauss draws inspiration from another classic work, Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 1984) [232]. Malinowski describes the Kula, an elaborate system of exchange amongst the Trobrianders who inhabit a range of islands in the western Pacific Ocean. Trobrianders exchanged necklaces and armbands made from rare shells. With specially adorned canoes Trobrianders took off to other islands often far away (the Kula ring was more than 150 miles in diameter; ibid: 82). The tradition of Kula was separated from regular barter that took place in the wake of these expeditions. Kula exchanges only took place between acquaintances who already had a bond. In mobile phone communication we see that the majority of exchanges occur between people who have an intimate relationship, like friends, family, and romantic relations. "The mobile phone is the tool of the intimate sphere", Ling notes (Ling, 2008: 159). The Kula followed asymmetrical circular patterns. Shell necklaces circulated between islands in clockwise direction and armbands in counterclockwise

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[230] A longer version has been published in Dutch as "Geven en Nemen: mobiele telefonie als giftcultuur" (Giving and Taking: mobile telephony as gift culture) (De Lange, 2008).

[231] Originally published in 1924.

[232] Originally published in 1922.

direction (Malinowski, 1984: 93-94). Circular exchange patterns can also be discerned in mobile phone practices. Teenagers in South Korea collectively read and compose messages and circulate chain messages amongst themselves (Yoon, 2003: 337). Asymmetrical exchanges occur in communication between young people and their parents. Often the parent calls first or suggests to call the child back in order to save costs. Between partners it is customary that if one leaves the home, he or she will be the one who keeps the other informed of his/her whereabouts. Even among young people asymmetrical gifting occurs, as Taylor and Harper observe (Taylor & Harper, 2003). A British girl contributed £5 to the call credit of her best friend's younger brother. She wanted to maintain a good relation with her best friend, and this implicated being nice to her younger brother (ibid: 277-278).

Trobrianders attached hierarchies to Kula objects and told mythical stories about their perilous journeys through tempests and rough seas. Malinowski writes: "each one of the first-class arm-shells and necklaces has a personal name and a history of its own, and as they circulate around the big ring of the Kula, they are all well known, and their appearance in a given district always creates a sensation" (Malinowski, 1984: 99). Via the mobile phone people frequently tell little stories ('micro-narratives') by exchanging 'objects' such as photos, text messages, MMS, voicemails. People give each other solidified experiences of special events, meaningful memories, and intimate emotions. Telephone conversations between intimates are often ongoing stories. These refer to earlier conversations both partners remember. Just like the unique character of Kula objects lay in their names and in their histories of who possessed them, mobile gifts derive their unicity from the personalities of the giver and receiver. What's more, the message in its original form is not only the carrier of meaning but the meaning itself. Simply copying a received text message into another form (e.g. by jotting down the message as a note) robs it of its symbolic meaning (Taylor & Harper, 2003: 273). Mobile exchanges often have a ritual character. Their meaning is not just expressed by the gift, or by giver and recipient, but through the giving: the ceremony that accompanies the exchange. According to Taylor and Harper, the ordered exchanges of goodnight messages between friends or lovers have a ceremonial quality. "Sleep well my love" messages go back and forth. They express intimacy and a wish to be close to each other. The end of the exchange is postponed with each new message. This act expresses attachment and commitment. Through the observation of ceremony, the exchange of messages that in themselves are quite mundane is charged with symbolic power. The ceremony becomes ritualizing "insofar as it results in the meaning of the message being thereby altered in ways that give it semi-sacred values" (Taylor & Harper, 2002: 441).

According to J.L Austin's speech act theory, all communication is performative. An utterance consists of the meaning of what is said (locutionary act), the function of what is said to achieve some goal (illocutionary act), and the effects of what is said upon the listener (perlocutionary act) (Austin, 1962: esp. 94-107). Many researchers of mobile communication point to its 'phatic' function (Fortunati, 2002b: 516, 523; Green & Haddon, 2009: 48; Haddon, 2000: 5; Licoppe, 2004: 148; Ling, 2008: 153; Rettie, 2008: 299). In the words of Leslie Haddon, "the point is not so much the message but the gesture of getting in touch" (Haddon, 2000: 5). Not surprisingly, the notion of performative "phatic communion" as "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" actually was formulated by Malinowski in an article that appeared one year after his major work on the Kula exchange (Malinowski, 1923: 315). In *Argonauts* Malinowski already pays attention to the performative power of linguistic formulas that were spoken in Kula exchanges. He notes: "[t]he native is deeply convinced of this mysterious, intrinsic power of certain words" (Malinowski, 1984: 451). In his ensuing article, he argues that an "utterance has no meaning except in the *context of situation*" (Malinowski, 1923: 307). Language in its written form is a "mirror of reflected thought", whereas in its "primitive uses" language "is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection" (ibid: 312).

The idea of communication as situated performance is fodder for two main strands of critique I direct at Ricoeur's narrative identity theory in the final chapter. For Ricoeur, narrative is primarily a medium for (self)reflection. It stands in a referential relation to everyday actions and events, and represents people's identity. He pays no attention to actual situations and conditions under which people are telling stories, and the role of performative utterances. Furthermore, Ricoeur is exclusively concerned with the temporal dimensions of identity (how can we retain permanence in time). He neglects the spatial dimensions of identity. How are identities shaped by, and constructed in contextual settings, and by movements between these settings? Ricoeur's narrative identity theory focuses on the *content* of stories, at the expense of the *context* of storytelling. In phatic mobile communication, what matters is not just *what* is told, but *that* something is told, and *how* it is told.

Gifting also serves to emphasize status differences. Gifts are used as weapons in *agôn* rivalries. The more one gives away the greater the status. When the other can no longer meet the obligation to reciprocate he has lost (Mauss, 2004: 50-55). This aspect of rivalry has also been observed amongst British teenagers. They engage in the to-and-fro sending of text messages, whereby neither one is supposed to give in:

> The exchange processes - the to and fro of text messages, along with other
> phone-mediated rituals of exchange - provide a backdrop to the plays and

counter plays of rivalry and the organisation of rank, or status, accomplished by performances of particular kinds. The gift, with its embodied meaning - the text message, the call, etc. - and its value are thus a means of demonstrating positions of rivalry and status.

(Taylor & Harper, 2003: 284)

Malinowski pays a great deal of attention to hierarchy and status rivalry through gifting. Valuable objects gave the owner, often a high-ranking chief, great status. More ordinary objects were exchanged between sub-ranking helpers. A similar status differentiation exists in the geography of communicative exchanges. Kate Fox describes how gossip dissemination via the mobile phone is based on reputation, which itself is a product of reciprocal praise and judgment. We rather chat with someone who is a "good gossip" (a predominantly female skill, Fox adds) (Fox, 2001). Fortunati suggests that calling someone directly on the mobile phone can be an expression of power, especially when the fixed home or work number is knowingly bypassed. In doing so, people are "shifting the center of communications gravity in their favor" (Fortunati, 2002a: 53).

Kula gifts derived their significance and value from continuous movement. Only by being giving away, the gift gave off its value to the giver. The former possessor might have been left empty-handed in a material sense, symbolically he had become a richer person. After a limited period, usually a year or two, Trobrianders passed on the necklaces and armbands to exchange partners on other islands. Keeping an object to oneself for too long - and thereby out of the moving circle - was seen as ill mannered (Malinowski, 1984: 94). Similar rules apply to mobile phone gifting. Young people consider the continuation of the gift circle vital. Norwegian teenagers who don't reply a text message after a certain time fall "out of circulation" (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 151-152). Teenagers in South Korea who ignore other people's calls are "chewing out", which means they are not reciprocating in time. They risk receiving less calls and messages and consequently lose popularity. Ignoring someone may also be consciously employed in status tactics. The person that is being "chewed out" often suffers from a loss of self-worth (Yoon, 2003: 338). Proximity and distance matter too. In France it has been observed that people who live geographically separated make fewer calls yet twice as long as people who live nearby (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002: 105). Like the Trobrianders, they reserve the most precious and rarest gifts for people farthest away.

Trobrianders wore their Kula necklaces only at very special occasions. Armbands were too small to be worn even by children (Malinowski, 1984: 87-88). Why did the Trobrianders attach so much value to objects they hardly ever used? Man, Mauss concludes his essay, is no utilitarian *homo oeconomicus* who defines value purely as use value (Mauss, 2004: 98). Gift giving is not a classic economic transaction in the

sense of redistributing scarce goods. Nor can the gift be understood as a mere token or sign representing something else, for example as a sign of intimacy between people. What makes the gift special is that it is infused with the personality of the giver (ibid: 16, 79, 99). Gift giving, according to Mauss, is a 'total phenomenon' that pierces the boundaries between economical, religious, social-structural, aesthetic, and juridical domains (ibid: 49).

5.3.2 Types of mobile gifts

When does it make sense to speak of gift exchanges in mobile communication? Obviously, instrumental uses of the mobile phone - calling an information number, ordering a pizza, making a business appointment - bear little qualities of ritual gift exchanges. In such cases, the service is provided *outside* of the exchange of the message and exists solely in the economic domain. Further, it does not matter who the giver and recipient are, as a totally different person can deliver the same service. Moreover, the communicative exchange is oftentimes limited to only one conversation without any expectation of a continuation. Mobile gift exchanges therefore must comply to three conditions. First, the form of the exchange has the shape of a self-contained circle in which people exchange messages. Second, gifts have an intimate character, that is, the value and meaning of the gifts does not lie in a material value of the object itself but in *who gives* and *who receives*, and how the gift is ceremonially 'wrapped'. Third, the communication must be infinite, principally without closure. It must invite ongoing exchanges and commitment. We now analyze types of mobile gifting in finer detail.

i. Giving a mobile phone

Parents often give their children a mobile phone when they reach a milestone in life, like the transition to high school. Kyongwon Yoon describes how South Korean parents or uncles give children a mobile phone when they think they are old enough for it (Yoon, 2003: 335). The gift is not just the phone itself, but the expression of the parent's trust that the child will be able to stand on its own legs. Yet there are no free gifts, as Mary Douglas aptly captures Mauss' point in her introduction to the 1999 revision of *The Gift* (Mauss, 2004: ix). A gift implies the reciprocal obligation for the child to take more responsibility. The mobile phone underlines the transition to a new stage in life. Indeed the giving of a mobile phone may occur ceremonially. For example by at once solemnly *and* teasingly handing over the mobile phone, declaring that from now on the child must take responsibility ("now you have to pay your own bills") and at the same time poking fun of his new status ("that'll mean some extra paper rounds").

It is a modern-day 'rite de passage'. With the transition to adulthood comes discrete ownership over things (Nafus & Tracey, 2002: 213). To possess is to be able to give away. To own a mobile phone is the first step into participating in the game of gifting.

ii. Giving mobile phone numbers

Most people do not give out their number to anyone. They tend to be slightly apprehensive in giving away (and receiving) phone numbers, especially a mobile phone number. As already said, in France managing phone numbers involves trust and expectations of reciprocity (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001: 102). There are again cultural differences. As noted before, this apprehension is less pronounced in Indonesia, where young people are quite eager to share their phone numbers for instance via print weeklies. It has also been observed in Jamaica in the practice of 'link-up', whereby people actively aim to extend their social networks and quite unproblematically exchange phone numbers with strangers on the streets (Horst & Miller, 2006: 89-91). In any case, exchanging phone numbers is an opening gift that creates the possibility to forge a deeper social relationship.

iii. Sharing the mobile phone

Among teenagers it is common practice to share mobile phones when one has no more calling credit. Amongst Korean kids it is considered not done to refuse someone the use of one's phone (Yoon, 2003: 337). Adults tend to do this less, presumably because they often have post-paid subscriptions. Still, they too may admiringly play with a new device offered for show by a friend, colleague or family member. The mere touching of each other's mobile phone is a very intimate act. It is important to keep in mind the performative charge of such gifts. As is observed among British teens, "it is not merely the object of exchange from which the meaning originates, but also its role in the ceremonial exchange itself" (Taylor & Harper, 2003: 290).

iv. Sharing mobile phone content and context

By far the most important type of gifting is sharing content. People show each other text messages, let others listen to voicemails, share (self-made) ringtones, photos, videos, and other files, play little games together, listen to music together on one headset or in groups over the mobile phone speaker. Sharing through the mobile phone can occur directly from device to device or via the internet. It occurs between people who have a special relationship with each other. As said, what matters is not solely the content itself but the context that is established through the sharing. Gifting is ritualized and conforms to the rules of reciprocity. People who share their pictures

with someone expect to see someone else's photos in return [233]. The mobile phone offers a wide range of channels for communication: voice calls via either GSM or CDMA networks or voice over IP (VoIP) calling; text messages (SMS), either by phone or via some free or paid web service; multimedia messages (MMS); mobile email; instant messaging (IM) and chatting (IRC); peer-to-peer messaging like Bluetooth. Each type of communication has its own affective connotations and is used in specific contexts. Calling is very direct and personal but may also appear pushy. A text message is less direct and often more playful in character by making creative use of language and smilies. Many Indonesians for instance feel that they can say more via SMS, since it is less direct. This range of options poses a considerable burden on the giver to choose the appropriate carrier as a 'gift wrapper'. The next challenge is to pick the right words and use the right tone. Moreover, the gift has to fit in the short-term or long-term micro-narratives that are spun by earlier exchanges. By no means should we forget to inform how the job application went, or if last weekend's flirt worked out or not. Like a physical present, the gift succeeds when the recipient feels that the message is the result of the giver's thorough care and reflects the personalities of both giver and receiver. The right gift balances between anticipation and surprise ("I was hoping you would call"), between recognition and originality ("that's so you!"). What counts as its 'perlocutionary force' is that the message conveys: "it is only me who could have said this right now to you". This fits with Leslie Haddon's argument that people have become "communication managers" who have to make complex decisions in managing their "communications repertoire" (Haddon, 2005: 7, 16). From this observation, it is not a big step to liken the decision-making process to a strategic game. The goal in this game is how to best address someone, or - inversely - how to best avoid someone we don't want to talk to. Haddon notes that managing the communications repertoire does not always run smoothly. People may have different expectations as to how they should be contacted. There might be differences among the generations, or other social variables like class and gender (ibid: 16). Failures can occur in mobile gift giving. Receiving a template message with standard content ("the answer is YES") is like getting an unwrapped box of chocolates grabbed from the supermarket shelf. It carries no personal value. Especially when the preceding message was carefully composed this can be met with disappointment. It is not an equivalent exchange. Taylor and Harper found that teenagers attach a relative hierarchy to communication media. Messages should be reciprocated with ones approximately equal in value, but not the same. To

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[233] While in online environments the obligation of reciprocity might be less strong, it does occur in the exchange of computer game tips (Sun, Lin, & Ho, 2003) or in open source software development (Bergquist, 2003).

answer a personal text message that is sent via the phone by sending a text message via a free web-based service ("powered by Yahoo") is seen as cheap and an affront (Taylor & Harper, 2003: 283-284).

Gifting practices create ties of intimacy and an imagined sense of co-presence. Text messages are used to 'play' with distant friends and simulate co-presence (White & White, 2005: 7). Several researchers focus on how creative expressions using the phone's multimedia capabilities establish a sense of proximity (Hjorth, 2007; Ito, 2005; Koskinen, 2005; Rantavuo, 2007; Villi, 2007). Sharing an ongoing stream of photos from an individual point of view with a handful of close friends or intimate others supports what Ito calls 'intimate visual co-presence' (Ito, 2005). Along similar lines, Mikko Villi argues that exchanging mobile phone photos via MMS (multimedia messaging service) creates the illusion of spatial and temporal immediacy (Villi, 2007: 322-323). Again, communication establishes shared context, not just content.

Exchanges also occur within calls. Emanual Schegloff analyzes how 'opening sequences' in telephony are rule-based rituals in which each party takes turns in speaking (Schegloff, 2002a: 289; 2002b: 326). An asymmetry exists in calling. The caller knows who he is calling but the recipient does not. Therefore the answerer is allowed to speak first. Schlegoff observes that people play identification games when they make a telephone call. People prefer to be recognized over having to identify oneself. This often leads to elaborate guessing games and giving little clues. People sometimes cheat. They claim recognition where none occurs (Schegloff, 2002a: 292). Recipients can also use Caller ID to neutralize the asymmetry in calling. Callers then might use Caller ID blocking as a counter-measure (ibid: 293). The mobile phone offers even further possibilities for restoring symmetry in this recognition game. Most phones enable people to group their contacts in categories (friends, work, favorites), assign specific ringtones to people, or automatically divert calls to voicemail. These can be strategies to cope with the invasion of a mobile phone call. I want to underline that such little games are not necessarily meant to find a static equilibrium between caller and recipient. That would close the exchange. Communication between intimates should always leave openings for future contact. Mobile communication has been noted to bear the quality of an ongoing conversation. Formal openings and closures are often bypassed (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002: 106; Ling, 2008: 120; Schegloff, 2002a: 284-285). Like traditional gifting it is infinite and perpetual.

Language games are an important aspect of mobile communication. We have seen the example of Dewi's text message in *bahasa gaul*. Such language games mark the boundaries of who is in and who is out. The mobile phone both blurs boundaries (work-leisure, public-private, distant-present, etc.) and aids in erecting new ones. Taylor observes that talking about the mobile phone can be a strategy to turn attention

away from more awkward topics (Taylor, 2005). Similarly, Ling notes that teenagers in Norway talk about the phone to set a boundary around a particular topic, as if to say let's stick to this safe subject (Ling, 2008: 97). Young Norwegians developed a temporary fad for using pidgin Swedish (ibid: 130-131). They use ever-changing slang language as a boundary marker to define membership of the peer group (and inversely who does not belong to the group). Oddly, they sometimes use longer words, or words that are more difficult to type: *tsjenara* instead of *hei* ("hi"); *krämmar* as a deliberate misspelling of the Swedish *kramar* ("hugs"). Ling concludes that the teenagers trade in writing efficiency for more complexity and more ritually involved words (ibid: 131). Adding to this conclusion, I suggest that such practices can be seen as an example of what Clifford Geertz calls 'deep play'. Deep play means deliberately making activities or events more difficult ('deep') in order to add drama and importance and to set them apart from normalcy (Geertz, 1975a). Through deep play people construct their identities. Enlarging the importance of particular aspects of life is a meta-social commentary that allows people to interpret themselves. It is "a story they tell themselves about themselves" (ibid: 448). Group identities are shaped in this play through the mobile.

Gifting often involves exchanging jokes and laughing together. Since its inception, the telephone has been a rich source for humorous play. The fixed telephone initially was used more for entertainment and communal participation than for business, writes McLuhan. He recalls a joke of the early days whereby people would ring their friends, identify themselves as an engineer, and say "cover up your phone, we're cleaning the lines" (McLuhan, 1994: 297). Sociologist and historian of the telephone Claude Fisher describes how the landline was used (mainly by women) in non-functional ways, which outsiders (mainly men) considered 'frivolous' or 'trivial' (Fischer, 1992: 78-81, 234). Koskinen and Battarbee study the use of sound in mobile media use (Koskinen & Battarbee, 2006). They find that joking makes up a large portion of people's MMS messages (multimedia messaging service). Participants were given MMS enabled phones and started to send each other weird sounds, like cries and laughter. This happened especially in the beginning when people were experimenting. "In particular, one man, Mara, became an expert in sending odd cries and sounds to others, including mimicking hens, pigeons, ostriches (!), and pigs, as well as introjections of various sorts" (ibid: 2-3). Ling too pays considerable attention to exchanging jokes via the mobile phone (Ling, 2008: 135-148). He considers humor a ritual form of interaction with multiple functions. "Humor, joking, and repartee engender social cohesion, help in integration and in-group identity, provide insight into the exercise of power relations and repair work within groups, and mark group

boundaries" (ibid: 136). Sometimes however joking can turn into bullying. There are stories abound of especially young people who use their mobile phone to harass their peers or others [234].

5.3.3 Differences between old and new gifting

Mobile gifting underlines the ritual character of a large part of mobile phone communication, that is, communication between intimates [235]. It underlines that mobile media communication does not destroy former ties but to a degree 'restores' pre-modern small-scale sociability [236]. Of course this is not a return proper to any previous situation. Mobile gifting differs from traditional gifting. First, the frequency of exchanges is much higher. Trobrianders only set out in their canoes once a year. Research from Finland shows that young people expect someone to reply a text message within 15 to 30 minutes. Longer is not acceptable and considered rude (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002: 186). In Victor Turner's terms, traditional cyclical gifting ceremonies were occasional 'liminal' inversions of everyday life, whereas mobile gifting are ongoing 'liminoid' everyday rituals. Traditional gifting took place in spatiotemporally segregated zones. Mobile gifting often takes place during otherwise lost in-between moments that fold into the ongoing stream of everyday activities. A few minutes wait on the train, a brief pause between classes; these otherwise wasted moments are optimized to do some 'social motor maintenance'. Traditional gift ceremonies were public and the stories about legendary Kula objects were publicly shared. Mobile gifts sometimes are being made public too, for instance shared via 'web 2.0' platforms. But most of the time the content remains hidden, and the activity of gifting itself tends to be done inconspicuously and secretively. Young people in particular appear to consider it a challenge to use their phone in clandestine ways: during class, in the cinema, after bedtime (in the context of romantic relations, see Ellwood-Clayton, 2003: 234). Moreover, mobile gifts often consist of words, images, and memories that are meaningless for most people except for the people sharing them. This fits with the post-modern idea that meaning and values have become highly subjective, and that broadly shared 'grand narratives' lost their attraction.

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[234] News media have paid a great deal of attention to the stupid fad 'happy slapping'. A random bystander is smacked while filming with the mobile phone camera, and this footage is shared online.

[235] Research about the landline telephone similarly shows that "half of the telephone calls from any given residence go to only five numbers, indicating that repeated conversations are held with a small circle of friends and family" (Fischer, 1992: 225-226).

[236] Several authors point to this apparent inversion of Tönnies' classical characterization of modern society in terms of a transition from *Gemeinschaft* ('community') to *Gesellschaft* ('society') (Ling, 2008: 186; Nyíri, 2003a: 13; Pertierra, 2005: 28).

As seen, Caillois calls play unproductive, "creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, *ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game*" (Caillois, 2001: 10, my emphasis). This is untrue for mobile gifting (and arguably for any game). With each exchange a transformation occurs. Schechner notes of gifting rituals: "[n]ever is a balance struck, because balance would threaten an end to the obligations, and this would lead either to war or a stale peace. As long as the obligations are intact the social web transmits continuous waves of paybacks throughout the system" (Schechner, 2003: 124). Each new exchange strikes a new actuality. Mobile communication is a perpetually moving circle, an 'infinite game' that needs constant care and attention.

In conclusion, what is playful about mobile gifting? There are a number of game elements in mobile gift exchanges (*ludus*). It is rule-governed, it creates order, it has competitive dimensions, it tends to be shaped like a closed circle (a circle of intimacy) that includes familiar people and wards off outsiders who are not (yet) gift partners. Mobile gifting's rule-governed interactivity - people must answer in time to a call or text message - bears the quality of game rather than a narrative, although little narratives occur *in* gift exchanges. Mobile gifting at the same time bears elements of free play (*paidia*). It is not goal-oriented but an end in itself, it involves ongoing to-and-fro movements, and humorous joking, and opens up room for creative expressions and experimentation. Contrary to games where the reward exists outside of the activity, in mobile gifting the reward is the ongoing exchange itself. Mobile gifting is *autotelic*: it is not a sign or symbol that refers to-, or represents something else, but a phatic performance that points to itself. Mobile gifting is an 'infinite game' (Carse, 1986). Gifting opens up a perspective on the apparent triviality and lack of coherence in mobile communication exchanges. From an outsiders perspective other peoples' mobile conversations seem pointless, like any play or game ultimately is pointless as long as one is not playing. These messages acquire their meaning only to those inside the circle. Not just as messages that say something, or pretend to say something, but as messages that enable people to articulate the conditions of their relations to others. Mobile communication's 'phatic' performativity is a showing of a doing.

5.4 Play by the mobile

While technological progress *as a whole* continually narrows our sphere of freedom, each new technical advance *considered by itself* appears to be desirable. Electricity, indoor plumbing, rapid long-distance communications . . . how could one argue against any of these things, or against any other of the innumerable technical advances that have made modern society? It would have been absurd to resist the introduction of the telephone, for example. It offered many advantages and no disadvantages. ... [A]ll these technical advances taken together have created a world in which the average man's fate is no longer in his own hands or in the hands of his neighbors and friends, but in those of politicians, corporation executives and remote, anonymous technicians and bureaucrats whom he as an individual has no power to influence *.

* Since many people may find paradoxical the notion that a large number of good things can add up to a bad thing, we will illustrate with an analogy. Suppose Mr. A is playing chess with Mr. B. Mr. C, a Grand Master, is looking over Mr. A's shoulder. Mr. A of course wants to win his game, so if Mr. C points out a good move for him to make, he is doing Mr. A a favor. But suppose now that Mr. C tells Mr. A how to make *all* of his moves. In each particular instance he does Mr. A a favor by showing him his best move, but by making *all* of his moves for him he spoils the game, since there is no point in Mr. A's playing the game at all if someone else makes all his moves.

The situation of modern man is analogous to that of Mr. A. The system makes an individual's life easier for him in innumerable ways, but in doing so it deprives him of control over his own fate [237].

In the essay *Industrial Society and Its Future* (1995), better known as *The Unabomber Manifesto*, the current technological condition is described as the antithesis to human freedom. The writer is 'neo-Luddite' Ted Kaczynski, a former assistant professor in mathematics at the University of California, also known as the Unabomber [238]. He was not your average guy. Between 1978 and 1995 he sent mail bombs to random people working at universities, airlines and in computer businesses, killing three and injuring 24. The ideas voiced in the Unabomber Manifesto are radical but by no means insane. They express a broadly felt sense of powerlessness and loss of freedom as a result of technological changes.

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[237] Source: the Unabomber Manifesto, paragraph 128 and footnote 21: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Industrial_Society_and_Its_Future.

[238] The Luddites were a early 19th century movement of textile workers who destroyed weaving machines in protest against the mechanization brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

In this section I investigate how mobile media technologies as part of 'the media' at large induce a sense of 'being played'. We are not univocal masters over our information and communication technologies. Mobile media also impose their logics on us in a dialectic between freedom and force. This dialectic already occurs on the other play levels. When we start playing on the mobile we are impelled to play on because of its inbuilt reward system, its 'immersiveness', and/or because of social obligations to our co-players to continue. Play with the mobile can turn into a burdensome competition of continuously increasing personal prestige. And play through the mobile gets us inextricably caught up in reciprocal networks of gift exchanges from which it is hard to escape. Still, I choose to analyze 'play by the mobile' as a distinct level. The primary reason is the commonly voiced ambivalence towards mobile phones and media technologies in general. They bring new freedoms *and* impose new burdens. This deserves separate treatment to underline that the heuristics of play is not all about emphasizing the expressive freedom and joyous creativity of digital media as 'technologies of freedom' (Pool, 1983), but just as much about understanding their sometimes brutal force. It connects to the old discussion in science and technology studies between technological determinism and social constructivism. Many theorists have sought to overcome this dichotomy. The fact is that this tension remains alive and kicking in laymen views. I propose that the pair free play and game act as a lens that is less categorical in separating and opposing the technological world from the human world. 'Play by the media' looks at media *as culture*. It shows how media logics and our own play attitudes are intertwined. Media both restrain and enable. As code- or rule-based games they set boundaries and stakes (*ludus*). As playspaces they open up room for free play (*paidia*). Playful identities emerge in this dialectic of freedom and force.

Mobile media technologies are tied up with other media technologies: the internet, television, various printed media, and even with literature and poetry. In the chapters about Indonesia we have seen that mobile media cannot be understood on their own. With the notion of 'media convergence', Jenkins convincingly argues that it is no longer useful or even valid to speak of old and new media as distinct domains (Jenkins, 2006). The present media landscape has become a hybrid blend of mass media, print, and various ICTs. In this section I address 'media' in a broad and interrelated way as media culture. This involves the risk of saying unspecific things about 'the media' in general. To avoid this I shall make clear at each point what medium or media I talk about.

5.4.1 Tyrannies of choice and speed; colonization of private and public life

The mobile phone presents us with new choices. Too much choice becomes a burden. Barry Schwartz calls this "the tyranny of choice" (Schwartz, 2004). As we have seen, Haddon argues that we have become decision managers who must cope with the complexities of mobile communications technologies (Haddon, 2005: 7, 16). The mobile phone confronts us not only with more but also with new choices. Should I get a mobile phone? What type? How should I customize my phone? Should I use it only for functional calls or also to socialize? Should I use the phone in the presence of other people? In what situations should I put it on silent? Is it OK to substitute a personal visit to someone with making a call? How often should I call my parents? Should I call/text/send an email? Is this place or event worth taking a snapshot of? Should I just watch and listen to an artist performing in the here and now, or should I record it with my phone to share it with others elsewhere and for a later time? Should I ask for directions to someone on the streets or should I look it up on my GPS-enabled smartphone with navigation software? Should I be available for work during holidays? And so on, and so on. Such choices are not limited to specific situations. They continually 'flash up' as aleatory (chance) moments, because we take our mobile phones everywhere and cannot anticipate if and when we will be confronted with them. As a result, the course of everyday life must be managed like a strategy game. It demands of us to make real-time decisions at every junction in order to get a grip on the chance moments. We are forced to play [239].

Mobile phones and other ICTs lead people to experience a speeding up of life, *ilinx* sensory confusion, and a sense of powerlessness. This is not a recent phenomenon. Speed and the disruption of traditional structures and experiences were central themes in commentaries on early modern society. Early modern societies were characterized by an emerging metropolitan life in the fast lane, and the rise of space-time transcending transport and communication technologies. We have seen how Benjamin characterizes this mediated urban life in terms of rapidly alternating shock experiences. A few decades later, speed became a crucial notion for McLuhan. His analysis of electronic media revolves around the question how quantitative factors cause qualitative changes to occur (McLuhan, 1994). The speed of electronic media would lead to acceleration, intensification, and separation of commercial and political functions, and eventually cause an implosion of old structures like the city (ibid: 103, 106). In the same vein, Virilio argues that the logics of speed of electronic media lets real time prevail over the real space of the city, and adds: "the more speed increases, the faster freedom decreases" (Virilio, 1986: 142). Townsend claims that the mobile

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[239] Even saying no to the mobile phone is a reactive decision to avoid playing this game, with social ostracism as a potential result. Those who fear cellphone tower radiation will find it is almost impossible to escape.

phone speeds up the 'urban metabolism'. This makes decision-making and management of everyday life more complex and less predictable (Townsend, 2000: 89). For Meyrowitz, the speed of electronic media has made physical, social, cultural, political, and economic boundaries more porous (Meyrowitz, 2003: 97). All these authors express the idea that speed not only liberates us from old spatiotemporal constraints but also destroys old structures and certainties, and makes life more complex. Digital ICTs further add some extra gears to society's speedy 'machinery'. While speed thus is an old theme, it seems no coincidence that presently slow movements ('slow food', 'citta slow', 'slow living') are gaining in popularity worldwide. This may well be interpreted as a reaction to the broadly felt tyranny of speed 'caused' by omnipresent technologies. One of the main proponents of the slow living movement, Carl Honoré, explicitly mentions information- and communication technologies as one of the contributing factors in a rushed life, without however rejecting them [240]. That indeed seems the challenge: by maneuvering between embracing and rejecting technologies, we are forced to reflect on our engagement with them.

Mobile phones are associated with loss of both privacy and publicness. Many feel that the invasive character of mobile communication and concomitant intrusion on privacy is a serious downside of the mobile phone (although less so in Indonesia than in many western countries). Individuals have nowhere to hide from the all-hearing ear of their bosses, spouses, family members, friends. People can ring in at any moment. Deciding not to answer may lead to suspicions and provoke anger. Commercial sales calls provoke rage, even more on the mobile phone than the fixed line. In his investigation of mobile messaging in China as a means of control, Jack Qiu aptly calls the mobile phone a 'wireless leash' (Qiu, 2007). Licoppe notes how the mobile phone ringtone "summons us" to react, and can be a threat to our 'face' in the presence of other people (Licoppe, 2008). Simultaneously, many feel that the mobile phone also usurps the public domain. Annoying ringtones and private talk in public situations disrupt the level playing field that makes up the 'commons', the spaces and places that belong to us all [241]. In Japan, making voice calls in public transport is seen as poor manners. People usually comply with this social norm (Matsuda, 2005: 23-24; Okabe & Ito, 2005: 205). In many other countries the rules are not so explicit, or people refuse to act in accordance with such rules. In a survey among New Yorkers, Kathleen Cumiskey finds that bystanders who hear other people calling feel "annoyed, disturbed,

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[240] See http://www.carlhonore.com/?page_id=6.

[241] Or the spaces that belong to none of us. The omnipresence in our present urban landscapes of what Augé calls 'non-places', places without history or identity, may take away a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Not technology on its own 'causes' the destruction of public space. It is embedded in the broader make-up of urban societies, I would say.

angry, disrespected, and ignored" (Cumiskey, 2005: 229). People experience "a sense of powerlessness", and feel "trapped" in the position of onlooker or even "voyeur" (Cumiskey, 2005: 230). In public situations people are forced to play the role of audience and listen to someone else's performance. Both bystanders and the person who is called in public can feel overpowered by the situation. In a UK study about the impact of receiving phone calls while on the move, Ann Light finds that many people panic and get the sense of "being moved about". They must "juggle" the phone to maintain a balance between the contemporaneous physical situation and mobile communication (Light, 2009: 201-202). In her view, the mobile phone is "penetrative" as much as it is an enabling device (Light, 2009: 197). One person's liberty forms another person's shackles.

5.4.2 New power mechanisms: from surveillance to sousveillance, identity profiling

The mobile phone is a tool for surveillance. In the Netherlands, the police have more than once obtained mobile phone numbers from telecom providers to use them for 'SMS bombardments' in order to find perpetrators of soccer hooliganism. In one case, 17.000 people who had been near a stadium in Rotterdam between certain hours received a text message in which they were asked for cooperation [242]. Other mobile technologies like RFID-based public transport cards are frequently associated with loss of privacy, surveillance issues, and state control.

The mobile phone induces a new type of surveillance that is often called 'sousveillance' (Mann, Nolan, & Wellman, 2003). Citizens are no longer monitored from above by institutions and the overarching state authority, but from below by their fellow citizens. Armed with mobile phone cameras and internet connections people record and upload any breach of social norms. A notorious case is the "Korean Dog Poop Girl". A woman who refused to clean up her dog's excrements in the subway was filmed with a mobile phone camera. After the film was put online many people started recognizing her. She was repeatedly humiliated both online and in physical encounters, and reportedly quit her studies [243]. In Indonesia, compromising footage shot with mobile phone cameras and spread online resulted in several public sex scandals. Sousveillance is the inverse of the singular and central all-seeing eye of the panopticon, a circular prison architecture with guards in the middle and inmates around the edges. Michel Foucault adopted this concentric architecture as an image to depict how institutions (the family, the school, the workplace) in 'disciplinary societies' keep

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[242] This outraged the Dutch movement for digital civil rights Bits of Freedom, calling it "unlawful and immoral". See http://www.bof.nl/docs/opiniesmsactie.pdf (in Dutch).

[243] See http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/06/AR2005070601953.html.

subjects in tightly controlled spaces of enclosure (Foucault, 1995). The *possibility* of being monitored enforces a self-disciplining in individuals. Gilles Deleuze observes a transition from a 'disciplinary society' to a 'society of control', where it is no longer clear to which institution the prying eyes belong (Deleuze, 1990). Deleuze suggests the rise of a new type of subject. We no longer are disciplined as integrated individuals whose numerical bodies are fixated though the visible monitoring inside institutional confines. Instead we are being controlled by many invisible computerized systems that turn us into mobile 'dividuals' who exist only as traces of code in databases [244]. Control via (mobile) media is an invisible distributed multiplicity, a networked force in which we are implicated as both *surveillant(e)* and *surveillé(e)*.

All mobile phone users unwittingly scatter informational traces. While not paying particular attention to issues of surveillance, Mimi Ito *et al.* observe that people leave various informational 'footprints' in particular locations via portable informational objects, like mobile phones, laptops, RFID-based chip cards and credit cards (Ito, et al., 2009: 79). This happens in customer transactions and by participating in loyalty schemes. Ito *et al.* describe footprinting as "the process of integrating an individual's trajectory into the transactional history of a particular establishment, and customer cards are the mediating devices" (ibid: 79). Mobile media are not just communication technologies that we use for intentional utterances but also information technologies that work in the background and collect data about us. Often without us knowing what, where it goes, and for what purposes it is used, let alone knowing how to control it.

These notions - society of control, footprinting - point to the emergent dominance of informational database systems in a wide range of transactions, not just in the economic domain but increasingly also in the social domain. The database narrows 'identity' to 'identification' in order to allow or deny access to certain services or people. It reduces a rich understanding of identity to a mere set of preferences. Only if we are identified as loyal customers can we get a discount. Similarly, online social media platforms are coded spaces that define us by our personal tastes and attributes: our date of birth, relationship status, religious views, brands we like, groups we join, and so on. These are stored as database entries (and/or browser cookies). These entries are data-mined, and used for targeted advertisements. For online businesses such databases are valuable assets to draw in other users and reach critical mass, and thereby increase their shareholder value and potential takeover revenue. Even our utterances on such platforms become database entries that can be aggregated for

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[244] This perspective stands in contrast to the views of Beck and Giddens, who (still) think of late modern "risk society" in terms of an opposition between institutions and individuals (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991: 15).

economic profiling and social profiling [245]. Other people believe they can 'read' us by browsing back through our collection of entries. In fact many organizations skim social network profiles before hiring new employees. What's more, others have the power to 'write' us without us always being in control over what is written. They can post messages about us or add party pictures tagged with our name. Just one password unlocks access to our online personae, with sometimes dramatic consequences when malevolent others get their hands on this 'identity'. Even if we actually can delete unwanted entries (many of which we don't know exist), they still exist as indelible traces in search engine caches. All this leaves us at the mercy of forces beyond ourselves. As argued in the previous chapter, we are less and less the sole keepers of our public selves. We increasingly drift away from ideals of being autonomous creatures shaped in rational deliberation (see Gergen, 2000: 156). In truth, we have never fully been in control of our public image. Goffman keenly observes a fundamental asymmetry between performers, who engage in 'impression management' by communicating information about themselves, and audience, who witness the performances of others (Goffman, 1959: 2, 7). Performers are only in control of the impression they give, not of the impression they unintentionally give off. The audience sees both. Media technologies - online social media in particular - contribute to further entropy in identity management. Not only do we have less overview of who the audience are, that is, who have access to our performances, we often do not even realize that we are giving off information in the first place via 'footprinting'. This makes it much more difficult to manage our public selves. From our earlier discussion of Goffman's theatrical view of social interactions we concluded that identity is not a property, something we are or have, but a verb, something we do. We are not simply a static collection of attributes but continually engage in dynamic interactions with other people, the world, and ourselves. Our identities emerge from these relations. These two sides of mediated identity - the profile versus the performance - stand in diametrical opposition. Sure, we can use digital media to play out ourselves in creative expressions and ongoing interactions. At the same time the media play trickery on us. We are lured into believing that technologies and online social networks offer a 'free' (as in both speech and beer) play space for 'doing' identity, while their underlying logic is one of categorizing us (and selling us) by our informational profiles [246].

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[245] In this context, De Mul writes that our present age is ruled by a 'database ontology' (De Mul, 2009: 6).

[246] These social networks are frequently called 'walled gardens'. Inside one is free to move. But getting information out (or oneself) is hard.

Is there a way out? We can trick back. Performers may decide to mislead their audience. They can pretend to give off impressions while it is actually an intentional performance (ibid: 2). Not being truthful is an intrinsic aspect of our everyday performances in Goffman's view. It is a way to restore the symmetry of the communication process and reinstate control over our self-impressions. All of us engage in an "information game - a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery" (ibid: 8). When we feel played by the media, deceit is the main tactics at our disposal. And indeed we often cheat and lie online as a way to deal with privacy protection [247]. People are fairly good at recognizing cheating by judging the conditions of the storytelling, whereas machines and databases are easily fooled. Crucially, people often do not mind each other's cheating under the condition that the frames for interpretation are communicated [248]. The ubiquitous smiley wink ;-) for instance indicates we should take what is being said not too literally. In the context of mobile phones, Horst and Miller observe that in Jamaica women often give out false telephone numbers to men approaching them on the streets (Horst & Miller, 2006: 91). In my interpretation, men probably realize that this happens but prefer taking a false number than being truthfully told "no". In the tension between the profile and performance, cheating is a play with the conditions of truth and veracity. Still, as databases become connected and online and 'real life' increasingly intermingle, old habits like adopting separate online personae are much harder to maintain. Little lies are more easily exposed. And so the circle moves on: the more we become ourselves online the less we are in control over our selves.

This touches on a problematic aspect of Ricoeur's narrative identity theory. Ricoeur tries to combine two modalities of our existence: the causal order of sameness (the factual 'truth' of our temporal permanence) and the interpretative order of selfhood (the truthful fictions we tell). These orders correspond to Bateson's (a) type messages that say something about the causal order, and (b) type messages that simulate to say something and work in the interpretative order. In our current media world we are increasingly burdened with the difficult task to manage the variety of contexts for storytelling. Narrative identity theory lacks a framework for understanding under what circumstances people tell certain stories (or distance themselves from their own stories). Narrative identity theory has no eye for the everyday tactics people

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[247] This point is made by Genevieve Bell in a keynote talk at PICNIC 2008 in Amsterdam. See this report: http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2008/09/25/picnic-08-secrets-and-lies. It is also a central finding in the research of behavioral economist Dan Ariely, who finds in experiments that most people cheat, but only a little (Ariely, 2008: 201, 213).

[248] In the Netherlands people started swapping out supermarket customer cards (Albert Heijn bonuskaart) needed for discounts as a way to protect their privacy by corrupting the database. Few people would regard those engaging in this rather innocent deceit as intrinsically untrustworthy liars.

employ to manage their identities in the contemporary struggle between profile and performance. The conceptual pair game and play by contrast does offer this perspective. Mediated storytelling situations are shaped by the tension between ascribing profiles to people in coded game spaces (*ludus*), and the room for explorations and self-descriptions in free play (*paidia*). I propose that a theory of playful identities focuses on the conditional order - the (c) type messages - under which we communicate and convey impressions. This offers plenty room for deceit, and failure, in technologically mediated identity constructions and performances.

5.4.3 Ontological doubt and ludification: between cynicism and engagement

Information- and communication media dissolve the ontological boundaries between reality and imaginary fictions, as we have seen in the discussion of Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum. Media events refer to one another instead of to an external reality. We are lulled into believing that events have taken place in the way they are represented. Yet a nagging doubt remains. We are not sure whether events portrayed in mass media or online media are real. Moreover, we cannot ascertain whether events are portrayed truthfully. Illustrative of this point is Dutch journalist and writer Joris Luyendijk's account of his experiences as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East (Luyendijk, 2009). The redaction of the Dutch national television news regularly summoned him to a location where an incident had occurred. The criterion for newsworthy events is not some objective universal measure, Luyendijk says, but depends on how a region or country is 'framed' in the media landscape. Most of the time, Luyendijk himself was oblivious that anything had taken place nearby. The redaction would brief him about the occurrences with information they acquired from other news agencies. Then he had to present this 'breaking news' on the spot in front of the camera as if he had been an eyewitness. While he probably was the least informed link in the chain, his physical proximity became the measure of truthfulness of the media report. Luyendijk's account reveals something many people instinctively feel (and what by now is almost a truism), namely that mediatized accounts of the world 'cheat' us into a sense of reality. This raises fundamental doubt not only about reality itself, but also about the truthfulness of accounts of reality. We have become skeptical about narratives that claim verisimilitude [249].

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[249] Crises in narrative legitimacy have been declared on a macro-level in 'the end of grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984); on a meso-level in the general distrust of expert institutions and knowledge systems (Giddens, 1991) and of mediatized information (Baudrillard, 1994); and on a micro-level in the erosion of the classical narrative as a means for self-understanding (De Mul, et al., 2005; Maan, 1999).

We live in a ludic culture fueled by media technologies (even leaving aside the tremendous share of obvious playful programming in various media: games, quizzes, contests, comedy, cartoons, satire, and so on). Frequently, media do not even pretend to be 'serious' in their presentations. Truthful accounts of 'real' events are presented as play. In their formats and ways of (re)presentation media - particularly television - tend to ludify the seriousness of domains like politics, business, law, and so on. A few days after Obama was elected president, CNN show *Political Mann* assessed the extent to which he had been truthful to his electoral promises. This was done with an 'Obameter', an animated caricature of Obama with his arm as an arrow on a scale from false to true, and making funny cartoonish noises. The sheer quantity of media channels and information people digest makes it increasingly hard to achieve impact. To make an item that resonates it has to be distinct from all the other expressions. Play and games are a fathomless vat of inspiration. Of course play has never been away in any of these 'serious' domains. Huizinga shows that culture is playful in origin (the play element *of* culture, not *in* culture). Huizinga's analysis of the playful origins of the judicial system, war, education, and arts, was innovative because it brought back to attention what had been deliberately forgotten, in the process Weber famously terms the disenchantment of the modern world. In order for modern bureaucratic institutions to 'work', boundaries had to be erected between work and leisure, between seriousness and fun, between real and only play. Present-day media representations thrive on playing with these boundaries. Present ludification highlights play elements *in* these 'serious' domains.

The following example illustrates this. On December 19 2008 the entire cabinet of prime minister Yves Leterme in Belgium stepped down as a result of scandals surrounding the Fortis bank takeover [250]. After the sale of the bank was announced, many private individuals were left with virtually worthless shares and rose to court. It was discovered that the government, who had agreed to the merger, had tried to influence the outcome. The prime minister had been in touch with the spouse of one of the judges. She had leaked information about the proceedings of the case via her mobile phone. With this information the prime minister had briefed government lawyers about a defense strategy. The mobile phone also played a crucial role in live reports of the ensuing events on national television. The government was summoned to the parliament and the minister of justice resigned. It remained uncertain what Leterme himself was up to. In front of the camera a member of opposition wondered why he had not yet received a text message announcing the resignation of Leterme. A journalist appeared on screen. He declared that he had received an SMS from an

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[250] This description is largely based on a television program by Dutch actuality program Nova on Friday December 19 2008, in turn largely compiled from live reports by Belgium national television VRT1.

"exceptionally dependable source", claiming Leterme had proposed the resignation of the whole government. Only a few minutes later he reappeared. Glancing at his mobile phone he withdrew his earlier statement. With an ironic smile he concluded that different political parties were "spinning" this issue by sending text messages to journalists with their own version of what is going on. A television commentator noted: "if it weren't so dramatical, we could call it a soap". Later the journalist reappeared and once more said that from an "exceptionally dependable source" he had received a text message. Glancing at his mobile phone, he started to read it aloud with an official-sounding voice, stating that the entire government had offered their resignation to the Belgium king. The commentator remarked: "the Belgium government crisis unfolds by SMS". Later she called the affair a "Shakespearian drama". The director of a Belgium newspaper later repeatedly used this term "Shakespearian drama" in a television commentary. This case shows how mobile phones were used to blur boundaries between separate worlds and uncover and report backstage affairs. More important for my argument here, the mode of storytelling represented these events as a "Shakespearian drama" and "like a soap". The real-time updates, the intrigue and sudden plot changes, the multiple elements involved in compiling a story together from fragments, the joyous thrill in revealing secrets, the unreliable story-teller and broken claims to truthfulness, the exposure of trickery and double roles among those on pedestals; politics was turned into media theater to be consumed for amusement rather than to be taken as truthful.

The question I like to pose is who are actually being played? Obviously in the Belgian case, politicians and media reporters were 'playing' each other through mobile and mass media. But in the end it is the audience who are played. Sure, the ludification of 'serious' events by media is pleasurable for the viewer. But only for so long. It provokes a craving for ever-more impulses in a cycle of gratifications and boredom [251]. More importantly, these are becoming confusing times for the construction of identities through mimesis. When so many of the potential role-models we see in the media are turned into caricatures, puppets, actors in dramas, 'simulacra' without originals; not only what they represent (politics, judicial system, business, academia) is taken less seriously and delegitimized, it also raises the question how we ourselves can become 'authentic' persons. In narrative theory it is clear that protagonists in stories are fictional characters. Emplotment is a structure that, unlike life, has a clear beginning and closure. And the mimetic process of applying narrative to life connects the two separate worlds of history and fiction. In contemporary media however, these boundaries are continually moved, inverted, and transgressed. Apparently in relative safety, and with little consequences for viewer or reader. After all, it's only

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[251] Gratification is well-known concept in mass media research (for instance Blumler & Katz, 1974).

television/the internet/the movies. Yet ludic representations in the media world come to serve as blueprints for how we understand the world in playful terms: the theater of politics, the judicial circus, the president as a cartoon figure. Postmodernists may embrace this blurring of boundaries as a liberation from the modern imperative of clarity and clear-cut categorizations, and essentialist categories and power structures. Yet how can we escape from lapsing into perpetual irony or even cynicism, when the artificiality and mobility of boundaries and play elements *in* 'serious' institutions is continually 'exposed'? Can we avoid putting all our utterances in brackets and quotes ['like this'], suggesting it may be otherwise? Marxist critical thinker Paolo Virno strongly phrases this issue in his essay *The Ambivalence of Disenchantment*:

> At the base of contemporary cynicism is the fact that men and women learn by experiencing rules rather than 'facts' … Learning the rules, however, also means recognizing their unfoundedness and conventionality. We are no longer inserted into a single, predefined 'game' in which we participate with true conviction. We now face in several different 'games,' each devoid of all obviousness and seriousness, only the site of an immediate self-affirmation - an affirmation that is much more brutal and arrogant, much more cynical, the more we employ, with no illusions but with perfect momentary adherence, those very rules whose conventionality and mutability we have perceived.
> (Virno & Hardt, 1996: 16-17)

In fact, isn't the ludification of culture by the media a corruption of play? One argument for this is economical. Media enterprises draw play into the economic domain, commodifying not goods but 'memories' [252]. Jeremy Rifkin argues that the movement from industrial capitalism to cultural capitalism entails a shift from a work ethos to a play ethos (Rifkin, 2000: 260). He worries that the commodification of cultural experiences undermines the *status aparte* of free pure play as the nurture bed of culture (ibid: 263-264) [253]. Another argument is cultural. Exposing the play element *in* 'serious' institutions is not a rediscovery of their play origins but in fact a denial. Sennett describes a transition in the identities of 'public men' like politicians (Sennett, 1974). In the middle of the 18th century public figures in European cities presented themselves in public wearing a figurative (and sometimes literal) mask. Public mimicry through clothing and speech underpinned an emerging split between private personality and public social identity (ibid: 62, 70, 73). In the *theatrum mundi* (world as

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[252] Pine and Gilmore call this the 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 100).

[253] Others are less pessimistic. Jenkins observes the rise of a participatory media culture where the means for producing culture are no longer monopolized by corporations but increasingly accessible to active consumers (Jenkins, 2006: 169). Still, he adds, this participatory convergence culture can lead to agonistic struggles over authorship and ownership of cultural productions between corporations and consumers.

a stage), it was accepted that public man as actor was detached from his act (ibid: 107-108). In the 19th century personality entered the public realm. People became increasingly interested in the private lives of public figures. They were now believed and invested with authority based on their expressive personalities (ibid: 195-196, 211). This was a de-masking of public man as a facade, and an erasure of the boundaries between public roles and private life (ibid: 211-212). Current ludification deliberately 'exposes' the play element *in* politics. This results in the utter denial of the play origins *of* public roles. The public no longer accepts the masks of politicians. They must appear in silly shows 'as themselves'. At the same time the public expects them to be flawless 'real politicians', not actors. Selfhood is equaled with sameness: public role and private personality must be identical.

Ironically, adopting a playful stance towards the media is a tactics to deal with the ontological doubt media sow, and the ludification of representations. William Stephenson writes in *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (1967) that all media constitute play forms (Stephenson, 1967) [254]. On the one hand, mass media offer people pleasure in 'subjective play'. They allow individuals to temporarily escape social control (ibid: 1-2). On the other hand, and crucial for the point here, people must approach media with a certain disinterestedness (Stephenson sees disinterestedness as one of the characteristics of play). This way people can distinguish between imaginary and real events (ibid: 150, 192). A similar argument is made by John Fiske, who says that children explore the distinction between real and symbolic content on television through play, and satirize representations they identify as not real (quoted in Lister, et al., 2008: 300). The dialectic between freedom and force in 'play by the media' again emerges. *Nolens volens* we are forced to adopt a disinterested playful stance towards sometimes terrible events on our screens. Earthquakes, disasters, death; in order to maintain our sanity we must understand these events as occurring *in* the media as a realm apart from everyday normalcy. In this perceived borderless media world it is us who must erect the boundaries. The more we use the media to engage with the world, the more we must shield ourselves by taking a playful attitude towards the media. But it is hard work. In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, deaths of known or even unknown people highlighted in the (mass) media draw huge numbers of people to online condolence registers. Events happening *in* the media seep through the porous borders. It indicates a strong urge for *religare*, reconnecting, and sharing experiences *through*

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[254] See also Kücklich, 2004: 8; Sutton-Smith, 1997: 145.

the media to counter this disengaged stance [255]. It is a declaration of engagement: "I care". We are caught up in a self-perpetuating moving circle of cynicism and engagement. We must play.

5.5 Conclusion: conditional play

On this perhaps somewhat bleak note we return to the mobile phone. In what is now often called 'media literacy' or 'media wisdom' people are impelled to critically question the conditions under which media communicate events. A focus on the conditional order of media representations also occurs in mobile communication practices. Interaction via the telephone involves fewer visual or other sensory cues than in face-to-face interaction. This makes it more difficult to establish trust and manage the presentation of self. Mobile communication involves an ontological play with the boundaries of reality. People must imagine a real conversation. They must suspend their disbelief and create a sense of intimate co-presence and synchronicity out of a low fidelity distant voice. Mobile communication also involves negotiating believe in the truthfulness of each other's presentations. People compare the consistency of answers to the opening question "where are you?" with actual background noises (Licoppe, 2004: 137, 147). 'Frame-setting messages' are exchanged that indicate the status of the call, and that reaffirm relationships by referring back to previous calls in 'summon/answer sequences' (Schegloff, 2002a: 289). Notions like perpetual contact (Katz & Aakhus, 2002), connected presence (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001), hyper-coordination (Ling & Yttri, 2002), lightweight interaction (Ito in Ling & Pedersen, 2005), and so on, all describe the phatic quality of mobile communication, whereby people continuously reassert trust and intimacy. Mobile communication thus foregrounds questions about its own mediation. It revolves around the frame-setting messages in the conditional order. In the final chapter it is argued that narrative, as employed by Ricoeur, does not take this reflexive stance towards the medium and the mediating process into account. The objective is to integrate the play perspective that

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[255] On the 'linking value' of products and services in general as a reincarnation of ritual and religion, see Cova, 1997: 301; and specifically about the mobile phone, see Ling, 2008.

has been developed and applied in our analysis so far with narrative identity theory. To do so, we must first identify the weak points in narrative identity theory and establish the contribution of the play perspective.

6. Conclusion. Playing the self: narrative and playful identities

6.1 What narrative does not tell: play critique of narrative identity theory

This concluding chapter consists of two sections. In the first I look at a number of weak points in the theory of narrative identity itself, and maximize the distance between narrative and play. To make this section more than a critique for its own sake, I formulate maxims for a theory of playful identity along the way based on narrative theory's shortcomings. In the second section I attempt to modify narrative identity into a theory of 'playful identities' by making an inverse movement back to narrative through the lens of play.

6.1.1 Narrative's closed circularity and sedentary ethics

Ricoeur's narrative identity appears to be a theory that allows for changing identities. Narrative identity rejects fixed essences but is constructed in a continuous oscillation between the poles of *I* versus *me*, *idem* versus *ipse*, and *oneself* and *other*. Self-interpretation via the mimetic cycle is never completely finished but continuously remade and reapplied to one's own life. Temporal permanence is a fragile situation, always under siege from discordant events. We constantly alternate between innovation and sedimentation. We tend to stabilize and solidify ourselves, yet there are always events that impel us to innovate and renew ourselves. We look back on our past and apply it to our present situation, and to carve out future directions. Similarly, we fit present actions and events in our past through the story. "[I]n narrativizing character, the narrative returns to it the movement abolished in acquired dispositions, in the sediment of identifications-with" (Ricoeur, 1992: 166). Even in his hermeneutic approach - method by movement - Ricoeur seems dynamic. The so-called 'hermeneutic circle' always revisits its initial point of beginning. This however brings the risk of a tautology, where the end point is anticipated in the starting point. Life is understood in terms of narrative, and vice versa. The only way out is to turn the investigation from a flat-surface vicious circle into a three-dimensional spiral; that is, by altering the initial terms as a result of increased understanding of them, and reformulating the question into a new one, Ricoeur is well aware of this danger (Ricoeur, 1984: 72). He

acknowledges that insofar emplotment favors concordance over discordance, it always extracts harmony out of life's dissonances. When narratives no longer fool us, they may appear as nothing but false consolations in the face of our imminent death: treacherous and violent lies (ibid: 72). Nevertheless, he counters, such argumentation rests on a superficial understanding of human time as chaotic. It is rooted in a modernist fascination with disruption and alienation. Another circularity Ricoeur faces is that the stage of *mimesis3* (narrative reconfiguration) seems a prerequisite for *mimesis1* (narrative prefiguration). Narrative interpretation would then become redundant since narrative prefiguration *presupposes* narrative reconfiguration. Is our pre-narrative experience merely the *result* of projecting our cultural knowledge about existing stories to life? To this critique Ricoeur responds by once again stating that life has a prenarrative quality. Even in everyday experience we tend to see our lives "(as yet) untold stories" (ibid: 74). He seeks support for this in psychoanalysis. A subject must unravel repressed stories and make them an actual part of his personal identity. Similarly, in court cases judges must disentangle and (re)construct a story from a complex of events and motives. Life, Ricoeur concludes, is in quest of narrative. "We tell stories because *in the last analysis* human lives need and merit being narrated" (ibid: 75, my emphasis).

Is Ricoeur truly open to alteration to escape the vicious circle? I don't think so. Narrative emplotment as 'discordant concordance' remains solid in place. Sure, Ricoeur sees changes in literary styles and the birth of the 'anti-novel' (he gives the example of Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, The Man without Qualities). But *in the end* we are unavoidably caught in the narrative loop as the resolution to our temporal existence that hovers between order and chaos (a reductionism emphasized in the last quote). It is because of this closed character that narrative theory has a certain apodictic character [256]. By positing the inescapable nature of narrative mediation he renounces possible changes in identity mediation. The circle has become closed and static.

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities offers a way out of narrative's closed circularity and is open to its own revisions.*

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[256] I leave aside Ricoeur's implicit reverence of scripture as the highest road to (self-)knowledge, which itself may reveal a culturally conditioned bias. In this respect, it appears that Ricoeur's religious convictions shine through, despite his firm assertion that his studies of identity "assume the bracketing, conscious and resolute, of the convictions that bind me to biblical faith" (Ricoeur, 1992: 24). Wouldn't this seem at odds with his claim about the privileged status of narrative as cultural blueprint for interpreting life? In other words, how can he ignore biblical faith when narrative indeed is the privileged mediation of who Paul Ricoeur is?

Despite Ricoeur's dynamic and processual view of identity construction, narrative 'in the last instance' seeks to abrogate movement and multiplicity. However temporal and unstable the *result*, mediation through emplotment posits the maxims of synthesis, stability and permanence as its prime *aim*. Narrative emplotment seeks to unify heterogeneous elements into a whole, it places primacy on concordance over discordance, and it tries to craft a configuration (with opening and closure) out of mere episodic succession (Ricoeur, 1991a: 22). Further, Ricoeur phrases the main problem of identity as how to preserve permanence in time in the face of change. His preference for stability is most apparent in his shift from a descriptive narrative identity to a prescriptive moral identity. He normatively charges the task of self-interpretation with seeking permanence. He values the full stop over the ongoing movement. The promising subject takes a moral stance towards himself and others. He halts in his wandering that results from the confrontation with so many possible models for life (Ricoeur, 1992: 167-168). By turning narrative into an imperative ("life is only worthwhile when examined"), Ricoeur can finally trade in the ongoing dynamics of the question "Who am I" for the stability of the declaration "Here is where I stand!" (as does Charles Taylor, as we have seen in the introduction). What is wrong with that? Don't we all need to actively create stability and coherence in the face of life's propensity for entropy? *So what* if narrative helps us to do so? I take issue with this ethical imperative of narrative. Ricoeur's view of life as a struggle to achieve stability and coherence is thoroughly conservative. Someone else might just as legitimately ask: how to stimulate change and innovation in the face of life's dread and repetition? As the privileged scheme for understanding life, narrative tilts towards the pole of what we earlier have described as sedentary metaphysics instead of nomadic metaphysics (Cresswell, 2006: 26). Without wanting to slide over to 'nomadic thought', I feel this dialectic between fixity and flow should be part of a theory of playful identities.

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities allows for mobility and change (and shall refrain from moral prescriptions how one should live, or what a good life is, veiled as a descriptive account of identity).*

The closed circularity of narrative is hard to reconcile with an inquiry into new mediations of identity. How to get out? Ricoeur acknowledges that the narrative scheme itself is a historical model. It evolves from cultural traditions, and hovers between sedimentation and innovation. He sees a continuum from servile repetition of sedimented rules to calculated deviance. Still, in my view Ricoeur takes a too conservative approach by saying that even innovation is rule-governed behavior, tied to the models handed down by tradition. "[A]s soon as we go beyond the field of these

traditional narratives, deviance wins out over the rule. The contemporary novel, for example, can to a large extent de defined as an anti-novel, for it is the very rules themselves that become the object of new experimentation" (Ricoeur, 1991a: 25). By contrast, I suggest that true innovation neither entails playing by the rules (novel), nor playing with the rules (anti-novel; Huizinga's cheater), but not playing according to the rules ('a-novel'; Huizinga's 'spoilsport' [257]). Rather than stretching boundaries but remaining inside, innovation involves transgression and rupture. In the essay *What Is an Author* Foucault says that the initiation of a new discursive practice clears "a space for the introduction of elements other than their own" (Foucault, 1991: 458). By contrast, scientific or literary innovation can always be traced back to the machinery of transformations it has instituted (ibid: 459). In other words, the need or wish to challenge existing rules still subsumes innovation under the regime of rule-based change. The initiation of a new discursive practice on the other hand introduces true difference instead of repetition, Foucault writes. Innovation thus requires us not to play by the rules set by narrative. We must be spoilsports to develop a new approach to identity mediation. And then we can return to the old in order to recognize its strengths.

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities does not play by the rules set by narrative but instead offers a new lens to look at identity mediation.*

6.1.2 Narrative's simplified view of culture

A related point concerns Ricoeur's take on (the transmission of) culture and the privileged role he accords to narratives. The transfer of narratives across time and distance is presented as quite unproblematic, at least, Ricoeur pays little attention to it. But culture is never simply a given, nor always compatible with individual identities or different cultural identities. Already in 1934 anthropologist Edward Sapir argues that culture is not an impersonal abstract system (Sapir, 1934). We ourselves as individuals are the bearers of culture. And we reflect on our own culture. There is a constant dialectic between culture and personality, or as Sapir specifies, between a part of behavior that is considered a cultural pattern and a part of behavior seen as person-defining [258]. This dialectic weaves through all our paradoxes: freedom versus force, difference and similarity, and sameness versus selfhood. Frequently, this becomes a

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[257] Huizinga, 1955: 11.

[258] People tend to see the familiar in terms of personality and the unfamiliar in terms of culture, Sapir observes. When he sees his son play a game of marbles he interprets this as shedding light on his personality. When he sees a Chinese mandarin joining in an academic dinner he interprets this as saying something about his cultural background.

downright subversive struggle at some stage in life. "The discovery of the world of personality is apparently dependent upon the ability of the individual to become aware of and to attach value to his resistance to authority" (ibid: 409). Culture is a dynamic process fraught with internal struggles. It only comes into being as a result of constant explorations, rehearsals, mistakes, and subversions. "Culture is then not something given but something to be gradually and gropingly discovered" (ibid: 414). Aside from the word 'discovered', which suggests culture exists somewhere 'out there' (like the idea that the self resides somewhere in us), Sapir's view paves the way for the idea that culture, instead of being 'codified' in (narrative) traditions, is *actualized* through continuous rule-breaking and boundary-transgressions. Underneath dominant cultural narratives at least as many counter-narratives exist. And, I add, in complex heterogeneous societies even radically incompatible narratives exist that stem from different traditions. These cannot be defined in terms of countering other narratives. That would imply they are mere reactions to dominant narratives, subsume them under similarity, and affirm the status of dominant narratives as such. Furthermore, personal and group identities frequently become means in political struggles. In chapters 2 and 3 we have seen how the mobile phone is the focal point in incongruent views about what kind of 'technological modernity' Indonesia should embrace. We have also seen that beneath the dominant stories about mobile phone modernity and personal prestige, different, much darker tales circulate about the (sexual) dangers that come with this new medium. A play/game perspective opens up room for agonistic collisions between incompatible elements within and between societies. If we truly want to think difference without an overarching concept, while still leave the possibility for interactions between different people, we may take identities as playful. Indeed, the paradox of difference versus similarity as an apparent contradiction can be overcome. On the one hand identities are incompatible games defined internally by their own rules. One cannot play soccer with a hockey stick. On the other hand, in free play identities are performed in actual interactions. People can decide to create new collaborative hybrid playforms (shockey, hoccer?). They need not agree with each other's rules, as long as they agree on the conditions for mutual interaction.

Further, culture does not merely consist of stories [259]. Other transmitted cultural patterns exist that contribute to a person's sense of who and what he is, for example embodied interactions and physical postures, and cultural knowledge that involves the senses: sound, smell, touch [260].

[259] Interestingly, Aristotle - from whom Ricoeur derives the crucial notions emplotment and mimesis - says that tragedy, as the imitation of action, consists of action not narrative (Aristotle, 1907: VI).

[260] In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* the protagonist famously recalls his childhood memories after eating a madeleine cookie dipped in blossom tea. Of course he then *recounts* his life *as narrative*, but there is a pre-narrative sensuous trigger that evokes memories and only then warps him full-force into his own past.

Furthermore, is narrative a universal cultural mediation? Ricoeur restricts his analysis to the Greco-Christian origins of western cultural traditions. He suggests that elsewhere other narrative traditions exist. This implies that he holds literary narrative as a universal medium. Yet in other societies different mediations of identity may exist. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, a rudimentary literary tradition has only relatively recently emerged in Indonesia. Lively theater practices have existed for much longer and are deeply ingrained in many regional cultural traditions. We have seen how *wayang* puppet play is regularly invoked to comment on present (political) issues (section 2.2). Would it not make more sense to say that Indonesians use theater as a cultural blueprint for (self-)understanding rather than literary narrative? Of course theater has narrative qualities too. But Ricoeur's conception of narrative is too narrow. He only looks at literary genres dominant in western societies. Therefore, justified critique has been waged against narrative for putting western literate societies at the top of a developmental scale (Carr 1987, quoted in Fabian, 1991: 241).

Narrative theory simplifies what culture is and how it is transmitted. It disregards agonistic forces at play in the tension between the individual and culture at large, and between heterogeneous cultural elements within societies. And its claim to universality is questionable. Ricoeur all too easily upholds a broadly shared narrative tradition as the privileged medium.

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities pays attention to the agonistic struggles involved in cultural innovation and sedimentation, to different bearers of cultural knowledge, and to the conditions for interaction.*

6.1.3 Narrative's neglect of spatiality and becoming

For Ricoeur, shared cultural symbols set the rules for interpretation and define the room for innovation. This points to another problem, namely that Ricoeur phrases identity construction almost exclusively in the sense of temporal dynamics. In my view narrative theory lacks a framework for understanding the role of spatiality, place and mobility in identity construction [261]. This is particularly urgent as the world becomes more and more mobile, and people, objects, and ideas travel around the globe. Spatial aspects of identity can be narrative (shown in section 1.3). Locales are to a certain

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Even if human life were narrative 'in the last instance', which I dispute, it glosses over other cultural forms of knowledge.

[261] Mitchell points out that narratives are profoundly spatial too: the physical text itself, the fictional world that is described, the lay-out of the plot, and the literary work as a system for generating and mapping meanings of a world outside of the text (Mitchell, 1980: 550-553). Ricoeur however solely stresses the temporal aspects of narrative identity.

extent 'scripted' with prescriptions for behavior. Sense of place can be founded on historical and/or mythological narratives (section 3.3). However, as argued in section 4.3, maps better capture the *interrelations* of places, mobilities, and distant social relations that shape people's identities than emplotment can. The map acts as a medium through which people understand their interrelations in spatial terms. What plots do for narrative identities, maps do for playful identities. (Room for) movement is staked out in rule-driven games (*ludus*), or opened up in free play (*paidia*).

Narrative lacks a practical view of how people initially meet and identify with one another at the interpersonal level, other than suggesting people come to share personal and cultural stories. I propose we regard meeting in temporal *and* spatial terms as a crossing of trajectories. Intersecting routes come before merging life plots [262]. Becoming involves meeting others and forging new relations. This presupposes an initial encounter, a 'spark' that potentially sets a fusion of routes in motion. If we consider what circumstance, activity, and mindset is most prone for meeting, play in its various guises is the ideal catalyst. Especially when the rules of normalcy are pierced. Imagine two strangers in the city walking towards each other on the pavement. At exactly the same moment they make a habitual dodging movement. Alas, they choose the same side and bump into each other. They may become suddenly aware of their little sidewalk ballet as an avoidance game spoiled, perceive the unexpected physical contact with a stranger as a play of fate, and that could be the beginning of something beautiful... (Of course they could also stick to the rules of urban role-playing, briefly murmur an apology, and continue their separate ways without ever knowing about the biography of the other). We have seen the centrality of serendipity and encountering otherness in our discussion of locative media and urban culture. For interaction between urbanites biographies are irrelevant, at least initially. In my view a crossing of routes, whereby the initial spark is a slight diversion or breach of rules, is a better depiction of initiating relationships in this increasingly urban and mobile world [263].

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities takes mapping as a key structure for identity's spatial situatedness, mobilities, and ways of becoming.*

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[262] Again narrative's 'last instance' jumps over important dimensions in identity construction. Of course in reading novels people 'meet' other people and places too. But how do books come upon one's path?

[263] Urban life of course is not all about meeting strangers, as we are often introduced to others via mutual acquaintances. Still, this too might be better captured by a mapping of intersecting social networks.

6.1.4 From narrative reference and representation to playful conditional performances

The biggest problem in my view is narrative's referential and representational relation to 'practical life'. Ricoeur situates narrative mimesis between being a break from, and a connection to life. Narrative identity theory takes identity as the *interpretation* of selfhood (*mimesis3*) through its *representation* in stories (*mimesis2*), which *refer* to events in life itself (*mimesis1*) (Ricoeur, 1984: 45-46). Ricoeur makes it very clear that narrative is not life. Stories function mimetically *as if* they were life. In the selection and ordering process of emplotment, narrative is cut loose from the occurrences to which it refers by creative imitation. In this break from referentiality to representation, narrative emplotment opens up a space for fiction with a force of its own. Only when narrative has passed through this stage is it reapplied to the self. This double life of narrative as both reference and representation seems one of its strong features. It accounts for the doubleness of identity as mimicking other people, the world, and oneself as a narrative character; and for identity as self-referential in what it represents: a self that is uniquely *about itself*. However, this comes at a price. First, through the mimetic process narrative identity is separated from everyday life. Self-interpretation is a (thoughtful) mental process that occurs after the fact. Narrative theory lacks a perspective on identity as an emotional, intuitive and sensory embodied instance that, instead of just being about the world or constituting a separate world of itself, seeks to abrogate this separation and become part of the world, engage and transform the world, however unattainable. Identities are not only told in hindsight. They are also expressed in the here and now. Second, as performances identities actualize the here and now. Narrative theory, at least with Ricoeur, does not account for the deployment of identities as a means. How are identities more or less intentionally employed in specific situations to achieve certain goals (in what has been called 'life politics' or 'identity politics')? And what is the balance of power between self-descriptions, and ascriptions by other people and institutions? Third, narrative identity obscures how the mediation itself is dealt with. The fact *that* people tell narratives is one thing. *How* people tell them is another. Ricoeur spends much thought on the medium-specific properties of narrative as the privileged mediation of time and identity. Yet he does not address reflexivity towards the mediation itself. What does it mean to construct our lives through stories? Again, Ricoeur claims that narratives mediate identities *in the last instance*. I agree that there is no such thing as an immediate experience of identity. All experience is already mediated by previous experiences, one's cultural background, and so on. But what about the first instance? Or the intermediate instance? In short, these three interrelated issues are: How are

identities actualized in everyday life? How is everyday life itself actualized by performing identity? How is the fact of mediation itself understood? They need further discussion.

Narrative identity as self-interpretation via (the process of) imagination comes at the expense of identity as embodied performance in the 'here and now' of a social situation. Narratives are largely mental constructs that operate at the level of imagination and thought, but not at the level of embodiment. Put simply, in narrative the self is constructed by thinking; in play the self is performed by doing and showing. This is not to say that narrative identity excludes praxis. Stories are perfectly capable of doing powerful things [264]. Let's look at an example. Every 17th of August Indonesia celebrates its independence from Dutch colonial rule. On the 62th annual Freedom Day tens of thousands flocked to Freedom Square in the heart of Jakarta. Young people from all of Indonesia's current 33 provinces were present. They wore their region's ethnic costumes. As soon as the official speeches finished, they started posing and taking pictures of each other, often with their mobile phone camera. The results were immediately reviewed on the screen, and either met with approval or deleted, after which a new round of posing began. This posing, individually or as a group, was done in a self-conscious and joyous fashion. Now, we may understand what is going on by telling a story about how this event is tied to events occurring in the past (*referring* to Indonesia's colonial history and subsequent struggle to oust the Dutch). We may consider the event itself as a kind of storytelling about the birth and character of a nation (the arranged presence of young people from all provinces in traditional attire *represents* Indonesia's national motto 'unity in diversity', and the country's orientation towards the future while cherishing its rich traditions). Nevertheless, applying the poetics of narrative to this event takes away the 'weight' of its own unique instance. It would subsume the event under the order of external reference, or double it as a symbolic representation standing for something else. By contrast, a performative view takes the event as meaningful in itself. The dress-up and photographing sessions bore elements of a ritual performance. They took place in a temporally and spatially secluded space and created an artificial world, they involved temporary transformation of the body and a multifaceted sensory experience, they were done for their own sake, and they made use of material artifacts as props (see Bell, 1997; Schechner, 2003). Wearing colorful costumes and playfully posing in front of photo cameras turned these young people into actors in a shared theatrical play. Moreover, their self-aware poses indicated a performance. They do their identities, they know it, and they show this knowing. The playful posing *actualized* the shared ideals of transforming Indonesia into

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[264] In his discussion of speech act theory Ricoeur refers to Austin and Searle (Ricoeur, 1992: 42). However, performativity with Ricoeur remains at the level of utterances and text, not in everyday situations.

a modern nation that literally incorporates traditional regional diversity in unity. As a performance the event does not merely refer to or stand for this transformation, it *is* the change [265].

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identities foregrounds expressive performances of identity in addition to its interpretation.*

Narrative addresses how identity is mediated but not how identity 'works'. Ricoeur pays little attention to the question why people occupy themselves with identity, other than implying that it is a psychological need to maintain temporal coherence. In humanistic vein, narrative identity foremost is an end in itself. Identity as a means to strive for certain outside goals remains outside of his scope [266]. The mimetic pretense *as if* in narrative mediation operates on the mental level of the individual or group in reference to the world and others, but not in their actual embodied performance. It is pretense about the world but not in the world (as for instance seen in the discussion of *gengsi* in section 3.1). As a result, it fails to account for cheating and failure in the performance of identities. Sure, narratives too can be debunked. Two things can go wrong. Either the *truth* of the story is disputed, or the *verisimilitude* of the narrative account (is the story told in a truthful manner?). The trouble with the first is that there often is no way of knowing the truth behind the story. Heavy criticism has been waged against the positivist view of reality as an observable order existing outside of human interpretation about which truth claims can be made that are subject to falsification. Not in the least by Ricoeur himself, in his attempt to lift identity from the causal order of *erklären* to the interpretative order of *verstehen*.

At this point it is fruitful to refresh the framework of our emerging theory of playful identities. As we have seen Bateson identifies three types of communicative messages: (a) messages that say something ("moodsigns" in animals); (b) messages that simulate moodsigns; (c) frame-setting messages that enable the receiver to discriminate between a and b, messages that say "this is play" (Bateson, 1972: 146). Similarly, Schechner says play organizes performance, makes it comprehensible (Schechner, 2003: 103). Performance is not simply a doing, it is a showing of a doing. This is both actual and symbolic (ibid: 114-115). Meta-communicative (c) type messages act as 'frames'. They are principles of selection that enable us to distinguish between (a) and (b) and judge the conditions for interpreting communication. In

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[265] See Schechner, 2003: 127, 129, 186, about the transformative power of theater.

[266] In reflections on what has been called 'the politics of identity' the question is asked how fictional constructs around identities are employed in order to reach certain (political) goals, like recognition of 'being black', 'being gay', 'being woman' (Hall, 2000: 118; Heyes, 2009).

similar vein, Geertz points to various layers of meaning in the 'thick description' of communicative messages. He gives the example of an eye movement. This may be interpreted as twitching, winking, or parodying the winker, although to the observer the movement is identical (Geertz, 1975b: 6-7). Like Bateson's three message types, these three levels correspond to *doing*, *doing as if*, and *a showing of a doing*. As communication they operate in different modalities. The first is the causal order of establishing logical truths (is that about which you speak true?). The second is the interpretative order of establishing intentions and meaning (is what you tell truthful?). The third is the meta-communicative conditional order of establishing shared codes that are necessary for interpretation (should I interpret what you say as truthful or true?) [267]. Geertz notes that the eye movements can be interpreted in even more ways (ibid: 7). A person might stand in front of the mirror in rehearsal, attempting to control his winking, his parodying, or even his involuntary twitching. Rehearsal is a door opener into the domain Goffman calls the *back region* or *backstage* (Goffman, 1959: 111-114). This is the area (and moment) where playing frontstage roles - the public facade we keep up in 'impression management' - is temporarily suspended. Backstage, identities are rehearsed, not performed. Another important concept pair is *giving* and *giving off*. Giving refers to the intentional impression we try to make on other people. Giving off refers to the unintentional, involuntary, or even unconscious impressions we make on others. Taken together, these notions are part of a dramaturgical perspective on identity. Identity is nothing but the loose repertoire of roles we play in 'information games' (ibid: 8). As indicated in section 1.3, this leaves open the question if and how we forge all those different roles into some sort of whole, which is a major strength of narrative theory. This will be the aim of the final section, where I propose that the map is a structure that creates coherence in play.

Armed with this ammunition we return to narrative's referentiality and representation. In my view, by seeking to overcome the positivist search for establishing truth - (a) type messages - narrative gets stuck at the level of (b) type messages. Narrative as historical reference presupposes that a story is about an external reality, which exists in the causal order of truths. Narrative as fictional representation posits that narrative has become 'reality' in itself and only exists in the intentional order of speaking truthfully. Each history is fictional, Ricoeur says. In fact, (b) type fictional representations *are our only way* of getting to (a) type messages that refer to reality outside the utterance. What is being told (a signified reality) is

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[267] These three communicative modalities do not cover the whole gamut of epistemology. At one far end there exists the order of undisputed certainties without negation. Like water to fish, these are certainties so taken for granted they are beyond truth. After all truth implies that untrue things exist. The other far end extends infinitely into a "thick description" of complexities and contingencies. But as argued earlier, this regressive meta-communication can all be fitted into the conditional order of metaplay: "is this play?".

subsumed under the tale (the signifying discourse). Other narrative theorists stress this exact point. Barthes says: "[narrative] ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted" (Barthes, 1977: 119, my addition in brackets). Hayden White speaks of "the *artificiality* of the notion that *real* events could 'speak themselves' or be represented as 'telling their own story'" (White, 1980: 8). According to White, "[t]he reality of ... events does not consist in the fact that they occurred but that, first of all, they were remembered and, second, that they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence" (White, 1980: 23). Jerome Bruner writes:

> Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude". Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose *acceptability is governed by convention* and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false.
> (Bruner, 1991: 4-5, my emphasis)

Narrative identity theory says we can only understand others, the world and ourselves by telling truthful fictions. But verisimilitude is equally troublesome. As we have seen section 5.4, many people have lost faith not only in the possibility of truths about reality, but also in the truthfulness of its representations. Mediation and mediatization contribute to this disbelief in the 'acceptability of convention', as seen from journalist Luyendijk's account of how news is made. When we are being played by the media, truth and verisimilitude become fictions that are subject to disbelief. A world in which there is no longer a sense of truthfulness behind the fiction becomes a delusional 'simulacrum' (Baudrillard, 1994). We then risk sliding down the slippery slope of relativism when our access to reality is nothing but discourse. If truth is traded in for verisimilitude, then what are the criteria for establishing truthfulness? Ricoeur sought a way out of the impasse between Descartes' resort to truth in the fundamental certainty of the cogito, and Nietzsche's nihilist renunciation of any 'facts' behind interpretations and rhetorics. The founding principle of *ipse* permanence, as we have seen, is the promise. Because of his insistence on maintaining permanence in time, Ricoeur imbues the promise with the status of 'intentional truth'. But isn't this verisimilitude then still founded on an ontology of true and false? I have to conclude that under the guise of an epistemology of truthfulness Ricoeur reintroduces a metaphysics of truth by recourse to an ethics of being true to oneself and others.

Storytelling is no longer an unproblematic activity. Ricoeur lumps together various kinds of storytelling under the headers of literary and historical narratives. He disregards the importance of *how* stories are told, read, and applied to the self *as stories*, and under what circumstances. Narrative identity does not account for the ways people employ frame-setting messages of type (c) as a way to manage the conditions of what they say and do. Because narrative identity theory fails to account for messages of type (c), it conflates type (a) and (b) messages. I suggest that our to-be-theory of playful identities centers on what has been italicized in Bruner's quote above. We must ask: what are the conditions under which a promise is made, or a story in general is recounted? What are the conditions that make both narratives *and* performances acceptable to oneself and others? Under what conditions can they be amended, and what are the consequences? A focus on conditional (c) type messages sheds light on the question how people deal with the mediation of identity itself. How do people cope with the 'fact' of their narrative identity as 'fictional truth', or their performed identity as 'illusory reality'? Narrative theory neglects people's orientation towards the mediation itself. Ricoeur does look at the distancing relation between narrative voice and narrative, and irony at the level of *mimesis2* [268]. However, he does not venture to analyze the dynamics of (ironic) detachment and reattachment between narrator and self in *mimesis3.* This is precisely what a playful view of identity does. As is expressed by the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, the actor is detached from his act, and he shows it (Sennett, 1974: 109).

Why do we need this view? Identities today are not simply *referring* to or *representing* the qualities of an individual or group of people (if ever they could). No longer essential truths, nor truthful self-descriptions and other-ascriptions, identities have evolved into a far more complex and conditional notion. Identities often are strategically deployed towards certain ends. Ironically, this frequently involves what has been called 'strategic essentialism'. Individuals pretend *as if* they adhere to essentialist identity traits ascribed to them as members of a group. For instance, they may mimic stereotypical representations of gays, blacks, women. They do so in specific contexts as a critical or political strategy in order to demand recognition *as* gay, black, woman (see Heyes, 2009; Morton, 2003: 89). By referring to well-known stereotypes, people play with identity representations. It is a perfect example of boundary play in the conditional order. "This is not what it says it is, and you and I know it". By overly acting out people play with the paradoxes between sameness and selfhood by using identity as a means, between individual differences and similarity as members of a group, and between freedom in self-descriptions and force in stereotypical other-ascriptions. A performance aims to create an effect. For that it needs to be acceptable to others.

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[268] For instance in his discussion of Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* (Ricoeur, 1985: 118, 118fn29).

Performers are reflexively oriented towards the conditions of their performance, themselves as performers, and the audience for whom they perform. This 'playing the performer' entails a triple reflexivity towards the *doing*, the *doing as if*, and *the showing of a doing*. Narrative identity can include a showing of the telling but then this showing is a playful performance. A theory of playful identities thus goes beyond truth and verisimilitude, and foregrounds the question how do people communicate the conditions of their identity performances? It is a coherent - not unifying! - framework for reflexivity towards both the interpretation and the doing of identity. In mediated communicative exchanges, and complex societies, identities are not naturally given anymore but negotiated. The conditional (c) type messages - the frame setting messages - become more important. We need them to set the rules for mutually intelligible communication. Only then can a story be believed while at the same time its mediating function is never completely forgotten. In the words of Manoni: "*je sais bien mais quand-même*" (I know but still) (Mannoni, 1969).

> *Proposition: a theory of playful identity is not exclusively referential and representational but includes reflexivity towards the fact and effect of identity mediation by focussing on the conditional 'play' order of communication.*

In the beginning of this thesis I proposed that narrative identity should not be substituted by a theory of playful identities but instead be modified. Taking what I see as one of narrative theory's strong points, its dynamic structure of the three mimetic levels, we see how mobile media practices shape playful identity construction, and how this can be combined with narrative identity.

6.2 The story, the mobile, and the play: linking narrative and playful identities

Despite its shortcomings as a theory, I find narrative a convincing historical description of identity. At least from a western perspective, narrative has been a key mediation in looking at ourselves. With the rise, fall, and renaissance of literary culture, an 'inner turn' was set in motion that continues to influence how we conceive of ourselves as selves today. In *Sources of the Self* Taylor shows that writing - especially the genre of

autobiography pioneered by Michel de Montaigne - stimulated an inward movement of disengaged introspection and self-interpretation (Taylor, 1989: 177-184). Through literature we came to distance our selves from ourselves, the pillar under the modern (western) conception of identity. The question is whether narrative is still "the privileged form of mediation"? The answer to this obviously rhetorical question will become clear in this section. I propose we move away from Ricoeur's universalist claim that narrative mediation is the prime entryway to knowledge about the world, others, and ourselves. Instead narrative is but one of the possible mediations, one that best covers the temporal dimension of our existence. Digital media technologies provide other orientations towards life and self-understanding. The argument is that these are better captured in the pair of notions play/game. Temporal dimensions of existence recede to a less prominent position as mobile media technologies place equal (if not more) emphasis on spatial relations.

In this section I rework the mimetic stages of narrative identity into an outline of a theory of playful identities. Ricoeur consistently speaks about a prenarrative 'world of actions and events' in which we implicitly recognize narrative structures (narrative prefiguration, *mimesis1*). We create order in seemingly disparate actions and events by structuring them into a plot in which we are the protagonist (narrative configuration, *mimesis2*). By applying plot to ourselves we come to understand ourselves as readers and writers of our life (narrative reconfiguration, *mimesis3*). By contrast, I prefer to speak about *interactions* in our relations to the world, others and ourselves. This is not cosmetic wordplay but central to the argument that play rises to the fore as the mediating force that connects performing identity with self-interpretation. It is therefore necessary to rename the mimetic phases to play phases: *play1*, *play2*, and *play3*. In *play1*, the complexities of urban life and the role of mobile media induce a preunderstanding of the world of actions as a playful world of interactions. In *play2*, we construct and manage coherence in the world of actions through playful interactions. In *play3*, we come to reflexively understand ourselves as interacting players. The conceptual pair play/game sets out a spatiotemporal field in which we move and interact. If plot is the general underlying logic describing the temporal direction of narratives (even while not all stories have a plot), mapping is the underlying logic describing the spatiotemporal dynamics of play (even while not all play can be captured in maps). Similar to giving an overview of a story to someone by explaining the plot, we would use a map to show the play.

6.2.1 Play1: prefiguring life as play and game

Ricoeur's first mediating moment, *narrative prefiguration* or *mimesis1*, poses that life is prereflexively grasped in terms of its narrative features. Narrative tradition functions as a cultural blueprint to recognize in actions (i) a structure, (ii) symbols, (iii) and a temporal framework. I rework this level into playful prefiguration.

i. Structure

According to Ricoeur, life is prenarratively structured since we implicitly understand life's actions and events as composed of the same elements as stories are made of: a conceptual network of goals, motives, agents, circumstances, and interactions with- (Ricoeur, 1984: 57-59). First of all, stories are not the only medium composed of these elements. They also occur in games and play. Today, the conceptual pair play/game becomes more prominent as an implicit structure than narrative because we live in a world in which the conditions for our interactions rise to prominence. An increasing number of people inhabit complex, heterogeneous, and mobile (urban) societies where diverse cultural traditions intersect. Far more people are now mobile themselves: in exile, in diaspora, living a 'nomadic' life (Peters, 1999a). Particularly in large cities like Jakarta, there is no longer a majority of people who share the same narrative blueprint for understanding life. Instead they must negotiate the conditions of a shared *modus vivendi*. Playing together, as in collaborative *bergaul,* or against each other, as in competitive *gengsi* (section 3.1), have become main principles in interactions, instead of a common narrative tradition. Further, via various media channels we are exposed on a daily base to sometimes conflicting stories about a multiplicity of 'real' or imaginary worlds elsewhere. With real-time interactive media we are also able to interact in and with these multiple worlds, and move between them, however incompatible they appear. To a degree we must understand these worlds as separate playworlds as a defense against being played (section 5.4). The mobile phone in particular continually presents us with events from elsewhere. Instead of being a singular narrative setting, everyday life is multiplied by actions from elsewhere to which we must respond. Actions then become interactions. In heterogeneous urban societies the mobile phone is an ideal tool to exert control. The flip side is the experience of contingency towards life's actions and events [269]. The mobile phone potentially interrupts our present actions at any time, and inserts wholly new unexpected events. The mobile phone accentuates modern life's oscillation between *agôn* mastery over actions and *alea* play of fate (Caillois, 2001: 97, 108) [270]. Urban and mediated communicative interactions highlight spatial rather than temporal

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[269] According to studies some 47% to 68% experience 'disconnect anxiety' when for whatever reason they are temporally off the grid (Aducci, et al., 2008: 2; SRG, 2008: 3).

implicit structures. The play/game pair is well equipped as a structure for spatial mobilities. Interactions are coded by structures, rules, prescriptions, and artificial boundaries that guide how we can act, as in games. At the same time interactions are free play in a *Spielraum* that opens up spaces for infinite new explorations, border transgressions and movements between different games. The play/game pair enable us to grasp life prereflexively as interacted, not narrated.

ii. Symbolic meanings

Narrative theory holds that investing actions with symbolic meanings shapes our preunderstanding of life. This makes actions 'readable' like texts. Heterogeneity, and the lack of knowledge urbanites tend to have of each other's biographies, make reading symbolic meaning less relevant. And mobile media make it more difficult. Life among strangers has always been characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty. Everyday interactions mostly develop along scripted roles instead of an in-depth investigation of each other's biographies. The theatrical perspective of symbolic interactions is more apt to urban life than narrative. Strangers in public adopt a role of civil neglect. They behave inconspicuously, "to give no one a reason to have anything at all to say about the matter" (Lofland, 1973: 141). By implicit contract the narrative qualities of people's actions are attenuated. Performers agree to muffle their acting to avoid stimulating others into an active reading of what is going on. Reciprocally, the 'audience' silently agrees not to 'read' the events happening around them. At most, this symbolic reading is like a little post-it note: "don't bother me!" The non-reading of each other's actions is a typically urban mode of symbolic interaction. Mobile media make actions in public space far more difficult to read. In the context of Jakarta we have seen how young people communicate in *bahasa gaul*, the youth language that is forever in flux and hardly decodable for elderly people. Partial snippets of mobile phone conversations in public settings make us reflexively aware of life as composed of symbolic codes, and of interactions as an encoding/decoding process. Overhearing mobile conversations induces reflection on the rules of engagement and our own standpoint vis-a-vis the other. Our implicit understanding of action shifts to the conditional order. We must adopt an active strategy towards such situations [271]. Daily

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[270] Not everyone necessarily deplores this loss of control. Being subjected to greater forces that rock one's fate can bring an exhilarating sense of joy (a point made by Kücklich, 2004: 38-39). Katz notes that the mobile phone contributes to aleatory experiences of "random reinforcement" in people who pathologically sieve through their incoming messages to look for that one grain among the chaff (Economist, 2008). We enter the domain of enthralling *ilinx* experiences, and exaltation during *flow* experiences (Caillois, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

[271] The annoyance many feel when other people call in public has to do with the breech of the implicit non-reading contract.

confrontations with heterogeneous and unknown cultural codes unavoidably draws our symbolic preunderstanding of actions into a configurative *play2* and reflective *play3*. When reading cultural symbols no longer comes 'naturally', we either engage in a playful deciphering puzzle or 'close the circle' by shutting ourselves off. (In go the earbuds, up goes the volume.) Furthermore, people in public situations use their mobile phones in performative 'stage-phoning' (sections 3.2 and 5.2). Actions are not just read but also enacted. As argued, the public domain becomes a play arena for agonistic struggles over meaning and ownership. In all cases actions become interactions. Symbolic interactions then are preunderstood as tactical interactive games rather than symbolic narrative reading.

iii. Framework for course of actions

Ricoeur asserts that people recognize in sequences of actions temporal frameworks (plots) that call for narration. I hold that sequences of interactions also consist of spatial relations that call for mapping. Locative media explicitly organize actions and events on maps (chapter 4). As reincarnations of the static map, interactive digital cartographies provide a framework to organize the world of interaction both in spatial and temporal terms as geotagged 'micro-narratives'. With locative media the digital map clearly prevails over the plot as a framework for event sequences. In mobile phone communication too recognizing a spatial framework is of more direct concern than recognizing temporal plot. Again, by taking a dramaturgical perspective we see why. According to neoclassical theater rules, a comprehensible performance needs to conform to three unities: unity of time (the action occurs in a limited time span), unity of place (the action takes place in a singular setting), and unity of action (all actions contribute to the plot) [272]. A single communicative action quite unproblematically conforms to unity of time. A real-time voice call is synchronous for both callers. They are sure of one thing: the interaction (talking on the phone) occurs at the same time for both parties [273]. The speakers however are in different places. And often they do not know where the other is. Communicative interaction via the mobile phone lacks initial intelligibility about setting. This indeterminacy foregrounds the need for spatial ordering. The need to assess temporal unity is pushed to the background. (Unless the

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[272] The three unities extend Aristotle 's classical definition of emplotment (*muthos*) in tragedy. It should be noted however that Aristotle only distinguishes two unities: the temporal unity of action that takes place in a single period of time, and dramatic unity that characterizes a single action as whole and complete in itself. There is no unity of setting with Aristotle. And temporal unity is not even necessary in the construction of plot (Ricoeur, 1984: 39-40). Ricoeur's occupation with reworking Aristotle's *muthos* to include temporal unity in narrative may well explain his lack of attention for spatiality in narrative.

[273] I am using the simple scenario of a one-to-one voice call. It is of course possible to make conference calls that involve multiple people.

call is redirected to voicemail. In that case the caller is acutely faced with the temporal uncertainties of asynchronous action.) We have seen that the first question on the phone often is "where are you", in order to pinpoint someone's location and picture him in a locale. Preunderstanding communicative events requires not only clarity about its topic but also about its *topos*. The callers must form mental maps that connect their two physical *topoi* (here and there) with a shared instance of an imagined meeting place. Mental maps cannot create *unity* of setting, but at least they establish *coherence* as a precondition for mobile conversations.

Communication often is not a singular event but part of a larger chain of actions. This chain can be composed of both mediated and physically co-present interactions. Such series of interactions may severely violate the three unities. Still they can be coherently prefigured through mapping. Let us again look at what Ling and Yttri have called 'micro-coordination', the practice whereby people use the mobile phone to coordinate a future physical meeting in sequences of increasingly precise communicative exchanges (Ling & Yttri, 2002: 139, 142-146). Micro-coordination involves both temporal and spatial coordination. By establishing a precise meeting time people work towards 'closure' of the chain of actions. People also browse their mental maps of the city to find a good meeting spot, and progressively zoom in on a specific place to meet. In my view spatial coordination is dominant in micro-coordination. People can wait a while but they must be sure of the meeting point. And they must agree that it is indeed a nice place. The implicit framework that holds a sequence of events together in micro-coordination is the map rather than the plot. In imagining ourselves moving on these maps and in collaboratively choosing a meeting place as the goal we preunderstand our interactions as moving avatars in games rather than as narrative protagonists.

6.2.2 Play2: configuring life as play and game

In narrative theory the configuration of plot brings events and actions into a structural, meaningful, and temporal order. To create cohesion between seemingly heterogeneous events and actions in life, we apply plots with a beginning, middle and end (though not necessarily in that order, as Jean-Luc Godard said of modern cinematic storytelling) [274]. We submit discordant events to the unifying structure of a concordant story. We imbue them with meaning insofar they contribute to the whole. Plot also offers a sense of direction to life's temporality, giving it a point. Narrative configuration is a mechanism of selection: how is the story composed, what belongs into the story (and what need

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[274] Aristotle already said that the unity in emplotment does not necessitate a sequential ordering of beginning - middle - end, as long as the middle is indeed defined by succession. The logic of tragedy plots even is one of reversing temporal succession (Aristotle, 1907: vi, x; Ricoeur, 1984: 38-39).

not be in it), and what is its overarching direction and theme. The function of play in *play2* is again elucidated along the mentioned three dramaturgical unities: (i) time, (ii) place, (iii) and action. Because actual *unity* is hard to configure with space and time-transcending mobile media I shift the focus to the question how *coherence* can be created.

i. Coherence of time

Mobile phone conversations frequently are not organized like temporal plots with an opening and closure. Sure, in single instrumental (business) calls opening and closure remain intact. We easily fit such instrumental calls in a sequence of communicative exchanges by referring to previous and future calls or meetings. The phone memory even aids our own by logging date and time of past calls, and reminding us of future to do's. 'Micro-coordination' too is goal-oriented. When the goal is achieved the event reaches closure. However, mobile communication practices often bear the quality of an ongoing conversation. Mobile phone interaction is an 'infinite game' of gift exchanges (section 5.3). No goal exists besides the 'phatic' quality of the interaction itself. This is particularly true between close friends who communicate in short and frequent gestures at irregular times (Licoppe, 2003: 181) [275]. Formal openings and closures by greeting procedures are bypassed (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002: 106; Ling, 2008: 120; Schegloff, 2002a: 284-285). Calls pick up in the middle of a previous conversation and leave future conversations open. There is no point at which they are made into concordant events that fit a greater narrative, or discordant events that are left out. How then is temporal coherence created, and why is this play? If we *must* apply narrative terms to such communications, they surely are not literary and historical narratives that are neatly organized in self-contained chapters. Instead, they consist of an episodic chain of events, like soaps. Each new action provokes a reaction in an ongoing to-and-fro interplay. In technical terms we might say that *narrative time* (time taken to narrate, *Erzählzeit*) completely subsumes *narrated time* (the duration of the narrated event, *erzählte Zeit*). If we go along with Ricoeur, who says that the relation between narrative time and narrated time in storytelling is a "game with time", then we see all the more that mobile communication is an 'infinite game' (Ricoeur, 1985: 80). Narrated time *becomes* narrative time in self-referential phatic talk. This is why it is play: interaction is imbued with meaning by doing, instead of being invested with narrative meaning by a telling afterwards. Further, the playful 'micro-narratives' that

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[275] Licoppe distinguishes two modalities of communication between friends: conversational communication, long and ritualized calls spread out in time, and connected communication, which is frequent, short and occurs at irregular intervals (Licoppe, 2003: 181-182). The first occur mostly between people who live far apart and the second between people who live in close proximity (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002).

emerge in mobile conversations are collaboratively composed without a main narrator, like gossip [276]. They are interactive stories to which all parties contribute as part of a team. The rules of gifting create a temporal order: one should reciprocate within a certain amount of time, and one should take turns. Finally, and oddly perhaps, the infinity of gifting itself structures time. The fundamental uncertainty towards the future is alleviated by the assurance that a present act of gifting will lead to reciprocal actions to come. Narrative tries to negate the future's uncertainty by narrowing the potential course of actions through the imposition of plot. Play embraces uncertainty by opening up the future as a playspace for rule-based interactions, while games too narrow the potential course of action by imposing rules. So using the play/game pair draws this temporal dialectic inside the proces of identity construction itself.

Mobile phone practices play with traditional emplotment. Frequently, the mobile device is a means to 'kill' lost moments. Waiting for the train, during travel, being too early for an appointment in a bar: we almost automatically grab our phone and start to make a call or compose a text message (listen to music, surf the web, play a game, watch digital television, or update our online social network status). Lost in-between moments are no longer the blank lines that separate individual events and actions in a unified plot. Silent transitions, normally untold, now become meaningful interludes: playing time. Instead of actionless breathing pauses that allow us to recuperate, these moments are used "to the max". This attitude of optimizing time for entertainment or social maintenance conjures up visions of life as a game or a contest. How many laps can you race in 5 minutes waiting time? How many emails can you answer in 15 minutes of metro travel? We are challenged to "make the most of now", as the Vodafone slogan puts it (see Akker & Prins, 2008).

ii. Coherence of place

Ricoeur neglects the role of place in narrative and ignores the issue if and how people configure narrative coherence in spatial terms. He unproblematically assumes narrative configuration to take place within a singular cultural tradition, and conflates narrative cultural tradition with *location*. Ricoeur explicitly limits his analysis to the western narrative tradition, which he traces back to Greco-Christian origins. In seeking to integrate Aristotle's concepts of *muthos* (plot) and *mimesis* with Augustine's philosophy of time, Ricoeur glosses over the differences between these two cultural lineages that together constitute 'the' western narrative tradition [277]. Furthermore, Ricoeur understands cultural change as innovation within one rule-based cultural tradition

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[276] About gossip in mobile communication, see Fox, 2001, and Ling, 2008: 148-154.

[277] By contrast, in Taylor's genealogy of western identity, the tension between Greek and Christian origins and its aftermath in modern times is a dominant theme (Taylor, 1989).

("play with the rules"). He ignores cultural change as the result of irreconcilable differences by outside influences and tensions from within ("not playing according to the rules").

Ajit Maan criticizes Ricoeur's implicit assumption of a unified narrative setting (Maan, 1999). Maan points out that identities are no longer based on a singular place. She argues an increasing number of people, notably migrants, move between multiple settings. Maan proposes a model of "internarrative identity" that mediates between the multiple settings of narrative identities.
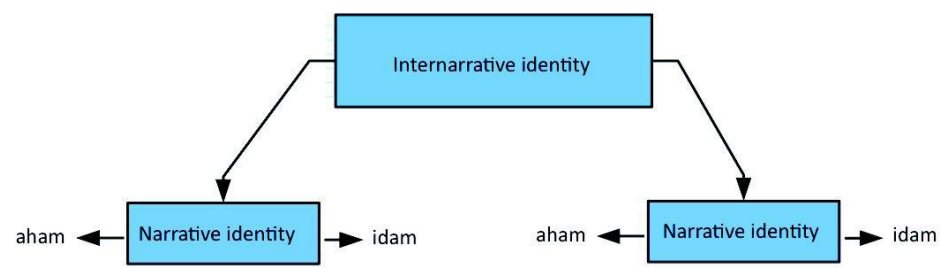

Figure 7: (Simplified) model of Maan's 'internarrative identity'.
Maan changes Ricoeur's ipse with the Sanskritic aham, and idem with idam, which highlights 'shared sameness' with others (Maan, 1999: 58).

This model takes the spatial discontinuities in people's lives into account. It does not presuppose spatial unity. It only requires coherence in the way people tell stories (ibid: 58). Not surprisingly, Maan's sensitivity for the spatial qualities of identity results in a model that starts to look like a rudimentary mental map. Nevertheless, Maan too assumes that the narrative 'legs' of internarrative identity themselves are more or less unified settings. She equals narrative tradition with *locale*. Migrants from setting A move to setting B and must combine these two narrative traditions in an overarching internarrative identity. She does not consider multiplicity, difference and mobilities *within* a single setting. Further, she does not consider how the 'meaningful movements' *between* settings contribute to people's identities. How much further can we stretch the rules of narrative theory? I prefer to be a spoilsport and step outside narrative identity theory, at least for the moment.

Since 'place' has been mentioned a few times in this section, let us refresh our memories with what has been said in section 3.3. Place has multiple meanings. There is *location* (a particular geographical position or area), *locale* (social situation, setting) and *sense of place* (the subjective experience of a place) (Agnew, 1987: 28). Each dimension can play a role in place-based identities. In practice, identities tend to be

composites. Location is key to parochial identities, the idea that who you are is where you are from. Identities based on geographical location tend to be static closed circles that exclude others. Locales are central in social identities. Settings are inscribed with implicit and explicit rules prescribing how to interact with others by playing social roles. Social identities are about 'impression management': how we perform roles in front of other people in particular social settings (Goffman, 1959; Hannerz, 1980). Sense of place underlies cultural and personal identities. Sense of place is partly narrated. It features in stories people tell about who and what they are. These can be shared stories about a common actual or imaginary ancestry, origin or destination, or stories that express a personal connection to certain places. Sense of place is also performed, I add. In the case of Freedom Day in Indonesia we have seen how young people from different regions *actualize* the national motto 'unity in diversity' in a showing of a doing. On an individual level, De Certeau sees walking as a 'tactics' by which people create their own spaces out of pre-produced places.

In traditional communal identities these three places were a unity. Location and locale overlapped and determined someone's identity in the social group, which was expressed through, and sanctioned by a common sense of place. In early modern times, with the rise of the metropolis and new technologies, a multitude of distinct settings with thick boundaries were created. Workplace, home, holiday, leisure, places of consumption, public space, etc. became the loci of "increasing segregation of experiential spheres" (Meyrowitz, 2003: 94). People now played more than one social role and broadened their horizons with multiple senses of place. Although place was no longer unified, at least it was still coherent. Multiple locales and senses of place were logically connected to locations. Mass media blurred the boundaries between formerly segregated experiential and social domains. Social roles were sung loose from physical locations, supposedly causing people to have "no sense of place" (Meyrowitz, 1985). 'Non-places' became the spaces of 'super-modernity', and were devoid of 'sense of place', the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history embedded in places (Augé, 2008: 63, 70). With the rise of 'placeless' ICTs, the ties between place and identity appears to have been weakened further (see section 4.1) [278]

At first sight, mobile media technologies indeed appear to contribute to a further breakdown of unified place and its connection to identity. First, locative media multiply and mobilize physical *locations* for actions. We have seen that locative media allow locations to be geotagged, inscribed with micro-narratives, and travel elsewhere.

[278] Notions like Meyrowitz' 'global nomads', Castells' 'space of flows', or Bauman's 'liquid modernity' rhetorically suggest that places in the digital age lack local scale, fixed anchors and boundaries (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 1996: 378; Meyrowitz, 2003). Castells simultaneously witnesses a reaction to globalization in the ICT-based 'network society', with the revenge of parochialism rooted in 'space of places' (Castells, 1996: 378; 1997: 1-11).

Second, the mobile phone allows people to rapidly switch between multiple *locales*. Definitions of the social situation where the action takes place become less clear. As we move back and forth between multiple locales in which we play divergent and sometimes conflicting roles, diversions and contradictions in our stories easily surface (Geser, 2004). All of a sudden we find ourselves managing two very different front stages (Ling, 2008). From the perspective of bystanders, the definition of a social situation can shift dramatically when others make or receive a call. What was an intimate dinner in a fine restaurant may quickly turn into an embarrassing situation when the guy sitting at the adjoining table with a woman by the candlelight receives a call from a suspicious spouse and gets involved in a marital dispute [279]. Whether we are caller or bystander, the rule-based character of locale is exposed and we find ourselves improvising a role to play in the changed situation. Third, the mobile phone induces multiplicity in *sense of place*. More than ever we have an idea of what is going on elsewhere. Again, this is not something exclusively brought about by mobile technologies. For much longer people have been able to get a sense of elsewhere through various media. Mobile media technologies are different because they combine elements that existed separately in older media. Information about elsewhere is easier and cheaper to obtain, available in greater abundance, can be accessed from anywhere, and is available in real-time. The type of information changes too. It is multi-medial when transmitted via more than one channel (image, sound, text; web, voice call, text message), and multi-sensory when it involves vision, hearing and increasingly touch and kinetics (the phone's vibrating function; haptic interaction with the device, especially devices with an accelerometer). Information can be broadcasted from one to many, or from many to many. Most often it is two-way and interactive. Through wireless technologies information can be obtained while we are on the move, detached from location or locale. All this seems to lead to a splintering of place.

At the same time mobile media technologies reinforce spatial coherence in the face of disunity. The mobile phone camera is used to inscribe locations with a sense of place, as we have seen in the case of Raoul (section 3.2) and of locative playground Bliin (4.3). Migrants can more easily maintain connections to their place of origin, as in the case of Ida (3.2). Mobile media connect people to imaginary places elsewhere and thus give a sense of direction to someone's life, as in the case of Dewi (3.2). Provider Esia designs phones in accordance with 'local' identities (3.3). Mobile communication organizes social coherence in 'gift circles' (5.3). Locative media always position us in the

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[279] Of course social situations have always had a certain potential for instability (the spouse might actually walk in and start a row). The fact that people are so much easier to reach from outside situations, and that people calling have little if any clue about another's situation, makes an appropriate judgment of a social setting by all parties far more difficult. Managing social face in such circumstances can and does easily get awkward, sometimes as much for the audience as for the caller.

center of the map, offer a multitude of services tied to locations, expose the narrative qualities of places, add read/write rights to place, and open up a play space for spatial exploration (4.3). Smart mobs and flash mobs induce people to physically gather and cooperate at certain locations (mentioned in 2.3 and 5.2). The mobile device itself can be even considered a place, a portable home we dwell in. We store a large part of our lives and our relations with our friends and family as digital objects in phone memory and have them with us all the time. With the phone we always carry along familiar terrain. In all cases, the mobile phone helps us in spatial orientation. It acts as a mapping device and compass that assists us to maintain spatial coherence in our interactions and navigate life.

iii. Coherence of action

Mobile communication challenges the functional role of actions in a unified plot. Plot circumscribes the higher order logic, the 'point' of the narrative. In the plot there is no room for events and actions that do not have a function. The unity of narrative life is continuously challenged by new discordant events, which are either made concordant or placed outside the narrative. Narrative identity theory does not give insight in the conditions under which events are made discordant or concordant, other than postulating that events should fit the plot. Moreover, narrative emplotment assumes identity is constructed only from concordant events [280]. Our theory of playful identity in the making focuses on the conditional order of boundary play. Seemingly discordant actions still contribute to identity construction. The unpredictability of an incoming call or message continuously threatens to disrupt the configuration of plot. It is much more difficult to 'tame' the many discordant events that intrude into our current actions, and to integrate them in a concordant plot. It may seem we have given up the ideal of unification altogether. Mobile phone conversations have been noted for their triviality or even banality (for instance Bassett, 2005: 43; De Vries, 2009: 87; Haddon, 2000: 6; Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002: 190) [281]. When an unexpected event occurs we grab the phone and call someone ("You won't believe what I just saw..."), send a text message, post it on a micro-blogging service or social platform, or take a snapshot or or shoot a video with the phone camera. Instead of being silently discarded and forgotten, discordant events and actions are highlighted and used for renewed interactions. They

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[280] As Ricoeur remains silent on the how and why of the selection process, one assumes mechanisms at play like forgetting, repressing, or simply declaring events impossible or unimaginable.

[281] Triviality is a recurring theme in the perception of new communication technologies. Claude Fisher recounts that as soon as rural women started socializing via the fixed telephone to overcome their isolation, men ridiculed the frivolity of the telephone (Fischer, 1992: 82, 231). Aronson describes how critics rapidly discovered the dreaded malady of 'telephonics' in 'telephone fiends' (Aronson, 1971: 157)

are logged to phone memory (e.g. as funny pictures and movies) and exchanged with others. Such 'micro-narratives' (section 4.3) do not meaningfully fit in a unified plot. They are a welcome distraction, entertaining and worth recounting in themselves. Micro-narratives could hardly be farther removed from traditional fiction or historical narratives, where each element is carefully pieced into to a whole through rational and reflective selection. In micro-narratives, what is communicated matters not just for its content but for its expressive power. Again, what is said matters less than that something is said, and how. It is not about the action that is recounted. The recounting itself has become the action. A substantial amount of mobile communication operates on the performative level of meta-communication [282]. Crucially, these messages are not about that which they say they are about. Rather than being reference to, or representation of the recounted action, these messages *are* the (inter)action.

Obtaining information from elsewhere is not a matter of choice, like flicking on the TV or grabbing a book. As said earlier in the context of mobile gifting, we are summoned to pick up our telephone and answer. In non real-time, space-transcending narrative media (books, newspapers, oral accounts), the sense of actions elsewhere resides in the imaginary realm of mimesis (*as if* one were in another place). Our sense of this other place matters little for what is going on here, or there. Actions elsewhere first must pass through mimetic cycle. They can easily be discarded as discordant. Boundaries remain erect. With mobile media the imaginary elsewhere has actual consequences for actions here and now, and vice versa. A live voice from elsewhere requires us to react. For example, we often receive information that something interesting is happening elsewhere. Suppose a friend calls with a voice barely audible above the loud background music: "Hi, I am at an awesome concert, you'd totally digg it! Come over quick!". An acute sense of missing out on events happening elsewhere may arise. Different from being told after the fact, mobile communication requires us to interact right now, right here. Narrative configuration of actions by a referential/representational medium external to the action itself makes way for playful configuration in which the doing structures the interactions.

6.2.3 Play3: reconfiguring life as play and game

In the stage of *mimesis3* life is reconfigured by applying narratives. The break between the world of text and the world of the hearer/reader is restored. We reflect on ourselves and come to understand ourselves as readers and writers of our own lives (Ricoeur, 1988: 246). Narrative identity mediates between character, in which *idem* and

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[282] Exactly how much is hard to ascertain. How does one operationalize instrumental calls and phatic communication? Instrumental exchanges can have a meta-communicative 'perlocutionary' charge too.

ipse identity coincide, and the promise, in which selfhood and sameness are separated. Narrative *character* consists of the more or less stable properties that make an individual recognizable as the same person (Ricoeur, 1992: 119, 121). In self-attribution we recognize ourselves as the same person by living according to our developed habits and identifications with-. In other-ascription people recognize someone as a consistent person with certain traits (ibid: 122-128). The *promise* expresses the individual's intention to be a consistent self. How do we come to understand and reconfigure ourselves as playful beings?

Character's self-attribution in habits and identifications with-, and other-ascription as consistent, are under pressure from the mobile phone. Former strict boundaries between social domains - work, private life, leisure - have become vague. We frequently receive work calls at non-working hours or even on vacation, and private calls during work time. Our boss may call in the evening to ask whether we can make a last-minute change to the presentation tomorrow ("oh, and by the way, can you come half an hour earlier?"). Such demands are hard to ignore. Often we succumb. In fact we are expected not to rigidly adhere to schedules anymore. Summonings through the phone constantly invade our life as a habitual creature. The mere potential of someone calling challenges our inadvertent habitual patterns into self-conscious strategies that we must hold up in the face of outside demands. Imagine a self-declared habit-loving person who likes to spend his evenings on the sofa with a good book, listening to some classical music, sipping a scotch. Just the thought that a friend or acquaintance might call - "come over to the concert!" - impels him to have a strategy at hand to ward him off. Can he still understand and uphold himself as a person with character defined by habit? Or as someone who must be ready to play pretense to maintain his own rules for living? Furthermore, not only is habitual life constantly challenged from the outside, more and more people appear to devaluate a life of habit. In his account of the late-modern work ethic, *The Corrosion of Character*, Richard Sennett describes this preference for detachment and abhorrence of fixity in phrases like "virtues of spontaneity" and "lack of long-term attachment" (Sennett, 1998: 45, 62). Similarly, in *Liquid modernity* Zygmunt Bauman speaks about "the differential access to unpredictability" as the epitome of personal freedom (Bauman, 2000: 120). The other dimension of character, identifications with-, is equally under strain. We no longer unconditionally identify with the people we are with physically, or with the situation we are in. We willingly seek discordance by moving away from the social situation present at hand. The mobile phone is a very handy tool to reconfigure our lives as free play, by always keeping as many options open as possible. There might always be a better party somewhere else with cooler people (see Kim, 2002: 71; Ling & Yttri, 2002: 155). Consistency of character is seen as dull and boring, even suspect as reactionary.

Flexibility, adaptability and a detached stance is perceived by many to be a sign of individual freedom. Changing ringtones and colorful fronts once in while to "tell who you are", as is common practice in Indonesia, seems to underline this idea of a character *du jour*. As far as other-ascription of character goes, answering a call in the company of others may bring the divergent roles we play to light. As Geser notes: "the attribution [of behavior] to stable personality traits becomes more difficult because such attributions have to be consistent with all the divergent forms of behavior observed" (Geser, 2004: 23, my addition in brackets). Other people acutely realize that the consistent character they ascribe to us is derived from the particular contexts in which they are witnesses to our lives. When the conditions change, we may no longer be recognizable characters to others. Online, the narrative notion of *attribution* is even further corroded. According to Ricoeur, utterances (as actions) are always attributable to someone, to a mine. On the internet anonymous commenting has become part and parcel, for better or worse. The practice has acquired an almost affectionate name in online culture: the 'anonymous coward'. It is not hard to imagine that commenters would sometimes be very displeased if their comment were actually traceable and attributable to them. The other pillar under narrative identity, the promise, or 'commitment' with Taylor (Taylor, 1989: 27), is equally under strain. Many people seem to find commitments burdensome and awkward. Mobile phone users constantly readjust their promises. Commitments are stretched, circumvented, renegotiated, adjusted according to our whims, flow, or feel of the moment. Because we appreciate this flexibility the mobile phone offers us, we display a remarkable consideration for other people's sudden changes of mind. Again, what matters is that the *conditions* of such changes are communicated.

If the habitual character and promising self are no longer adequate descriptions of how people see themselves and others, do we indeed reconfigure life as total free play in which we understand ourselves as opportunistic players? The mobile phone certainly brings an unprecedented sense of freedom in the double sense of *freedom from* constraints and *freedom to* act (Berlin, 1958). Yet as I have consistently argued, mobile phone communication is not entirely optional. Others apply pressure on us to be available, and to answer or call back within a certain amount of time (among Norwegian teens the rule of thumb is that peers must reply an SMS within 30 minutes: Ling & Yttri, 2002). Within the stakes set by others, we have the power to decide when to answer or not. We can choose to cheat on the rules by sustained non-answering, but this is dangerous. The paradox of freedom and force reveals itself to be an apparent contradiction after all. We reconfigure ourselves in a dialectic of 'conditional liberty' or 'voluntary bondage'. In fact this is characteristic of the late-modern condition in general. Bauman notes that the early-modern ethic of maximizing individual freedom

has resulted in society becoming far more rigid economically and institutionally. In the attempt to escape society's strangling fixation, the search for individual freedom has produced the very thing it sought to shake off. "Rigidity of order is the artefact and sediment of the human agents' freedom", Bauman writes (Bauman, 2000: 5, italics removed). By contrast, in our current age of 'liquid modernity' this rigidity is no longer challenged, Bauman says. The 'melting of solids', the permanent feature of modernity, is redirected. Now liquified are the relations between individual choices and collective projects and actions (ibid: 6). When the rules and codes are no longer fixed orientation points but become 'mobile', the rules themselves become exposed as man-made (as we have seen in section 5.4). Like spotting game in the wild they are best viewed while moving. Sure, we have always organized our lives according to rules. But under the pressure of change we become more aware of this fact, and are induced to reflect on the rules and on the condition of living a rule-governed life. Furthermore, for the lack of pre-given rules we must now set them ourselves. When the parameters to construct identities are underdetermined we must design our own conditions, and reapply them to ourselves. We must reconfigure life as if it were a rule-based game. As these conditions are no longer set in stone, playing the parameters becomes a life-long challenge. Paradoxically, living a rule-based life is the last vestige of self-determination. It is *I* who decides to willingly suspend disbelieve and play. It is *I* who is being played. By living life as a rule-based game we are free to play. Bounded by rules yet free to move we have become moving circles.

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