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**ATTACHED TO MY PHONE:  
A Study of Affective Mooring in Mobile Practice**

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### Declaration of Authorship

I Natalie Dixon hereby declare that this dissertation and the work presented herein is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 7 January 2019

## **Acknowledgements**

My sincerest thanks to my supervisors Joanna Zylinska and Sarah Kember for this intellectual adventure. I extend special gratitude and thanks to my husband, family and friends for their enduring support.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to South Africa and all South Africans,  
wherever they might find themselves.

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I foreground the affective dimension of mobile phones as a way to interrogate the socio-political implications of our relationship with technology. I question whether certain narratives have been submerged or even lost in the cultural history of technology. And, if so, what is at stake in their re-telling? To do this, I draw on a philosophical interpretation of affect as offered by Baruch Spinoza, adopted by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and developed further by cultural theorists such as Amparo Lasén, Larissa Hjorth and Susan Kozel. Here affect is articulated as a dynamic force that is contingent on relations between bodies – organic, human or nonhuman – and exists as part of fields of connectedness. Additionally, I draw on theories of embodiment as well as work from cultural theory and media and cultural studies to focus on the lived, felt experiences of bodies as the premise for developing concepts for use in mobile studies. I adopt a relational model of analysing media, whereby the body is perceived as a process of exchange between people, objects, ideas and places. My methodology follows a narrative approach, guided by the structures of feelings as a way to critique some taken-for-granted ideas about mobiles, such as the freedom they are said to enable or the social corrosion they supposedly engender. I examine cultural archives where affect seems to accumulate: for example, in messaging groups, films, advertisements, comic books, commentary and academic literature. ‘Affective mooring’ – a concept that articulates affect as a binding force in the formation of particular subject positions and relations of power – becomes a theoretical tool for developing critical analyses about technology in my dissertation. Using this tool I present a number of findings about mobiles such as the ways in which they engender conditions of work and positions of gender. Also, I show how as spatial technologies, mobiles are key in the formation of feelings of belonging *and* alienation in particular environments.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
Mobile Attachments	11
Mobile Studies	14
Theoretical Influences	16
Writing	21
Concepts of Power	22
Chapter Summaries	25
<b>CHAPTER 1: TENSION IN THE AIR</b>	<b>29</b>
Literature Focus	31
Methods Review	34
Apprehensive Beginnings	38
Bodies	41
Body Boundaries	45
Affect Theories	49
Biology and Affect	53
Mobiles and Affect	56
Affected Bodies	58
Affective Inflections	62
<b>CHAPTER 2: RETELLING MOBILE STORIES</b>	<b>65</b>
Whose Story?	68
Writing Affect	70
MOBILE VIGNETTE	71
Narrative and Story	75
MOBILE VIGNETTE	81
Mobile Stories	83
Writing Worlds	87
<b>CHAPTER 3: ATTACHMENT ISSUES</b>	<b>89</b>
Becoming Mobile: Narratives of Freedom and Productivity	89
The United States in the 1980s	92
Inventor Narrative	95
Decentralisation and Competition	99
Academic and Consumer Resistance	102
Dick Tracy	107
Madmen	111
Money Never Sleeps	115
Changing History	118
<b>CHAPTER 4: AFFECTIVE MOORING IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD WHATSAPP GROUP</b>	<b>121</b>
Neighbourhood Watch	123
WhatsApp	127
Neighbourhood as a Site of Study	130
Holding a Community	134
Neighbourhood A	136
Ghosts From The Past	140
Black Man Running!	145
Neighbourliness	147
<b>CHAPTER 5: BUDAPEST, MIGRANTS AND THE 'STRONGMAN' FIGURE</b>	<b>150</b>
Mobiles and Migrants	150

Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers .....	152
Shame and Fear in the Migration Process .....	155
Mobile Data and Surveillance .....	158
Resistance and Heterotopias.....	159
Keleti Train Station, Budapest.....	162
Making the Migrant Perceptible .....	169
Unproducing Difference.....	174
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>176</b>
Affective Mooring.....	180
Writing Process.....	183
Epilogue.....	188
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Appendix: Chapter 4 .....</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Appendix: Chapter 5 .....</b>	<b>213</b>



## LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1: Staged images of a woman conducting a FaceTime conversation at Gatwick Airport.....	71
Figure 2: Staged images of a man travelling by train and talking on his mobile between London Bridge and Gatwick Airport.....	81
Figure 3: (left) A scene from the cartoon strip Dick Tracy (right) An advertisement for a Dick Tracy wrist radio. .....	110
Figure 4: Scenes from the DYNA T-A-C promotional video (circa 1984).....	111
Figure 5: A Motorola advertisement for the DYNA T-A-C model (circa 1985).....	113
Figure 6: Screenshots of scenes from the Motorola 550 Flip Phone promotion (circa 1989).....	115
Figure 7: Gordon Gekko calls Bud Fox using a DYNA T-A-C phone in a scene from the film Wall Street (1987).	117
Figure 8: Neighbourhood Watch ('Buurtpreventive') sign on the outskirts of Amsterdam (Photo copyright: Antal Guszlev).....	123
Figure 9: Exterior views of Keleti station showing the upper and lower walkways and the main entrance to the station. (Photos: copyright Natalie Dixon).....	163
Figure 10: Photos of Keleti station at night showing the lower level of the station where migrants were camped (September 2015) (Photos: copyright Mauricio Lima).....	169

## INTRODUCTION

*I remember the first time I used a mobile phone. I had a Nokia 5510 feature phone with a stubby antenna that always poked out of my pocket. What I recall most clearly though is how people reacted when they saw me using it. In 1998 mobiles were considered the reserve of important people, people who had urgent things to do. Strangers, friends and family all oooooed and aaahhed when they saw my Nokia and I brandished it about like a piece of tech wizardry, placing it on tables in full sight of other students, talking loudly and pacing around the room as if ground-breaking decisions were in the making. I was unique and important. And it felt good. Skip ahead twelve years to 2010. Sleep deprived and irritable I stared incredulously at a pillow. It was midnight and I heard a ping. Then the pillow vibrated. No, in fact, under the pillow a Blackberry (not mine) was vibrating. Rage towards my sleeping partner overtook me. Aggressively I reached under the pillow, snatched the phone and tapped maniacally at the keypad. BBC news alert. BREAKING NEWS. Ping. I lurched out of bed in a fit of anger, screeching about interrupted sleep and the calamities that come with mobiles.*

*My feelings towards mobile phones, as briefly illustrated in these anecdotes, shaped the initial motivation that led to the making of this dissertation. If these stories are personal, it is because I have always felt very strongly about mobile technology – ranging from feelings of pride and excitement to mild irritation and pure rage. Yet I am not alone in this experience. All over the internet I read articles and news reports, and overhear conversations detailing very passionate accounts of mobiles. Often these accounts are worded in apocalyptic tones, perhaps to sell books or grab attention. Undoubtedly though, it seems that mobile phones have edged themselves into public debate. They often represent many social ills such as attention-deficit disorder and fragile family dynamics. For example, I have read more than once that mobiles contribute to the end of dating culture. A friend corroborated this claim; she said that she would end a date immediately if her companion placed their mobile on the table during conversation. Hearing and reading these stories, and reflecting on them in relation to my own experiences, I began an investigation into some of the feelings that attach to the technology.*

*When I turned to academic anthologies about mobiles, I discovered that, often unawares, academics seemed to also be grappling with their own feelings about mobile technology and often struggled to articulate them. Perhaps, as their names suggest, mobiles have a moving quality to them, not only because people carry them around, but also because mobiles are constantly shifting in the promises they offer and the kinds of affects they enable.*

*In this sense mobiles are quite tricky, they are not easy to 'pin down', but that is exactly what many early academic anthologies on the subject attempted to do. Indeed, authors seemed to be intent on pinning down our usage frequency and the kinds of effects that mobiles had on people. While this literature provided me with valuable data about what we do with our mobiles, it said very little about why we do it and about what this means. After spending time reading these scholarly accounts, I would always leave the library feeling like something was left unsaid. All around me people were cocooning with their mobiles, seemingly obsessed and entranced with their conversations. In the canteen I saw people enjoying lunch, talking to friends and also peeking at their phones and sharing images with each other. What I observed and felt was a particular intimate atmosphere. People's feelings about mobiles spilled over into spaces and relationships and yet I could not find that reflected clearly in words or concepts in the literature about mobiles: these feelings and atmospheres seemed to only exist on the streets. Also, I had a sense that these feelings signalled something larger was at stake – that feelings of intimacy or frustration that were often shared and felt between people also extended to wider networks of influence.*

*Inspired by a small group of researchers with a similar interest, I entered a phase of informal research into mobiles. I started photographing people talking or texting on their mobiles in public places. I did this as a way of making sense of my own feelings about the technology, or to discover potential patterns or work through some of the images I had captured. One time a friend turned his camera on me while I was standing at a tube station in London with close friends. When I reviewed the photo later it was strange to see myself as part of a trio of bowed heads staring into mobile screens, not talking to each other but being together in some sense. It was through this image that I began to understand my participation in mobile culture, not simply as an observer, but as someone who is implicitly part of this culture: bound to others through and in mobile communication, as a commuter who participates in public spaces and who feels and experiences the atmospheres surrounding mobiles. Mindful of my participation in mobile culture, the next, formalised phase of my research is contained within the subsequent pages of this PhD dissertation. This process of writing has offered me a way to critically engage with these initial hints, gut feelings and emotions, and most importantly account for how they are connected to the gendering and 'othering' that occurs through technology.*

## **Mobile Attachments**

In this dissertation I examine the affective attachments that exist between people and mobile phones. My central concern is to explore, through the lens of affect and affect theories, to what extent and in what way the field of mobile studies can carve out another path towards understanding the socio-political implications of our relationship with technology. While mobile studies have shown a heightened interest in affect in recent years, I argue that this dimension of mobiles still invites further research, especially as it relates to relations of power. As argued in this dissertation, affect can be used in a very particular way – that is, as a methodological tool alongside narrative – to render insights into positions of gender, conditions of work and feelings of belonging.

In order to critically assess how mobile technologies maintain, extend and reinforce relationships of power I have developed the concept of ‘affective mooring’ – defined as a binding force which is mobilised through mobile technology and which fixes people in differing positions of power. Through this concept, advanced through three case studies in the three chapters that form the core of this dissertation, I challenge some of the processes of relationship-making and their associated ideologies that tend to recede into the background of everyday lived experience, become normalised and are even taken for granted in narratives about mobile technology. In this examination I am guided by two key questions: have certain narratives become submerged or even lost in the cultural history of mobiles, and if so, what is at stake in their re-telling?

My analysis proceeds by examining a cultural archive of mobile phones that is made up of the industry and media discourses; academic literature; films; conversations; advertisements, comic books and social media commentary that circulate in the public domain. As mobile phones are less than 40 years old, their cultural and historical archives are arguably still in the making. Through my method of cultural analysis, I take issue with some of the normative assumptions about mobiles, as they relate to issues of hegemony and the creation of subject positions. One example is the early industry rhetoric perpetuated by popular media and industry voices through promotional videos in the mid-1980s, which assumed that mobiles liberated ‘us’ from temporal or physical constraints of the office and enabled a universal sense of freedom (Tube, 2015). In this narrative, mobile phones represented signs of middle-class prestige premised on freedom of movement, while obscuring problems with male bias and a reconfigured work day, where any time or any place presented an opportunity for getting things done. Specifically, this universal sense of freedom rested on assumptions about ‘us’, especially as it related to gender and class. In that

framework, all people are assumed to share similar experiences of work and forms of mobility, when in fact many working-class women have never experienced a discrete work day, as their affective tasks related to kin work and maternal care often extend well into the night (Stabile, 2012).

As a media and cultural studies scholar I understand mobiles to be part of a *way of life*. Thus, my understanding is that mobiles are a *part of* culture, not *the cause or effect* of cultural acts and processes. My analysis of mobile culture, following Raymond Williams' definition of 'structures of feelings', is concerned with 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt' (1977: 132). Here, structures of feelings point to the qualities of experiences and relationships expressed as a presence in a community at a particular time and context (Williams, 1977: 131-132). Aligning with a cultural studies approach to technology, I place emphasis on forms of contingency and genealogy above concepts of inevitability and so-called progress (Slack and Macgregor Wise, 2002: 490). Furthermore, I privilege concepts of agency above causality in my examination of mobiles. Drawing on posthuman theories, I am also committed to articulations of technology that insist on the mutually constitutive agency of humans *and* mobiles in the technological relationship.

As I will show in this dissertation, mobiles are lively actors in our networks of being in the world and, as such, they are part of 'bringing forth' feelings in people as well as producing affective notions of place. What I mean by this is that mobiles mediate our relation to the world in dynamic ways, as key actors in spatial and social practices. I understand mediation to be a dynamic and complex process that is a 'key part of understanding and articulating our being in, and becoming with, the technological world' (Kember and Zylińska, 2012: xv). Mediation is a process of technological intra-action between humans and mobiles includes multiple influences on the levels of the biological, economic, cultural, social, psychological and political. I use the term intra-action here instead of interaction as a way to emphasise the co-emergence of people, technology, texts, images and affects. In intra-action, agency is not isolated into separate entities; rather agency is co-constituted as a function of their entanglement (Barad, 2007: 33). Therefore, I understand 'mobile practice' to be a noun and a verb (Wetherell, 2012: 23). For me, mobile phones and the kinds of affective practices they enable are processes that entail aspects of movement, repetition, control and discipline. In this context of bodily affective capacities, technology cannot be perceived as ideologically neutral; it is not merely an object or hardware. As Martin Heidegger reminds us, 'the essence of technology is by no means anything technological'

(1977: 3). Instead technology, from its Greek origins *techné*, is a 'bringing forth' and 'a way of revealing' (Heidegger, 1977: 4-5).

While affect has many different interpretations and orientations, in this dissertation the focus is on a particular aspect of affect, that is, a felt, lived, embodied reaction to new media technology that implicates the mind, body and environment. Considering this focus, I have developed the concept of 'affective mooring'. Affective mooring addresses affects mobilised through mobile phones, such as fear, paranoia and shame, which reinforce certain socio-political positions *for some people*. These positions hinge on a sense of 'being in this together' that is articulated as a form of 'we-ness' re-affirmed through feelings of belonging. Most importantly though this feeling of ontological security<sup>1</sup>, this 'we-ness', is often premised on acts of exclusion or alienation of others. In other words, the 'we' that experiences a sense of stability and containment is always established in opposition to a 'them' that represents danger or insecurity. In this way affective mooring speaks to the politics of affect where passions and feelings can point to the rupturing of spaces and communities *as well as* binding them together. In this vein I emphasise that affective mooring, as a concept and a theoretical tool for mobile studies, is constituted by social processes, political intention, language, meaning and history. As I will argue, the popular discourse and cultural histories of race, gender and class are constitutive elements of affective mooring.

I have borrowed the term 'mooring' from urban geographers to describe a point of fixity or established practice – whether spatial, infrastructural or institutional – that configures and enables mobilities. In this sense, geographers often make reference to transmitters which enable the flow of information; or train stations and airports which enable the international and domestic flow of travellers (Hannam et al., 2006: 3). I argue that mobiles offer a kind stabilizing force amongst the flows of information, people and things in everyday life. Thus, affective mooring entails a form of stability and even containment which refers to how some people can feel a sense of security and boundedness through mobiles, often in the context of social and/or material precarity.

Affective mooring thus becomes a central concept for addressing my key research question: what is at stake in re-telling the cultural history of mobiles? This concept has

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<sup>1</sup> Here I refer to Anthony Giddens' definition of ontological security as a feeling of security that relates to continuity of self-identity and the constancy of the material and social states of individuals' environments. In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens writes that 'ontological security has to do with ... being-in-the-world' and is primarily concerned with the emotional rather than cognitive realm of experience (1990: 92). GIDDENS, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

offered me a way to critically evaluate certain assumptions and normalising processes – including practices of productivity, acts of neighbourliness or conditions of belonging – which are all affectively mobilised through mobile technology, as shown in my three case studies. Each of these case studies develops the concept of affective mooring a little further, albeit in very different contexts. These contexts include the United States in the 1980s during the public launch of the first mobile phone; an enclosed neighbourhood in South Africa in 2013; and in a train station with forced migrants in Budapest in 2015. As evidenced by this list, my cultural timeline of mobile technology is guided by affects rather than chronology, particularly where affects seem to cluster around stories about mobiles. In particular, I seek out moments where affects tend to spill over, become amplified by technology, and stick to texts and bodies. In the next section of this chapter I will situate my approach to mobiles as it relates to the interdisciplinary field that has become known as mobile studies.

### **Mobile Studies**

Due to the ubiquity of mobile technology in everyday life, sociologists, media and cultural theorists as well as communication scholars have approached the study of mobiles from different perspectives. These perspectives include the history of mobile phones (Gerard Goggin); a sociological perspective on the impact of mobile technology on social cohesion and coordination (Rich Ling); the study of the cultural practices of mobile music (Michael Bull); the examination of the spatial aspect of mobile gaming (Ingrid Richardson); and feminist concerns about the gendered dimensions of mobiles (Larissa Hjorth), to name only a few. Considering the wide scope of the scholarship on the topic, I will identify my own location and approach – related to affect – within the field of what is often referred to as ‘mobile studies’. The field of mobile studies certainly also requires some critical reflection as it is hardly coherent, or even universally understood (Hjorth et al., 2012: 1). Rather, the field is characterised by multiple viewpoints that relate not only to the variety of methodological and epistemological approaches from scholars but also to their different disciplinary origins. Some have labelled mobile studies a ‘thriving subfield within the larger field of new media studies’ (Saker and Frith, 2018: 2). They see it as having originated with the study of mobile technology, such as the Sony Walkman and more recently concerning itself with mobile phones and other wearable technology (Saker and Frith, 2018: 2). But, as Jason Farman writes in *Foundations of Mobile Media Studies*, after 20 years the field is still in the process of defining itself (2016: 4). This still-emergent field, mobile studies – much like its subject

matter, mobile technology – is constituted by a network of influences. Thus, in the same way that mobile technology is rarely examined outside of its broader techno-social environment – such as technical infrastructure, cultural context, history, industry regulations and social etiquette – the field of mobile studies should itself be perceived as networked, as it relates to internet studies, social media studies, mobility studies and, more recently, migration studies. Farman underscores this point succinctly in his claim that the field of mobile studies is ‘inherently interdisciplinary’ (2016: 5).

To be clear, this dissertation focuses only on mobile phones – and, considering Farman’s point, perhaps the challenge of trying to define mobile studies relates to mobiles themselves – which, as I understand them, are processes or events and not devices for examination or things that we can easily dissect. Mobile phones have networked qualities; they engage and intersect with numerous aspects of everyday life in ways that resist a singular approach and that rather constitute a diverse field of study. In other words, mobiles represent a form of multiplicity – through their numerous forms, channels and affordances – as well as their technical, cultural, social, political and economic dimensions (Hjorth et al., 2012: 1). While the field of mobile studies is diverse and prolific in its scholarship – with its own journal *Mobile Media & Communication*, conferences and books – some argue that there remains a lack of theoretical depth and structure within the field, especially as it relates to political engagement (Martin, 2014: 174).

This latter point is of interest to me, as my own approach to mobiles draws on an intersection of several other fields of study, primarily that of affect studies, media studies and cultural studies. I argue that affect theories provide a relevant perspective for the study of mobiles as they are primarily concerned with bodies – both animate and inanimate ones. These bodies are not bounded, isolated things but are part of on-going processes of communication and information exchange. This is extremely relevant to mobile phones, a technology that is almost always on our bodies and constantly receiving and transmitting various bits of information. This emphasis on affect and media technologies might be considered especially urgent in the context of recent global populist movements. As Chantal Mouffe argues, affects are central to the formation of political identities and the media has a large role to play their diffusion (2000: 146). More recently in the European context, Mouffe has argued that theorising affects and their relationship to collective identities is central to understanding the current political domain (2017). Considering these points, I argue that the lack of conceptual tools in mobile studies for addressing affects and their mediation through mobiles – especially as this process relates to inequalities between



people – invites further research. This is not to infer that affect was absent from mobile studies or mobile theory before this point – as I will detail in Chapter 1, affect was always part of mobile studies, if not always overtly acknowledged. To further contextualise my research within the field of mobile studies, in the next section I will briefly review some of the theorists who have most inspired my research.

### **Theoretical Influences**

The field of mobile studies has developed significantly over the last two decades since the first publications on mobiles appeared in 2002. Specifically, I am invested in understanding what significance lies at the intersection of affect and mobile studies. I argue that scholars who have studied mobiles over the last 20 years have taken some time to come to terms with this affective dimension of mobile technology and with their own feelings about technology. I will trace out this history, if only very briefly. It is worth noting that, despite the recent upsurge in literature about affect, emotion and media – as evidenced in *Networked Affect* (2015) edited by Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen and Michael Petit; *Affective Methodologies* (2015) edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage; *Haunting Hands: Mobile Media Practices and Loss* (2017) written by Kathleen M. Cumiskey and Larissa Hjorth and *Mediated Intimacies: Connectivities, Relationalities and Proximities* (2018) edited by Rikke Andreassen, Michael Nebeling Petersen, Katherine Harrison and Tobias Raun – this foregrounding of affect in relation to mobiles is relatively new. The editors of the recently published book *Mediated Intimacies* articulate new kinds of intimacies associated with media technologies through concepts of mediation via the work of Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska, for whom mediation is considered an ‘active process of doing and becoming through media technologies’ (Andreassen et al., 2018: 2). This approach to technology as a process of becoming through mediation, one I am aligned with, implies that media technologies are entangled ‘with fundamental parts of our human condition’ (Andreassen et al., 2018: 3). Susanna Paasonen extends this claim to suggest that, as new forms of mediated intimacy emerge, they ‘feed into patterns of structures of feeling that provide everyday lives with a particular tempo and feel’ (2018: 113).

One of the most concentrated research investigations into mobile communication initially took place amongst sociologists and communication scholars at the Digital World Research Centre at the University of Surrey – initiated by the University’s Human Sciences department in 1998. Some of the earliest writing at the intersection of affect, emotion and mobiles was produced at the Centre by the sociologist Amparo Lasén. Lasén considered the

shared agency between people and their phones and, as such, is one of the key inspirations behind my research, as she explicitly engaged with postmodern theories – including affect theories and actor network theory – to examine the mediation and expression of feelings and emotions through mobiles. Most importantly, Lasén highlighted bodies – and the physical connection between technological and human bodies – to examine emerging forms of subjectivity. In this vein she wrote a series of essays, including ‘Affective Technologies – Emotions and Mobile Phones’ (2004), ‘Understanding Mobile Phone Users and Usage (2005) and her subsequent book, *Mobile Phone Culture: Affective Technologies and Everyday Life* (2006). What is important to note here is that this kind of work, foregrounding the affective and emotional register of mobiles, was not a key focus of mobile studies in the first decade of scholarship. Scholars were more pre-occupied with accounts of mobile phone adoption rates, diffusion patterns and cultural differences in mobile usage. This latter pre-occupation is evidenced in the many graphs and tables in one of the first ever books about mobiles, *Wireless World* (2002), edited by Barry Brown, Nicola Green and Richard Harper from the Digital World Research Centre and in the collection *Perpetual Contact* (2002) edited by James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus.

Aligned with Lasén, my theoretical allegiance is to philosophical traditions drawn from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Their theory of affect, inspired by Baruch Spinoza, emphasises intensity, dynamism and the degrees of power that exist between bodies (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 299). Spinoza defines affect as the outcome of an encounter between bodies, placing importance on the relational context in which affect occurs (1955: 131). Therefore, affect is contingent on relations between bodies – organic, human or nonhuman – and exists as part of fields of connectedness (Spinoza, 1955: 131). Following Spinoza, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari write that ‘To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings’ (2013: 299). In its most literal sense, Spinoza’s theory of bodily capacities and the potential of affect to slow or intensify them are seen all around us in everyday routines, as people using their mobiles tend to slow their walking pace as they answer a call, or their postures become more hunched as they retreat to corners to position themselves against walls or stare out of windows. While these changes in bodies are interesting to observe, I would like to extend my analysis to bodies of a different kind, where, following Deleuze and Guattari, a space, social system or idea can also be considered a body. In this sense bodies

and the affects that attach to them signify differences in power and questions can be raised in this context about how some bodies have come to matter more than others (Butler, 1993: xi).

The rise of social networking sites in 2006 and smartphones in 2007 were a turning point for mobile scholars. As mobile cameras and the mobile web became more widespread, the affective capacities of mobiles were given more attention by scholars. With the launch of the Apple iPhone in 2007, users discovered the potential for constructing, sharing, editing and broadcasting versions of themselves to their online social networks. Studies of mobiles thus became more focused on the forms of networked affects that presented in mobile culture. Scott W. Campbell claims that this point also marks a shift in focus within mobile studies to the spatial impacts of the technology (Campbell, 2018: 3). His point is important to note, in that mobile studies evolved from concerning itself with how people connected to each other to also include how people and places connected through mobiles (Campbell, 2018: 3). It is around this time that I perceive a manifest change in the discourse of mobile studies – from sociological concerns of cultural relativity, diffusion and uses of mobiles to more of an emphasis on affect and phenomenology. The latter interests, stressing movement, process, change and the co-agenial relationship between people and mobiles, introduced a distinctly new epistemological stance to the field. It was around this time that Lasén proposed certain affective notions and vocabulary for the field of mobile studies, including terms such as ‘affective bandwidth’,<sup>2</sup> which described the capacity of mobiles to mediate emotions and affects. Larissa Hjorth further contributed the notion of ‘mobile-mediated intimacy’ through her research into mobile photography (also see Hjorth’s exhibition work titled ‘Snapshots’ 2006). This shift to the affective dimension of mobiles was, in part, contingent on related developments that took place within social sciences. For example, it was also around this time that more attention was given to the role of the senses in knowledge creation, as evidenced in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009) by Sarah Pink.

In the most recent scholarship on affect and mobile media, authors have built on the more generalized vocabulary of affect and mobiles by Lasén with specific accounts of mobile practices and their related affects. Many of these accounts of mobiles speak directly to the specificities of technology, including the broader cellular network and mobile applications. For example, Paasonen focuses on instances of network rupture, when reception signals fail, or users are disconnected from their phone and experience the fear of missing out. In her

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Affective bandwidth’ is a term coined by the affective computing scientist Rosalind Picard in her book *Affective Computing* (1995) and subsequently borrowed by Amparo Lasén in the context of mobile communication.

case study of young students, she posits that network connectivity is a modulator of individual agency and intimacy attachments – a concept she terms ‘infrastructures of intimacy’ (Paasonen, 2018: 104). Lin Prøitz, Larissa Hjorth and Amparo Lasén refer to processes of ‘affective witnessing’, describing how, through mobile media – in the form of photos and video – public mourning and national loss are given new forms of expression. Their examination proceeds from the mobile media that circulated after the South Korean ferry disaster in 2014, in which 246 high school children died. The media depicted both the victims’ last words and the selfies taken just before their deaths and the public outcry, anger and grief that circulated online in response (Hjorth et al., 2018: 68). In another recent study, Jette Kofoed examines the media practices of teenagers on Snapchat, with a focus on the sharing of ‘ugly’ images as a form of deep friendship making (2018: 122). She coins the terms ‘affective trails’ to describe the process of friendship maintenance through the specific features of Snapchat, such as the fire emoji in the application that denotes a sustained exchange of images between friends (Kofoed, 2018: 127).

As illustrated in these examples, examinations at the intersection of affect and mobiles include detailed accounts of how researchers place emphasis on the body *as well as* media specificities as sources of information. It is within this niche that I place myself, as a media scholar adopting a cultural studies approach to write about mobiles and engage with theories and concepts of affect. As part of the writing process I have been predominantly influenced by phenomenologists, and by media and cultural theorists. These scholars privilege affective registers of technology above the cognitive, in examining issues of hegemony. These authors include Susan Kozel, Lisa Blackman, Valerie Walkerdine, Elspeth Probyn, Vivian Sobchack, Larissa Hjorth, Melissa Gregg and Sara Ahmed. In their separate ways, all of these authors foreground the distributed agency between people and media technology. They also privilege the affective, sensory and bodily investments and attachments that exist in media environments as they relate to both human and nonhuman actors such as data, networks and algorithms.

Importantly, in framing questions about mobiles I have chosen to identify the latter as a technology, rather than media. Often these terms – media and technology – are used interchangeably in studies of mobiles, leading to the conclusion that there is little need for any ontological distinction between the two. However, in my writing, the foregrounding of technology points to an emphasis on technological specificities that modulate experience. I understand these specificities to be part of the material constitution of technology that can ‘change the environments and ecologies, natural and social, in which they exist’ (Lister et al.,

2009: 14). I draw on Martin Lister and his co-authors' claim that the physical constitution of technologies is important to recognise. These physical properties of technology 'can seriously constrain the range of purposes to which they can be put and powerfully encourage others. Hence recognising what a technology is – really and physically – is a crucial, if a partial and qualified aspect of a media technology's definition' (Lister et al., 2009: 14).

This foregrounding of technology also reveals my alignment with thinkers in the field of science and technology studies, specifically Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles. Both authors have influenced my approach to 'our' relationship with mobiles – one that strongly resists human-centric beliefs in favour of seeing the entanglement of humans and technology, distributed agency and mutually constitutive relations. Here relations refer to the makers of technology, those who market and sell mobiles, as well as the histories of those technologies in society. In particular I am invested in how affect and affect theories can extend the field of mobile studies by implicating their wider context of alliances. By alliances I mean processes of relationship-making – on a micro or macro level – that relate to issues of social alienation and / or belonging.

In addition, many of my observations and conclusions about mobiles have been composed while being in motion. This applies to my journeys on trains as a witness to conversations amongst fellow passengers or while waiting in an airport lounge as part of a journey. Indeed, mobiles themselves have a travelling quality to them: we take them on our journeys, they accompany us, often close to our bodies. Mobiles therefore tend to imply a transience that is aligned with process and movement. As already noted, urban geography theorists have provided me with the language and concepts that best articulate the relationship between movement and stasis in mobile practice. For example, in *Splintering Urbanism* (2001) by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, the authors explore the overlapping spheres of networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition. Mimi Sheller, John Urry and Doreen Massey's essays on cities and neighbourhoods as processes (as opposed to places) have informed my thinking about how mobiles form part of networks of objects, actors and ideologies that constitute the flow of everyday life.

Further still, I have learnt from media scholars working in migration studies – a field punctuated with affect, mirroring the kind of tensions and emotions that are inherent in the migration journey. Many scholars in migration studies appear to have embraced the phenomenological dimensions of migration, especially in relation to their own feelings and involvement, which has made the literature on the subject both more personal and more

affective. In the context of the so-called<sup>3</sup> European migration crisis, I argue that the relationship between mobility and technology invites closer attention. ‘Crisis’ implies a certain emotional quality and highlights urgency, maybe even danger. In this context Saskia Witteborn and Marie Gillespie have cogently argued that the affective affordances of mobiles should be privileged above the technical ones in studies of migration. Affects such as fear and shame are shaping forces in human migration, especially as they relate to mobile technology (Witteborn, 2014: 73). My analysis of the relationship between shaming and the process of ‘othering’ through mobile phones during migration owes much of its vocabulary and concepts to research currently taking place at the intersection of media and migration studies.

## **Writing**

My inquiry into structural relations of power is undertaken through writing, which I apply as a means of cultural analysis in this dissertation. I also view writing as a process that holds the potential for change. I argue that studying mobile media by using a narrative mode – a way of working that is attuned to feelings and affects – is well suited to the examination of mobile communication, which is in itself endowed with storytelling and affect. Indeed, mobile phones narrate our experiences through the photographs, messages and conversations they enable and store, often as evidence of our most intimate relationships and lived experiences. My examination of the affective attachments between people and mobiles is conducted in two ways. First, I identify certain moments in the cultural history of mobile phones as particular sites for making sense of mobile communication and relationships. Therefore, the timeline of this story is delineated by what I identify as affective moments in the cultural history of mobile communication – rather than by specific historical periods of technological development and its presumed progression.

Second, I compile and collage these archives as part of my writing process. Following Raymond Williams, my cultural analysis is a process of selection and interpretation (1998: 56). This process involves a gathering of certain ephemera of everyday life that relate to mobile usage and to specific notions of place and space as narrative leads to produce a story about mobile culture that, I argue, might otherwise go largely unnoticed. For example, some essays in the formative academic literature on the subject cast mobile phones as disruptive tools that corrode social cohesion. By contrast, early marketing material celebrates the

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<sup>3</sup> ‘So-called’ because this hackneyed phrase ‘migration crisis’ is often used as a tactic to create fear and paranoia by populist governments and media.

phone as a utopian technology that frees people from the constraints of time and place. Therefore, when some of these archives are compiled and examined together, they tend to contradict, intersect or complement each other, thus creating a form of affective resonance in this dissertation. I view this affective resonance as a task of writing, 'achieved when writing finds the particular form adequate to what it describes' (Gibbs, 2015: 227). Such affective resonance, becoming a part of a mobile story, can be understood as both a literary and political tactic. To communicate through a form of affective resonance is also to place emphasis on the ontological dimension of scholarly practice and to embrace rather than avoid displays of affect or emotion (Gregg, 2006: 1). An affective address does, in part, also offer a challenge to the established boundaries of epistemological value in the humanities, where value is traditionally based on objectivity and detachment (Gregg, 2006: 5-6).

My practice of writing, guided by affect, further borrows the 'graphy' from the field of ethnography to render certain experiential and storied moments as critical research contributions. Considering my situational specificity as a writer, I do not view 'writing to be a methodological "tool" in any simple sense' (Gibbs, 2015: 224). I agree with Anna Gibbs' argument that 'writing is ... a process, implicitly dialogical, in conversation with the world, with other writing, and reflexively, with itself. It is this very means of procedure – a turning and returning – that characterises it as an affective methodology' (Gibbs, 2015: 224). Drawing on this definition, I view writing as an act of 'bringing forth or creation' (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 81). Here writing facilitates the formation of new perceptions, ideas, theories and ways of thinking. In this more abstract sense, writing is also a form of technology that mediates different forms of bodily extension, where bodies are not limited to viscera but are conceptualised as bodies of thought or ideas too (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 304). Therefore, writing – claimed as a methodology in this dissertation – is not merely a means of documentation, but also a mode of developing theory and analysis. For me, writing is not an after-effect of field research but rather a 'mode of inquiry in its own right' (Gibbs, 2015: 222).

### **Concepts of Power**

The case studies contained in this dissertation highlight relations of power, as they are mediated and sustained through mobile technology. Indeed, cultural studies, since its emergence as a field in the 1950s, has been occupied with concepts that articulate relations of power as a fundamental starting point for analysis of culture (Gibson, 2007: 3). Importantly, relations of power -- aligned with the general tenets of cultural studies -- need to be 'local, specific and historically formed as any other concept' (Gibson, 2007: 15). I will

come back to the second point as it relates to my specific case studies. First though, I will highlight my conceptualisation of power relations and discuss how those relations are established, drawing from the writings of Michel Foucault and Chantal Mouffe. My choice of these two theorists relate to specific foci of my dissertation – mobility and affect. Specifically, Foucault’s theories have allowed me to articulate some of the relationships of power that emerge within the movements and flows of people, technology and information in urban settings. Mouffe’s theories have allowed me to think through the role of affect in the establishment of relations of power.

I have focused on what Foucault refers to as ‘modes of objectification’ through which people are made into subjects (1982: 208). Here I am attentive to Foucault’s study of ‘dividing practices’ in his essay ‘The Subject and Power’ (1982), whereby subjects are divided from society or from themselves through techniques of classification, containment, medicalization and stigmatization of selected groups (Rabinow, 1984: 8). In this respect, Foucault cites examples such as the isolation of lepers from society, the containment of criminals in the penal system and the institutionalization of psychiatric patients in hospitals (1982: 208).

In addition, I draw from Foucault’s concept of biopower, as examined in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977/1995). Broadly stated, this concept articulates how bodies – their gestures and movements – are disciplined, ranked and ultimately made docile through techniques and technologies of power. In this context Foucault cites techniques of institutional control and bodily manipulation. These include temporal elements such as timetables that impose regular rhythms and rituals in schools; and the conditioning of bodies through rhythmic attunement to physical practices such as military marching (Foucault, 1995: 155). Surveillance technologies at borders, including retina scanners and facial recognition software, present contemporary examples of how the body remains a key domain for the exercise of power. One of the necessary conditions of power, enacted through disciplinary techniques, is that the normal and the abnormal are seen as necessary and distinct categories. More so, this division necessitates the ‘existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal’ (1995: 199).

Both modes of power – objectification and biopower – are characterised by relations between individuals or groups. So that ‘if we speak of the structures or mechanisms of power, it is only as far as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others’ (Foucault, 1982: 217). More pointedly, relationships of power in a Foucauldian sense always



imply a level of action – where action is taken upon others – in which the most extreme manifestation is an absolute constraint such as in a prison or asylum (1982: 220). My focus on the technique of dividing practices is a considered one as my case studies highlight how spaces of exclusion are produced, where exclusion is based on lack of certain privileges associated with gender, class, nationality and race. I am particularly invested in developing my concept of affective mooring as it relates to the constraint and containment of groups in the context of urban mobility, including traffic flows, flows of information and people. In other words, I am interested in how power is exercised through the containment and disciplining of some bodies – those considered not ‘normal’— manifested as limitations imposed on movement and mediated through technology. In this sense I perceive mobile phones to be *part of* an apparatus of governance, i.e. ‘that which has the capacity to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions or discourses of living beings’ (Agamben, 2009: 14).

I would like to build on these concepts already outlined by focusing more closely on the affective dimension of power relations, utilising the writings of Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe, who writes in the context of political theory, asserts that no political project can risk avoiding affects and their mediatisation, as defining forces in the formation of collective identities (2005: 6). Her approach to affect, inspired by Baruch Spinoza, Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein, emphasises those affects mobilised in the political domain that move people in a particular direction, ‘to desire something and act accordingly’ (Mouffe, 2017). Her focus is on the crucial role of affects and how they can be discursively mobilised for political aims. This focus on affect is part of Mouffe’s larger analysis of the rise of the ‘populist moment’ in Europe. Broadly, Mouffe critiques rationalist models of democratic politics which, she argues, are muted by the affectively charged discourse of populist movements for ‘the people’ (2005: 70).

I would like to draw particularly on Mouffe’s discussion of the affective and discursive shaping of adversarial categories of ‘we’ versus ‘they’, where the distinction between the two is drawn along moral lines of good versus evil. Here Mouffe cites examples of discursive tropes used by politicians including the ‘axis of evil’ by George W. Bush and the ‘evil empire’ espoused by Ronald Regan (2005: 75). Mouffe’s concepts have facilitated my thinking on what is exactly at stake in affective terms deployed in some of the case studies I have analysed. Here I refer to the affective shaping of collective identities defined by ‘people like us’ that tend to be constituted through ideals of white, middle-class European homogeneity. In line with my methodology - a critical writing praxis mobilised by affects - I

aim to articulate what is at stake in the formation of a particular 'we' and 'them', where that 'we' is presented as neighbours, family or nation, and is positioned against a 'them' denoted through notions of the stranger, danger and otherness.

### Chapter Summaries

Each chapter of this dissertation travels through various contexts, starting with a meta-reflection on the beginnings of scholarly literature and discourse on mobile phones in **Chapter 1**, titled 'Tension in the Air'. As part of this literature review I discuss three titles in the emergent field of mobile studies. The first, *Perpetual Contact* (2002), edited by James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus, is arguably one of the most influential titles in the field, as evidenced by the number of citations it has had (1,731 since its publication in 2002, many of which still appear in contemporary literature on the subject). I argue that this foundational work sets the tone for the development of mobile studies, especially as far as it diminishes the notion that we engage with new media through, and with, our bodies. Instead, a cognitive appraisal of our interaction with media is privileged by the editors and authors over other registers of awareness, such as those occurring on the level of affect and embodiment. This is evidenced in the numerous graphs and statistical tables included throughout this book. However, it seems that after the publication of *Perpetual Contact* scholars wanted to re-focus their attention on aspects of the body-mobile relationship, as evidenced in the other two publications included in this review chapter: *Machines That Become Us* (2003), edited by Katz, and *Mediating the Human Body* (2003), edited by Leopoldina Fortunati, Katz and Raimonda Riccini. What emerges is a rather awkward engagement with concepts of the body and the then new idea of posthumanism. I argue that this development in mobile studies is worth highlighting as a particular moment of struggle for theorists and researchers, who were grappling with the then nascent and complex human-mobile issues.

In addition to providing a review of mobile literature in Chapter 1, I outline my understanding of affect in relation to the other debates within the field of affect theory. I review some of the major critiques within the field, such as those levelled against Brian Massumi by Ruth Leys as they relate to his use of the Basic Emotions paradigm.<sup>4</sup> In addition,

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<sup>4</sup> Leys refers to the Basic Emotions paradigm, which is the basis of theories often espoused by neuroscientists and psychoanalysts that consider affects to be a pre-cognitive evolutionary response to stimuli. She refers to Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman in this regard as theorists who claim affects are pre-programmed biological responses that exist independently of meaning or intention (2011: 437).

I review Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard's critique of affect theorists – in particular Mark Hansen – who loosely translate aspects of research from the life sciences into cultural studies. I then outline Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect, as a key (albeit contentious) contribution introduced to cultural studies by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank in 1995. In the third section of this chapter I attempt to bridge these two areas of focus – mobiles and affect theory. I take a closer look at the essays by Lasén, who moves beyond the early work of mobile studies to introduce an affective vocabulary into the field. I also discuss how Lasén's significant but somewhat generalised approach to affect has been addressed in the more recent literature, with precise attempts to differentiate and even perform some of the affects that circulate in mobile communication. In this regard, I highlight the research of theorist and dance practitioner Susan Kozel.

In **Chapter 2** I propose a narrative method as a way to foreground the affective dimension of mobiles. I argue that mobile phones, through the ways they mediate our daily experiences – in the distribution and archiving of images, words, messages and feelings – have become co-authors of our cultural history. Considering this claim, I view a narrative method as particularly well suited to the study of mobiles. 'Many of the cultural research practices are too focussed on content and structures of signification, with too little attention paid to reflecting inventively on where and how affect may be traced, approached and understood' (Knudsen and Stage, 2015: 2). Considering this call to reflect inventively, I illustrate a particular affective register in this chapter through the inclusion and examination of two photographic vignettes, staged with friends and based on my own experiences with mobiles in public spaces. I claim that by foregrounding affect in this story – through the moments depicted and through the register in which it is written – this narrative method can be used as a critical tool for addressing some of the assumptions that exist about mobile practice. The chapter's conclusion poses writing as both an affective-critical tool and a process of intervention that raises questions about the relationship between people and phones.

In **Chapter 3** I examine the implications of the early attachments that formed between consumers and mobile phones in the United States around the time of the technology's launch in 1984, especially as it relates to issues of gender. I analyse how these attachments were affectively embodied, enacted and assigned value through heroic male figures. By drawing on a media archive which features the Motorola inventor Martin Cooper, the cartoon character Dick Tracy, advertising material, and the film character Gordon Gekko I analyse how these figures offered illusionary ideals of freedom and autonomy to the public

imagination. I argue that in response to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, consumers found a sense of security, even stability, in the desirable productivity that mobiles promised. Indeed, any consumer fears and apprehension about the adoption of the technology were swept aside or submerged by stories of masterful male efficiency and productivity. This chapter questions the emancipatory narrative of mobile productivity by highlighting the latter's implications for the conditions of work and the gendering of technology.

**Chapter 4** extends the challenge to assumptions about freedom even further, by offering a story about belonging and alienation seen through the prism of a WhatsApp group chat, and premised, in part, on a particular set of historical circumstances. In this case study neighbours in South Africa identify and track strangers via their WhatsApp group; they also describe their feelings of anxiety and fear in the group and they put plans into action. In this context, certain notions of information sharing and the cherishing this implies are often entangled with ideas of protection in the neighbourhood. Using the case study of an enclosed neighbourly community in Johannesburg, this chapter draws on theories of affect and mobility to elaborate on the concept of affective mooring. That is, I suggest that a neighbourhood WhatsApp group constitutes an affective mooring – an established practice and point of fixity – that generates a sense of being held in a community through feelings of collective presence and safety. Notably, these feelings of presence and safety are hinged on acts of resistance and alienation towards strangers. In this way, WhatsApp as an affective mooring in the neighbourhood is also a site for negotiating ideals of belonging. I draw from various archives in this chapter – ones that constitute a stickiness that accrue and distribute value – including crime statistics, newspaper reports, social media commentary and conversations. These archives restlessly sit together to invoke some of the texture that makes up this particular story of suburban life. The chapter ends up questioning the notion of a neighbourhood as a taken-for-granted entity. Instead I argue that the neighbourhood is a concept forged through ideals of middle-class homogeneity.

In **Chapter 5** I examine affective mooring through the attachments that exist between forced migrants and their mobile phones. More specifically, I focus on an incident that took place in September 2015 in Budapest, when a group of approximately 2,500 forced migrants, mostly from the Middle East and Afghanistan, were stranded at Keleti train station due to the Hungarian government's moratorium on the international travel of migrants and refugees. Drawing on theories from mobility studies, affect studies and media studies, I examine various news reports, academic literature, personal experiences and feelings about Keleti station and the informal migrant camp that was established there. In my reading of

this incident from an affective perspective, I propose that mobiles provide a way for forced migrants to create a heterotopic space in extreme conditions, where migrants are affectively moored by media practices that enable feelings of familiarity and ontological security. These practices not only constitute a refuge for migrants but also offer a sense of agency in the form of resistance, however small, towards the stigmatization and shaming they experience. This chapter highlights the value in putting certain disciplines into conversation with each other, namely migration studies and media studies. The former offers perspectives on shaming in media practices that I argue are crucial to this emergent theme within media studies.

My **Conclusion** offers some reflections and notes on the kinds of political work that can be undertaken in future studies of mobiles. By ‘political’ I mean the examination of problematic and unequal relationships that emerge and become established through mobile practice. In this respect, I reflect on some of the key influences in my development of the concept of affect-as-mooring. I argue that my approach to mobile research resists any tendencies to reduce the world to purely cognitive appraisals, as I foreground and privilege the affective responses of bodies to technology – where bodies refer to user bodies, researcher bodies and ideas and ideologies *as bodies*. I finish my thesis by suggesting that an implicit ethical demand is placed on researchers in studies of the affective dimension of media. This demand is understood as a responsibility towards the displaced and marginalised stories or voices that have been submerged by more dominant historical narratives of linear technological progress. I further reflect on how my concept of affective mooring developed through the three case studies. Notably, this development would not have taken place without the valuable interdisciplinary conversations that I fostered, most notably with urban geography and migration studies. I briefly address my hope for how the concept will be used as a tool – one uniquely forged through affective and narrative means – within media studies to examine the ideological concerns associated with technology.

## CHAPTER 1: TENSION IN THE AIR

*Why does a phone ringing on the stage create instant tension?*

- Marshall McLuhan (2001: 292)

When Marshall McLuhan made his observation about a ringing telephone, he was referring to the classic landline. However, in a time of near-ubiquitous mobile telephony I maintain that his question of tension still remains pertinent. Indeed, the sound of a phone moves us; it requires effort to ignore its call. More specifically, this aspect of the medium raises the question of what reactions to mobile phones mean and how these translate into academic literature on the subject. To answer it, I review the first decade of literature about mobile phones (2000 - 2010) in this chapter, paying careful attention to how researchers in sociology as well as cultural and media studies approach the affective dimension of mobile practice as part of their studies and how, at a certain point, an affective vocabulary begins to develop in the field. In the first part of this chapter I review the key themes in *Perpetual Contact* (2002) edited by James E. Katz and Mark Aakhus; *Mediating the Human Body* (2003) edited by Leopoldina Fortunati, Katz and Raimonda Riccini; and *Machines That Become Us* (2003) edited by Katz. Written by a close group of sociologists, during rather interesting, if not tense, times – that is, amidst the terrorist attacks in New York City in 2001 – these titles are characterised by trepidation and even anxious undercurrents.

The first, *Perpetual Contact* (2002), a foundational work, sets the tone for mobile studies with a particular emphasis on mobiles as intrusive and corrosive tools that impact social interactions and integral processes of the human body. In this way, much of *Perpetual Contact* elides the human body as a source of influence and tends to place emphasis on technology as a determinant of change. However, it seems that after the publication of *Perpetual Contact* scholars quickly wanted to re-focus their attention on aspects of the body-mobile relationship, as evidenced in the other two publications included in this review: *Machines That Become Us* (2003) and *Mediating the Human Body* (2003). Compared to *Perpetual Contact* these subsequent titles received a muted response from the academy with far fewer citations.<sup>5</sup> Despite this response, what appears in these two latter books is interesting to note: a rather awkward engagement with concepts of the body and emerging

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<sup>5</sup> *Machines That Become Us* has been cited 238 times since 2003 and *Mediating the Human Body* has been cited 181 times since its publication in 2003.

ideas of posthumanism. I argue this literature is worth highlighting for two reasons: firstly, it reveals a particular moment of struggle or tension between sociological and phenomenological accounts of mobiles. And secondly, this literature provides a marker for how far the field has developed since then with regards to issues of human-mobile agency. While some contemporary mobile literature assumes the co-constitution of people and mobiles,<sup>6</sup> in early mobile literature scholars appeared to still be grappling with the implications of the proximity of mobiles to the body and the complexity of this relationship. This struggle is of particular interest to me as it provides a starting point for where to position my own research – that is, as situated at the affective juncture of debates about human and technological agency. Indeed, this debate amongst mobile theorists was at its most intense during the early stages of research and still continues to develop through theories and methodologies – especially as it pertains to feelings, emotions and affects. As Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska claim in *Life After New Media*, ‘our relationality and our entanglement with non-human entities continues to intensify with the ever more corporeal, ever more intimate dispersal of media and technologies into our biological and social lives’ (2015: xv).

As already noted, I approach questions of agency in the human-mobile relationship through theories of affect. I am not suggesting that affect theories provide a neat conclusion to questions of agency. Instead, as argued in the second part of this chapter, in this highly contested area of study affect theorists offer charged arguments and explosive rebuttals about how affect is defined and differentiated from emotion and feeling (Massumi, 1995) (Ahmed, 2010) (Leys, 2011) and whether there is any basis in claims for its autonomy and independence from other bodily systems (Leys, 2011) (Papoulias and Callard, 2010) (Hemmings, 2005). Further, tensions arise in the field of affect studies concerning the interdisciplinary borrowings that take place between neuroscience, psychology and cultural studies. Indeed, affect theorists tend to either borrow certain aspects of neuroscience and developmental psychology to scaffold their arguments or criticise these borrowings as theoretical ‘missteps’ (Papoulias and Callard, 2010: 45).

In the third section of this chapter I bridge these two areas of focus – mobiles and affect theory – by outlining my concept of affect in relation to mobile technology and to other debates within the field of affect theory. I highlight the essays of Amparo Lasén, who extends the early work of mobile studies to introduce an affective vocabulary into the field. Her writings represent the first explicit acknowledgment of affect in relation to mobiles. I

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<sup>6</sup> Evidence of this can be found in the recent anthology *Mediated Intimacies*, in which the editors stress the mutual shaping of humans and media technologies via processes of mediation (Andreassen et al., 2018: 3).

therefore pay specific attention to the development of a new vocabulary within mobile studies, introduced by Lasén with phrases such as ‘affective technology’ (2004: non.pag.) and ‘affective bandwidth’ (2010: 14). As part of this examination I focus on affect as articulated by Spinoza as well as Deleuze and Guattari as a force that implicates a wider set of obligations and relations to various bodies (both human and nonhuman), a community or a space. I am particularly interested in how mobile research develops in 2009 and 2010, after the launch of Facebook, with a focus on emotion and affect. Lasén’s approach to affect has been revisited in more recent literature, with precise attempts to differentiate and even perform some of the affects that circulate in mobile communication, as seen in the research of theorist and dance practitioner Susan Kozel.

In the further part of this chapter I focus on those concepts of affect that have particularly influenced my way of working in the dissertation, including the scholarship of Elspeth Probyn, Valerie Walkerdine, Vivian Sobchack, Susan Kozel and Lisa Blackman. This literature privileges the affective and sensory aspects of mobiles above cognitive registers of experience, with particular emphasis on bodies and process. In part, what I mean by this is that mobiles are intimately tied to the human body and the body’s affective capacities, in a way that suggests that so-called bodily boundaries are rather more porous than stable. This idea of body permeability thereby calls into question other distinctions that tend to be taken for granted, such as what is considered inside/outside, mind/body and us/them (Blackman, 2008: 10). The concept of body permeability aligns with my specific mode of affective questioning, reading and writing that attempts to avoid these kinds of dualisms.

### **Literature Focus**

I have chosen to concentrate on a selection of three titles in this literature review for specific reasons, to tell a story of a *particular kind*, which I will discuss in this section. Aligned with my methodology – a narrative approach guided by affects – I become attuned to moments where affects tended to cluster in three titles, presenting an extrusion in mobile literature that demanded my attention. Scholars in *Perpetual Contact* (2002), *Mediating the Human Body* (2003) and *Machines That Become Us* (2003) appeared to be grappling with the implications of the proximity of mobiles to the body and with the complexity of this relationship. This struggle is of particular relevance to me as it provided a starting point to position my own research – that is, as situated at the affective juncture of debates about human and technological agency. Indeed, this debate amongst mobile theorists presented rather overtly in these three titles – especially as it pertains to feelings, emotions and affects.



It is the particular affective dimension of this literature that drew me to these titles. In this vein I paid attention to the feelings of discomfort and unease about mobile communication that tended to circulate much like an undercurrent in this collection, even though they were granted little acknowledgment from the authors.

This moment of tension allowed me to give an account of the place of affect in the field of mobile studies, and, more significantly, provided me with a way of articulating my own mode of working, one that is attuned to affects and their meaning in larger relationships of power. In addition, in my reading of literature about mobiles – both contemporary and earlier work – I encountered numerous citations and references to this collection of titles, alluding to their influence on scholarship in the field of mobile studies. For example, definitions of how mobiles have impacted the spheres of public and private are often drawn from *Perpetual Contact*, setting a particular tone for studying mobiles, one that tends to obscure the affective and phenomenological accounts of technology. My choice in this review was deliberate in an effort to foreground the affective dimension of mobile scholarship. Admittedly, this chapter's narrative could have had different starting points that would have led me in different directions. I would still like to acknowledge the wider emergent field of mobile studies as it pertains to affect, mobiles and concepts of embodiment to further contextualise my literature review. I will outline a few of these texts in the following section.

*Technospaces* (2001) edited by Sally Munt highlights the embodied practices of new media technology. Indeed, Munt defines technospaces as 'lived, embodied fluctuations in human/machine interaction' (2001: 11). Drawing on theories of space and time from Doreen Massey, Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu, this title explores formative questions in relation to mobile technology (including laptops, iPods, mobiles and personal assistants). Key questions include: 'What forms of embodiment are practised in technospace?'; 'How do subject/object relations become practised in the new media technologies, and do they affect constructions of self?' and 'Must an ethics of technospace be realised?' (Munt, 2001: 11). Munt stress that a focus on spatial practices and their entanglement with new media technology implies relations of power. Specifically she calls for a tempering of discourses of euphoria around new media technology with consideration for the ethical, humanistic needs of our technospaces.

Aligning with Munt's call for a fuller understanding of spatial practice and mobile technology, 'In the Company of Strangers: Mobile Phones and the Conception of Space' by the Sussex Technology Group examines early mobile usage in public spaces in Brighton (UK)

in 1996. Stressing the cultural context of these mobile practices, the authors reveal the permeability of public and private space as phone users no longer distinguished between different spheres as separate 'places' delineated as 'here' or 'there' (Bassett et al., 2001: 216). Rather, the blurring of these spaces introduced a number of interesting findings, including the ambivalence amongst mobile users who desire access to networks of emotional support but can also be affected by the scrutiny and surveillance that mobiles present (Bassett et al., 2001: 220). Drawing on interview material and Jean Baudrillard's theory of the 'revenge of the object', the authors examine the impact of mobiles on the psychological space of users. Here mobiles are paradoxical technologies that do not neatly fit into binary categories of security or control but rather occupy the blurry middle ground (Bassett et al., 2001: 208). In other words, mobiles are technologies of control – exemplified by employers who keep track of their workers – *and* technologies of security, enabling emotional contact and support at any time or place.

In relation to questions of emotional containment and mobile technology, I'd like to turn to Michael Bull's ethnography of personal stereos in his essay 'Personal Stereos and the Aural Reconfiguration of Representational Space' (2001). Specifically, I want to highlight aspects that relate to this dissertation such as the sense of interiority that mobile music (in the form of personal stereos and later iPods) affords users. Drawing from Jean Baudrillard, Bull articulates music as a form of mobile home as listeners choose the intimacy of music over the immediacy of the outside surroundings (2001: 244). Bull further elaborated on concepts of mobile music, and more specifically the role of the iPod in everyday experiences of commuting in his essay 'No Dead Air! The iPod and the Culture of Mobile Listening' (2005). He articulates the imaginative ways in which people adjust (or accentuate) their mood as well as reconceptualise waiting time and commuter space through technology. Bull points directly to issues of control and power – that is, the fact that iPod users feel they have a better sense of control of their environment due to the calming or energising effects of their music. Echoing some of his earlier claims in his 2001 essay on personal stereos, Bull gives many examples that reveal how commuters can mediate their sensory experiences of public spaces with mobile music to better manage their journeys. His argument rests on the idea of the iPod (and the stereo before) as both technologically enabled forms of mobile privatisation (Bull, 2005: 352-353). He writes that 'continuation of mood from home to street is achieved by bridging these spaces with music. Use can be described as creating a 'space' within which users unwind and unravel their emotions, thus providing a base for thinking more clearly or lucidly' (Bull, 2005: 349).

Building on the concept of technosoma introduced by Munt, Ingrid Richardson calls for alternative modalities of embodiment in her study of portable media devices, including PDAs, MP3 players and gaming consoles. She maintains that, far from being a disembodied experience, these devices demand an incorporation of both the physical as well as the virtual surroundings, introducing a unique 'technosoma' (Richardson 2005). Simply put, she claims that mobile gamers can -- while walking or commuting -- simultaneously incorporate experiences of being 'there' and being 'here'. Drawing on phenomenology and theories of medium specificity in her theorisation of portable devices Richardson calls for re-thinking existing dualistic perceptions of embodiment as we turn towards specific technologies and media interfaces. In this sense Richard proposes that 'mobile device usage [is] quite literally a mode of embodiment, a way of "having a body"' (Richardson, 2005). Her claims rest on notions of body permeability and mutability attuned to the physical environment and technological appendages.

### **Methods Review**

To recap, the methodology of this dissertation adopts a narrative approach guided by affects as a way to develop a critical analysis of people's relationships with mobile phones. In this section I will review my method as it pertains to the ethics and obligations associated with writing about living subjects. These ethics and obligations relate to certain moments in my research process. For example, my observation of strangers in public spaces; people I interviewed; social media commentary; and mobile conversations I have referenced -- all of which have been subjected to the university's ethics procedure. Specifically, in this context of ethical clearance, I would like to focus on my position (and privilege) as a researcher who maintains a particular situatedness. That is, my research emerges from historical and material contingencies that are immanent in the story of this dissertation.

My approach is guided by James Clifford's claim that culture is not a static thing awaiting description and analysis but is rather 'contested, temporal, and emergent' (1986: 19). His claim is located within an approach to ethnography that emerged in the 1960s, that places particular emphasis on the self-reflexivity of writers and evades any notions of completeness in knowledge creation. Instead Clifford proposes that research is delimited by an 'open-ended series of contingent, power-laden encounters' (1986: 8). He writes that "Cultures" do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to do so involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship' (1986: 10). In

recognition of the partiality, contingency and enacted relations of power in research endeavours, the following specifications become especially pertinent: Who speaks? Who writes? When and where? Under which historical and institutional constraints? (Clifford, 1986:13). By raising these questions Clifford poses culture as a process that cannot be authoritatively represented but is rather more dialogical. Following Clifford, research accounts do not present a complete summation or representation of culture, rather, research is perceived as a moment of 'ethnographic production'(1986: 16).

Similarly, Donna Haraway claims, 'I try to use stories to tell what I think is the truth – a located, embodied, contingent, and therefore real truth' (1997: 230). Indeed, the notion of objective truth has been critiqued by theorists who rely on concepts of partial truth, or contingent truth, as Haraway puts it, which is mediated by language, technology as well as social and cultural influences. This view acknowledges that descriptions of reality are conversations rather than conclusions and are always contingent on the researcher's context or vantage point. Gender, socio-cultural and temporal contexts all have the potential to shape research agendas by attaching significance to certain areas of concern (Bochner, 1994: 25). To reiterate, Clifford writes that, 'Even the best ethnographic texts – serious, true fictions – are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control' (1986: 7).

Following Haraway and Clifford, my research into mobile culture emerges, in part, from my location as a white female within the privileged echelon of Western academia. Indeed the very idea of researching mobile culture assumes a level of privilege, only made possible (and relevant) when people can actually own mobile phones and have access to Wi-Fi or money to buy data in order to use them. My own situatedness -- including the material and semiotic apparatuses that shaped my upbringing in apartheid South Africa -- played a significant role in the selection of some of the case studies in this dissertation above others, especially as they relate to issues of gender and race. As a process that is inherently dialogical, my writing reflects and informs my own questions of selfhood and identity as much as it endeavours to contribute a partial, located knowledge about mobile culture.

Pointedly, as a writer and mobile researcher, my knowledge claims are inflected by my affective experiences. Said differently, affects exert pressures on my knowledge agenda. For example, in Chapter 4 I have examined neighbourhood relations through the lens of WhatsApp group in Johannesburg. The affective impetus for this chapter was informed by my own embodied knowledge of middle-class white neighbourhoods in Johannesburg and the kinds of fears and paranoia that circulate there. As a 'modest witness', to this group I

have read the dynamics of the neighbourhood in a particular way, paying attention to certain affects and expressions of emotions while avoiding any form of authoritative or complete claims on knowledge. Following Donna Haraway, the process of modest witnessing implies a way of seeing, a mode of paying attention to certain moments where my framing, reading and interpreting of those moments are grounded in specific bodies. Here 'bodies' refer to the messy bloody fleshy kind as well as bodies as ideas or thought.

Further, my critical analysis was informed, in part, by the access I was given to the messages in the group. The content of the group was used as a narrative lead in the writing of this chapter, thereby providing an affective backdrop for my writing and to invoke some of the atmosphere of the neighbourhood. I was granted permission to view and use the messages by the group's administrator. This person, elected by the neighbourhood to represent them, acted as the gatekeeper for the neighbourhood on issues of information dissemination. As Nigel Fielding notes in *Researching Social Life*, gatekeepers are often important negotiators in granting access to information and assessing the risk to their group or organisation they represent (2001: 150). In my case, the administrator informed the group of my research by messaging them directly. She outlined the scope and subject of the research, where it was taking place and how the group could contact me if they wanted access to the final research report. Where I have included snippets from the group in this chapter, the names of group members have been anonymized to avoid revealing their identity.

Pertinent to my methodology, I recognise my impulse to record certain events above others in the reading of this group, and to assign meaning to them in this mobile story. My choice is often guided by embodied responses to mobile technology to inform a particular affective perspective. My story thus deals with the legitimacy of certain events, relationships, connections and their meanings over others. Indeed, this is a particular story where meaning has been assigned to affective moments located within a specific post-apartheid, post-colonial, contested context. Moreover, this interpretive account of the group was mediated by technology, language and my own theoretical and affective stance. Indeed, in each of the case studies I have foregrounded mobile mediation as a significant, complex and dynamic process.

Mediation was a key consideration for me, also in relation to my experiences as a commuter overhearing mobile conversations and the curiosity, irritations and excitements that these evoked. My observations of people in everyday commuter scenarios, and the vignette I created based on these experiences, have greatly informed my thinking through

what people do with their phones and what phones do with people. My observations were largely informal and provided inspiration for how I write about the intimacy (and the complexity this invites) in mobile culture. In this respect I took inspiration from Tim Ingold's assertion that researchers have much to gain from attending to their inhabited world, being attuned to their environments and fostering a 'perceptual awareness of their surroundings' (2011, 162). To avoid any ethical issues arising from these observations of people on trains and in airports, I have re-staged these commuter scenes with friends. This re-creation, shot with my iPhone, is part of my own thinking-through and re-narrativising these moments to analyse their meaning as part of my critical writing praxis. Pointedly though, this re-narrativising sought to accentuate mobile mediation as an implicit component in the creation of knowledge. Haraway emphasises this point in her essay 'Situated Knowledges': 'We are not in charge of the world. We just live here and try to strike up noninnocent conversations by means of our prosthetic devices, including our visualization technologies' (1988: 594).

The editors of *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, write that the 'digital has become part of the material, sensory and social worlds we inhabit' (Pink et al., 2015: 7). Indeed, the proliferation of online forums, social media networks and blogs as contested and affective nodes in communication networks have provided a fertile research ground for researchers. I am interested in instances of affective expressions of rage, frustration and excitement online as they relate to particular contexts and questions about mobiles. In the case study of Keleti in Chapter 5 I analysed extracts from a public Facebook group – Telekom HU. This site of contestation, between Facebook users, was a key affective juncture that informed my thinking about how communication technologies are entangled with issues of national identity and perceptions of otherness.

Finally, my analysis of Keleti and the informal refugee camp that formed there was informed by my interview with Kate Coyer, an academic at the Central European University in Budapest. Coyer's first-hand experience of the camp and the Wi-Fi she set up there meant that she was a source of information about how the infrastructure was established and used. Coyer reviewed, via email, the final text for this chapter and consented to its use. Coyer's account of events at Keleti cannot be read as a universal truth but instead as *a partial perspective* on the events that took place at Keleti mediated by language, ideas and her location within a liberal Western university that publicly contests many Hungarian government policies, most especially those pertaining to migration and refugees.

## Apprehensive Beginnings

On the eve of the millennium and amidst an atmosphere of global trepidation over the Millennium Bug – a forecasted breakdown of computer systems due to a complication of date rendering – a group of international scholars, mostly sociologists, gathered at Rutgers University in New Jersey to workshop social aspects of mobile technology. Even though mobile phones had been publicly available for almost two decades, little mobile scholarship existed. The chairperson, James E. Katz, announced the workshop as a first for mobile scholars. The group quickly bonded, forming lasting connections, as evidenced in subsequent literature and a multitude of cross-citations and references. Following the meeting, one of the first ever collections of essays on mobiles titled *Perpetual Contact* (2002) was published.<sup>7</sup>

On reading *Perpetual Contact* it would seem that a particular, perhaps unintentionally affective register emerges in the writing and reading of this title. The editors and contributors seem to have distinctly affective responses to their subject but grant these affects little or no acknowledgement. It appears as if the authors are grappling with uneasy feelings about mobile communication that tend to circulate much like an undercurrent in this collection. Throughout the title we find affective descriptions of the impact of mobiles on social behaviour and public space. Hinting at his feelings of un- or even dis-ease Katz describes the ubiquity of mobile technology and its universal influence on behaviour across continents as a ‘pandemic’ (2002: 301). Subsequently he describes new forms of mobile marketing that ‘prey on the human consciousness’, elaborating that ‘potentially gross abuses exist’ (Katz, 2002: 301). At the very least mobiles are considered ‘radical’ (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 96); they are also described via pejorative terms such as ‘at risk’, ‘under threat’, ‘breaks apart’, ‘intrusion’ and ‘invasion’ (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 96) (Katz, 2002: 302). It is relevant to note the context in which this research took place. Between 2001 and 2003 widespread mobile internet access and online social media networks did not exist. Therefore, research was mostly restricted to text messaging and voice calls. Signal quality was poor and was often referenced as a cause for disrupting intimate communication (de Gournay, 2002: 202). Call and data costs were also high and people were very cost-conscious

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<sup>7</sup> Some additional notes about this workshop: It was held at Rutgers University from 9-10 December 1999. The subsequent publication included some of the most prominent voices in mobile scholarship such as James E. Katz, Mark Aakhus, Leopoldina Fortunati, Christian Licoppe, Richard Ling, Birgitte Yttri, Emanuel Schegloff, Kenneth J. Gergen amongst others. While Katz claimed the meeting was a first for mobile scholarship, *Perpetual Contact* (2002) was published in the same year as *Wireless World: Social and Interactional Aspects of the Mobile Age* edited by Barry Brown, Nicola Green and Richard Harper from the Digital World Research Centre at the University of Surrey.

(Vincent, 2005: 97). Mobiles were in their infancy and convergence with other technologies and applications were only just beginning. Geo-location services, haptic technology and digital assistants had not yet been invented.

Some contributors to *Perpetual Contact* adopt a more disdainful, but no less emotive stance towards mobiles, especially as they relate to the so-called displacement of face-to-face communication. For example, French sociologists Christian Licoppe and Jean-Phillippe Heurtin claim that 'a private interpersonal mobile phone call can interfere with other sets of activities, impose intrusively upon an unwilling audience, and interfere with on-going face-to-face, direct contact' (2002: 99). Part of their concern lies in the 'dual engagement' that takes place when people try multitasking everyday activities with mobile phone conversations (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 99). Licoppe and Heurtin describe the frustrations of a post office worker who has to navigate customers requesting service while also talking on their mobile phones. In a rather apocalyptic tone they write that 'the dual engagement in interpersonal interactions is a threat to the smooth development of on-going, face-to-face interactions, and thus to the social order itself' (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 99). Licoppe and Heurtin's response seems to be amplified by communications scholar Chantal de Gournay in her essay 'Pretense of Intimacy in France' (2002). She writes that because of mobile phones, 'previously legitimate rules guiding individual conduct in interaction with others ... have become obsolete' (de Gournay, 2002: 196). Escalating Licoppe and Heurtin's apocalyptic sentiment she claims that 'We are in full civic regression' (de Gournay, 2002: 197).

It does not take long for a reader of *Perpetual Contact* to sense that mobiles are unwanted interlopers in social life – as well as in this collection of essays, appearing as objects that stand in opposition to the so-called traditional or natural order of things. Katz remarks that 'Whenever the mobile chirps, it alters the traditional nature of public space and the traditional dynamics of private relationships' (2002: 301). This reference to tradition gives another significant prompt to an underlying assumption in this title: that face-to-face communication before mobiles forms part of an organic, even pastoral, way of life, encompassing all the associations of purity and goodness that supposedly come with it. Ironically, Katz warns readers against this notion in his introduction, lamenting that these 'judgements are generated from a philosophy about humans and communication that embraces the Romantic image of Rousseau's natural man' (2002: 9). Despite this warning, many of the essays tend to embrace a marked dualism, splitting their analyses into two phases. The first phase is a time before mobiles, when human interaction is somehow peaceful, void of tensions, smooth and upholding a social order. Pitted against this seemingly



idyllic first phase is a second period of communication, defined by mobile intrusion and the crumbling social dynamics that involves a loss of face-to-face communication.

While Katz claims in the preface to *Perpetual Contact* that ‘we want to understand how the “life feel” of the lived experience may be altered owing to the availability of this [mobile] technology’ (2002: xxi), very little attention seems to be paid to the ‘feeling’ punctuating these essays. Instead, the literature is presented as distanced from its own affective register. In a somewhat detached scholarly way the authors go about inspecting mobiles as objects that determine social life, seemingly oblivious of the affect that appears to be circulating and attaching itself to these texts. A good example of this distanced approach is in Ling and Yttri’s discussion about expressive communication amongst Norwegian teens. Arguably, the pair have chosen a sample group in the midst of a particularly emotional phase of identity development – the teenage years. However, in their examination of this content their method and writing are limited to representational accounts and finding patterns in texting language to denote emotion such as ‘an emphasis on homophones, cognates and abbreviations’ (Ling and Yttri, 2002: 162). Their examination appears to place emphasis on patterning and neat categorisations, which seems strangely at odds with the somewhat messy and potentially ambivalent life phase that their essay examines. While the language and sentiment in *Perpetual Contact* hint at some sort of affective dimension to mobiles, the authors and editors tend to set these aspects aside as mobiles are presented (in part) as practical tools for the co-ordination of home and work life (Licoppe and Heurтин, 2002: 95) (Katz, 2002: 48). As a result, the book focuses on the cause-and-effect patterns of mobile usage, as well as emerging practices, habits and etiquettes, especially in the domestic context.

Indeed, the ‘strength of popular perceptions associating scholarly endeavour with notions of objectivity, emotional detachment and rational thought have made discussions of affect’s place in the academy difficult’ (Gregg, 2006: 6). In a counter-stance to this somewhat distanced and detached mobile discourse, Melissa Gregg calls on scholars in cultural studies to take confidence in the field’s ‘own objects and methods of enquiry to work through the times of “fear and turbulence” that surround us’ (2006: 155). Teresa Brennan expands on Gregg’s sentiment in *The Transmission of Affect*. She argues that affects and reason continue to persist as binaries in scholarship, as ‘affects pass from the state of sensory registration to a state of intelligent reflection’ and in this way passions and the ‘other I’ who reflects on them become divorced (2004: 120). Even the idea of using the first-person pronoun ‘I’ in certain academic contexts is assumed to be ‘ideologically and analytically suspect’ (Gregg,

2006: 5). However, eschewing the affective register of the text, the overall empirical goal of *Perpetual Contact* appears to rest on deciphering consistent and generalized patterns and, as Katz makes explicit in the conclusion of the book, 'We suggest that there is a logic associated with communication technology' (2002: 302). Katz positions this mobile logic and patterns of use as precursors to predictability. In other words, if empirical research can identify the patterns that exist in mobile use then predicting behaviour will be the next expected step.<sup>8</sup> Katz offers vague criticism of the limited scope of 'post-modern, developmental, feminist and ethnomethodological perspectives' in as far as they are unable to predict future variations of mobile practice (2002: 316).

As with much of mobile scholarship at this time, the texts included in the collection are dominated by authors from social and communication sciences. The methodological approach in *Perpetual Contact* typically contains a mixture of empirical research and social theory, couched in larger references to changes in social dynamics occurring at the time, like the domestication of the technology (Haddon, 2003) and the de-regulation of social life (de Gournay, 2002: 196). The tendency therefore is towards quantitative methods, seen throughout the literature in numerous data graphs and statistical tables that show usage patterns and diffusion rates. This formative literature is characterized by similar epistemological reference points, drawing on theories of symbolic interaction from sociologists such as Erving Goffman, Anthony Giddens and Georg Simmel. Questions, observations and ideas in this context are framed in sociological terms and frameworks, such as theories of collectivism and individualism, or interaction theories such as those outlined in Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this context, the scholars appear to try and corral their own affects and attachments to mobile practices and events in order to quantify, categorise and perhaps even close them down for analysis. Yet, despite these attempts, I argue that affects – as a persistent force in these discourses – tend to attach to the words, phrases and bodies of theorists anyway, to reveal the tensions and frustrations of the mobile contributors to *Perpetual Contact*.

## **Bodies**

Mobiles, usually held in close proximity to people's bodies, are often referred to in mobile studies in terms of bodily intimacy (Fortunati, 2002: 48). As seen on street sidewalks and on

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<sup>8</sup> With the advent of digital methods in the humanities and other related empirical methods of working with mobile data in research, arguably this tendency to seek patterning to predict behaviour by using data has only escalated.

commuter trains, people's bodies are often inflected with the gestures and movements that the technology invites (Kozel, 2011). Even mobile messages are, in part, 'the small expressions of affection, interpersonal transmissions of thoughts – small and intimate – sent directly between bodies' (Plant, 2003). However, the relationship between the human body and mobiles is considered, if only very briefly, in *Perpetual Contact* through the work of sociologist Leopoldina Fortunati. She takes up the cautionary tone of her fellow contributors as she concludes that 'new problems' will arise with mobiles that lie near or even in the human body (2002: 61). Notably, a focus on corporeality in sociology is not new. The body has been a central component in social theory from as early as the 1980s and 1990s – an approach labelled by some as the 'sociology of the body' (Blackman, 2012: ix). Yet in *Perpetual Contact* aspects of the body are presented in highly representational and symbolic terms. For example, forays into the mobile-body relationship begin quite literally by researching mobiles as a body accessory and status symbol. Focusing on cultural relativity and mobile use at the time, Fortunati argues that Italians are uniquely fashion-conscious, perceiving mobile phones as part of their visual identity and therefore adopting them as fashion accessories (2002: 54). Similarly, Fortunati claims that Italians perceive the lack of spontaneity as socially undesirable and therefore the mobiles become symbols of favourable social flexibility (2002: 55). However, as part of this examination of mobiles as fashion accessories and symbols of social capital Fortunati also raises the following question: 'is the mobile phone a technology of intimacy?' (2002: 48). I argue that her question of intimacy will lead to an avenue of mobile scholarship that will be less reliant on technicist perspectives and methods. That is, Fortunati's writing hints at the body as a source of knowledge and a distributed notion of agency between technology and humans. This emerging literature is more concerned with relational aspects of mobile practice, discussed briefly in this chapter and again in Chapter 2.

Alongside Fortunati, Sadie Plant – a former academic known at the time for her mainstream books on culture and technology such as *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture* (1997) and *Writing on Drugs* (1999) – examines the centrality of bodies in mobile communication in her Motorola-commissioned report titled 'On The Mobile: the effects of mobile telephones on social and individual life' (2001). Plant did not contribute to any of the first mobile anthologies but her report examines similar themes. Perhaps as a result of her outsider status with regard to the existing literature she approaches the mobile as a 'fascinating technology', eschewing the kind of foreboding that characterises other scholarly writing at the time. In contrast to contributors in *Perpetual Contact*, Plant calls for

a 'fresh start and an open mind' when examining mobiles (2001: 24). In the preface to her report she writes that 'few of the models and hypotheses developed in relation to other new communications technologies can be applied to the mobile without the risk of obscuring what is truly novel in the wireless world' (2001: 24). Plant examines this novelty by emphasising unique mobile postures, movements and gestures. Even though she tends to include many of the uses-and-diffusion trends of her fellow mobile scholars, unlike other writers she adopts a somewhat playful, colourful, even literary stance towards her subject. She writes that 'The warbles, beeps and tunes of the mobile have become so common that their calls have begun to constitute a new kind of electronic bird song, changing the soundtrack of the cities and altering the background noise in regions as varied as the forests of Finland and the deserts of Dubai' (Plant, 2001: 29). Her humorous anecdotes, descriptions and large colourful photographs of people talking on their mobile phones can be read as creative offerings as much as an ethnography of the technology.

Plant ventures into the under-researched human-mobile relationship by discussing various forms of body language that mobiles demand, including standing and crouching postures, walking speeds and finger gestures (2001: 51). She offers an informal taxonomy of body language to explore the effects of the phone on the body. For example, Plant labels a person with confident and open body language on a mobile call in public as the *Speakeasy*; by contrast the *Spacemaker* uses a more introverted and closed stance while talking, often carving out a quieter space to communicate (2001: 51). Plant further develops a set of mobile archetypes based on bird behaviours, such as the 'solitary owl' to describe people who use their mobiles sparsely, or a 'chattering sparrow' to denote the opposite (2001: 66). A 'calm dove' takes calls discreetly and a 'flashy peacock' is the classic exhibitionist (Plant, 2001: 67). Plant's humorous classification points to modes of being in the technological world that are somewhat more attuned to the affects circulating in mobile communication. Echoing McLuhan's quote prefacing this chapter, she writes that 'Like a calling bird, a ringing phone demands a response. Public uses of the mobile spread this tension to all those within earshot, while leaving them powerless to intervene: only the person to whom the call is made is in a position to respond' (Plant, 2001: 30).

Plant was one of the first mobile researchers to examine the implications of mobile use for personal etiquette in public space. However, this theme of mobile public etiquette – and how it relates to intimacy – becomes a much larger debate in the literature (Katz, 2002: 301) (de Gournay, 2002: 195). In this context, intimate conversations are no longer confined to after-office hours or personal spaces like the home (Gant and Kiesler, 2002: 121). These

blurred boundaries between work and personal life, facilitated by mobile technology, suggest that users often have to reconcile their perceptions of places (like the office) with emotional and bodily responses connected to the personal realm and vice versa (Plant, 2001: 50). As intimate mobile conversations in public spaces are scrutinized, an overarching theme emerges in this discourse: instances of forced or voluntary mobile eavesdropping in public are highly affective acts. They are characterised by authors through descriptions of irritation, embarrassment and annoyance, as Plant describes:

A young teacher in Chicago said that she found such enforced eavesdropping more frustrating than intrusive: she wouldn't mind so much if she could hear both sides of the conversation, but instead found herself drawn into speculations about the missing the sides of dialogues in an attempt to fill the gaps. One commuter in Birmingham expressed irritation about all mobile calls she overheard, but her travelling companion said she was annoyed only by "boring people and bland conversations": some of the half-conversations she overheard were better than soap operas on TV, and all the more engaging because they allowed her to speculate about the unheard and unseen end of the line. She had built up vicarious relationships with the people she saw everyday, and felt concerned and engaged with their lives. "I often hope to hear the next episode", she said, 'and I'm disappointed when they get off the bus". (2001: 47)

As with other aspects of mobile communication, the management of intimacy in public is largely framed in literature as part of a cause-and-effect scenario. As Debbie Jolly writes in her review of *Perpetual Contact*, 'Due to the perceived zeitgeist brought about by the advent of the mobile, this collective becomes oriented towards an "impact" of technology framework' (2003: 406). For some, adopting a social constructivist perspective, the relationship between mobile communication and intimacy can be seen to be a consequence of the on-going process of modernization (Gant and Kiesler 2001: 121). For instance, de Gournay points to processes of de-regulation in public life, facilitated by communication technology, not just the mobile phone, that challenge certain normative positions in French society (2002: 196). For example, the de-relegation of institutional authority can be seen as the internet emerges as another source of information. Similarly, de Gournay cites aspects of 'modern sociability' as causes for the disrupted boundaries of public and private spaces (2002: 199). She argues that with the introduction of mobiles and the acceptance of personal conversations in the workplace, the mobile phone can be seen

to act as ‘a medium for the publicization of emotional fulfilment’ to others (de Gournay, 2002: 200). This reference to emotion offers, perhaps unintentionally, a way of thinking about mobiles as part of a process of emotional affirmation, raising further questions. For example, what other methods of research can be used to understand the intimate, emotional and affective dimensions of mobile communication? How can these affective instances be articulated in sensory, phenomenological or subjective terms?

Plant and Fortunati offer some of the first discussions of intimacy, the body and mobiles. Yet these discussions are predominantly framed as symbolic and given towards representational accounts of the mobile-body as a medium for self-expression in terms of fashion and social status. However, Plant’s tendency towards literary descriptions of expressions and gestures of the body hints at something more in mobile communication: how people manage themselves in their mobile practice is perhaps also a way of understanding how subjects are formed and shaped in mobile communication and what power relations may also present. If so, how do we consider networked communication and the socio-political implications associated with it? More specifically, are notions of so-called freedom and autonomy often assumed in narratives about mobiles? And for whom? Plant’s observation of eavesdropping in public space also points at a type of familiarity between strangers who share not only space but also feelings of excitement or even boredom. I argue that these observations of intimate mobile conversations in public and the tension that seems to exist between public and private space invite further research. Yet can this research be done affectively? Like the proximity of the mobile to the body, can the research move closer to the experience of the user? How can these sites of affect be understood better, in ways that are attuned to the permeability of bodies?

### **Body Boundaries**

Questions about the body – and, more specifically, mediation of the human body – gained further attention during another workshop between scholars in January 2001 in Milan, Italy. This meeting culminated in the book *Mediating the Human Body* (2003), edited by Katz, Fortunati and Raimonda Riccini. The title includes the core group of mobile authors from *Perpetual Contact* as well as an extended group of multi-disciplinary contributors including linguists, engineers, neurologists, designers, psychologists and ethnographers amongst others. To approach this complex subject, the editors of *Mediating the Human Body* called on a multiplicity of perspectives – including literary analysis, historical comparisons,

analytical reports and speculative interpretations – to extend the discourse on communication technology beyond interpretations from the often-cited sociology texts. The result is seemingly too messy for some, as one scholar remarks that the anthology is too eclectic and lacks ‘a coherent impression of the effects of new technologies on human beings’ (Moore, 2006: 57). This collection of essays offers a significant reflection on how scholarship is seemingly moved by the nascent academic and popular discourse – in particular, the fear of body alienation, human obsolescence, ‘destructive’ processes and even ‘profaned’ bodies (Fortunati et al., 2003: 6). At one point, during the editing of contributions for publication, news of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City broke. The editors, understandably fearful of the implications of this event, warn that the attacks show ‘how bodies become not only victims of war and other kinds of violence, but also weapons of war’ (Fortunati et al., 2003: 5). The authors appear to move into a protectionist stance, perhaps as a way to reinstate ideals of so-called bodily boundaries.

While *Mediating the Human Body* gives a generalised account of technologies related to the body and not only of mobile phones, it refers to mobiles as precursors to the more invasive body technologies such as pacemakers, plastic surgery techniques and technology embedded in fashion garments (Fortunati et al., 2003: 5). The integration of technology into the human body has been the subject of a large and ongoing corpus of literature spanning multiple disciplines. However, as the editors remark in the introduction to *Mediating the Human Body*: ‘no matter what one’s attitude toward the desirability of these developments, virtually no one regards them without passion’ (Fortunati et al., 2003: 1). These passions surface as authors continue to come to terms with issues of the proximity of technology to the human body, intimate relations and the permeability of the technology-human interface. Evoking the ambivalence that characterises the mobile discourse, the editors of *Mediating the Human Body* write that ‘clearly the amazing progress in the integration of the human body with technological devices increases the anxiety of many, and the delight of others’ (Fortunati et al., 2003: 1). The body is foregrounded as a site of contestation – a ‘battleground’ for competing social and political forces as well as intellectual disciplines (Fortunati et al., 2003: 216). Katz, Fortunati and Riccini argue that issues related to the body in mobile studies have been sorely neglected. This foregrounding of the body seems to point to an emerging perspective on media as a hybrid – as both a ‘question of technology and biology’ (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 7). This approach forms part of an emerging corpus of interdisciplinary scholarship concerning the body and its associated

identity politics evidenced, for example, in Valerie Walkerdine's *Children, Gender, Video Games* (2007) and Lisa Blackman's *The Body* (2008).

Mobiles in this context are not simply an incidental technology in a larger history of body-invasive technologies; as the editors position them as an early opportunity to explore the so-called boundary lines between humans and machines, or, in more dramatic terms, as a 'new path of humanity' (Fortunati et al., 2003: 5). However, this opportunity is still framed in defensive terms. Mobiles are described as 'the main technology that invades [the] body ... the communicative instrument that has gone the furthest down the path of individual encroachment' (Fortunati et al., 2003: 8). Several contributors to *Mediating the Human Body* raise more philosophically inclined questions in order to make sense of human-mobile relations. In this respect, information theorist and engineer Giuseppe O. Longo discusses the entanglement of mobiles and people as an emerging kinship, suggesting aspects elements of what will become known as posthumanist theory. Longo terms this entanglement '*Homo technologicus* ... homo sapiens transformed by technology' (2003: 23). While starting off on a somewhat optimistic and explorative note about the new modes of being for *Homo technologicus*, Longo's conclusion adopts a recognisable feeling of foreboding. Doubt and apprehension creep into his essay as a potential species shift is considered. This is evidenced in his description of how technology encroaches on the human body, rendering the latter at best repressed and at worst obsolete. Longo argues that the quality of human interaction hinges on 'rich and complex characteristics of bodily expression' that supposedly require a unity of mind and body. He then offers that technology 'impoverishes' this unity of the 'original body-mind nature' and, as a result, interactions tend toward 'restricted' forms of communication and a 'disappearing' body (Longo, 2003: 27). The body is positioned in these texts as a static entity, somehow bounded, but now also under attack, or at risk of disappearing. I argue that this perspective eschews the idea that the body is a process amidst other interconnected streams of information and objects, opting instead for an articulation of the body as an independent, even static, entity.

Perhaps as a result of the circulation of tensions, doubts and apprehensions in mobile scholarship the mobile researchers gathered at Rutgers University in April 2001, only three months after the Milan workshop. Once again the meeting took place under the chairmanship of Katz, again to discuss issues of human-machine relations. Many of the same authors featured in *Perpetual Contact* gather for the conference but this time their aim was different, as they attempted to move beyond the gratification, innovation, diffusion and needs analysis of communication technology (Katz, 2003: 18). The results were published in



*Machines That Become Us* (2003), an edited collection of essays in which scholars began to use the term 'relationship' to describe behaviours related to human-mobile interaction. As editor, Katz engaged with various viewpoints ranging from a paranoid vision of machine-ruled dehumanized future to body implants as tools for pleasure and function (2003: 318). *Machines That Become Us* marks another point in mobile literature where authors deal with larger philosophical questions about the human-machine relationship. However, the concept of human-becoming-machine is not new and can be found in a rich and extensive body of literature, including in cyborg studies, theories of kinship and the posthumanist by Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles amongst others.

As outlined so far, this nascent mobile literature focuses predominantly on cause-and effect approaches and does little to engage with the more established lineages of work dealing with human-machine relationality. As literary scholar Michael Filas writes, *Machines That Become Us* offers good coverage of the social aspects of mobile communication but it is 'an awkward and isolated attempt to engage with the on-going study of cyborg (and other body) ideology' (2004: 405). Rather, the title is concerned with a literal interpretation of the human-mobile relationship on three levels. The first is the material incorporation of machines into the physical surrounding – this includes body and clothing implants. The second is the way machines represent us to others in social interaction – either by augmenting or supplementing face-to-face or mediated interaction through wearable or mobile technology. The third instance is when machines become part of our expressions of self – for example as fashion statements (Katz, 2003: 315).

In response to questions of human-machine relations – specifically where to locate the human in times of so-called machine intelligence and heightened forms of automation – Haraway, Hayles and Bruno Latour have offered a number of approaches that acknowledge the sociality and agency of both. Although differences exist between these approaches, they are broadly aligned in opposing notions of human exceptionalism as well as dualistic ideas of nature and culture. Amongst these theories there is also a broad acknowledgement of the interactive and porous boundaries between human and machine, implying the potential for information exchange and a wider set of relations beyond the body surface, which the editors of *Machines That Become Us* and *Mediating the Human Body* seem to be grappling with. This potential, in some instances labelled 'affect', underpins emergent forms of subjectivity (Seigworth, 2005: 160) (Lawlor, 2008: 174).

In her *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, Joanna Zylińska articulates the contingency of relations implied by affect as follows: 'It is only through relationality with

what is not in us – with other living beings but also with the widely conceived “environment” that consists of animate and inanimate entities and processes – that we can activate the life that moves us’ (2014a: 68). My own alignment within affect theory includes an emphasis on relations between bodies of different kinds – a relationality that implicates a wider set of connections and alliances (Brown and Stenner, 2009: 181). The editors of *The Affect Theory Reader* Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write,

Cast forward by its open-ended in-between-ness, affect is integral to a body’s perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, and the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside of itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter. (2010: 3)

In this respect, Gregg and Seigworth claim that a major orientation in affect studies lies in research into assemblages of humans, machines and the inorganic – for example, in robotics and cybernetics, or in any research at the intersection of human and nonhuman (2010: 6). Affect can be described here as acting as a hinge that ‘opens up the human to an expanded set of relations and obligations’ (Zylinska, 2014b). Describing these connections and alliances more explicitly, Zylinska argues that ‘the affective turn always entails a certain posthuman sensibility’ (2014b). To explore affect theory more thoroughly in the next section of this chapter, I discuss some of the theoretical concepts that have most influenced my research while also highlighting some of the major criticisms of affect theory.

### **Affect Theories**

A ‘writer’s investment in their subject often transmits to the page and can spread to readers of their work’ (Gregg, 2006: 7). The articulation of affect by Melissa Gregg as a form of transmission becomes visible in the very titles and essays written *about* affect. Initially, when first reading about affect theory I quickly became positively moved by many authors’ poetic and somewhat ephemeral descriptions. In this sense, affect emerges from the ‘quality of a sunset’ (Coleman, 2005: 11) or as an ‘inventory of shimmers’ (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 1), or as ‘atmospheres’ (Ahmed, 2010: 37) or as ‘unassimilable intensities’ (Massumi, 1995:

88). At first glance, the field of affect studies feels like a theoretical wonderland that seems to escape the confines of so-called positivist cause-and-effect logic, offering potential for vitality and creativity, demanding the priority of the realm of feelings over cognition. In this way, affect literature performs a sort of charm, perhaps even a persuasive spread, as Gregg suggests.

However, any reader only needs a few chapters of affect literature to also be confronted with some harsh contestations amongst the theorists. In addition to the poetic and emancipatory tones of some affect literature, it is also commonplace to find other texts with phrases such as ‘radically unhelpful’, ‘struggles to deliver’ (Wetherell, 2012: 4) and ‘shameless’ (Wetherell, 2012: 10). Critics accuse each other of scholarly misconduct, using terms such as ‘he wilfully or otherwise misreads the data’ (Leys, 2011: 467). Clare Hemmings warns us that ‘affect frequently emerges through a circular logic’ (2005: 548).

While Margaret Wetherell calls for ‘patterns and order’ in affect theory (2012: 4), others insist on the absence of any ‘magical closure’ (Stewart, 2007: 5). Kathleen Stewart adopts Raymond Williams’ claim that affects ‘do not have to await definition, classification or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures’ (1977: 132). These kinds of oppositions in the literature can infuriate as much as explain; confound as much as enlighten a reader. For some, such as Anna Gibbs (2001: 1) and Teresa Brennan (2004), affect is best understood in biological terms – as a contagion, leaping and spreading between bodies. For Kathleen Stewart, affect is seen as a form of resonance, which, very simply put, is when readers check their own feelings in response to particular narratives (2007: 3). For Valerie Walkerdine affects are central to understanding how people develop a sense of belonging to a set of encounters, space or ‘communal beingness’ (2010: 95). Noticeably, there are many different conceptualisations and orientations of affect in affect theory. Affect theorists themselves are rarely singular about their orientation, often opting instead for various theoretical ‘crosshatchings’ (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 5).

Indeed, affect literature seems to represent a fractured, perhaps even messy academic scene that reflects the kind of subject that is being debated. However, I understand these contentions in affect theory not as a sign to retreat, but rather as a demand issued to a researcher to figure out a ‘just right’ approach to affect, driven by curiosity and speculation. In this vein, I draw inspiration from John Law, who writes:

If much of reality is ephemeral and elusive, then we cannot expect single answers. If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we’re going to have to

give up on simplicities. But one thing is sure: if we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new ways ... Perhaps we will need to know them through the hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies. These would be forms of knowing as embodiment. (2004: 2-3)

Some of my reference points for affect are drawn from Elspeth Probyn, Valerie Walkerdine, Vivian Sobchack, Susan Kozel and Lisa Blackman. As noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, these theorists all foreground embodiment and sensory aspects of media in their arguments – where embodiment is considered a ‘vibrant process resulting from interactions between body, mind and the environment’ (Hayles, 2002: 297). This process cannot be considered outside of history and culture. To focus on embodiment in this way is to also insist that ‘nature and culture are not pre-existing entities’ (Blackman, 2008: 37). Sobchack, guided by existential philosophy, writes in *Carnal Thoughts* that she is interested in ‘making “meaning” out of bodily sense’ and part of that involves ‘exploring how we are orientated spatially both off and on screen or asking about what it means to say that movies “touch us”’ (2004: 1). She conceptualises the body as ‘a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figuratively makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others’ (Sobchack, 2004: 2). Similarly, Kozel, a phenomenologist, tries to make sense of users’ interactions with mobile phones and social media through her own and others’ dance performances. She claims that mobile practices, shown through dance, provide an ontological mirror that reflects our co-constitution with machines, systems and networks (2014: 80). In the same respect, Probyn claims writing as an affective and embodied practice, insisting that ‘Writing takes its toll on the body and the bodies that read or listen’ (2010: 76). In the context of a narrative method, Kathleen Stewart claims that ‘The questions they [affects] beg is not what they might mean in an order of representation, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes or knowing, relating, and attending to things are somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance’ (2007: 3).

This concept of resonance is used by Probyn, Stewart and Sobchack as a writerly tactic. For Sobchack it is ‘not whether or not the reader has actually had – or even is in sympathy with – the meaning and value of an experience as described – but whether or not the description is resonant and the experience’s structure sufficiently comprehensible to a reader who might “possibly” inhabit it (even if in a differently inflected or valued way)’ (2004:

5). Probyn describes how ‘the reader “catches” the writer’s interest’ and claims that ‘it’s about recognizing what you’re trying to do to the reader’ (2010: 76). Further, these theorists implicate themselves in examinations of affect, as part of an embodied and ‘enworlded’ way of working, that is, as a way to acknowledge the researcher’s own investments in the research process that is not divorced from her subject and context. As Brian Massumi claims, ‘We are our situations, we are our moving through them. We are our participation – not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking at it all’ (2013: 111). In this vein I draw on Probyn’s essay ‘Writing Shame’ in which she explores the toll taken on the body by the writing process, reflecting on her own experiences as an academic. As part of this reflection she claims that academic writing still suffers from an objective and distanced approach, which in affect studies tends to translate into a lack of feeling (2010: 74). She insists on a productive relationship between writing and affect, where affect is a ‘visceral reminder to be true to interest’ (Probyn, 2010: 73).

As noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, my research orientation emphasises embodiment but, also more broadly, is in conversation with philosophical traditions drawn from the ethology of bodily capacities found in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. To briefly recap, their theory of affect, inspired by Baruch Spinoza, emphasises intensity and dynamism and the degrees of power that exist between bodies (2013: 299). Spinoza defines affect as the outcome of an encounter between bodies, placing importance on the relational context in which affect occurs (1955: 131). Therefore, affect is contingent on relations between bodies – organic, human or nonhuman. Spinoza writes in ‘On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions’ that, ‘motion and rest of a body must arise from another body, which has also been determined to a state of rest or motion by a third body’(1955: 131). In other words, affects exist as part of fields of relations and connectedness. Following Spinoza, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari write that ‘To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings’ (2013: 299). Significantly, the body – as defined by Spinoza and adopted by Deleuze and Guattari – is not defined merely by its humanness, organs or functions. Instead, ‘A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, and a collectivity’ (Deleuze, 1988: 127). This orientation within affect theory, inspired by Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari has been complemented and contradicted by affect theorists who borrow from texts and experiments in the fields of biology and psychology.

Critics of this form of borrowing – especially as it pertains to theories inspired by the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins – are concerned with the split between body and mind that his work introduces to affect studies. In the next section I review some of these criticisms within affect theory while also taking heed of these arguments in relation to my own concept of affect as developed in this dissertation.

### **Biology and Affect**

The tendency amongst affect theorists to call on aspects of biology supposedly introduces a ‘new kind of foundation to cultural theory’ (Papoulias and Callard, 2010: 32). This form of borrowing from biology provides a model for some cultural theorists for understanding how people make choices and decisions based on pre-cognitive affective responses (Leys, 2011: 436). This conceptualisation of the body in cultural studies is not meant to be read as essentialism, but rather positions biology as a ‘ground for culture’ (Papoulias and Callard, 2010: 33). Influenced by cyberneticist Norbert Wiener, Silvan Tomkins, who was writing at the height of the cybernetic influence in the 1950s, offers a theory of affect – subsequently widely cited in cultural studies (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 5) (Gibbs, 2010: 187-188). Tomkins defines affects as neuro-physiological events. He identifies nine primary affects: interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, anger, fear, contempt, disgust and shame (1981: 325).<sup>9</sup>

Tomkins’ theory emphasises the co-assembly of the affect system with other bodily systems, functioning as a feedback mechanism that operates at various times independently from, interdependently with and dependently on them (1981: 324). Responses to the intensity of stimulation involve facial muscles; the viscera, breathing, voice, the skeleton and the autonomic blood flow (Tomkins, 1995: 19). In other words, people sweat in terror, faces turn red with anger and their hair stands on end with fear (Tomkins, 1981: 322). Drawing on evolutionary biology, Tomkins extends Charles Darwin’s work in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) as he posits the face as the primary locus of the affective response (1981: 315).<sup>10</sup> He claims that innate affect is ‘extremely contagious’ (1981:

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<sup>9</sup> Tomkins further distinguishes affects as either innate or learned: innate affect can be found in the cry of a baby driven by hunger, while learned affect best describes the affect activation of a grieving adult crying, with full awareness of her motivations (1981: 317).

<sup>10</sup> Tomkins also identifies voice and breathing as other sources of affect (1981: 315). However, Tomkins work in the area of the face has influenced theorists working on the expression of emotion and facial recognition studies such as his student and now author on the subject, psychologist Paul Ekman (Tomkins, 1995: xv). Ekman, and his

324). This concept is echoed by many other theorists inspired by him – most notably Brennan and Gibbs.

Tomkins' theory of the individuality of the affect system is a departure from the work of other prominent theorists writing before and alongside him. Sigmund Freud regards affect as being a derivative of, or dependent on, drives and as being confounded with cognition (1957). While Freud regards a person's physiological drive (sexuality, libido, desire) as the source of human motivation and identity, Tomkins names affects as the primary motives for any kind of human action (1981: 306). In this way, Tomkins positions affect as fundamental to human functioning. His theory can be used to explain how affective phenomena function and how we perceive their motivational power. A particular set of science authors – such as Tomkins, his student Paul Ekman and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio – have become a focus for scholars in affect studies. Cultural theorists seem to either rely on theories from these scholars or use their texts as the basis for criticism. Since the so-called affective turn in 1995, when Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank introduced Tomkins' work to cultural studies in their essay 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold', many cultural theorists have called on Tomkins to support their own writings on affect (Gibbs, 2010: 188). Affected by his title *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank claim that Tomkins 'excited and calmed, inspired and contented' (1995: 2). Critical of what they see as antibiologism in cultural theory, the authors use Tomkins in an attempt to bridge the humanities and the sciences. Specifically, they laud Tomkins' framework for 'layering biological with machine or computer models of the human being' (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 8). Punctuated by phrases such as 'if', 'may', 'whether because', Tomkins' writings imply a sense of speculation, even trepidation in biological research that further inspires Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank (1995: 3). Utilizing Tomkins' argument about affect as central to human functioning, 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold' impacts theory with an insistence that affect displaces the centrality of cognition in the production of knowledge (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 5).

However, as Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard argue in their essay, 'Biology's Gift: Interrogating the Turn to Affect', this tendency to borrow from the sciences on the part of some humanities scholars often entails some mistranslations, even distortions of that knowledge (2010: 48). Specifically, they contend that in neuroscience affects are

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company Paul Ekman International further explores the potential of the face and body language to recognise so-called potentially dangerous suspects, would-be terrorists or wrong doers as part of the SPOT (Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques) programme, employed at American airports and supported by the U.S Transportation Security Administration (see [www.ekmaninternational.com](http://www.ekmaninternational.com)).

conceived as a ‘non-cognitive system of bodily responses to environmental stimuli’ (Papoulias and Callard, 2010: 40). But, once translated into cultural studies, these responses come to stand for a kind of mutability and dynamism of matter (Papoulias and Callard, 2010: 47). Similar to Papoulias and Callard, Ruth Leys is critical of cultural theorists who ‘cherry pick’ concepts from science and transfer them into cultural studies. Specifically, Leys criticises Brian Massumi, a prominent voice within affect studies, for employing a somewhat contradictory logic in this regard.

Drawing from Spinoza, Massumi describes affects as ‘unassimilable intensities’ that either increase or decrease the power of the body to act, depending on the type of encounter bodies experience (1995: 85). Therefore, a joyful encounter with another body may increase the power of a body to act in certain ways, while in another situation despair may slow it down to act in completely different ways. This account of affect places emphasis on the various modes of body movement and change. Leys argues that Massumi’s arguments align with the Deleuzian model of thought that opposes dualities of any kind – especially between mind and body – calling on dynamic and networked concepts of affect. Yet, according to Leys, he then also refers to experiments that rely on concepts from the Basic Emotions paradigm that re-affirm the distinction between mind and body (Leys, 2011: 442). She cites Massumi’s claims about the autonomy of affect – in which he claims that affects might be dampened or even tamed by science – are in fact based on evidence from two scientific experiments<sup>11</sup> that in turn assume a distinction between cognitive (mind) and autonomic (body) processes.

I want to highlight this tension between biology and cultural studies as it relates to some of my own borrowings from affect theory. To recap, my concept of affective mooring articulates those affects mobilised through mobile phones that reinforce certain socio-political positions *for some people* through feelings of security and belonging. This feeling of ontological security is often premised on the exclusion or alienation of others. Specifically, my conceptualisation of affective mooring is in conversation with a number of theories including those from urban geography and studies of migration. In addition, I have borrowed Valerie Walkerdine’s idea of affective containment to better understand how members of a community can feel a sense of security, even being held through technology, in the context of social and material precarity. Walkerdine articulates emotional holding as an embodied, relational and unconscious process, analogous to a baby being held close to a warm body

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<sup>11</sup> These experiments include those by media researcher Hertha Sturm in 1980 and the Missing Half Second experiment by Benjamin Libet (1970 -1990).



and being fed (2010: 95). For infants, this holding is performed through inter-related physical and psychic registers (Walkerdine, 2010: 96). The latter 'provides the bedrock for being able to experience oneself as whole and therefore as safe' (Walkerdine, 2010: 95). Walkerdine claims that over time a community can envelope itself in a metaphorical skin that provides 'a feeling of ontological security for a community beset by uncertainty and insecurity' (2010: 91).

For Walkerdine, a sense of holding is an affective process enacted through certain practices, such as neighbours who hang washing and 'have a natter', play hopscotch or simply ask for advice (2010: 99-100). Through these practices – as a collection of neighbourly 'doings' – people experience feelings of being held or contained, countering other 'feelings of the fear of being uncontained, unsafe or dying' (Walkerdine, 2010: 95). The idea of holding is particularly pertinent in a neighbourhood that might experience precarity, but what I am missing from this concept is how it relates to the movement and flows that seem inherent to community practices. I there pursue a slightly different articulation of holding, one that emerges out of the discourse of flows and movement of urban studies. So, while an affective mooring may enact some of the same dynamics as Walkerdine's practice of holding – such as stability and safety – it is located in a paradigm that is more attuned to the affordances of mobility.

Moreover, Walkerdine's notion of containment originates from the psychoanalytical tradition: specifically, infant case studies which she extends in relation to community practices. Crucially, her theory of containment is premised on affect as pre-linguistic and independent of thought (2010: 96). So, it is here that my connection with Walkerdine's case study meets its limits because affective mooring as articulated in this dissertation is constituted by social processes, political intention, language, meaning and history – and is therefore *not* principally an unconscious individual-based process. I argue that as a concept and a theoretical tool for mobile studies, affective mooring is historically and socially shaped. Popular discourse and cultural histories of race, gender and class all constitute the dynamics of affective mooring. In the next section, I will reflect on the work of theorists who have influenced my thinking on how affect and technology relate to power differentials.

### **Mobiles and Affect**

Sociologist Amparo Lasén argues for affect as movement, impact and change, and for the shared agency between people and their mobile technology. In her essay 'Affective Technologies – Emotions and Mobile Phones' (2004), Lasén introduces a new vocabulary into

mobile literature related to aspects of affect theory. She calls for mobiles to be conceptualised as 'affective technologies', which she defines as 'objects that mediate the expression and exchange of feelings and emotions' (Lasén, 2004). She claims that people are 'moved' by their phones, in the same way that they can move each other (Lasén, 2004). In this way mobiles can transfer a mood into a space, to emit a presence that affects others – unlike any other wearable technology (Lasén, 2010: 8).

In an essay titled 'Mobile Media and Affectivity' Lasén adds the concept of 'affective bandwidth' to the mobile context, to describe 'the amount of affective information relayed through a particular device or application' (2010: 14). In this essay she scaffolds her concept of affective bandwidth on a theoretical framework that acknowledges the sociality and agency of both humans and mobiles. Lasén appears to draw on the notion of distributed agency to be found in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. This examination of the affective traversing of human and non-human boundaries has implications for human subjectivity (Seigworth, 2005: 160) (Lawlor, 2008: 174). Deleuze and Guattari characterize affect by its position in a system of forces that is open and mobile, and that constitutes an inseparable part of everyday life. Invoking the meaning of 'affectus' from Spinoza – defined as the body's ongoing, intensive variation in its capacity for acting – Deleuze and Guattari claim that affect produces new subjectivities (2013: 302). Affect thereby points to the multiplicity and movement that constitute being in the world – in other words the potential for a body, with an interactive and porous boundary to affect and also be affected by other bodies (Blackman, 2012: 2). Relating this notion to mobiles, Lasén writes, 'Nowadays mobile media act upon us through their affordances and constraints. They mediate, facilitate and help shape our encounters with other people, institutions, images and ideas, which move and act upon us. Therefore, mobile media can become themselves affected and affecting bodies' (2010: 8).

The context of Lasén's research is significant as important shifts take place in mobile culture during 2005 and 2006. The mobile phone – through developments in technology such as the built-in camera, and people's experiences of the technology – evolves into a popular tool for producing content. This change represents a shift from a consumer to a producer style of usage and has implications for the circulation of affect. With the public launch of Facebook in 2006 as an emerging social network, the opportunity to share content is made possible. For some, the mobile phone becomes not only a tool for communication but also a tool for authorship and creativity (Hjorth, 2006: 4). In this context of creativity and authorship, digital ethnographer Larissa Hjorth offers a new focus in the discourse on mobiles, extending beyond the functional uses of mobile phones to include a more affective

and creative study of mobile culture. More so, Hjorth underscores the significance of the body and affect in the mobile context. In one example, she considers mobile snapshots less as static objects for analysis and more as on-going processes of iteration – involving, for example, self-editing, deletion or recreation, and tailored to the desires of users (Hjorth, 2006: 4.). In this vein, iterations are a form of curation and choreography of a self, as mobile users are able to edit the size of their foreheads, remove blemishes or alter the colour of skin. Here, the body becomes a site for potential alteration and objectification, akin to the practice of plastic surgery. Hjorth writes that ‘now there is a demand for instantaneous perfection, no less’ (2006: 4). In this context snapshots can be seen as a source of gratification, even self-validation and happiness, but also frustration and disappointment if they fail to meet user expectations. Here affect works to bind people to certain notions of self-identity within online social networks as well as amplifying the immediacy of encounters with others.

Lasén and Hjorth align on the notion of permeable bodies. Here, permeability refers to the idea that bodies do not exist in a bounded sense, but in a porous state and therefore there emerges an ongoing opportunity for connecting to – and becoming extended with – other bodies (human and nonhuman) (Blackman and Venn, 2010: xiv). This extension and connection offer the potential for exchanges of information that may affect bodies in certain ways. Fortunati makes a subtle move towards this concept of affect when she refers to ‘the concept of the body as a way of exchanging energies’ (2002: 49). Extending beyond literal accounts of emotional attachments to, or dependency on, mobile phones, subtler analyses of mobiles as affective technologies start to emerge through the analyses of these scholars. I am aligned with Lasén and Hjorth’s notion of distributed agency and, moreover, I argue that this turn to affect provides an opportunity to explore other dimensions of mobile practices, where socio-political dynamics are also understood as corporeal.

### **Affected Bodies**

Considering the discussion of mobile literature in the first part of this chapter, an affective engagement with mobiles can be seen to diverge from accepted schools of thought or practices. Indeed, it seems a tension exists in mobile scholarship with regard to how to approach the affective dimension of technology. In their essay ‘Everyday Dwelling with WhatsApp’ Kenton O’Hara and his co-authors note that their theoretical framework – taken from a variety of fields, including anthropology and sociology, and with an emphasis on felt

life and embodied forms – is at odds with other fields ... which [are] ‘more committed to the idea of a discovering kind of science’ (2014: 2). However, this acknowledgement is perhaps also a marker of the expanded range of mobile scholarship that has emerged since the publication of *Perpetual Contact* (2002). Indeed, as this literature review has shown so far, the focus of mobile studies has shifted to include a relational model of thinking – employing affective ways of reading, writing and probing our relationships with mobile phones. This approach to research is best exemplified by Susan Kozel, who places emphasis on the relational ontology of humans and technology while seeking to challenge popular notions of disembodiment in the mobile context.

Today mobile phones and social media are rarely seen apart, in the sense that mobile phones make it possible for people to literally mobilise their social networks, making social networking activities accessible in any space, time and place (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 163). In this context, Kozel insists on a dynamic relationship between space, body and mobile, focusing on the intersection of systems of technology, the body and dance performance. Kozel addresses aspects of sensory engagement and, specifically, criticisms of disembodiment, in her essay ‘Dancing with Twitter: Mobile Narratives Become Physical Scores’ (2014). In this essay she outlines a research project titled *Intuitweet*<sup>12</sup> that uses Tweets and mobile phones as a method of choreographing a dance performance over multiple locations. Researcher-dancers use the content of tweets (marked with the hashtag #intuitweet) to choreograph a performance, thereby metaphorically connecting corporeal and virtual experiences. The archived tweets are then collected in an informal and haphazard dance score. Kozel describes *Intuitweet* as ‘corporeal excavations of social computing’ that emphasise aspects such as ‘the body, the other, being (non being), qualitative, dynamic, intensities, fluctuations and duration’ (2011).

Drawing on phenomenology, Kozel and her co-authors are interested in lived experience, specifically the translation of affect and sensory information into dance, mediated by technology. In their view mobile phones are unique tools due to being networked, mobile and placed close to the body (Kozel et al., 2014: 81). *Intuitweet* works when researcher-dancers read a tweet on their phone with the hashtag #intuitweet.<sup>13</sup> They then draw on their intuition and creativity to turn the text of the tweet into a dance movement at the exact location and time the tweet is read. The intention is not to physically enact the moves described in the tweet, but rather to choreograph an entirely new

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<sup>12</sup> *Intuitweet* was created by Susan Kozel, Mia Keinänen and Leena Raouhiainen.

<sup>13</sup> The Intuitweet project also had a desktop version but was predominantly conducted via mobiles.

performance, in other words, to intuit a new movement from the text. For example, Kozel describes reading a tweet from a fellow dancer: 'Fluid legs made me want to walk sideways or at least to waver, no more straight lines, soft peripheral focus make me a bad pedestrian.' Kozel reassembles this particular tweet into a new movement in her kitchen by falling to her knees and crawling on all fours (2011). Her response via Twitter reads: 'Bad pedestrian made go on all fours and crawl which I hapily (sic) did in the comfort of my kitchen' (Kozel et al., 2014: 83).

To repurpose social media – in the mobile context – or to use it in a way that is unconventional, can be seen as a transformative act, as evidenced by these performances (see Kozel et.al, 2014: 79). Visceral experiences are created and choreographed through a process of mobile phone mediation. The larger implication is that our media practices can reveal how we exist in the world or can serve as an 'ontological mirror' (Kozel et al., 2014: 80). In this vein, to experiment with, and misuse, social media and mobile technology as tools for research, according to Kozel and her co-authors, can potentially create new avenues for understanding sensory engagement and its relationship to lived experiences (2014: 80). This misuse may also reveal the 'liveness' of the medium – where liveness is 'the possibility of the emergence of forms always new' (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: xvii). In their essay Kozel and her co-authors suggest that mobiles can perform a type of nudge or touch that propels bodies into movement (2014: 89). She points to a larger conceptual framework of inter-subjectivity and inter-corporeality – the idea that bodies are embodied through each other – referring to both technological and human bodies. Kozel's work more broadly can be seen as a way to extend existing or accepted philosophies of thought and methodologies in mobile studies.

In this vein, Kozel – as a dancer and theorist – attempts to make various affects, senses and places visible, when they are assumed to be invisible. Arguably Kozel refigures the perceived disembodied social media practice of tweeting by purposefully placing emphasis on the body as an agent of affect, change and movement. She can be seen to practise her media philosophy by finding a creative way of performing imaginative concepts and ideas via dance. Therefore, her work may help transcend some of the constraints of merely describing affects through language. The dynamic relations of affective mediation are literally performed in Kozel's work.

Kozel's writing and practice speak to a larger body of philosophical work dealing with issues of embodiment and the virtual. In this context N. Katherine Hayles emphasises the distinction between embodiment and the body. While the body can be seen as a human form

(often as idealized cultural representations), embodiment is a process that involves various interactions between body, mind and the environment (Hayles, 2002: 297). Hayles offers that 'Embodiment is experienced from the inside, from the feelings, emotions, and sensations that constitute the vibrant living textures of our lives' (2002: 297). I argue that a performance-based experiment like *Intuitweet* highlights affect as an embodied response to mobile technology. In her essay 'Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments' (2002) Hayles emphasises this inter-subjectivity as follows: 'the human who inhabits the information-rich environments of contemporary technological societies knows that the dynamic and fluctuating boundaries of her embodied cognitions develop in relation to other cognizing agents embedded throughout the environment, among which the most powerful are intelligent machines' (2002: 303). Here, Hayles defines the posthuman subject by way of their cybernetic existence with porous boundaries, distributed cognition and the coupling of material and information components – where neither information nor the body is privileged (1999: 3). According to Hayles, the posthuman is not so much defined by the inclusion of non-biological parts in the human body but rather by new forms of subjectivity (1999: 4). If the concept of the posthuman is regarded as a cogent critique of humanism, then new forms of subjectivity, including those outside of the technology-human examples, for example those explored in animal studies, can also be considered within the realm of the posthuman. Following Zylinska, affect in the context of mobile technology implies a posthuman sensibility (2014b). Bodies in this context are defined as processes that form part of contingent and interrelated networks which are constituted by other bodies, forces and ideologies, rather than as isolated and bounded entities.

Mediated experiences shown in Kozel's work are constantly changing: they are always in motion and never static. Along with her fellow researcher-dancers she assembles and reassembles tweets to choreograph new movements. *Intuitweet* is a ceaseless movement – from tweet to respondent dance to the next tweet and again to the next dance. This movement gives the sense that this project is inherently processual and not necessarily stabilized or ended: rather, it continues to morph and emerge as it turns into new performances. This movement and change give a sense of media flow, where events, bodies, and affects are not fixed objects but constantly circulating and affecting each other. Perhaps in this way *Intuitweet* reveals a vitality that produces the possibilities of new connections and unexpected events. *Intuitweet* can be seen to connect ordinary life events and knowledge production echoing Henri Bergson's claim that 'life ... progresses and *endures* in time' (2014: 236). The final dance score – i.e. the archive of tweets that Kozel and the other

researchers leave behind – can be seen as residue evidence or traces of these embodied affects.

In the realm of dance performance, *Intuitweet* does not stray far from lived experiences of mobile communication. Mobile practices affect bodily movements – often when phones ring, people immediately stop what they are doing to read an incoming message or take a call that has the potential to change their mood or enjoyment of a place. Echoing Spinoza’s theory of bodily capacities and the potential of affect to slow or intensify them, mobile users often alter their bodily rhythms and dynamics during mobile practice. Emphasising the point, Hayles claims, ‘Living in a technologically engineered and information-rich environment brings with it associated shifts in habits, postures, enactments, perceptions – in short, changes in the experiences that constitute the dynamic lifeworld we inhabit as embodied creatures’ (2002: 299).

### **Affective Inflections**

The mobile phone, as outlined in this chapter, can be considered less a thing and more an event or process, which is constituted by multiple interactions of actors (human and nonhuman), culture, places, technologies, affects and intimacies.<sup>14</sup> As evidenced in this literature review, this site of interaction has been studied from various perspectives, starting with a more apprehensive and distanced approach by a small group of prominent mobile scholars. Their scholarship tries to tabulate and categorise the effects of mobiles, but, as I argue, what emerges through the writing is a very particular affective register. Authors tend to show feelings of disdain, fear, paranoia, elation and awe towards mobiles. However, this affective register is left unacknowledged by those scholars, as they favour other, largely sociological concerns, such as changes in social space – specifically the boundary of public and private spaces – and changes in symbolic interaction in everyday life.

Spinoza claims that ‘no one has yet been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of nature what the body can do’ (1955: 132). This statement is especially relevant in the realm of mobile communication. For me it is the continuous generative potential of affect as it circulates between bodies that produces such a rich area of scholarly interest, especially as it pertains to the continuously changing field of mobile technology. In this vein, affect surfaces more prominently in mobile literature with the

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<sup>14</sup> I am borrowing a sentiment from Donna Haraway’s writing on genetics here. In her research context of biology, specifically aspects of genetic research, she posits that genes are not things but ‘instead the term gene signifies a node of durable action where many actors, human and non-human, meet’ (1997: 142).

introduction of online social networks. A small group of researchers turn to an explicitly affective vocabulary to describe mobile phone practices, engaging for the first time with affect theory and an implied notion of the posthuman, a concept defined not by machine parts in a biological system, but by new subjectivities or becomings. As Elizabeth Probyn writes, 'the unifying point seems to be that strong affect radically disturbs different relations of proximity: to ourselves, bodies, pasts' (2010: 86).

To sum up, I argue that affect theories offer us an avenue for understanding how to move beyond using only language (and in the case of mobile phones, emoticons) to explore intensities of feeling. Sensory and corporeal research projects such as those employing dance have shown how we can address issues of so-called disembodiment in the mobile context. Kozel creatively charts this affective landscape by performing its gestures, bodily changes and movements, taking issue with an approach to mobile becomings as patterned and categorised behaviours. Rather than corral the excess of affect into defined categories, Kozel's approach demands an open-endedness, echoing the mutability and becomings of affect.

The editors of the *Affect Theory Reader* Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth claim that 'There is no single unwavering line that might unfurl toward or around affect and its singularities, let alone its theories: only swerves and knottings, perhaps a few marked and unremarked intersections as well as those unforeseen crosshatchings of articulations yet to be made, refastened, or unmade' (2010: 5). Considering this sentiment and the review of literature presented in this chapter, many more opportunities appear to exist for researching the affective interface between mobiles and people. As part of the research process I argue in favour of complicating stories about mobiles by giving them an affective inflection. By muddying the notion that mobile phones are functional and highly efficient machines researched only as objects of use, I opt instead for seeing mobiles as dynamic events, filled with doubt, multiple points of view, speculation, affect and other concerns that can be approached with humour and even mischief. As Law writes, 'parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are this is because they have been distorted into clarity' (2004: 2). Specifically, I take Law's latter wording 'distorted into clarity' as an ethical call for re-writing histories, paying particular attention to how technologies can be understood as enabling and stabilizing relationships of power. Working with the assumption that mobiles can be companions in this critical intervention, my aim is to further investigate how to examine our attachments to them, detailed in Chapter 2.



As Christian Licoppe and Jean-Philippe Heurtin note in *Perpetual Contact*, 'When asked about how they use a cell phone, almost all the interviewees had a story to tell' (2002: 95). I consider the practice of storytelling significant. In the following chapter I will elaborate further on this idea as part of my narrative method. Through storytelling I aim to position myself in the same niche as Kozel and Hjorth, who, I argue, offer a relational and critical approach to mobile technology. As well as drawing on the key theoretical influences discussed in this chapter, my approach relies on being guided by affect, that is, on paying close attention to instances when affects cluster as signs of particular social and political dilemmas.

## CHAPTER 2: RETELLING MOBILE STORIES

*There is no story that is not true.*

- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1996)

Long before the invention of mobile phones, the human-machine relationship has been studied by fields as diverse as philosophy, cultural theory and science. As discussed in Chapter 1, due to the near ubiquitous use of mobile phones, a technology that is seldom separated from the human body and that permeates so many aspects of lived experience, questions about the nature of the human-machine relationship have been raised in this context too. In this chapter I outline a methodology that seeks to highlight affective dimensions of our relationship with mobile phones. My intention is to provide a cultural account of the human-mobile interaction by writing in a way that allows for a greater attunement to the affective aspects of these relationships, while also not letting go of the scholarly conventions of analysis and interpretation, with their accompanying expectations of rigour.

To recap, my aim here is to develop an affective narrative about mobile phones that will reflect on and perhaps even problematize existing narratives about our ways of using and engaging with them. This reflection also ultimately extends to our relationships with each other. Amongst these existing narratives are versions of technological pragmatism that claim mobile phones are useful communication tools for the coordination of everyday life (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 95) (Katz, 2002: 48); celebratory narratives that claim mobile phones liberate us from constraints of time and place (BBC, 2013) (Katz, 2002: 2); as well as alarmist narratives that claim mobile phones corrode aspects of social cohesion (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002: 96) (Katz, 2002: 302) or even cause the ruin of dating culture (Williams, 2013) (Holman, 2013). The first part of this chapter deals with the process of storytelling and the elements of narrative inquiry, specifically with how dominant narratives are constructed and maintained.

My emphasis in this dissertation is on offering a critical intervention, as part of my storytelling and narrative method, where my analysis of mobile culture is, following Raymond Williams, a process of interpretation and selection (1998: 56). I have included two vignettes in this chapter – brief literary sketches of my public encounters with mobiles are

told in the first person, attuned as they are to the affects circulating and attaching (as well as detaching) to things and people at certain times and places. The images in these vignettes, captured with my iPhone, are re-creations based on real events and staged with friends. These images are based directly on my encounters with people and mobiles in everyday moments while commuting, waiting or working and they form part of my re-narrativising, remembering and making sense of these events.

I decided to re-stage these scenes using my iPhone for a few reasons. Firstly, I preferred to avoid any ethical concerns about privacy that might arise from photographing strangers in transit. Mostly though, I wanted to highlight how my research inclinations and the technology I use are key mediators in moments of observation, capture and narration. Lastly, this process of photographing and recreating also helped me to slow down these observations. In this slower mode I felt I could pay special attention to mobile practices as part of my narrative and critical way of working. Indeed, 'it seems as if the focus on affect automatically implies the researcher's own body and practices of writing' (Knudsen and Stage, 2015: 19). Therefore, these vignettes show, in part, how I intend to tell a mobile story that is filled with curiosity, trepidation, doubt and my own sensory involvement. Rather than a comprehensive account of mobile practice, the sketches are more an indication of my research sensibilities in the construction of this mobile narrative, premised on certain forms of participation. More so, these vignettes present a starting point for dealing with an issue of translation in this chapter, as certain embodied and sensory experiences are articulated as part of a critical academic writing practice. My theoretical examination of these vignettes offers me a way of situating them in larger debates within mobile studies.

On this subject, the editors of *Affective Methodologies*, Britta Tim Knudsen and Carsten Stage, argue that affect research demands that scholars enter into a conversation with – rather than invent – the world. This kind of dialectical relationship further implies that the researcher is intrinsically part of, and not situated outside, their experiments (Knudsen and Stage, 2015: 5-6). This approach to research into emotions and affect is especially significant with regard to writing, where writing is both a text and a means of analysis in this dissertation. Following Lisa Blackman, Sara Ahmed and Ruth Leys, I want to resist any methodological split between writing and affect. I name-check these particular theorists by way of showing my allegiance to aspects of process, relationality and the permeability (*not* division!) of bodies in analysing mobile culture. As the vignettes in this chapter suggest, affect implies a sense of embeddedness in a larger field of socio-political processes and dynamics. As explained in Chapter 1, the so-called autonomy of affect is a point of contention amongst

cultural theorists and so I want to be especially clear regarding my position on this. I do not perceive my writing and the language contained therein to be any sort of distortion of affect or existing in opposition to affect. Instead I perceive affect as something that guides or even mobilises my writing – as evidenced in the selection and interpretation of certain events – to highlight particular relations of power.

This dimension of mobility in my narrative is significant. Mobility in this sense relates to the travelling nature of my story as it moves between different places, people and events. However, movement also relates to my approach to creating knowledge about mobiles. Here I follow Tim Ingold, who argues against a transmission model of inherited knowledge: ‘Rather than supposing that people apply their knowledge in practice, we would be more inclined to say that they know *by way* of their practice – that is through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment’ (2011: 159). Put simply, Ingold offers that ‘movement is knowing’ where the ‘integration of knowledge ... does not take place “up” the levels of a classificatory hierarchy, but “along” the paths that take people from place to place within the matrix of their travelling’ (2011: 160). This concept of ‘knowing along’ is discussed in more detail in the first part of this chapter.

Therefore, the story that unfolds here does not seek to classify different types of mobile behaviour or fixate on the functionality of the phone, but rather attends to the relations that emerge from mobile phones. I take quite literally Ingold’s call that ‘knowledge is integrated not by fitting isolated particulars encountered here and there into categorical frameworks of ever wider generality, but by going around in an environment’ (2011: 160). In the process of writing, I borrow from certain ethnographic techniques and modes of thinking to craft a narrative about technology and mediation. Specifically, I am attentive to arguments about the contradictory split of ‘being in the world’ and ‘knowing about the world’ (Ingold, 2014: 387). In this way Ingold calls for an ontological commitment from ethnographers to the research process. In this mobile story I place my ontological commitment in writing as a critical praxis. As writing is a craft, one that can produce affect, feelings and thoughts in writers and readers alike, I am utilizing it as a mode of thinking and analysis, to describe what people are doing with their phones (and what phones are doing with people) at certain times and places. Writing in this sense is not simply about keeping ‘good field notes’ or making ‘accurate maps’ or ‘writing up results’ (Clifford, 1986: 2). In this vein, the second half of this chapter discusses mobile stories as a method of critical analysis and perhaps even subversion through selected case studies, such as *Haunts* from media scholar Mark Sample.

## Whose Story?

As Sara Ahmed argues, 'encounters between embodied subjects always hesitate between the domain of the particular – the face to face of this encounter – and the general, seen as the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism. The particular encounter always carries traces of those broader relationships' (2000: 8). I argue that to explore the so-called affective timeline of mobile phones means to critically evaluate affects as part of broader political designs. This type of affective analysis or mode of thinking takes issue with gender roles, instances of remote mothering, public displays of shame, social precarity and belonging and alienation, as they all relate to the formation of certain subject positions. More specifically, the case studies presented in this dissertation place emphasis on how certain relationships of power are established and reinforced through mobile practice. Similarly, Lisa Blackman argues, 'it is centrally important to consider a realm of bodily affectivity if one wants to understand and analyse the cultural inscription and incorporation of social difference' (2008: 65). My writing therefore follows the practices of certain critical traditions where writing offers the potential for change or even a springboard for more subversive thought, hopefully enabling a move towards transforming social and cultural structures (Cixous, 1976: 879).

As James Clifford claims in *Writing Culture*<sup>15</sup>, 'metaphor, figuration, narrative affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted "observations," to the completed book, to the ways these configurations "make sense" in determined acts of reading' (1986: 4). More so, if stories are central components of our lived experiences and of how we go about living our lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 2), then at this moment in technological history human storytelling has become largely mediated, even co-authored, by mobile phones. Simply put, we are in this together, literally. However, this is not to suggest some sort of harmonious story about humans and mobiles claiming well-articulated conclusions about 'our' relationship, but rather a step towards considering the messiness, complexity and affectivity of our kinship. It needs to be pointed out that discussions of machinic becomings often entail a humanist blind spot. Therefore, the critical injunction to 'return to the human after the posthumanist critique' cannot be ignored or diminished in debates on human-nonhuman relations (Zylinska, 2014a: 61).

Perceptions of 'our' relationship emerge in a dynamic way through my act of writing as a situated, partial and embodied storyteller who, like most people, is continuously shaped

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<sup>15</sup> *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* edited by Clifford and George Marcus.

by my intra-actions with and amongst mobiles. Human fingers touch and hover above mobile screens, mobiles vibrate in pockets close to the body – our human-mobile encounters are intimate and physically close. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, ‘Perception will no longer be in the relation of a subject and of an object, but rather in the movement serving as the limit of that relation ... Perception will confront its own limit, it will be among things, in the set of its own proximity’ (2013: 329). Following Deleuze and Guattari, it is, in part, our human-mobile proximity that constitutes our co-emergence. My assertion is that a multitude of stories are embedded in mobile phones and their everyday use. Through these stories a clearer picture of the structure of our relationships with technology and each other can emerge. To follow Zylinska, this approach is not to undermine the agency of mobile phones in the telling of this story of our human-mobile relationship but rather to recognise both our kinship and singularities. As she argues, ‘Ethical doubt has the potential to turn the focus and attention of the study of interspecies relationality precisely to the alterity that is not in me. It does not therefore serve the ultimate reaffirmation of the human “I”’ (Zylinska, 2012: 215).

Stories without some form of contest are not stories at all (White, 1980: 23). Mobile phones provide multiple contact zones for contestations – concerning issues of community, history, race, class and gender, amongst others. This storytelling process also implicates various actors, such as mobile phones, users, the networks, the manufacturers, industry and governments. Many of these contests have long histories. To fully contextualise the affective dimensions of mobile communication, I argue that a historical reading is required, constructed by accessing certain cultural archives. For example, in Chapter 4 of this dissertation the history of race relations in South Africa and concepts such as the ‘black peril’ inform an understanding of the dynamics that emerge in contemporary neighbourhood mobile communication. Revisiting history, perhaps even as part of a process of retelling it, highlights some of the influences extending from the formative structures and processes that constitute mobile communication. Extending this notion further, narrative can be considered a mutable rather than static construct. In other words, narrative – in its form and contents – is also contingent on its historical and social context and thus in a continuous state of process. In this sense narrative can be perceived as a reflection of the general historical conditions of society in which it develops *and* the technologies from which it is constituted (Bassett, 2007: 5).

Therefore, this narrative inquiry renders participating actors (past and present) in the mobile context more transparent, or maybe even brings them forth in the first place, to show how this technology represents and exercises ethical, political, economic and social

influence. This mobile story adopts a critical perspective in as far as this methodology resists both the maintenance of the status quo and notions that technology is ideologically neutral. Some scholars have actually moved beyond the impact narrative of mobile technology – that is, beyond explaining how mobile phones impact social life – to focus on more affective and critical perspectives on the technology. To illustrate this point, I draw on research from Larissa Hjorth and Mark Sample, who both ask, in different ways: what do different affects in mobile practice mean?

### **Writing Affect**

As explained earlier, I use affect and affect theory as conceptual tools in my research and writing process in order to recognize the broader context and history of mobile practice. In other words, affect informs my storytelling. My aim is to use my particular modulation of the concept of affect – i.e. affective mooring – to offer a particular reading of mobile technology. My focus is on what transpires in the affective bloom-space of my narrative inquiry into mobile practice. ‘Bloom-space’ is a term borrowed from the editors of *The Affect Theory Reader*, to refer to a type of emergence or an opening of space (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 9). This inquiry is done by identifying certain moments in the historical and contemporary timeline of mobile phones that I consider to be characterised by affect. Specifically, these are events or moments where affects can be seen to cluster and become entangled with mobile phones – for example, in an informal refugee camp that formed in Budapest in 2015, where migrants and refugees experienced shaming as part of their journey of forced migration. This leads me to a number of questions, such as: What can this event tell us about how shame operates to discipline and control the movement of migrants? More so, how did the mobile Wi-Fi network that sprang up at this informal camp enable certain forms of resistance against this shaming? Similarly, how do these same mobile affects perform and circulate in the context of the so-called European migration crisis? I therefore see these affective moments as opportunities to investigate hegemonic concerns in mobile culture that are otherwise rendered unseen or obscured. To reiterate, my analysis of media technologies in this dissertation is developed within the framework of media and cultural studies which remains attuned to affects in mobile culture – affects that point to ideological concerns. Through this method, I want to avoid reducing mobiles to mere objects of analytical study that are somehow exempt from the affective context, culture and history

that produced them. As Probyn claims, 'Writing is interested; it is deeply embedded in contexts, politics and bodies' (2010: 89).

## MOBILE VIGNETTE

*The waiting lounge at Gatwick Airport is filled with standard-issue blue airport-lounge seating and damp fatigue. A woman in the opposite row of seats packs and unpacks her suitcase. In between packing she makes a FaceTime call<sup>16</sup> on her iPhone and suddenly a man and baby appear on the screen. She rests her iPhone on an adjacent seat. Now on her knees, bent over, her movements are anxious as she hurriedly shoves things into the tiny carry-on suitcase. Meanwhile, the sounds of the man and baby spill out of the phone and into the surrounding space. Perched on a seat in the crease of the Caller's jacket they coo and cackle. Caller continues to re-arrange her suitcase turning to the FaceTime conversation intermittently, babbling at the baby. They speak in French, giving them partial privacy amongst a group of mostly English-speaking passengers. Some people within earshot of the phone stare at the screen too. Caller seems unfussed by sharing an intimate moment with an airport lounge filled with strangers. Two rows down I see a woman eating a packet of chips. An airport announcement is made. I try to imagine what mediated motherhood feels like. For a moment I am transported out of Gatwick and into a family apartment, in a French family home, watching a mother pack a suitcase while a baby blows her kisses.*



Figure 1: Staged images of a woman conducting a FaceTime conversation at Gatwick Airport.

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<sup>16</sup> FaceTime is a video calling application that is a standard-issue software with iPhones.



In the context of motherhood and new communication technologies such as mobile phones, media scholar Mirca Madianou raises the question of how these technologies have 'changed women's experience of motherhood, their practices of mothering and, ultimately, their identities as mothers' (2012: 277). As part of a broader ethnography of Filipino transnational families, she argues that these technologies 'not only change the practice and the intensity of mothering at a distance, but also have consequences for the way that women see themselves as mothers and the ways in which they negotiate the cultural contradictions of migration and motherhood and the accentuated ambivalence they engender' (Madianou, 2012: 277). Madianou's research focuses on the specificities of Filipino mothers who often work great distances away from their families over substantial periods of time. However, some of these findings may be applicable to mothers who work remotely for shorter periods but experience similar feelings.

Specifically, Madianou recognizes the highly charged and emotive issues that remote mothering presents. She points to the feelings of ambivalence – related to balancing work and family life – in the context of everyday experiences and explains how 'for mothers with left-behind children, this feeling is exacerbated due to the deterritorialization of mothering' (2012: 282). Madianou goes so far as to claim that this ambivalence is negotiated in part by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (2012: 282). She argues that ICTs allow for both the performance of what it means to be a mother albeit from a distance, as well as being the main channel through which women negotiate their ambivalence about mothering at a distance (Madianou, 2012: 292). For example, some mothers are present during children's homework sessions or during meal times via video calling. Interviewees claim this practice, in part, 'represents a more realistic experience of mothering and an opportunity to "feel like mothers" again' (Madianou, 2012: 291). In many instances, mothers interviewed by Madianou emphasised feelings of co-presence generated through applications such as video calling. Some mothers reported leaving the camera on for hours at a time to extend the effect of togetherness (Madianou, 2012: 288). Another form of ambivalence seems to present in this ethnography as mothers describe the difficulty of being in their children's lives through various mobile practices, but not being physically proximate. Mothers report difficulty in not being able to make physical and/or sensory contact with their children (Madianou, 2012: 290).

Madianou writes, 'Generally, even for mothers who are regular internet users, mobile phones remain the preferred medium when it comes to understanding how their children "really are" and for conveying depth of feeling' (2012: 292). Part of this ethnography

illustrates how affect – mediated through mobiles – acts as a mooring force that binds mothers, their children and extended family. These affects appear to attach to particular moments of mobile practice such as video calling and text messaging. Indeed, many women in Madianou's interviews even broke down in tears while recalling their experiences. This communicative practice bears significant emotional weight on the bodies of mothers. In part, Madianou's study, with her emphasis on connected presence and rituals of motherhood through ICT practices, challenges one of the more dominant popular media narratives about mobiles and parenting.

One example of this popular narrative can be found in Adam Alter's *Irresistible: Why We Can't Stop Checking, Scrolling, Clicking and Watching* (2017), which posits technology in opposition to ideals of good or perhaps even ethical parenting. The cover-artwork of Alter's book features a somewhat ominous glowing iPhone. Influenced by behavioural psychology, Alter describes how Silicon Valley executives, including the late Steve Jobs, resisted introducing their children to mobile technology.<sup>17</sup> Using an addiction metaphor in his description, Alter writes, 'It seemed as if the people producing tech products were following the cardinal rule of drug dealing: never get high on your own supply' (2017: Prologue). He further describes how top Silicon Valley executives selected certain schools for their children that avoid learning methods mediated by technology such as iPads (2017). Alter's Western, and arguably more privileged narrative of parenting, presents technology as existing in tension with 'traditional' or assumed normative modes of parenting. By avoiding other examples of parenting, like the ones Madianou gives, where mothers rely on mobiles to understand the lived experience of their children – especially among those mothers seeking improved economic stability outside of their homeland – Alter's techno-scepticism inadvertently underscores the class differences inherent in mobile practices.

Considering this notion of affective attachment and its implications for bodies and the relationships between bodies, I ask: what techniques are available, in addition to interviews (which are Madianou's method), to achieve more intimate accounts of this highly embodied practice? More so, how do possible alternative methods translate into academic writing? In this context I am informed by the work of Sarah Pink and her discussion of sensory ethnography. Influenced by Tim Ingold, Pink argues from the perspective of phenomenological anthropology, with an emphasis on experience, which for her foregrounds the senses and affect, and develops new ways of understanding human perception (2011: 273).

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<sup>17</sup> In this instance, Alter refers to mobile technology in a slightly broader sense than just mobile phones but includes electronic tablets such as the iPad in his discussion.

Pink's larger emphasis is on articulating an alternative to the more traditional models of ethnographic ways of working, methods that go beyond observation and data collection and encourage a more participatory engagement between researcher and subject. Pink describes methods such as walking and talking with research participants and using video techniques to record and construct narratives about topics. In one example she describes an audio and photo recording of someone who recounts his journey, on foot, back from the hospital where he had first been diagnosed with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (Pink, 2011: 272).

What I find encouraging about Pink's approach is her insistence that researchers claim their own responses – both embodied and imaginative – to subjects. Her claim seems to rest on ideas of experience and participation – an active doing. She outlines her approach as '*learning in and as part of the world, and seeking routes through which to share or imaginatively empathize with the actions of people in it*' (Pink, 2011: 270, original emphasis). What marks Pink's argument is a clarion sense that researchers involve themselves in the construction of knowledge and are not situated apart from it. While my vignettes in this chapter are not participatory in the sense that Pink describes – i.e. I do not enter into dialogue with people about their mobile practice or conduct a participatory experiment – I argue that there is still a form of engagement there that cannot be denied. My contention is that there exist variations on 'being with' research subjects. I perceive a connection between myself as a commuter and researcher and others who also participate in the quotidian practices of travelling. In this shared practice, there are mobile acts in these contexts that demand attention and, in some instances, evoke empathy. As part of sensing and empathising with others – a central part of my research process – an opening of the imagination is perhaps allowed. My assertion is that in the shared spaces of commuter trains and public transit zones mobile phones allow for a greater shared experience of affect – both individual and collective – where affects can even be perceived as entering the public mental archive. Culture is always relational and, importantly, located within histories and relations of power (Clifford 1986: 15). The challenge is thus to avoid any notions of an authority voice that somehow represents culture but rather to exist in a dialectical relationship with aspects of mobile culture as part of the writing process. Indeed, as Clifford notes, culture is not an "it" but is rather a self-reflexive process that is 'contested, temporal, and emergent' (1986: 19).

In public spaces such as trains and airports mobile phone conversations seem to even demand a form of tacit mutual engagement from people in the vicinity, whether simply by virtue of their close proximity or the kinds of atmospheres that are produced by those

conversations. More so, I am sensorily engaged with my surroundings: I hear the sounds from mobile conversations; I see images on screens; and I empathise with my fellow passengers who, like me, show signs of anxiety about familial isolation. In this sense, I am not simply witnessing or observing a FaceTime conversation between a mother and her baby. More so, in these instances, through a certain kind of atmosphere produced in mobile practice, I am offered an avenue for imagination, even fantasy. Taking this concept further, wireless communication can be seen to constitute a spatiality, one that is atmospheric and dynamic (Gabrys, 2010: 47). This notion of spatiality produced through wireless communication is, according to Jennifer Gabrys, a way to conceptually open up theory to the kinds of shifting publics that emerge in cities – where publics are defined as ‘special moments or spaces of social opening that allow actors to switch from one setting to another’ (2010: 57). In the example of the mother-baby FaceTime conversation, it is perhaps this affective atmosphere that offers a way for me to partially inhabit but also critically examine how mothers participate in parenting tasks at a distance and negotiate the ambivalent feelings that come with remote mothering, or what a French family meal-time entails, and to speculate about the forms and rituals of mediated mother-child intimacy. As this vignette suggests, narrative is generative, open and expansive in form, rather than linear and/or retrospective (Bassett, 2007: 2-3).

### **Narrative and Story**

For centuries people have turned to narratives to organise, interpret and make sense of their experiences. As Roland Barthes claims, ‘Narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative’ (1975: 237). Narratives give human experience a form and meaning, one that translates a sense of ‘knowing into telling’ (White, 1980: 5). For example, autobiographical narrative gives form to experience, in a way that, according to Liz Stanley, indulges all of its complexities, allowing for ‘an awareness of ontological complexity and fragmentation’ (1993: 206). The relationship between narrative and life is not limited to a static representation of experience but instead is an evolving dialectic, one that remains productively open-ended (Haraway, 1988: 592) (Ingold, 2014: 388). The vehicles of narrative take countless forms, spanning a variety of media, including news bulletins, everyday conversations, written word, still and moving images (Barthes, 1975: 237). Mobile phones have also been used as creative devices to narrate different experiences. Some researchers have used mobiles to narrate experiences

of place by creatively misusing the technology – in other words, using mobile phones outside the usual ways and contexts – in order to subvert and experiment with them. For example, mobiles can narrate a sense of place by drawing on mediated affects and feelings in location-based networks to produce a critique of the obscured commercial imperatives and dynamics embedded in them (see *Haunts* later in the chapter).

Many authors use the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ interchangeably, indicating their interrelatedness. Regarding narratives, Hayden White writes, ‘Narrative is a metacode’, a way to transmit a message of some version of shared reality, even across cultures (1980: 6). Narratives therefore assign meanings to a sequence of events; they rank the importance of those events and indicate some sort of causal relationship. For example, White argues that medieval annals offer a low form of narrative as they present history as a straightforward chronological recording, a sequence of events that seemingly happened *to* people, devoid of human agency – ‘Flood everywhere’ or ‘Hard year and deficient in crops’ (1980: 14). Annals are records of events, but with no apparent significance or relationship to each other apart from their chronology. However, despite their linearity and lack of meaning, annals can offer a form of narrative through omission. These omissions in annals render some years simply devoid of any events, where seemingly ‘nothing happened’. These gaps are important as they signal a form of legitimacy that is assigned by the annalist to some events (those included) over others (those not included). White argues that more coherent narratives, unlike annals, describe experience by creating a structure and order of meaning (White, 1980: 9). In other words, a coherent narrative provides explanations for why events are linked (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 9). As Barthes claims, ‘narrative ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of events recounted’ (1975).

In formal terms, a story contains a subject, a beginning, middle and end, a discernible narrative voice and a plot (White, 1980: 11). Plot is significant, as this component of a story refers to the structure of relationships and therefore implies that events contain meaning and do not simply ‘occur’ as it seems in the case of historic annals. Following these definitions, narrativizing is an act of doing something; an active telling that includes an interpretation of events and therefore deals with issues of authority and moralizing (White, 1980: 27). A story is contained in a specific format and embodies a particular narrative of a certain time, context and culture. Pointedly, a story relates human experience in a way that appeals to a particular authority, thereby establishing a perceived sense of moral order or social hierarchy. Stories with a prominent narrative voice are therefore always linked to issues of authority and imply a sense of moral closure.

Haraway claims, 'I try to use stories to tell what I think is the truth – a located, embodied, contingent, and therefore real truth' (1997: 230). Indeed, the notion of objective truth has largely been expunged by researchers and theorists who rely on concepts of partial truth, or contingent truth, as Haraway puts it, which is mediated by language, technology as well as social and cultural influences. This view acknowledges that descriptions of reality are always contingent on the researcher's context or vantage point. Gender, socio-cultural and temporal contexts all have the potential to shape research agendas by attaching significance to certain areas of concern (Bochner, 1994: 25). According to Clifford, 'Even the best ethnographic texts – serious, true fictions – are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control' (1986: 7). Pertinent to my methodology, I recognise my impulse to record certain events above others and to assign meaning to them in this mobile story. My choice is often guided by embodied responses to mobile technology to inform a particular affective perspective. In this way this story of mobiles is far removed from a chronological record. Instead, I have intentionally selected certain moments that I consider obscured or overwritten in the cultural history of mobiles. My story thus deals with the legitimacy of certain events, relationships, connections and their meanings over others. Indeed, this is a *story of a particular kind*, where meaning has been assigned to affective moments located within specific historical, social and political contexts as evidenced in the three case studies in this dissertation. As Hegel claims, history displays political-social order (2001: 76-77). I attach value to my chosen narratives as a way to make such an order visible. Most importantly, my focus is on how mobiles are implicated and embedded in the establishment of differential power relationships.

If narrative assigns meaning to events, and presumably has some sort of influence on individuals and society, the choice of narrator is significant. Offering a particular perspective, situated in a certain class, gender and race, narrators have the potential to challenge or confirm a certain socio-political position by placing emphasis on aspects of the narrative above others. This emphasis can either contest or confirm existing structures and therefore narratives deal in issues of legitimacy and authority (White, 1980: 17). An example of this authoritative aspect of narrative is well illustrated in the book *Native Nostalgia* by historian Jacob Dlamini. As a fellow South African who lived through apartheid, albeit under very different conditions, I find Dlamini's writing deeply moving in its ability to problematize entrenched narratives about this historical period. Germane to this dissertation, he uses reflections of quotidian experiences of walking streets, talking to neighbours and going to school during apartheid as the premise for a materialist logic. It is this logic formed through

everyday bodily experiences that helps guide an understanding and awareness of what passes as 'our' culture and history (Sobchack, 2004: 6). Echoing the sentiment in the quote prefacing this chapter – 'There is no story that is not true' (Achebe, 1996: 99) – Dlamini uses his own experiences as a young South African growing up in a Johannesburg township<sup>18</sup> during the 1980s as a challenge to existing narratives about apartheid. His descriptions, which are part memoir, part ethnography, are rooted in the everyday rituals taking place in the township – including money lending, language usage and domestic greeting etiquettes. From the perspective of a deep lived experience Dlamini challenges the narrative that presupposed all black South Africans to suffer equally under apartheid only to be later redeemed through overcoming the evils of the system, with his suggestion of native nostalgia.

Dlamini provokes the stability of existing liberation narratives by asking, what if a person claimed to have had a happy childhood under apartheid? Or if someone claimed that life under apartheid was better than in a democracy? Dlamini makes the point that not all black South Africans shared the same experience living under apartheid. He resists the archetypes that the apartheid struggle narrative relies on – a life marked by poverty and unhappiness – by presenting his story of life under apartheid as a happy childhood. His insistence is that readers should not shy away from discomfiting notions of native nostalgia, but instead use them to try and understand the complexity of lived experiences of black South Africans under apartheid (2009).

Using stories as the grounds for interpreting experiences means acknowledging that those experiences, like life, are also full of ambiguity, chance and improvisation (Bochner, 1994: 29). Dlamini writes that apartheid 'was a world of moral ambivalence and ambiguity in which some people could be both resisters and collaborators at the same time' (2009: 156). *Native Nostalgia* offers an interpretation of life experience under apartheid as well as an alternative viewpoint of what he considers an accepted truth told about that experience. For example, Dlamini explores his own nostalgia for Afrikaans, the so-called language of the oppressor (the apartheid regime) and the enforced medium of instruction in black-only schools in South Africa. However, he offers that Afrikaans is also the language of colloquial banter and friendly exclamations sometimes incorporated into African languages producing unique hybrids. Using language alongside other aspects of lived experience Dlamini purposefully muddies any so-called distinctions – between happy and sad, good and evil, collaborator and resister – by referring to a 'world of grey zones' (2009: 158).

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<sup>18</sup> A township in South Africa is a suburb or city of predominantly black occupation, formerly officially designated for black people by apartheid legislation.

In Dlamini's story the concept of accepted truths can be seen as contingent on a variety of things, most especially the political aims of liberation forces. While democracy was the ultimate achievement of the struggle in South Africa, without a claim of suffering and a contest between good and evil, the movement's liberation narrative seems to be precariously scaffolded. In this sense, perhaps what becomes an accepted truth can also be seen as a manoeuvre, sculpted by the dynamics of politics. Therefore, the real contention in Dlamini's story is that it runs contrary to political agendas built on struggle narratives about the moral good overcoming apartheid's evil forces for the cessation of mass suffering. Dlamini is certainly not undermining narratives of those who claim suffering but rather uses his own experience as a way to 'diffract' – to create patterns of difference in – stories of life under apartheid. Diffraction is a term used by both Donna Haraway and Karen Barad as a counter-notion to reflexivity. Simply put, diffraction, as a methodology, aims to show patterns of difference while reflexivity shows patterns of similarity (Barad, 2007: 29). Dlamini shows that life cannot be captured in one version, or in one master theory, or claimed authoritatively. As he shows, personal narratives can constitute alternative, even uncomfortable accounts of life. These kinds of accounts are what Donna Haraway refers to as the 'radical multiplicity of local knowledges' (1988: 579). Dlamini's book further highlights the question of where the researcher is located in their practice. Or, phrased differently, from what vantage point, or perspective, do researchers approach their work?

In the mobile context, digital ethnographer Larissa Hjorth shows how mobile novels in Japan can challenge existing gender narratives in that society. The novels (known as *keitai shōsetsu*) are mobile user-edited and -generated stories that are written and read mostly by women. The stories are often autobiographical, confessional and written in a diary-style format. The first version of a novel is distributed via mobiles to readers who then download, read and suggest edits or changes to plotlines and characters back to the author. Often stories are set in domestic scenes, in some instances reinforcing gender stereotypes of women in the home, but also allowing for readers to have a (counter) voice in these narratives (Hjorth, 2014: 243). Hjorth views the capacity for engagement and adaptation in the public space as a way to explore gender performances. In this sense mobile novels are not simply stories that describe things but are also enactments of the desires and affects of their readers. According to Hjorth, the mobile novel therefore becomes a rich space for the analysis of 'ways in which gender is constructed and maintained through a series of localized gendered activities and regulations – and subversion' (2014: 243). Hjorth illustrates how narrative coupled with the medium specificity of mobile phones provides interesting



avenues for research into the technology. Here I refer to Katherine Hayles' concept of media specificity, which foregrounds the materiality of the medium as a dynamic interplay emerging from the reading and interpretive capacities of users, the content and the physical qualities of the medium itself (2004: 72). Hjorth argues that these novels 'Demonstrate how mobile media is undoubtedly transforming what it means to be creative and intimate' (2014: 238). Her assertion is that these novels subvert the traditional role of readers by offering multiple-authorial opportunities for women to create parts of the story through user-generated content. In this way many women contribute intimate stories – otherwise restricted to the private realm – to the public realm (Hjorth, 2014: 238).

These examples by Dlamini and Hjorth illustrate the role narrative plays in posing questions about the structures and dynamics of race, culture and gender. In Hjorth's case it is through the medium specificity of mobile technology – for example, a sense of reader/writer intimacy and the malleability of an authorial voice through editing functions – that a dimension of our relationships with technology and our relationships with each other can be explored. To focus on these kinds of stories embedded in mobile cultural practices means to listen carefully and critically; and to pay attention to the stories that are reduced or relegated by more dominant narratives. What are the possible alternative stories as well as limitations that are created by adopting a critical vantage point (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 10)? One of the advantages of narrative inquiry is that, as a method, it acknowledges the open and mutually constitutive exchange that happens between narrative and real life. It is during these processes of real-life exchange that affects and feelings emerge. My assertion is that these affects are important signifiers that are relevant to how, in Hjorth's example, gender roles are perceived and performed. Phrased differently, 'a useful method in narrative inquiry is to ask, "why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origins might be"' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 11). Furthermore, whose feelings are at stake? In this way affects can be seen as potent narrative devices that hint at dynamics of power and representation. This is not to suggest that affects are like portal doors that reveal a hidden dimension to gender relations, but rather that as narrative devices affects are important invitations to interpretation.

This is the invitational mode in which I would like this dissertation's narrative to unfold, one that is characterised by speculation. In other words, I argue that mobile narratives, as culturally important parts of human expression, invite speculation as well as answers. Therefore, I attempt to sensitively narrate aspects of mobile practices and culture to render them relevant and meaningful. What results is not an accepted truth but a view on

experience, as well as a way to influence thinking and hopefully extend inquiry. In narrative terms this is not a static process but rather one of continual storying and restorying that sees meaning shift and change over time (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 9).

## MOBILE VIGNETTE

*A man travels on a train from London Bridge to somewhere unknown. He lingers in the disembarkation area of the carriage, alone. He faces the closed doors like a schoolboy standing in the corner. The din of the train provides the background track to an otherwise silent carriage. People read books or scroll listlessly on their phones. The man clutches his mobile while his voice booms across the carriage. Like a balloon his conversation stretches and expands excitedly, only slightly hampered by poor network coverage. ‘No, I’m going to the Savoy for lunch tomorrow and then we’re going to Cirque du Soleil at the Albert Hall. [laughs] Um, yeah, it’s Marloe’s birthday so I think she’s looking forward to that. [pause] Yeah alright. I don’t know if you’ve read my text, I might have been slightly rude in there; it’s always me overstepping the mark. Just uh, no I don’t think I would, I’d delete it if I was you. Okay, anyway, there’s a slightly rude bit in there, slight overstepping the mark. You know me, don’t you...?’*



Figure 2: Staged images of a man travelling by train and talking on his mobile between London Bridge and Gatwick Airport.

The word shame originates from the Goth word *sham*, ‘which refers to covering the face’ (Probyn, 2010: 72). According to Probyn, ‘The crucial element that turns sham into

shame is the level of interest and desire involved. There is no shame in being a sham if you don't care what others think or if you don't care what you think. But if you do, shame threatens' (Probyn, 2010: 72-73). In the aforementioned vignette the caller has revealed a level of inappropriate interest in someone and his shame is amplified through the current location of his text message – that is, in the receiver's media archive that constitutes a record that is stored and can be retrieved and distributed to others and re-read many times over. In this sense, his text message becomes a form of currency that can be used to unsettle existing relationships, commitments and so-called proper modes of sexual relating.

Shame circulates in mobile practices in a variety of instances, such as cyberbullying and text shaming, when explicit images are circulated via mobile messaging amongst groups without the consent of those pictured. In all these instances mobile images and texts are assigned value, where value is accrued through distribution of that content within wider networks. This notion of value distribution relates to Sally Munt's claim that shame is both an object and a process, one that I argue is entangled with mobiles and that brings forth the emotional dimension of affects, amplifying them and extending their reach into new environments and to new audiences. 'Shame is an emotion that travels quickly, it has an infective, contagious property that means it can circulate and be exchanged with intensity' (Munt, 2008: 3). This means that shame as an evolving process is better articulated as being contingent on aspects of mobile practice, while also signalling a level of control as images and texts can be used as a way to subjugate or incriminate people.

For Munt, shame operates in a more visible register within the context of nation states, extending shame beyond the personal or the private, as some groups are identified and stigmatised – such as 'the underclass and the urban poor, rural labourers and peasants, "gypsies" or Travellers, homosexuals...' (Munt, 2008: 3). Shame can therefore be understood as an ordering mechanism that serves to bind groups in a particular affective containment, enabled and amplified through mobiles. So shame in these instances can signal a socio-personal dilemma, or perhaps render 'different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) visible' (Ngai, 2005: 3)

In her essay 'Writing Shame' Probyn highlights shame as an affect that 'reworks how we understand the body and its relation to other bodies, or for want of a better word, to the social' (2010: 74). In the context of her own writing practice, she describes how shame works through the body, extending writers to readers, bodies, ideas, concepts and other affects. 'Shame is subjective in the strong sense of bringing into being an idea or entity through the specific explosion of mind, body, place and history' (Probyn, 2010: 81). I would like to extend

Probyn's claim here by suggesting that shame as an affective and embodied force is materialised and amplified through mobile technology. Mobiles are able to render shame as a moving or travelling 'thing' i.e. as distributed text and/or image objects. The so-called ephemerality of affect is thereby given textual and visual form as part of a media archive that brings forth new potential for shaming as content is distributed and travels throughout a network of people. Conversely, mobiles can also be part of countering acts of shaming, enabling a sense of agency amongst a stigmatized group as they construct alternative narratives. This argument points to shame as being both subjective and contingent, as something that 'reconfigures how we think about the body' (Probyn, 2010: 81). Considering these arguments, shame can be more easily understood as a process that penetrates specific bodies (even nations) at certain times, assigning value to ideas and notions of assumed normativity.

### **Mobile Stories**

As Amparo Lasén, Ken Hillis and Jodi Dean have noted, it is not only information that is transmitted and exchanged during mobile communication, but also affect – which circulates between people and their phones. People have become attached to their devices through interest, pleasures and frictions (Hillis et al., 2015: 1). I argue that affect not only signifies the breach of human-machine boundaries and distributed agencies, but also shows tensions and pleasures of another variety, including alienation, collectivity, gain, loss, control – all forces that can be considered unseen but inherent in the mobile story. Therefore, part of my methodology is to foreground affect as a way to develop narratives about mobile-mediated communication and its wider socio-political implications.

As already noted, the affective connection that exists between people and mobile phones is often been reduced to a scholarly label in academic discourse. Mobiles are called 'affective technologies', 'technologies of affect' or 'affective machines' (Lasén, 2010) (Dean, 2015). This somewhat abstract and generalized condition of affect continues to be used in descriptions of mobile practice, often saying very little about the scope or range of attachments between people and technology. I argue that to only label and thereby broadly acknowledge that affect exists and circulates in some sort of general way falls short of grasping the complexity of mobile mediation. More so, to label the human-mobile relationship affective does not differentiate it from any other relationship. As many affect theorists claim, affect is the 'in-between-ness' of life (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 1). There is

effectively no moment or relationship that is devoid of some kind of affect. Therefore, instead of generalising affect in mobile mediation, I am heeding Probyn's call that affects have 'specific effects and warrant precise descriptions ... A general gesture to affect won't do the trick' (2010: 74).

In an effort to expand on the range of affects highlighted in mobile research and ultimately, to understand more about the complexity of the mobile-human kinship, I raise the following questions: Is it enough to say that mobiles are simply affective technologies, without articulating what kinds of affects they generate and what they might signify? And, what roles do mobiles perform in the circulation of affect? Over the past decade, a set of well-worn affects has been regularly cited. These include the anxiety associated with being constantly tethered or leashed to the device (Lasén, 2004: 2) (Arnold, 2003: 244). To expand on the descriptions of affect in mobile research is to also acknowledge that a range of affects does indeed exist. If affect indicates a level of interest, as Probyn claims, then what do instances of endless mobile texting, or seemingly aimless screen scrolling signify? In light of this behaviour, some media scholars have started to probe some less-cited affects. More precisely, these scholars are exploring what certain types of lacklustre feelings – such as boredom, indifference, or listlessness – mean in mobile-mediated communication.<sup>19</sup> As media theorist Niels van Doorn asks: 'How do bland feelings circulate, coagulate, and attach themselves to (digital) objects in our ready-to-share media and news environment? In an "always on" mediascape, is banality the new normal? Is indifference a mere dissociative symptom, or can it act as a performative strategy to cope with political instability and social precarity?' (2015).

The study of mobiles through narrative methods has been taken up by a number of researchers studying the influence of mobiles on people's experiences of space and place.<sup>20</sup> Specifically these studies have rested on, amongst other things, the fact that mobile phones provide opportunities for both giving an account of a place – such as through an audio tour or interactive content – and also that people can add their own interpretation of places by leaving spoken recordings or pictures, as shown in a number of projects using locative media. Research taken up in this vein of 'locative narrative' suggests that people who narrate by using mobile phones are positioned as flâneurs, wandering through places both witnessing and reporting their environment (Barber, 2014: 95-96). The flâneur is often associated with

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<sup>19</sup> For one example of research into banality in mobile media see Hjorth and Burgess' article 'Intimate Banalities: The Emotional Currency of Shared Camera Phone Images During the Queensland Flood Disaster' (2014).

<sup>20</sup> For a collection of these essays see *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies* edited by Jason Farman (2014).

19<sup>th</sup> century French literature and city life. The flâneur strolls, gathers and conducts life activities while also consuming the latest cultural artifacts. The flâneur ‘watches activities, hoping to draw knowledge and understanding from them, and so become both a witness and a reporter’ (Barber, 2014: 95). Most notably the concept of the flâneur is associated with the writer Charles Baudelaire and subsequently the philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin.

However, many theorists have criticised the notion of a flâneur as being an overly masculinist concept. In these arguments, critics point to the outside-ness of the flâneur, as someone who is ‘not considered part of the crowd, although he or she may be in it’ (Lashua, 2010: 212). ‘In terms of class and status, he or she is clearly apart and removed from what he or she is observing. The flâneur stands above the crowd and in a position of privilege but ironically one that assumes some sort of neutrality and invisibility. As a result, the flâneur becomes representative of an objective, privileged, masculinist way of seeing and knowing the world’ (Lashua, 2010: 212). In this sense the concept of the flâneur falls short of my methodological ambitions in this dissertation. The mode of research I am developing draws from the continuity of lived experience, an active mode of working and a guided discovery – one that is guided by affects as well as my research questions. My conceptual framework therefore rests on a relational approach to mobile phones, one that views this relationality not as embracing pre-formed existing entities but rather as a coming-together of entities which are uniquely co-constituted in practice.

In this regard, I draw on the work of Mark Sample, who employs subtle creative hacks on assumed narratives about mobiles by harnessing personal accounts and stories. Exemplifying White’s definition of narrative as creating meaning out of experience, Sample offers a mobile version of narrative practice. He playfully uses GPS<sup>21</sup> functionality in existing location-based social networking (LBSN) applications for its narrative potential. In a thought experiment titled *Haunts*, Sample tasks a group of students with using platforms such as Foursquare to layer autobiographical stories onto existing locations on the platform. In other words, unlike the ‘normal’ user process of LBSN, where users map their location by checking in or creating a pin, with *Haunts* the aim is not to simply map the geographic location of a place, but to allow for a more imaginative and affective account of a location. Sample refers to these accounts of a location as ‘chorographic’ (2014: 72). A chorographic account places

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<sup>21</sup> GPS stands for Global Positioning System and is functionality built into many mobile devices through applications; this is often accessed via smart phones (Sample, 2014: 71).

emphasis on more invisible aspects of a location – such as the sense of a place – but it also allows for more creative and imaginative presentations (Sample, 2014: 72). He mischievously renames existing locations on a popular LBSN to illustrate the point. His local coffee shop becomes ‘Cave of Dreams,’ his home reads ‘The Treehouse of Sighs’ and his office on campus is ‘The Office of Incandescent Light’ (Sample, 2014: 73). With *Haunts* Sample shows us ways in which mobile phones allow people to read and write space in new ways, as phones and people participate in location-based social networks.

This type of narrative, guided by Sample as the authority figure, also urges students to map locations that can be considered less popular or incidental. These include spaces where people often spend time but pay little attention to; these are types of in-between spaces such as bus stops or highway underpasses (Sample, 2014: 74). Sample refers to Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopias here – ‘where existing physical sites are layered with incompatible counter sites’ (2014: 68). In other words, heterotopias are the other places, seen outside the norm, those not usually mapped and made visible. Therefore, Sample and his research group – through narrative means – attempt to highlight the untold stories of a city, creating a perspective on the hidden, more affective sense of place through mobile media practices. This example illustrates how narratives perform as modes of inquiry or analysis (Stanley, 2008: 436). As Liz Stanley argues, narratives are ‘what the researcher does, methodologically and analytically, here narrative is the phenomena under study and method of study’ (2008: 436). As a narrative experiment, *Haunts* articulates a subtle creative hack, subversion, or play of existing mobile media. It shows a way of repurposing this type of technology for telling personal stories. The promise of social networking platforms is that anyone with access to an internet-enabled mobile phone and data can participate in creating a narrative. But as with most historical narratives, those with economic wealth and political clout tend to tell the stories of a space (Farman, 2012: 3). However, *Haunts* reveals the larger commercial imperative of LBSN by turning the perceived normative role of consumers (like checking in to shops and bars) into narrators telling counter-normative stories about places (Sample, 2014: 76).

These stories are not always compatible with the aims of the locations on the network. For example, a local coffee shop aiming to attract customers may not want the story of a traumatic break up associated with its location profile on the network. Where a typical check-in may include a review of the coffee and Wi-Fi coverage, a *Haunts* story may instead feature messy details of an argument that took place there and the affects and feelings it conjures up. In this sense *Haunts*’ narratives run counter to the aims of the

commerce of the network. Where shops, bars and restaurants aim to have positive affective associations with their network profile, the *Haunts* narrative evokes the real, the emotional and even the traumatic. In this way *Haunts* very subtly attempts to challenge the normative commercial order and structure of the network. The question raised in this experiment seems to be: 'What is at stake and who benefits?' In this disruption the aims of the network members and their interests become only slightly more transparent.

### **Writing Worlds**

Assuming that no so-called master truth exists, as Jacob Dlamini demonstrates, I offer a situated storytelling method in this chapter to address questions of what mobile practice might mean. I argue that emerging narratives about mobiles offer an affective perspective as a way to extend our understanding of certain socio-political issues. I propose writing as both an affective-critical tool and a process of intervention that raises questions about the structural relationships between people and technology. Through a sensorily aware mode of working, which tends to be located outside of the dominant methods of analysis, the vignettes presented in this chapter illustrate the situatedness of my research – as part of lived experience. My intention was to perform a translation from routine experience to the embodied practice of writing and critique. Therefore, I am proposing a way of embracing affect beyond just using it as a general label, instead drawing on it as a narrative device or form of guidance. For me thus 'Writing is a way to extend the author's body into the exterior world; in this sense, it functions as a technological aid so intimately bound up with his thinking and neural circuits that it acts like a prosthesis' (Hayles, 1999: 126).

I argue that when affect is used as a prism for enlarging on various aspects of mobile practice, it forms a vital part my storytelling, or perhaps re-storying, of the cultural history of mobile phones. This re-storying act implies that writing has a strategic value, in other words that it can reinvent narratives rather than merely substitute them (Kember, 2016: 81). Following a critical tradition of feminist writing, stories can unsettle, reverse and displace some of the dualisms in existing narratives in the way that Dlamini, Hjorth, Pink and Sample show. More so, if writing is seen as a technology in itself – one that works and has strategic value – then it is 'a mechanism for re-wording and re-worlding and for re-telling stories that matter' (Kember, 2016: 86). This approach insists on not divorcing mobiles from their context and history and thereby isolating them as fetishized objects, but rather on seeing them as contingent and networked, existing as they do in the movement of our everyday experience



as well as being products of their history. As Caroline Bassett argues, 'Narrative remains central to what we do in an information-saturated world. Narrative is at the heart of the operations of everyday life and everyday culture within a world where digital technology is becoming pervasive. To consider contemporary narrative formations is to engage with contemporary techno-culture' (2007: 8). In the following chapter I revisit a significant period in the cultural history of the mobile phone, pertaining to the invention and adoption of the first mobile phone in America in the 1980s. I argue that this historical narrative – premised on a rhetoric of freedom and autonomy – ended up obscuring revised working conditions and the gendering of technology.

## CHAPTER 3: ATTACHMENT ISSUES

*I use my phone when I'm on the train to  
feel like I'm doing something. It's better than doing nothing.*<sup>22</sup>

### **Becoming Mobile: Narratives of Freedom and Productivity**

In this chapter I examine the narratives pertaining to the early marketing and industry rhetoric of the first mobile phone launch in America in 1984. I focus on the alluring promise of freedom – mostly from the constraints of the desk and office hours – as a key influence in the adoption of mobile phones amongst consumers, affectively binding them to the technology. Germane to the central research question of this dissertation, I am concerned with the implications of these early attachments to mobiles in relation to how certain subject positions were formed, especially, in this case, as they related to conditions of work and dynamics of gender. As I will argue in this chapter, in the context of rising neoliberalism in America, the notion of people-becoming-mobile and its initial associations with freedom, turned out to be nothing more than a proxy for more work. Indeed, the so-called freedom that mobiles promised was in fact a reconfiguration of conditions of work such that anytime and any place presented an opportunity for performing tasks, perhaps most especially for women. As I will show, some academics, columnists and consumers already had a sense of this reconfiguration of work, and their fears and apprehensions about mobile technology are evidenced in the extracts I have scattered throughout this chapter. However, it seems these fears and anxieties were swept aside and perhaps even submerged by a more persuasive fantasy of heroic productivity.

I am particularly interested in how masculinity as a founding subjectivity for mobiles was affectively embodied, enacted and assigned value through two popular cultural figures – the cartoon character Dick Tracy and the film persona Gordon Gekko. I show how that these characters were supported by marketing material, media and inventor narratives that aligned with a neoliberal zeitgeist that, simply put, ‘to be doing something, to move, to change ... is what enjoys prestige’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 155). Arguably, this zeitgeist still persists, as suggested by the quote by a young female student that prefaces this

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<sup>22</sup> A comment offered by a female student during a lecture at Webster University campus in Leiden on 14 November 2017.

chapter – to be productive, to do something, is valuable. As Simon Springer and his co-authors argue, neoliberalism should be approached as a concept rather than a label in order to address the many different registers it has been used in and the domains that it can be applied to (2016: 1). Very broadly, the concept of neoliberalism is defined as the ‘extension of competitive markets into all areas of life including the economy, politics and society’ (Springer et al., 2016: 2). I am particularly interested in neoliberalism as it extends to the organisation of subjectivity premised on ideals of white male bodies in positions of power. In this vein I am focused on how some core values of neoliberalism such as productivity, performance, personal empowerment and efficiency were emergent in and through mobile technology.

In the first part of this chapter I will set the socio-political scene of this story. My claim is that America in the 1980s was characterised by low-level fear and precarity associated with a global recession and rampant urban crime, amongst other factors. My focus on America is a considered one, not only because it was here that the first mobile phone was launched, but also because the country exercised (and still exercises) a dominant influence on popular and consumer culture globally. In addition, the emergence of theories and philosophies of neoliberalism, a key concept in this chapter, are associated with some key American thinkers, especially from the Chicago School of Economics after World War II including Milton Friedman, Aaron Director and George Stigler (Springer et al., 2016: 4). In addition, some of the key figures in neoliberal politics and policy making were active around the time the first mobile phone was introduced and popularised, including American President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and Chair of the American Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan (1987-2006) (Springer et al., 2016: 3).

In the next section I examine the inventor narrative of Motorola engineer Martin Cooper. Cooper is a prominent figure in the popular history of mobile phones, as evidenced by his many interviews and public presentations. As the self-appointed father of the cell phone, Cooper still features in popular media such as TEDx, YouTube, BBC, *The Economist* and *The New York Times*. In recent interviews, he still argues that the first handheld cellular phone in America symbolises a liberation of the body from the constraints of corporate work life. Cooper was one of the first to introduce the initial freedom narrative that surrounded the launch of the Motorola DYNATAC 8000X mobile phone in 1984. Following this, I will examine how this freedom narrative was redirected towards, even conflated with, notions of productivity and personal empowerment through marketing, media reports and most significantly the *Dick Tracy* cartoon and the film *Wall Street* (1987) featuring Gordon Gekko.

Considering these examples, a key question in this chapter is: to what extent can freedom be considered a universal affordance of mobile phones? Or posed differently: are all bodies equally free in the context of nascent neoliberalism and the introduction of new information technologies? To answer this, I argue that the introduction of the mobile phone should be seen as a cultural and historical event and not simply an artefact or object that represents a significant moment for the emergence of a particular mobile subjectivity premised on ideals of masculinity, ceaseless connection, competition and activity. Particularly, I examine how women were bound up in this technological fantasy, galvanised by media and marketing depictions of mobile practice. My point is, at this moment of invention in the cultural history of technology, women's work can perhaps be seen as re-constrained and re-shaped by mobiles, couched in the affective rhetoric of mobility as a sign of aspirational middle-class success. Women, who had been entering paid work in increasing numbers since the 1970s,<sup>23</sup> formed part of a new more flexible and decentralised work force. The demands of their paid work were made *alongside* those already placed on women as wives and mothers. Following the marketing rhetoric, with a mobile phone a woman could go about her life – be it for paid or unpaid work – and still maintain her domestic duties in the home and with children, only re-shaped by aspects of immediacy and contact-ability. For single women, conspicuous busyness was not only a sign of middle-class success but also a tactic for match making – to be busy meant you were desirable (Ehrenreich, 1985).<sup>24</sup> Notably though, those representations of success were embodied by men, where aspirations were orientated towards the form of the all-powerful male hero body.

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**It's not only women, of course; for both sexes, busyness has become an important insignia of upper middle-class status. Nobody, these days, admits to having a hobby, although two or more careers - say, neurosurgery and an art dealership - is not uncommon, and I am sure we will soon be hearing more about the tribulations of the four- paycheck couple. Even those who can manage only one occupation at a time would be embarrassed to be caught doing only one thing at a time. Those young men who jog with their headsets on are not, as you might innocently guess, rocking out, but are absorbing the principles of international finance law or a**

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<sup>23</sup> The percentage of women in paid work increased 15% between 1950 (30%) and 1990 (45%), according to the U.S Department of Labour ([https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NEWSTATS/facts/women\\_if.htm#one](https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NEWSTATS/facts/women_if.htm#one))

<sup>24</sup> This point is perhaps most vividly exemplified in the 1988 American film *Working Girl* featuring Melanie Griffiths as working-class secretary Tess McGill who tries to make her mark in Manhattan's stock broking scene. In the film McGill poses as a powerful executive and in so doing catches the eye of the leading man. McGill is later unveiled as a fraud but still gets her man.

**lecture on one-minute management. Even eating, I read recently, is giving way to "grazing" - the unconscious ingestion of unidentified foods while drafting a legal brief, cajoling a client on the phone and, in ambitious cases, doing calf-toning exercises under the desk.**

*HER column featured in The New York Times (Ehrenreich, 1985)*

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### **The United States in the 1980s**

To contextualize the emergence of the early mobile adopter in 1984 requires cognizance of the kinds of affects that circulated and pervaded the lives of urban middle-class Americans in the decade 1980 - 1990. While I am aware that there is a risk of homogenising Americans in this analysis, there are a number of prominent trends to observe. Between 1981 and 1983 a steep global recession took place which affected many industrialised nations including the United States (Krugman and Obstfeld, 2003: 683). The major debt crisis in Latin America exacerbated this period of financial unease as an untenable amount of foreign debt was accrued by countries including Brazil, Argentina and Mexico that simply could not be repaid (Krugman and Obstfeld, 2003: 683). Further, this decade was characterised by strategies of international displacement of production from first to third world countries and processes of 'fluidification' whereby workforces were more easily dismissed, retrained or transferred (Massumi, 1993: 14-15). During these years, Americans experienced some of the highest unemployment rates in history: 9,7% in 1982 and 9,7% in 1983 (Statistics, 2018). There was much at stake for women when it came to rising unemployment – apart from the loss of wages in the household it also signalled a change in the kinds of job they were offered often demanding fewer skills, lower pay and flex or part-time arrangements (Faulkner and Arnold, 1985: 45). Notably, it was during this time of fiscal uncertainty, in the early 1980s, that policy makers at institutions including the International Monetary Fund, and economists in the United States, sought a renewed emphasis on neoliberal policies (Springer et al., 2016: 95).

In 1981 Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States, ushering in an era of fierce national pride and the promise of economic revival from the recession and its effects (Rossinow, 2015: 139). Historian Doug Rossinow argues that behind Reagan's outward message of hope, lay fear (2015: 139). The foreign threats, in the Reaganite view, were Communists and terrorists. Domestic fears often focussed on the perceived and actual dangers of city life amidst rising racial tensions and violent crime in cities including Baltimore,

Newark, Detroit, New Orleans and Oakland (Rossinow, 2015: 139). The United States Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger went so far as to describe crime in the 1980s as 'a reign of terror in American cities' (Rossinow, 2015: 140).

According to Brian Massumi, American professionals, middle-class wage earners and the so-called underclass were all fearful of their class positions in the 1980s. As Massumi writes, 'Professionals ... lived in fear of falling into the middle class, which itself was on the precipice of overlooking the "permanent underclass" created by the partial dismantling of the welfare state. For the underclass, it was not only employment that had become precarious, but life itself, as infant mortality and murder rates soared and life expectancy declined' (1993: 15). Interestingly, in 1990, the American National Census showed that in the New York borough of Queens, a suburb often associated with an emergent middle-class, the percentage of black residents with college degrees rose from 30% to 52% in the 1980s and the rate of poverty in the borough for black residents fell to 3%. This example might recast Massumi's claim of middle-class fear as an response more deeply insinuated with race relations. Indeed as Rossinow claims, a rising black elite became increasingly visible in the city during this time (2015: 141).

Fear also dominated the workplace as a growing number of Americans experienced a sense of precarity as a result of having to adapt to new technologies such as personal computers and the competitive environment within which this adaptation took place (Massumi, 1993: 15). In addition, public fear in America, not unlike the rest of the world, was amplified by mass media reports of the ever-present dangers of the Cold War, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) reported in 1981 and the impending threat of global warming (Massumi, 1993: 11). America in the 1980s can perhaps be described as being punctuated by an atmosphere of 'low-level fear' (Massumi, 1993: viii).

Massumi argues that it was fear in this period that mobilised people towards the reinforcement of hierarchy and social boundaries between bodies (1993: viii). In consumer marketing, this manifested in selling an image of human fulfilment and desire rather than promoting a product. Significantly though, this fulfilment found form in adjectives such as 'power' (as in 'power lunch') (Massumi, 1993: 15). So too, 'networking' was the buzzword in the 1980s as empowered individuals connected through new technology (Massumi, 2013: 115). I argue that this notion of power was associated with practices and technologies of productivity and mobility, supported by ideas that differentiating between leisure and work time was increasingly irrelevant. Massumi goes as far as to suggest that leisure 'disappeared' as marketing insinuated itself into activities as mundane as switching on the television (1993:

16). As discussed further in this chapter, the adoption of the mobile phone was achieved largely by appeals to the affective potential of the technology. Couched in gendered narratives, mobiles held the promise of progress, connectivity and productivity.

In *Tantalisingly Close* Imar de Vries expands on this notion of progress, to suggest that mobile advertisements not only represent ideals of linear advancement but also yearnings for wholeness and completeness in consumers as they find some form of structured order in new technology (2012: 13). Specifically, I am interested in what implications powerful hero figures including Tracy and Gekko and their mobile prostheses had (and continue to have) for the masculine subjectivity of mobiles. I am also concerned with how, in response to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, consumers found a sense of security, even stability, in the desirable productivity that mobile phones promised.

Wendy Faulkner and Erik Arnold argue that to understand how technology operates and forms such a critical aspect of our lives, it is vital to analyse its two key underlying social organisations, that is: capitalism and patriarchy (1985: 18). Writing in 1985, around the time of the DYNA T-A-C's public launch, the authors claim that technology is inherently masculine owing to the dominance of men in its means of production (Faulkner and Arnold, 1985: 22). This dominance pertains to technology's design (by men), manufacture (by men) and its marketing and sales (by men). These more overt processes constitute some of the ways that women are most often excluded or alienated from taking part in technology (Faulkner and Arnold, 1985: 18) The team responsible for the design and engineering of the DYNA T-A-C at Motorola exemplify the dominance of this white capitalist patriarchy.<sup>25</sup> In fact, it was only in 1964 when Leon Myart took the Motorola company to court for discriminating against him in a job interview that the company first employed African-American analysers and phasers on their television production line (Schaefer, 1966).

Notably, the gendering of technology continues to persist – in the manufacturing and marketing of the technology. The latter can be evidenced at the nearest magazine rack, where technology titles still continue to use women's bodies on their covers and in editorials to advertise gadgets (see *T3* and *Stuff* magazines for example of this). Further, visitors to the leading market place for new mobile technology, World Mobile Congress in Barcelona, are often greeted by 'booth babes' – women, dressed in hot-pants and low-cut blouses who

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<sup>25</sup> The team responsible for the launch of the DYNA T-A-C at Motorola: Martin Cooper, communications operations vice president; Donald Linder, lead engineer; Ken Larson, DYNA T-A-C phone designer; Jim Durante, frequency synthesizers; Rudy Krolopp, design team leader; Ronald Cieslak, integrated circuitry; Bruce Eastmond, base station designer; George Opas; Richard Komrmusch, antenna design; James Mikulski, system design; Daniel Brown, integrated circuitry; Al Davidson, antenna design; Richard Adlhoch, integrated circuitry (<http://dynallc.com/great-moments-in-engineering-award-october-2007/>)

manage the technology displays and lure in passers-by. Women in this context, are not so much alienated from technology as they are equated with technology as objects of desire. These exclusionary practices are some of the keys to understanding the gender dynamics inherent in technology. In this chapter I am focused on the kinds of affects that present in cultural narratives and stories about mobile technology and their discursive potential for containing gender positions.

Faulkner and Arnold point to the masculinity of technology and its institutions as being protected by persuasion rather than by coercion (1985: 49). This is an important point and I suggest that the gendering of mobiles has been nurtured and reinforced by the discourses that surround the technology and more specifically the male 'power' figures that coerce us in stories about mobiles. It is not enough to say that media technologies impact 'our means and modalities of expression and signification' (Sobchack, 2004: 135). Indeed, it is our bodily sense of these technologies that matters too, specifically the 'sense we have and make of those temporal and spatial coordinates that radically in-form and orient our social, personal and bodily existence' (Sobchack, 2004: 136). Vivian Sobchack argues that as embodied subjects we are not merely symbolised by media but are constituted by it. She stresses the alteration of our bodily sense through cinematic or electronic media experiences where our 'existential presence to the world, to ourselves, and to others' can be radically transformed (Sobchack, 2004: 136). Following Sobchack's phenomenological argument, how do the affective attachments between people and mobiles also extend our knowledge of bodies situated in certain relationships of power and inequality as they relate to, for example, gender and class? In the next part of this chapter, I will outline how this subjectivity of technology was affectively embodied and thus gendered, first by analysing the narrative of its inventor, Martin Cooper, who commands a persuasive voice in the adoption of the technology.

### **Inventor Narrative**

I am aware that the terms 'inventor' and 'invention' are problematic, especially as the mobile phone, like with many other so-called inventions, emerged through the work of a number of researchers and engineers moving closer to the development of the same portable handheld phone technology in 1973. This mobile research took place at the Finnish company Mobira Oy, Bell Labs and Motorola in America, as well as the Japanese public corporation Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT). More so, the term 'invention' may also signal a historical reading of mobiles in a singular and dominant story of engineering – an approach I aim to



avoid in this analysis. Therefore, I refer to the *emergence* of the mobile phone instead of its *invention*, in part, to indicate my focus on the cultural, economic and affective contingencies of the technology's development and adoption. It is important to also point out that the portable hand-held mobile phone was first demonstrated to the media in 1973 in New York City by Motorola. However, due to frequency regulations and other restrictions, the DYNA T-A-C 8000X was only sold and marketed to the public in 1984.

Inventors tend to occupy a dominant voice in circulating fantasies about the application and development of technology, in part because they are most invested in fulfilling the promises of their inventions (Natale and Balbi, 2014: 209). Martin Cooper, the Motorola engineer credited with the invention of the DYNA T-A-C 8000X offers a persuasive first-hand account of how the technology was developed. In the media, Cooper is typically presented as a humble and likeable figure who recounts enthusiastic stories about electronic engineering. He imbues technological invention with a mythical quality that is highly affective. Now well into his eighties, Cooper remarks that 'I have been dreaming my whole life and living in a different world to most people; in a world more of the future and more of fantasy than the real world' (YouTube, 2015). He joined the Motorola company in Chicago in 1954 where he worked for three decades, rising through the ranks. In 1973 Cooper led the team that launched a prototype for the DYNA T-A-C 8000X. By the 1970s the Fordist model of mass production and assembly-line workers revealed certain crisis tendencies as the growth and profit of mass production slowed down, resistance to harsh working conditions heightened and the American economic dominance was threatened by European and East Asian expansion (Jessop, 2016). Cooper embodied the excitement and enthusiasm for the new information and communication technologies that were central to the burgeoning information age and emerging post-Fordist era. At the same time, labour became decentralized and more flexible (Brooker, 2017: 220). As Michael Hardt notes, in the early 1970s America a shift took place as jobs became highly mobile and involved flexible skills (1999: 91). This flexibility had implications, most especially for women. In this sense Donna Haraway defines the feminisation of the work force as implicating those who are 'extremely vulnerable, able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force' (1985/2003: 526).

Commenting on this flexibility and mobility with the introduction of the mobile phone, Cooper claimed: 'For 100 years we had been trapped in our homes, leashed to our desks by this copper wire, now was the time to set us free' (BBC, 2013). For Cooper mobile communication – talk and text – was a revolution. He argued that 'people are fundamentally

inherently mobile, they move around, they never would want to be leashed, tied to the desk or to their home or office if they had a choice' (YouTube, 2013a). Cooper claimed that 'freedom means you can talk anywhere' and his vision for the mobile phone was filled with the possibilities that come with freedoms of movement and choice. (Motherboard, 2015). Cooper's story was imbued with hopeful post-Fordist excitement that emerged with the invention of the first mobile phone prototype as a technology that supposedly freed people from the constraints of time and place. Even now, through online videos and newspaper editorials, Cooper's energy and exuberance for the promises of mobile telephony feel almost contagious.

Cooper's inventor narrative supports the claim that a new technology 'is almost inevitably a field onto which a broad array of hopes and fears is projected and envisioned as a potential solution to, or possible problem for, the world at large' (Sturken et al., 2004: 1). Mobile technologies, not unlike other electronic inventions that form part of technology culture, teem with 'dreams, visions, hopes, goals, expectations and imaginative premises' (Bailey, 2005: 17). This kind of technological utopianism – where concepts of freedom and autonomy are central – captured public imagination, privileging notions of advancement, progress and father-figure security. With the public launch of the phone and subsequent marketing, the theme of freedom became central to some of Motorola's advertisements. The opening line of Motorola's flip phone<sup>26</sup> television advertisement in 1990 proclaimed: 'There's an incredible freedom that comes with using a cellular phone and once you've experience it there's no turning back' (YouTube, 2011). In another promotion the voice-over claims, 'Now everyone can enjoy the freedom of a personal cellular phone' (Tube, 2015).

Notably, the promotion of wireless technology as a form of liberation and advancement – through the mass media and popular culture – predated the American introduction of the mobile phone in 1984. For example, Kim Sawchuk notes the inclusion of Motorola's handie talkie in the 1945 war film *Objective, Burma!* (2010: 30). The film articulated the affordances of wireless technology on the battleground, which was later made available to consumers as a Motorola portable radio. Extending her analysis Sawchuk writes that between 1945 and 1950 editorials in the photojournalistic magazine *LIFE*, keywords such as 'portability', 'mobility' and 'speed' were highlighted and associated with companies such as General Electric, Motorola and Bell. Wireless communication was marketed by these companies, alongside what seemed to be a public fascination with the

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<sup>26</sup> The first Motorola flip phone was introduced in 1989 and additional models in this range were release in 1991 and 1992.

power of electronic energy, ‘merging with fantasies of the propulsion of the body into space’ (Sawchuk, 2010: 30.). Paying close attention to the representation of wireless technology and the affective qualities these *LIFE* image-texts presented, Sawchuk traces the emergence of a particular ‘wireless imaginary’ (2010: 31). Here, imaginary is defined by a commitment to ‘understanding socially shared representations as they are connected to the construction and creation of institutions, such as democracy, and the practices that sustain them’ (Sawchuk, 2010: 31). In the post-war wireless imaginary, Sawchuk claims that middle-class white urban families were catapulted beyond their living rooms into outer-world possibilities of imaginary travel and movement (2010: 31).

In the realm of mobile phones, ‘cellular telephone companies literally capitalize on the dreams and anxieties unleashed by the very technologies they sell’ (Sawchuk, 2010: 29). Said differently, ‘what is being sold here is not a machine or a piece of hardware but the affective qualities associated with the technologies’ (Sawchuk, 2010: 34). The context of early mobile marketing was significant, as at the time, Cooper developed the prototype for the first handheld portable phone, a dynamic process of decentralisation of labour took place and the prospects of life outside of the conventions of large corporations emerged. More so, Cooper’s fantasies of freedom were amplified by shifts in power dynamics in the telecommunications field that took place at the time of the mobile’s invention, particularly the unsettling of the centres of so-called authority and monopoly at Bell Labs and AT&T, which involved the introduction of new competitors, the deregulation of monopoly and the construction of licence agreements for frequency spectrum. Cooper’s emotive descriptions of his rivalry with a fellow engineer at Bell Labs, Joel Engel, hinted at the promise of a different social and industrial order, implicating the shifting power relations in the telecommunications field, detailed in the next section. Cooper’s narrative, delivered in combative tones, was made that much more compelling with its David and Goliath trope. This narrative reflected, as much as it encouraged, an affective orientation and gendering of mobile technology – that is, that personal freedom and the power associated with this freedom were embedded in masculine notions of control, while overshadowing the existing precarity and vulnerability of the female workforce.

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***My car is a 1969 Cougar, and its violent trembling when in neutral soothes my back better than any lounge chair with built-in vibrator- massager now being featured in***

*the catalogues. A modern cassette stereo radio sits in the dashboard, playing the old Sinatra-Garland-Jolson songs that - if I tried playing them at work or home - would make my colleagues and family members sick ... I am all alone, not by the telephone, and I can sing along with Frank or daydream about the budget deficit without having to account, even subconsciously, for the time. I'm driving; I'm getting someplace; I'll be right there; not guilty. Comes the telephone in the car, and all that freedom is finished. We will all become always-reachables, under the tyranny of the telephone in the dominion of the dialed. Why do you think they call the mobile phones "cellular"? Because each geographic area is considered a cell, a word previously most often associated with prisoners and Communists. Ah, the cellmasters say, it's all voluntary. You don't want a telephone in your car, you don't have to have one. That's what they said about bathtubs. And telephones, and color television sets, and videocorders, and boiling-water faucets. You don't have to have them, but if you don't, you're a pariah. The day is coming when your boss will say "Whaddya mean, he's in his car - get him on the cellular phone!"*

William Safire, *The New York Times* column, 1984

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## **Decentralisation and Competition**

Andrew Herman claims that in the construction of any kind of technological imaginary there are specific narratological actants. More specifically, he claims that within the imaginary's narratives certain subjects occupy either helper or opponent roles. Helpers facilitate a desired goal, for example towards a utopian technological togetherness enabled by wireless networks in communities (Herman, 2010: 191). Opponents are most often figured as the barriers to this goal, both technological and institutional. In the case of Cooper, these two narratological roles are clearly evident. He criticized Bell Labs as a hindrance to the advancement of market competition and its lead engineer on cellular telephony, Joel Engel, as his 'nemesis' (Motherboard, 2015). In terms of institutions, he regularly pointed to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as a hand brake to the unbridled freedom and potential that mobiles offered consumers. Interestingly, this telecommunications rivalry has antecedents – as Alexander Bell and Elisha Gray have often been depicted as notorious adversaries who filed their patents for applications for a telephonic device on the exact same day in 1876 (De Vries, 2012: 108).

Bell Labs, a division of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T), developed the cellular model, which led to the name cell phone – and which constitutes the infrastructure of contemporary mobile telephony (Agar, 2013: 23). Engineers at Bell Labs also ‘invented’ the transistor, information theory, lasers, solar energy, radio astronomy, microchips and the UNIX computer operating system (Coupland, 2014). Founded by Alexander Graham Bell, who is often credited as the inventor of the telephone, Bell Labs had a reputation for ‘intelligence and inventiveness’ (Coupland, 2014). The perception of technical prowess and prestige at Bell Labs was created, in part, by their seven awards from the Nobel Prize committee since 1925 (Coupland, 2014). Martin Cooper’s optimistic notions about mobiles and the autonomy he associated with the phone was couched in the story of the little company Motorola lobbying against America’s giant telecoms monopoly Bell Labs (BBC, 2013). Cooper’s story, as told to various media, was filled with descriptions of Motorola as a plucky competitor versus the genius monopoly of Bell Labs. Cooper claimed he wanted to ‘take on the monopoly’ because ‘we believed in competition’ (YouTube, 2013b). He envisioned new dynamics emerging out of the mobile revolution, not only for mobile consumers but also for corporate America. Cooper placed special emphasis on his rivalry with Bell Labs, often portraying himself as an energetic entrepreneurial underdog against his nemesis engineer, Joel Engel, who Cooper claimed had a bigger team and more impressive resources (Motherboard, 2015).

At the time of the mobile phone’s announcement in America in 1973, much of the social world was still mostly characterised by mid-twentieth century social hierarchy and patriarchy. As Dot Griffiths writes in her essay ‘The Exclusion of Women from Technology’: ‘Technology is competitive, aggressive and controlling because it is generated in a social context which is itself characterised by these values’ (1985: 71). These patriarchal dynamics operated in large companies with considerable labour forces such as Ford, General Motors and General Electric that dominated the industry landscape. Businesses and government operated on models of large-scale top-down approaches and ‘telecommunications reflected and in turn bolstered this pattern’ (Agar, 2013: 28). In America between 1960 and 1990 the Bell System Conglomerate, colloquially referred to by Americans as ‘Ma Bell’, operated as a monopoly covering nearly all telecommunications in the country (Agar, 2013: 30). Therefore, mobile phones in this context were part of (but not the cause of) what author Jon Agar calls a ‘sea change’ in politics and technology (Agar, 2013: 30). I argue this sea change was

foregrounded by some of the ideals of neoliberalism, specifically autonomy, freedom and individualism, embodied, in part, by Cooper's media narrative.

In addition to the technical resources it had, Bell Lab's holding company, AT&T, held the sole licence rights for cellular telephony in America granted by the American Federal Communications Commission (FCC). This right, according to Cooper, gave AT&T an unfair advantage and so in the 1960s Motorola led what Cooper termed a 'battle' against the AT&T monopoly by petitioning the FCC and calling hearings in Washington (Motherboard, 2015). In 1972 the FCC was rumoured to be close to deciding on the licence issue and Motorola used the opportunity to plan the launch of their portable handset at a press conference (Motherboard, 2015.)<sup>27</sup>. Cooper's invention, the DYNA T-A-C 8000X, was launched on 3 April 1973 at the Hilton Hotel in New York City. The Motorola press release read,

...it will be possible to make telephone calls while riding in a taxi, walking down the city's streets, sitting in a restaurant or anywhere else a radio signal can reach ... We expect there'll be heavy usage by a widely diverse group of people – businessmen, journalists, doctors, housewives, virtually anyone who needs or wants telephone communications in areas where conventional telephones are unavailable. (1973)

On the day of the launch masts were positioned on nearby buildings in Manhattan to enable the first mobile call (Oehmke, 2000). At some point in the demonstration Cooper excitedly dashed outside to the busy Manhattan sidewalk talking into the phone. Oblivious to the road he almost stepped into oncoming traffic. Cooper claimed to end his enduring rivalry with Bell Lab's engineer Joel Engel by calling him: 'Joel, it's Marty, Marty Cooper, I'm calling you from a cell phone, but a real cell phone a personal handheld portable cell phone...' (Oehmke, 2000). Cooper's enthusiastic freedom narrative and his personal victory over his so-called nemesis coalesced into a sticky narrative – one that still attaches to contemporary news reports and editorials – as a technological victory story positing mobiles as key tools in conquering enemies and assuring the success and empowerment of an individual. Strangely, even Cooper's near-death experience in Manhattan's traffic on the day of his demonstration gave us a glimpse into the future of our relationships with mobile phones, as doing multiple things at once – the practice of multitasking – eventually became normalised through mobile

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<sup>27</sup> According to Agar and contrary to Cooper's narrative, it was not only Motorola petitioning the FCC as Bell Labs played a large part in lobbying between 1958 and 1968 to make cellular technology possible. When the FCC invited the electronics industry to present ideas for mobile telephony in 1971 AT&T were the only ones to meet the deadline (2013: 40).

technology. This aspect of multi-tasking, as part of a bigger regime of productivity, is significant as I will detail later in this chapter. First though, I will highlight some of the resistance towards the mobile freedom narrative as offered by academics, writers and consumers in the next section.

### **Academic and Consumer Resistance**

The central message in Cooper's narrative, that mobile phones liberate people from the constraints of time and place, has been challenged by consumers, the media and the academy – most notably feminist scholars. The initial excitement associated with so-called freedom through mobile phones has been a point of contention amongst academics. Academic literature positions the mobile as a 'wireless leash' for aspects of political control (Qiu, 2007: 74); and argues that people are problematically 'tethered' to their phones (Turkle, 2008: 122). In this latter sense, the desk and everything it represents in terms of work, productivity and responsibility are simply transferred to the mobile phone (Arnold, 2003: 244). Indeed, people are no longer constrained by physical space but are rather re-constrained by the demands of their work and perceptions of their own productivity and value. As Michael Arnold writes, 'The mobile phone means that potentially there is no escape from work, family, friends, or anyone else for that matter' (2003: 244).

In 1985 Donna Haraway offered her feminist critique of what she termed a new era of 'informatics of domination' (1985/2003: 524). For Haraway, microelectronic devices signalled issues of power, and communications technologies were 'the crucial tools recrafting our bodies' (Haraway, 1985/2003: 524). 'Our' refers to women who she saw as vulnerable in decentralised and often precarious areas of work characterised by 'flex time, part time, over time, no time' (1985/2003: 529). In 'A Cyborg Manifesto' she emphasised reconfigured social relations, made possible but not caused by new technologies, whereby individuals experienced alienation from their means of production and a 'massive intensification of insecurity and cultural impoverishment, with common failure of subsistence networks for the most vulnerable' (Haraway 1985/2003: 529). Borrowing from Haraway's critique, I want to emphasise her arguments about how positions of power are crafted over certain bodies – women's bodies – and her point that 'myth and tool mutually constitute each other' (Haraway, 1985/2003: 524). I consider this freedom myth about mobiles as Cooper's inventor narrative continues to spread through contemporary media sources as a powerful affective and discursive agent for attaching value to masculine notions

of mobile technology. More so, his narrative sets up mobiles in universal terms as a particular tool for establishing a position of freedom over constraint.

In addition, the murky distinction between notions of freedom and constraint surfaces through a close reading of a particular media archive from *The New York Times* newspaper between 1983 and 1987, as the extracts scattered throughout this chapter show. These extracts, published around the time that mobiles were made available to the public, unsettled the narrative of mobile freedom and instead revealed consumer fears and apprehension. As seen with previous media technologies such as the radio and television, readers and journalists alike raised concerns about certain aspects of the technology. As William Boddy notes, alternately fearful and euphoric representations usually accompany the introduction of a technology (2004: 4). Ideas of freedom and connectivity as presented by Cooper can be contrasted with other arguably marginal voices. In a 1984 piece about the car mobile phone *The New York Times* columnist William Safire wrote, 'Hold on. I'm part of "everyone," and I think the invasion of the sanctity of the personal automobile by the most intrusive instrument yet invented is an abomination and a horror show ... I enjoy driving to and from work alone. That half-hour each way is the only time I am unreachable by telephone' (1984). In another instance a reader asked: is it safe for drivers to be on the phone? (Apple, 1984). Other editorials described issues of surveillance and privacy such as this excerpt:

The power to snoop has increased dramatically because of two electronic revolutions, according to communications experts in government and industry. The first involves the quantity of human discourse over the airwaves. Private citizens and Government agents alike seem unable to get enough mobile radios, walkie-talkies and telephones in cars, boats, trucks, trains and planes'. (Broad, 1985)

Through these and other editorials, a tension emerged between what appears as an inventor narrative of freedom and the apprehension and fears of consumers.

These contrasting narratives about mobiles allude to the formative ambivalence about them, implying that people's attachment to the technology also entailed a level of resistance. As Ithiel De Sola Pool notes, albeit in the context of landline telephony, the telephone has a 'dual effect' and 'its impacts are puzzling, evasive and hard to pin down. No matter what the hypothesis one begins with, reverse tendencies also appear' (1977: 4). The fears of consumers about mobiles, as shown in various examples in this chapter, highlight a



certain paradox. The proposed promise of mobile freedom by the industry contradicted the sense that users had of freedom constituted by being detached from the mobile phone. I would like to expand of this idea further. What can be seen to develop amongst consumers and journalists was an awareness of the constraining rather than freeing potential of mobile phones and a sense that mobiles were reintroducing a commitment to work – both personal and professional – on a new and amplified scale. What I will argue is that this sense that early mobile adopters had of the relationship between increased work and mobile phones was countered by a persuasive neoliberal rhetoric of efficiency and productivity. In other words, what emerged was perhaps a subtler re-direction of consumer fears and apprehension, overshadowed by a purportedly more uplifting narrative of ‘getting things done’.

In her essay ‘Getting Things Done: Productivity, Self-Management, and the Order of Things’ Melissa Gregg claims that productivity regimes are enacted through new media hardware (2015: 187). More so, ‘new media hardware and software retrain seemingly natural aspects of social being towards more substantial and rewarding ends’ (Gregg, 2015: 187). She notes there is an almost religious fervour that surrounds retaining a sense of order and efficiency in the modern workplace. This productivity is often enabled through the affordances of mobile technology and applications that offer ‘liberation as much as consolation from everyday demands’ (Gregg, 2015: 188). Indeed, newspaper editorials of the DYNA T-A-C offered descriptions of mobile phone users being connected to others during leisure activities, albeit rather elitist ones, such as yacht racing, horse riding and even fox hunting. In July 1973 the DYNA T-A-C featured on the front cover of *Popular Science* magazine. Accompanying the article was a black and white photograph of a man floating leisurely in a rubber dinghy, presumably taking a break from fishing to place or receive a call. His fishing rod lies nearby in the dinghy. In one hand is a mug and in the other he holds the DYNA T-A-C. The caption reads ‘Fishing offshore, driving home from work, or riding horseback – this phone user could place and receive calls anywhere with new system planned by Motorola’ (Free, 1973: 60). In the same year the Associated Press described how the DYNA T-A-C could be carried ‘to the beach, the supermarket, the yacht, the fox hunt, the golf course, the hideaway where you went to get away from it all’ (1973: 20).

This depiction of leisure time inflected with the affordances of mobile connectivity and mobile applications contribute to what Gregg claims is a ‘specific affective bearing: their promise is to deliver productivity regularly and reliably, cognizant of the pleasures to be found in uninterrupted work’ (Gregg, 2015: 188). Here work is not limited to the realm of the office but also includes what Hardt claims is ‘affective labour’, a form of immaterial

labour constituted by maintaining human contact and interaction (1999: 95). 'This labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connectedness or community' (Hardt, 1999: 96). In post-Fordist popular discourse, gender is often elided in considerations of affective labour, to the extent that certain universal notions of conditions of work are assumed. Considering this point, I want to emphasise the relationship between mobiles and forms of affective labour, especially as it relates to the domestic sphere, where women's affective labour includes various acts of 'affect, care, love, education, socialization, communication, information, entertainment, organization, planning, coordination [and] logistics' (Fortunati, 2007: 144). With the introduction of the mobile phone these tasks can be viewed as finding a new immediacy as women become perpetually connected and 'always on'. The workplace invokes a kind of godlike power required by professionals as a way to control time and space (Gregg, 2015: 198). Notions of productivity, performed through tools of efficiency and organisation, become synonymous with visions of mastery and control (Gregg, 2015: 195). These notions are most potent for working women and mothers who, as Gregg point out, have long since been navigating the reality of 'multiple and conflicting stimuli' (2015: 198).

These first attachments to mobiles and the associations and promises they offer seem to persist in contemporary settings, albeit with other software affordances such as mobile applications or 'apps'.<sup>28</sup> Jodi Dean underscores the connection between mobile apps and affect, as part of the production of value. She writes, 'Fascination with apps is the affective attachment point tethering complex chains of production in which the app is less a product than itself another means of production. Yet with this in our hands, we aren't emancipated, controlling the conditions of our work. We are even more slaves of the machine' (Dean, 2015: 232). Framing apps as tools of communicative capitalism, Dean advances the idea that iPhones have become 'affective machines' (Dean, 2015: 232). She identifies affect as the binding agent between people and apps, devices and larger 'networks of enjoyment, production and surveillance' (Dean, 2015: 233). Individuals are ensnared in networks of communicative capitalism where 'Apps let us quickly engage others as the figures in our fantasies who watch us, anywhere, anytime. We imagine them seeing us and we feel important, connected, excited' (Dean, 2015: 235).

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<sup>28</sup> 'Apps' (applications) are pieces of software designed for a specific and narrow purpose for example a Facebook app. They are typically downloaded onto mobile phones, tablets and laptops (Dean, 2014: 233).

Dean's theory aligns with discourse about affective labour. Drawn from the theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, affective labour 'is labour that produces or manipulates affects' (2004: 108). The premise is that 'the assembly line has been replaced by the network as the organisational model of production, transforming the forms of cooperation and communication within each productive site and among productive sites' (Hardt and Negri, 2001: 295). Affect binds people to circuits of enjoyment they supposedly cannot escape and 'the aim of the drive is not to reach its goal but to enjoy our endless circulation and looping' (Dean, 2015: 98). Dean's analysis offers insight into practices of listless scrolling or seemingly aimless texting. These affects may therefore signal where people are positioned in a system of labouring for enjoyment. However, these affects also present opportunities for researchers to mark and follow the circulation of intensities to understand more about how they operate (Dean, 2015: 91). As Dean claims, 'affective links in networks are stronger than hypertextual ones' (2015: 91).

As I will argue in the following section, masculine ideals of mastery and conquest-through-technology have historically been perpetuated amongst American audiences, notably by the long-standing comic book detective *Dick Tracy*. The cartoon, created by Chester Gould, was first published in the *Detroit Mirror* in October 1931 and for a period of time was even sponsored by Motorola (Gould O'Connell, 2007: 82). The popularity of the cartoon is evidenced primarily in its readership figures. At one point Dick Tracy readership reached 50 million readers in over 500 newspapers (Kunzle, 2017). The cartoon popularised the idea of mobile technology in its broadest sense, through Tracy's two-way radio watch, often imbuing the technology with superhero acts of power and control.

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*To the Editor, The New York Times*

**We all know those business executives who find it difficult to walk and chew gum simultaneously. Now, with the introduction of new mobile telephone technology (news story June 13), thousands will be given the opportunity to attempt driving and making phone calls at the same time.**

**With all the coverage of this innovation, I have yet to read of any concern that the proliferation of mobile phones may increase the number of automobile accidents. Is it safe for drivers to be on the phone?... It seems that just the physical acts of lifting the phone, looking at and pressing the numbered buttons and holding the instrument up to**

**the ear all detract from a driver's ability to handle his auto. Further, talking over the phone, holding up one's end of the conversation, requires special attention and responsiveness, something which can and probably does reduce a driver's alertness to traffic conditions. Presumably, too, many of these conversations won't be mere social chatter but highly involving business discussions as executives literally wheel and deal. Anything that breaks a driver's concentration - even for an instant - can only invite disaster. Regulatory agencies must be mindful of the potential hazards which come along with cellular phones and ought to be ready to step in to protect us all if need be.**

*-William Apple, New York, June 13 (1984)*

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## **Dick Tracy**

As Judith Nicholson notes, 'the hero and phone watch from *Dick Tracy* are evoked regularly in news and studies of cell phone use' (2008: 379). While I agree with Nicholson about the numerous references to Tracy in the context of technological innovation, I find these references tend to be fleeting comments rather than analytical offerings, especially in academic publications. In popular literature, technology discussion forums and magazines tend to refer to *Tracy* with nostalgia, often related to the comic's future-orientated ideas about technology seen in article titles such as 'Fictional Devices that Became Reality':

For decades, a favorite of speculative sci-fi writers has been the watch communication device, a simple watch that can be used as a phone or a television, with Tracy's timepiece inarguably the most famous. Tracy's "2-Way Wrist Radio" first appeared in 1946, and the time piece has been an iconic part of Tracy's mythos ever since, seeing many evolutions over the years. In the more space age-oriented Tracy strips of the '60s and '70s, the radio become a two-way television allowing Tracy to see the face of those he communicated with – perhaps a future Apple Watch will incorporate a version of FaceTime to achieve a similar effect? ... the connection between wearable tech and genre fiction devices is so clear, that in 2013 Samsung used imagery of Dick Tracy — plus "The Jetsons," "Power Rangers" and much more – in a commercial for its smartwatch, the Galaxy Gear. (Buxton et al., 2014)

The *Tracy* comic presents a problematic narrative of progress that suggests imagination precedes or inspires innovation, while obscuring perhaps more marginal accounts of the technology that relate to issues of race and gender, presupposing that only 'white male heroes used pre-cellular devices in the name of American law and order' (Nicholson, 2008: 383). The inclusion of *Dick Tracy* in this chapter is in part to recognise *and* analyse *Tracy* as a seemingly persistent and significant cultural and bodily trope for mobile technology's enablement of productivity and conquest.

The lead character of the cartoon is the physically robust good-guy detective Dick Tracy, working in a crime-riddled city that resembles Chicago. The early plotline of the comic in 1931 centred on the kidnapping of Tracy's girlfriend, Tess Truheart and the murder of her father. Tracy joins the police force, rescues Tess and solves the case (Gould O'Connell, 2007: 164). The cartoon's popularity rests on its strongman hero protagonist and gadgets as well as its colourful cast, including Flattop Jones, Diet Smith, Tess Truheart, Sparkle Plenty and Moon Maid. Gould, also a keen tinkerer, introduced the two-way wrist radio gadget to the strip in 1946. A line of Dick Tracy Two-Way Wrist Radio toys went on sale to children (Fig. 3) with the promise of 'getting the low-down on things the very moment they happen' (Innovation Nation, 2015). The television advert for the wrist radio claimed to 'keep you in constant touch with your buddies' (YouTube, 2014). A few years later in 1953 Gould introduced the idea of telecasting technology into the cartoon to broadcast criminal line-ups to different police department locations. A year later his fictional creation became a reality in the New York police department (Gould O'Connell, 2007: 135). In 1954 Gould introduced the idea for an electronic telephone pick up (a pre-cursor to mobile caller ID) followed in 1956 by the floating portable TV camera, a predecessor version of the camcorder (Gould O'Connell, 2007: 135). By the end of the 1950s he created storylines in the cartoon 'reflective of the arriving and accelerating "space race". Themes of space travel, and high-tech crime and detection of such crime, debuted and continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s' (Gould O'Connell, 2007: 8).

While *Tracy* exemplifies the dynamic relationship between culture and the imagined possibilities of electronic engineering, it also illustrates how the comic came to configure a particular affective perception and bodily orientation toward the appropriation and use of mobile technology – especially as it relates to time. More specifically, I am invested in how *Dick Tracy* influenced the redirection of the burgeoning freedom narrative of mobile phones – from personal liberation towards superhero productivity. While initial freedom narratives were based on the idea of being mobile and connected, Tracy added a more hubristic

dimension to this. In Tracy's world, to be connected entailed conquest over others who cowered under his masterful multi-tasking. Robert Horvitz writes in *Whole Earth Review* that Tracy's phone-watch 'enabled the ace crime fighter to blast away at public enemies while calling for help' (1986: 34). Much like other superhero characters and their gadgets – such as Batman and his bat phone, Captain Kirk and his communicator – Dick Tracy's wireless two-way radio watch was figured as a critical advantage to the superhero as it gave him a competitive edge over enemies. Inevitably, this sense of 'edge' is premised on time and multi-tasking – that is, Tracy was able to outsmart criminals with his watch by somehow beating time. This notion that we can somehow outwit the system of time has become embedded in our relationships with technology, where technology enables us to 'devise a unique or superior relation to ... tasks that is either more enterprising or seemingly less compromised' (Crary, 2014: 46).

I argue that the configuration of the mobile phone, albeit through various fictional guises in Gould's cartoon, make two notions implicit in mobile use. The first is that mobile technology – where Tracy's watch performs many of the same tasks as a mobile phone – contains the capacity to outsmart others, even suggesting tones of moral goodness. The second is that part of this masculine competitive edge hinges on beating 'natural' time, in other words that mobile technology somehow renders Tracy (and ultimately mobile users) outside of the usual constraints of time. Even the concept of telecasting technology, or themes of the space race and technology rests upon notions of radically different conceptions of time and space. Mediated by mobile technology, distance and time seem to be malleable in the *Dick Tracy* cartoon. This concept of time relates to my central concern in this chapter, that is, what are the implications of these early attachments to mobiles in relation to how certain subject positions formed, especially, in this case, as they related to gendered conditions of work and multi-tasking.



Figure 3: (left) A scene from the cartoon strip Dick Tracy (right) An advertisement for a Dick Tracy wrist radio.

In *Mobile Communication and Society* Manuel Castells argues that while it may seem that wireless communication transcends time and space, it should rather be perceived as blurring spatial contexts and time frames (2007: 250). 'It induces a different kind of space – the space of flows – made of the networked places where the communication happens, and a new kind of time – timeless time – formed from the compression of time and desequencing of practices through multitasking' (Castells, 2007: 250). Castells argues that these specific dynamics of time and space are more broadly hinged on a culture of individualism where blurring space and time form part of a set of practices around the interests, values and priorities of each individual (Castells, 2007: 251). Rampant individualism can be seen as a defining characteristic of the 1980s, especially at the time the mobile phone was launched to consumers. 'With the rise of neoliberalism, the marketing of the personal computer, and the dismantling of systems of social protection, the assault on everyday life assumed a new ferocity' (Crary, 2014: 70-71). This concept of individualism and how it relates to mobile phones is examined in a further part of this chapter through my analysis of the film character Gordon Gekko, who I argue embodies the notion that time is monetized. Here 'the individual is redefined as a full time economic agent' (Crary, 2014: 71). Gekko, a Wall Street corporate raider in the late 1980s, offers an exaggerated masculine representation of the neoliberal subject as an aggressive, empowered and mobile individual who controls and profits from the markets.

So far in this chapter I have outlined Cooper's formative mobile freedom narrative, which is subsequently challenged by media, consumer and academic fears about the technology as it is introduced for public use in 1984. By introducing *Dick Tracy*, as a much longer running narrative that is often tied up with stories about mobile technology in general,

I want to better contextualise this neoliberal narrative of individual productivity that assumes time and space can be conquered and controlled. In the next section I would like to introduce, albeit in a supporting role to the hero characters of this chapter, the well-dressed, well-coiffed and hard-at-work men that featured in some of the first instances of mobile marketing the mid 1980s. This material reflects not only the overt gendering of mobile advertising but also augments the narratives of mobile productivity and efficiency, claiming that so-called dead, leisure or idle time can be turned into productive time. As Jon Agar argues in *Constant Touch*, the mobile phone was marketed to consumers as a way to be in constant contact, especially for business people (and based on the marketing material this rather refers to *businessmen*), so that no time could be considered dead (2013: 84).

### Madmen

Due to broadcast regulations it took almost a decade from its press launch in 1973 before Motorola could sell and market the DYNA T-A-C mobile phone to the public. In the wake of the mobile's release in 1984 new marketing material targeted consumers. An early promotional video aired in the 1980s for the DYNA T-A-C – now available on YouTube – featuring people performing what seem like important and urgent tasks (see Fig.4). In one scene, a man walks hurriedly down a flight of stairs of what looks like a court house using his mobile phone, the American flag flies to his left, whilst a woman dressed in a masculine ensemble of shirt and tie follows closely behind to offer support. In another scene two men lean on the bonnet of a large car pouring over construction plans. Set against a backdrop of skyscrapers and steel building material the men take turns talking into the phone. Another scene features a woman sitting in a restaurant making a call at the table using her DYNA T-A-C while her dining partner watches on.



Figure 4: Scenes from the DYNA T-A-C promotional video (circa 1984).

This footage presents an atmosphere of controlled urgency as mobile consumers wield a



special power, perhaps echoing the same sentiment of male autonomy and mastery created in *Dick Tracy*. The promotional narrative seems to suggest that mobiles offer a sense of immediacy and are ultimately signs of productive busy-ness. The scenes of people at leisure using their mobiles – which are repeated in other promotional videos (see later in this chapter) – suggest that leisure time can also be productive. The working domain is not constricted, as Cooper imagined, to a desk and office but also includes the golf course or the open seas or the ski slopes. ‘The mobile phone is a business icon, inseparable from the image of the empowered decision maker, acting in the world as an independent agent, but remaining engaged, in the loop, integrated with her team’ (Arnold, 2003: 243). The porous boundary between what can be considered separate spheres of work and leisure time is unsettled by the idea of the always-on and always-connected mobile user, such that the gestures and skills previously confined to the office are now universally applicable (Crary, 2014: 58).

Jon Agar suggests that the 17<sup>th</sup> century pocket watch, a technological predecessor to the mobile phone, ‘resonated to the rhythm of industrial capitalism’ (2013: 11). When they were first introduced, pocket watches seemed to convey status, because telling the time mattered – and it mattered most to those factory owners and entrepreneurs who equated working time with production value (Agar, 2013: 9). Agar writes that ‘As commercial and industrial economies began to roar, busy-ness conveyed business – and its symbol was the pocket watch’ (2013: 9). The pocket watch facilitated a new type of mobility, which meant people no longer relied on the traditional methods of telling the time, such as listening out for the church bell, as Agar writes, as watch owners could access time anywhere (2013: 10). Like the pocket watch, the mobile phone resonated with the rhythm of its social and economic milieu. More specifically, a neoliberal order entails a dominant ‘24/7 activity of techniques of personalization, of individuation, of machinic interface, and of mandatory communication’ (Crary, 2014: 72). A DYNA T-A-C advertisement from 1985 claims, ‘Take it to work, to play, to lunch and still keep up with your customers, your suppliers, your life’ (Fig.5.). In this sense, to be without a mobile phone came to resemble an inadequacy or disadvantage, inducing fears of being outmoded and left behind. By contrast, owning a mobile phone represented a certain productive status, one aligned with value. Two decades after its launch, this symbolism of mobile masculine prowess persists, as cultural theorist Sadie Plant illustrates in this account:

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. (2001: 49)



Figure 5: A Motorola advertisement for the DYNALOC T-A-C model (circa 1985).

In a promotional video for the Motorola flip phone, also available on YouTube, the desirable effects of productivity and continuous connectivity are depicted in various scenarios as mobile users transcend the so-called difficulties of everyday life (see Fig.6). The first scene pictures a man in a casual T-shirt talking confidently into his Motorola phone, reassuring someone that, 'I've got all my guys working on it right now' (Motorola 550 Flip Phone, 2015). The viewer catches a glimpse of construction happening in the background as the male caller prepares to leave the scene on his powerboat. Also, a man dressed in a white shirt and tie appears stuck in his cabriolet car during a traffic jam, so he deftly changes his meeting time with his mobile phone. Notably, scenes that feature women in this video are limited to either depictions of leisure or maternal care. These depictions seem to contain women in nostalgic gendered versions of themselves as carers, damsels in distress, consumers or simply looking pretty. For example, a young woman answers her mobile phone while sun-tanning on the beach (later she leisurely sips a drink at a café while talking on her Motorola flip phone) (See Fig.6). In another scene a mother at a restaurant calls home to check on the children. The video jumps to a third scenario where the phone might come in handy for female users, as a woman stares at her stalled car engine as she calls for help on her Motorola – 'Help is just a call away!' (Motorola 550 Flip Phone, 2015). The only African-

American person featured in this video cannot remember directions and is lost in a neighbourhood, but luckily he has a Motorola phone to call for help. The video ends with a final tagline: 'Make the most of your time' (Motorola 550 Flip Phone, 2015). White American males in this video are presented as being fully in control, commanding the time and the labour of others. Problematic depictions of all other mobile users reinforce the narrative that there are some – notably females and African-Americans – who are, at worst, in diminished positions marked by deficiency and need, who require help; and at best are confined to the realm of leisure and care activities.

I want to emphasise this relationship between the mobile phone and forms of affective labour, especially as it relates to the domestic sphere of kin work and care acts. With the introduction of the mobile phone these tasks can be perceived as finding a new dimension as women become perpetually connected. Notably, in this promotional video, acts of caring labour are entangled with the mobile phone, as connectivity is assumed to enable some form of autonomy from the place and time constraints of caring tasks. This illusionary narrative of freedom contradicts the very tangible reality that women who labour in capitalist economies never conform to 'a discrete work "day" or night' (Stabile, 2012). Indeed, as Carol Stabile writes in her article 'Magic Vaginas, The End of Men, and Working Like a Dog', women's working days are elastic – that is, any so-called temporal borders of leisure or work time are irrelevant in the face of the demands of emotional and physical labour such as caring for the elderly and children who do not keep office hours. Stabile's argument, forms part of a broader critique of the feminisation of the neoliberal subject and the gendering of affective labour. Often women's affective tasks extend well into the night. 'For generations at least, most women have been socialized to multitask, to prioritize, to take into account the needs of others through forced collaborations' (Stabile, 2012).





Figure 6: Screenshots of scenes from the Motorola 550 Flip Phone promotion (circa 1989).

By the late 1980s, illusionary narratives of freedom gave way to decidedly more individualistic forms of expression (California, 2017). I argue that one of the best illustrations of the status that mobile phones represented was yet to come. In 1987 the world was introduced to Gordon Gekko, the lead character in the film *Wall Street*, played by the actor Michael Douglas, who won an Academy Award for best actor for this role in 1988. Gekko introduced an additional layer to the masculine mobile narrative of so-called freedom and productivity by also implicating money. Gekko, much like *Dick Tracy* and Cooper, seemed to evade the limitations of time and beat the competition with the aid of technology, specifically his DYNA T-A-C 8000X mobile phone. His mantra from the film: 'money never sleeps' (1987).

### **Money Never Sleeps**

Corporate raider Gordon Gekko was one of the first film characters to use the DYNA T-A-C mobile phone not long after its public release. Set in the 1980s, film *Wall Street* was released

only months after the stock market crash of October 1987 and critics claimed it epitomised the excess of the era and Wall Street's obsession with power, status and making it big (Guerrera, 2010). It was the third-largest grossing film in America in its opening weekend in 1987 (Mojo, 2017). The film's director, Oliver Stone, claimed he wanted *Wall Street* to show the effects of 'unbridled capitalism' (Guerrera, 2010). However, as the journalist Francesco Guerrera remarked, 'people viewed it [the film] differently, seeing in this muscular, vivid portrait of money and its transformative social powers a modern parable for the American dream with braces replacing bootstraps' (2010). Gekko quickly became a popular anti-hero, cutting a sartorially impressive figure with tailor-made suits and slicked-back hair. He became both a 'household name and boardroom icon' (Chang, 2010). After the film's release *The New York Times* even featured Gekko amongst a group of film and TV characters with enviable style: 'Gekko - with his penchant for cuffed suit jackets and crunchy Jacquard-woven cravats – is perhaps the more compelling character ... His appearance is subtle and understandable within the conventional terms of Anglo-American tailoring ... The character serves as a credible model for the powerful executive who would have others follow his fashion lead' (La Ferla, 1987). As a power-hungry corporate raider Gekko embodied the hubristic machismo of the finance world in the 1980s (Guerrera, 2010). Some of Gekko's lines from the film, such as 'lunch is for wimps' and 'greed, for lack of a better word, is good' are still quoted in contemporary trading contexts (Guerrera, 2010). Guerrera described the film as 'both a mirror and a high-water mark for the financial industry of the period' (2010). The film chronicled 'the dramatic change that daring corporate raiders and the availability of cheap debt had introduced into a world of gentlemen's agreements and handshakes in a cosy, old-boys' network' (Guerrera, 2010).

In *Wall Street* a young impressionable stockbroker, Bud Fox, looks to strike it rich and under Gekko's influence agrees to commit corporate espionage. While the young Fox is gathering information, Gekko introduces him to Manhattan's so-called high-society perks including gentlemen's clubs, expensive restaurants, bespoke tailoring, cocaine and 'call girls'. Scenes in the film show offices littered with desktop computers, clunky keyboards and ticker-tape disk operating system (DOS) interfaces. In the film the DYNA T-A-C mobile phone is seemingly only reserved for Gekko, his arch-rival Larry Wildman and later, when he hits the 'big time', Bud Fox uses one too. In one particular scene in the film Gekko calls Fox using his DYNA T-A-C while leisurely strolling on the beach at sunrise in his bathrobe (see Fig. 7). Fox is shown in his apartment hunched over his computer in the dark, clearly woken up by Gekko, croaking out the line: 'Mr Gekko I'm there for you 110 percent' (1987).

In *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Jonathan Crary offers a cogent argument for the synchronised velocity of the neoliberal subject's daily life with the end of sleep, as a precursor to the ultimate market environment where both workers and enterprises are accessible around the clock (2014). It is worth citing the core of his argument in full to emphasise how the individual is positioned within these accelerated dynamics:

A temporal alignment of the individual with the functioning of the markets, two centuries in developing, has made irrelevant distinctions between work and non-work time, between public and private, between everyday life and organized institutional milieus. Under these conditions, the relentless financialization of previously autonomous sphere of social activity continues unchecked. Sleep is the only remaining barrier, the only enduring “natural condition” that capitalism cannot eliminate. (2014: 74)

Marketing material and media coverage of mobile phones, as discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, could be seen to create a sympathetic alignment between the technology as a measure of productivity and efficiency albeit disguised in male depictions and narratives of freedom. *Wall Street's* character Gordon Gekko further bolstered the narrative that leisure activities – including sleep or even time for lunch – could be filled with productive money-making tasks. Indeed, in material terms, the high price tag for the phone and high monthly call costs meant it was the reserve of the wealthy few.



Figure 7: Gordon Gekko calls Bud Fox using a DYNAt-A-C phone in a scene from the film *Wall Street* (1987).

The popular medium of film plays an important part in this evolving mobile narrative. Vivian Sobchack offers an argument for how, as cinematic subjects, we are inscribed with

'visual and bodily changes of situation' that create capacity to dream and imagine (2004: 148). In this way, we come to know what it feels like to inhabit a certain world. Following Sobchack I argue that *Wall Street* affectively mobilises audiences to dream and fantasise through the male hero body and its technological prosthesis, eager to inhabit the same exclusive, hubristic and materially excessive world as Gekko. Calling on Heidegger, Sobchack views technology as a 'bringing forth' – a certain way of being-in-the-world (2004: 136). Cinema, as one such technology, alters our subjectivity – where subjectivity is understood as a socially mediated process – implicating our body in making sense of concepts such as space and time, impacting our experience of the social world (Sobchack, 2004: 137). Sobchack refers to a kind of phenomeno-logic that emerges through cinema as viewers feel and perceive what it means to inhabit particular worlds, on levels of micro perception – bodily, sensory sensations including hearing and seeing – and macro perception – cultural or hermeneutic (2004: 138). She provides potent examples of the relationship between film and our sensate bodies, that is how movies can 'touch' and 'move' human bodies (Sobchack, 2004: 59). Through cinematic examples, she argues that viewers can experience being enveloped by a particular atmosphere or are knocked back by the sound of music or are even able to smell and taste the salty sea air as depicted on the screen. In her phenomenology of cinema Sobchack assigns primacy to the cinema-viewer body as a way of making sense of the world affectively, thereby decentering any notion that human experience can only be cognitively appraised.

In implicit terms, Gekko and *Wall Street* further affectively orientated the early mobile adopter in a 'mobile way of being' in the world that included the DYNA T-A-C 8000X not only as a sign of success but also as a way of ensuring a certain fluid and male superiority outside of any temporal limits. More specifically, Gekko's position, seemingly at the top of Wall Street, relied on his superhero ability to render situations and time as mutable, to call and 'be' anywhere at any time – thus insinuating the mobile phone with notions of success and ultimately money.

## Changing History

*You know, coming back in time, changing history ... that's cheating*

– James T. Kirk<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Star Trek: The Future Begins* (2009).

As the name suggests, mobiles are not static objects but are rather more transitive. In other words, mobiles can perhaps more accurately be understood as events that contain various registers, modalities, transitions and orientations. Further, I consider that mobiles do not simply exist but, to borrow Tim Ingold's terms, they occur in a 'relational meshwork of things and people' (2011: 175). So rather than close down mobile phones into objects that require classification, I offer that they should be approached in a way that is attuned to their affective dimensions, dynamic form and contingencies as part of politically engaging with the inherent ideologies of technology. By paying close attention to the affective dimension of mobiles – where affect is understood as a dynamic embodied response to technology that is discursively shaped – I offer a more integrated way of theorizing mobile experience outside of what is perceived merely in a cognitive register. In addition, if mobiles are seen as part of a relational meshwork, they are implicated in a dynamic relationship with other aspects of culture, as they shape and are shaped by culture. Following this premise, this chapter focuses on the attachments that can be seen to develop with the early adoption of mobile phones through certain gendered narratives and characters, such as the self-titled 'father of the cell phone' Martin Cooper, the hubristic characters Dick Tracy and Gordon Gekko and those featured in early advertising material.

To examine these cultural aspects of the so-called invention of mobile and their early adoption means to extend beyond the well-covered subject of mobile adoption rates and diffusion patterns. Within this framework of cultural and technological contingency, I would like to return to the central question of this chapter: what are the implications of the early attachments to mobiles? Through various vivid character narratives as presented in this chapter, I argue that an affective orientation can be seen to emerge. This orientation refers to how viewers, readers and users of media feel and perceive what it means to inhabit particular worlds (Sobchack, 2004: 138). In other words, through characters such as Dick Tracy, Gordon Gekko and Martin Cooper mobiles are bound up with masculine notions of freedom, productivity and ultimately value. Wielding their power gadgets these hero figures perform attitudes and enact particular affective orientations that produce feelings of ontological security within the context of a more flexible, decentralised and fearful American urban environment.

More so, as I have claimed throughout this chapter, the kind of being-in-the-world-with-mobile-technology implies a certain ontological commitment, where designations of certain bodies are produced in relation to others. In this vein, the dominant male narrative associated with mobiles in this early phase of adoption involves a mastery and/or control of



time. This mastery positions mobiles as weapons of control that somehow remove humans from the constraints of linear temporality. Instead, superheroes such as Tracy and Gekko are masters of time, and supposedly also of material conditions and processes. I argue that these notions of presumed mastery radically unsettle how 'we' perceive our role and place in the world, especially 'our' ability to affect change. The potential attached to mobiles becomes the ability to offer a different ontology, one suited to a masculine narrative of conquest, thus also closing down the possibilities of technology into familiar gender tropes where female consumers are in familiar positions of consumption, caring or distress.

The heroic narratives outlined in this chapter represent a bias related to gender in that they assume that all people experience time and multitasking equally, when in fact the temporal limits of familial care performed by women cannot be neatly time-stamped. Arguably, narratives related to kin work are over-written by so-called uplifting mobile narratives of 'getting things done', thereby eliding the demands of this immaterial labour and diminishing the demands that this kind of labour placed on women. In addition, the fears and apprehensions of mobile adopters become a muted voice in the more dominant narrative of technological progress and invention espoused by the industry. Furthermore, over time, these fears and apprehensions about the increasingly porous boundary between leisure and work time are submerged by narratives of productivity and the associative value of connectivity – in material wealth, which Gekko portrays in *Wall Street*.

Stories, ideologies and the accompanying psychodynamics intrinsic to relationships form a complex whole – they cannot be untangled from each other; they are what Haraway calls a 'cat's cradle' (1997: 268). In this chapter, extracts from formative mobile marketing and media illustrate Haraway's metaphor as they entangle affective and political dynamics with emerging masculine subjectivities. Continuing in this vein, in the following chapter I examine this narrative of freedom, albeit in a different guise. The concept of freedom of movement takes on a new dimension with other implications – as it relates to the neighbourhood and the freedom to movement therein. In this more contemporary and parochial setting, I offer the case study of an enclosed neighbourhood in Johannesburg that uses the messaging application WhatsApp as part of its neighbourhood watch activities. I draw on theories of affect and urban geography to examine how alterity – represented by the stranger – is established, negotiated and eventually expelled from a designated space. Through the concept of affective mooring, further elaborated in the next chapter, I call into question the very premise of the neighbourhood, not simply as a demarcated area where people with similar values live, but as a site for maintaining white middle-class normativity.

## CHAPTER 4: AFFECTIVE MOORING IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD WHATSAPP GROUP

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**NEWS FLASH: 3 May 2007, Johannesburg, 04:50am**

### **Gang tortures woman with boiling water**

**Enraged when they could not find the guns they hoped were hidden in a house, callous robbers boiled water and repeatedly poured it over the 68-year-old woman homeowner.**

**Sandy Staats, of Craighall Park in Johannesburg, was so badly**

**burnt in the torture that she died this week in Chris Hani-Baragwanath Hospital.**

**Yet, despite the sadistic nature of the attack, details were not released by police - even to the local policing forum.<sup>30</sup>**

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In this chapter I examine the communication that exists within a neighbourhood WhatsApp group chat. I suggest that neighbourly acts are affectively and discursively shaped within the group, and that mobiles generate a binding force that is essential to a sense of belonging in a community, between people or to a place. In this way, I am concerned with what work affect, and affect theories, can do to examine how a neighbourhood is produced as a place of inclusion *for some*, using the concept of affective mooring. My central argument is that a WhatsApp group offers a sense of rootedness amongst the flows of people and things in a neighbourhood. This sense can be understood to hold, even stabilise, a community through feelings of collective presence and 'being in this together'. However, as examples in this chapter will illustrate, this very process of collective holding and being is premised on historically conditioned acts of exclusion and prejudice. Therefore, I ask: what is at stake in affective acts of cherishing and protecting the neighbourhood?

Mobile phones have become part of the processes of information exchange and control in many neighbourhoods. More specifically, the messaging application WhatsApp is often adopted in neighbourhoods to distribute and discuss information about security. Some neighbourhood watch programmes are facilitated by WhatsApp and are connected to local

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<sup>30</sup> An extract from NDABA, B. 2007. *Gang Tortures Woman with Boiling Water* [Online]. IOL.co.za. Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gang-tortures-woman-with-boiling-water-351212> [Accessed 6 April 2016].

community policing forums in cities such as Johannesburg (Hattingh, 2015: non.pag.). Similarly, in London many residents have joined WhatsApp neighbourhood watch groups, prompting some journalists to describe the phenomenon as 'Neighbourhood WatchApp' (Avis-Riordan, 2017). In The Netherlands, the WhatsApp logo appears on signage in neighbourhoods in cities such as Amsterdam to alert people to mobile surveillance in the area (see Fig. 8). Letters from local police in that country urge residents to join WhatsApp groups as part of a neighbourhood watch programme. These examples point to the popularity of the application amongst citizens and security institutions alike, as a platform for coordinating surveillance. While surveillance is a term most often used in the context of law enforcement and is associated with the state, it seems that mobile phones are part of (but not the cause of) more complex relationships of surveillance where populations also watch themselves and each other 'in the course of intimate and interpersonal everyday relations' (Green, 2002: 33). 'Information gathering activities seem now more widely normalised and more often taken for granted as resources in everyday relations of trust' (Green, 2002: 33).

In the first part of this chapter I will further introduce the practice of neighbourhood watch. Thereafter, I consider WhatsApp and its unique features as a way to better understand how the formation of a virtual neighbourhood presence may be constituted within a group. This presence is often enacted through neighbourhood stories, where a WhatsApp group can be considered a teller of those stories. In part, my choice of a neighbourhood as a case study is due to the fact that it provides a potent microcosm of society at large. I draw inspiration here from Doreen Massey, who insists on a certain dynamism between local and global concepts of place. Her assertion is that the local is still highly relevant in debates about place, albeit through the lens of global dynamics, or what she terms a 'global sense of the local' (1991: 29). Next, I will examine the neighbourhood as a site of study, drawing on authors from the field of urban geography who focus on aspects of mobility and mobile communication. This discussion prefaces my argument that mobiles, as spatial and embodied technologies, enable a particular affective mooring through a WhatsApp group chat. To illustrate this concept further, in the third part of this chapter I call upon a 3-month archive of messages from a neighbourhood group chat in north-western Johannesburg, referred to hereafter as Neighbourhood A in order to protect the privacy of its residents. This case study is informed by general theories about neighbourhoods, mobilities and mobile communication. Inspired by Neighbourhood A, I have included various textual interludes between my analyses, such as the one that prefaces this chapter, to illustrate,

perhaps even enact, some of the emotions that circulate in neighbourhood discourse – including fear, panic and paranoia.

Notably, this neighbourhood presents a somewhat extreme case study, not only as South Africa experiences a high penetration of mobile phones, but because it is also a country with one of the highest crime rates in the world (Demombynes and Özler, 2005: 265). Most significantly though, South Africa bears the weight of both post-colonial and post-apartheid relationships and dynamics, where black voices have been systematically silenced. Therefore, addressing the question of ‘who speaks?’ in this chapter becomes part of my challenge to make visible my own affective mediation and partial perspective on the neighbourhood as a white South African female who grew up in apartheid South Africa and produces knowledge from (and for) a particular epistemological standpoint.



*Figure 8: Neighbourhood Watch ('Buurtpreventie') sign on the outskirts of Amsterdam (Photo copyright: Antal Guszlev).*

### **Neighbourhood Watch**

Surveillance, as a part of everyday life, is the cornerstone of neighbourhood watch programmes. More specifically, these programmes necessitate an emphasis on surveillance, where ordinary people work with the police to report anything ‘out of the ordinary’ (Ahmed,

2000: 28). The concept of neighbourhood watch originated in the United States in the late 1960s in the suburb of Queens in New York City in response to the rape and murder of a female resident (Chenery, 2017). Later, in the 1970s neighbourhood watch became more formalised in the United States as a way for residents to cooperate with the police in order to prevent crime (Ahmed, 2000: 26). As law scholar Anthony Minnaar writes, 'the broad notion of community safety was premised on the assumption that this would lead to greater participation in crime control and crime prevention from all sections by ordinary members of communities' (2004: 10). As already noted, nowadays, this kind of community vigilance often takes place via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, where neighbours report on suspicious people, vehicles and activities as well as alert the community to new crime tactics (Hattingh, 2015: non. pag.). However, the discourse about neighbourhood watch often includes notions of neighbourhood vigilance as a dimension of community cohesion, even neighbourliness. As an example, informatics scholar Marie Hattingh notes that social cohesion is enacted through the same social media platforms that neighbours use for surveillance, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, where communities offer support and advice, circulate information and share relevant media articles (2015, non. pag.). In this way, notions of information sharing and the caring this implies are often entangled with ideals of protection in the neighbourhood. Indeed, as Martin Heidegger offers, the very essence of the word neighbour – as a person who dwells ('near dweller') – implies acts of cherishing and protection; a neighbour preserves and cares for the dwelling (1971: 349).

My approach to mobile phones throughout this dissertation is premised on the claim that we engage with the technology through, and with, our bodies. Simply put, 'new media is bound up with the body' (Walkerdine, 2007: 20). In a similar respect, Leopoldina Fortunati (2003) and Sadie Plant (2001: 51) have described mobiles as intimate technologies of the body. My approach seeks to look beyond representational accounts of mobile practice – that is, beyond how we perceive the form, acceleration or accessories of the body – although these accounts are valuable. Yet my main aim is to consider what kind of bodily sensations take place during mobile practice and what they might mean. As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, Susan Kozel, Elspeth Probyn and Valerie Walkerdine have attempted to theorise the body as part of media studies. I draw on their work via a phenomenologically-inclined approach to mobiles to explore instances of bodily extension that occur through space and time during processes of technological mediation – where the term mediation refers to a complex set of dynamic intra-actions that operate on the levels of the biological, political, cultural and social and is key to understanding our co-emergence and being with technology (Kember and

Zylinska, 2012: xv). The central theme in this literature is that mobile practice is by no means a disembodied practice but rather relates directly to issues of the body and its technological mediation. This phenomenological approach can be described as 'making meaning out of bodily sense' (Sobchack, 2004: 1).

Therefore, to examine bodily sense in mobile practice, I rely on these particular affect theories to understand the body experiences outside of only cognition but also in terms of sensations and feelings. Mark Hansen argues that it is through affect theory that we can understand how new media is bound up with the body – specifically that is it through affective bodily interactions that digital imagery and interface are forged – and not by only perceiving these elements cognitively (2004: 9). Following this, I allude to the affective dimension of mobile practice as 'a corporeal aspect of new technologies' (Slack and Macgregor Wise, 2002: 495). Therefore, as noted in the Introduction of this dissertation, in examining mobile practice I consider a person's affective response as an embodied response to new media technology – where embodiment is a vibrant process resulting from interactions between body, mind and the environment (Hayles, 2002: 297). Similarly, Valerie Walkerdine argues that the 'central idea of affect is both sensation, or what bodies feel, and the sensational and ideational relations it fixes both within and between bodies' (2007: 21).

As explained previously, I use the term body in a Spinozian sense, adopted by Deleuze and Guattari, where the body is not defined merely by its humanness – organs or functions or subjects or substance but rather as a set of longitudes and latitudes. Longitude refers to the 'given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness' and latitude refers to the 'sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 304). By this definition, the neighbourhood itself can be perceived as a body, and so too can the ideas that circulate on WhatsApp. Drawing on accounts of affect as both an embodied response and the socio-cultural relations this generates, I examine the kinds of relations that are produced between bodies in a neighbourhood context.

Following these definitions, I employ the concept of affective mooring to examine suburban ideals of belonging. I also pay close attention to acts of resistance by neighbours towards strangers – through the practice of WhatsApp mobile surveillance – as people who supposedly do not belong to the neighbourhood. This resistance hinges on what makes a stranger, and the danger this allegedly implies, in terms of movement, appearance and acts of interpellation. Strangers are, according to Sara Ahmed, not just people we simply cannot recognise, but rather are constituted a priori to any encounter with them through various

discourses and techniques (2000: 37). Through discourses generated on neighbourhood group chat the stranger is produced as having particular traits or bodily dispositions. Here, bodily dispositions include ways of walking, talking, eating and conducting oneself (Blackman, 2008: 62). Indeed, social, symbolic and cultural capital are 'marks of status and social differentiation and manifest through bodily dispositions' (Blackman, 2008: 62.). In this sense, the stranger is someone who is out of the ordinary in the neighbourhood, which is signalled by their clothing, their gait or appearance. Strangers loiter. Strangers are dirty. Strangers are drunk. Strangers are noisy. Strangers are too quiet. Strangers are people who appear to have no purpose and who cannot be located in the present (Ahmed, 2000: 8). Most importantly in this case study the figure of the stranger is conditioned by history. For white South Africans the fear of danger tends to relate to fear of black bodies as a source of danger, or 'swart gevaar' (black danger)" (Lemanski, 2004: 103). Under the system of apartheid in South Africa this politically motivated fear related to – and further reinforced through – laws regarding race-based residential segregation. Many South African neighbourhoods are still influenced, perhaps even haunted, by this spatial inheritance of apart-ness.

In this atmosphere of surveillance, neighbourhoods have also been likened to 'tiny underdeveloped nations' that protect their borders and communities (Morris and Hess, 1976: 16). Neighbourhoods are thus described as being defensive and static, even turning to violence in order to maintain ideals of harmonious and pastoral life. Here, aspects of trust and surveillance can perhaps be understood as necessary parts of the concept of a neighbourhood, especially if the neighbourhood is already imbued with certain political valences. That is, a neighbourhood is not simply a piece of demarcated land where people share communal space and information, but it is also a place that often has a class, religious or ethnicity base that carries very particular histories of resistance and assimilation (Morris and Hess, 1975: 6). Furthermore, in the context of neighbourhood watch, the neighbourhood is often premised on, or rather imagined as, a 'pure and organic space' in need of protection (Ahmed, 2000a: 26). These programmes tend to be more prevalent in middle-class areas where property values are higher and residents are more likely to co-operate with police on issues of community safety (Ahmed, 2000a: 27). This tendency may point to neighbourhood watch as part of a larger dynamic of maintaining middle-class homogeneity, where space is shared amongst 'those like us'. Following this, I borrow the idea from David Morley that the neighbourhood becomes a particular form of privatised interiority, even a place of

transcendence, that must be protected against an infiltrating alien presence (2000: 218).<sup>31</sup> As such, 'It is symptomatic then of the very nature of neighbourhood that it enters public discourse as a site of crisis' (Ahmed, 2000: 26).

In this vein of crisis management, space is produced by a 'multiplicity of perception and inscription' (Farman, 2000: 13). This claim is well exemplified in the context of a WhatsApp group chat where notions of stranger proximity and danger are often negotiated and defined within the normative ideals of the neighbourhood. In relation to place, mobile communication provides an additional electronic-social layer to the material-geographic one (Hjorth and Lim, 2012: 478) (Pink and Hjorth, 2012: 148). However, I would like to expand this idea further, to consider not only the addition of a so-called mobile layer 'to' a physical place, but instead to consider the co-constitution of mobiles, places and people. Further, as discussed further in this chapter, concepts of belonging and stranger-ness cannot be divorced from the history and context of a particular neighbourhood, as elements that inform our understanding of how contemporary surveillance dynamics have come to bear. In the next section I will outline the particularities of WhatsApp in relation to practices of neighbourhood watch.

## **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application launched in 2009, that, as of December 2017, had one and a half billion users globally, making it one of the world's most popular communication channels (Constine, 2018). It has an easy-to-use interface that affords people a casual and continuous conversation style either in a one-to-one or a group setting (O'Hara et al., 2014: 4 - 6). The application was one of the first to use cellular data to send and receive messages, video and voice calls, making the cost of communicating free or negligible compared to regular cellular telephony. Amongst its most salient features, WhatsApp users can view a virtual time stamp – 'last seen online' – of other users' last interaction with the application. In addition, users are also able to assess when a message has been delivered and seen by a recipient through a series of tick icons associated with each message. This latter feature is also available in a group setting. I mention these specific temporal features as they have arguably imbued WhatsApp with a particular affective dimension. Specifically, these notifications introduce certain mechanisms of accountability (O'Hara et al., 2014: 98). In turn

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<sup>31</sup> David Morley's examination of alienation in a domestic setting uses the home as a starting point, not the neighbourhood. I am therefore borrowing and adapting his ideas about the home quite liberally, perceiving the neighbourhood as a collection of homes, that assume similar dynamics of interiority and fear of aliens.



these mechanisms generate expectations for a response or perhaps even generate feelings of guilt in the apps' users for not responding to messages. Indeed, Jeffrey Hall and Nancy Baym have labelled this kind of accountability as part of a practice of 'mobile maintenance', often expected in certain social relationships, for example between close friends, including a strong obligation to respond to mobile messages and calls (2012: 320). In their article 'Calling and Texting (too much)' the authors argue that in close friendships, 'people are steered toward increased expectations of connectedness and availability' that can establish solidarity but also bring about feelings of entrapment when friends become overly dependent on each other (Hall and Baym, 2012: 326).

While the relatively low cost of the application and its rich feature set are indisputable factors for the application's popular adoption, it is the 'quiddity of the experiences sought for and enabled' by WhatsApp that present scope for further research in mobile studies (O'Hara et al., 2014: 2). In this respect there are certain themes for consideration, such as people's faithfulness to maintaining connections, forms of social binding and the way in which people dwell and 'do friendship' with smartphones (O'Hara et al., 2014: 2). Intimacy and togetherness are enacted through the activities of WhatsApp. For example, the way people chit chat, exchange phatic content, or share images and information that creates a sense of being together or closeness (O'Hara et al., 2014: 1). In other words, people tell stories about what they experience, what affects them and where they are, which make up the felt-life of their everyday existence with others through WhatsApp. The flowing, ongoing, conversational style of WhatsApp, coupled with its features such as 'online' status, 'last seen online' and message notification ticks, also come to represent a presence for users of the application (O'Hara et al., 2014: 12).

Indeed, users come to feel the presence of others through conversations, but also by their online status and the lapsed time from the their 'last seen' feature on the application. In their essay 'Everyday Dwelling with WhatsApp' Kenton O'Hara and his co-authors describe how a mother monitors her 15-year-old son's WhatsApp status from offline (he turns his phone off to save battery while travelling) to online as an indication that he has arrived home safely and is back online (2014: 9). O'Hara and his co-authors argue that this form of mobile-mediated presence constitutes a kind of geographic locale for shared experience, not unlike sitting together on a couch (O'Hara et al., 2014:3). Indeed, even before the introduction of mobiles phones, Colin Turner and Alan Wurtzel argue in *The Social Impact of the Telephone* (1977) that the role of the telephone is 'not only as a means of

immediate interaction but [of] ... imminent connectedness' so that the primary psychological function of the medium is the 'maintenance of symbolic proximity' (1977: 257).

However, O'Hara and his co-authors take this concept of mediated presence even further, to say that WhatsApp exchanges, sometimes performed in groups and sometimes one-on-one, represent the comings and goings of people's everyday activities and in this way can be seen as constituting a 'digital dwelling' (2014: 3). Here, the concept of dwelling, inspired by anthropologist Tim Ingold, who draws on Heidegger, is that dwelling is forged in movement and experience and not simply the occupation of a place (2011: 147). 'Dwelling is not simply a place but a "doing" and needs to be seen as constituted by things done and felt, endlessly in the moment-by-moment of togetherness and directionality' (O'Hara et al., 2014: 11). These doings become part of the everyday fabric of the neighbourhood, where neighbours share information, seek advice from each other, ask favours or share jokes. In this same vein, Israeli mobile researchers describe a certain degree of togetherness that emerged through WhatsApp communication during a period of war in that country. The authors argue that WhatsApp is used to times of insecurity to share and establish the veracity of information, as well as circulate jokes and satirical messages through which users experience feelings of calm and relief during a stressful period. Notably, users reported that WhatsApp usage over this time strengthened their sense of patriotism and belonging to the state and community (Malka et al., 2015: 340).

As this example suggests, WhatsApp extends beyond simply being a tool for communicating, but also relates to a way of being with technology. As noted in the Introduction, Heidegger claims that 'the essence of technology is by no means anything technological' (1977: 3). So too, technology is not something we should regard as neutral. Following the Greek etymology of the term, Heidegger offers that technology is a 'bringing-forth' (1971: 7) which 'is therefore an inherently world-forming process, both on a biological and cultural level' (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 14). Using Heidegger's definitions in their broadest sense, I conceive of WhatsApp as a technology that brings forth certain ways of feeling and thus being in the world. As this example illustrates, being part of a community is a process – both technological and affective – that is, configured through WhatsApp and entails some feelings of relief and calm. The neighbourhood is thus revealed as a dynamic and complex set of relationships and processes where the distribution, storage and transformation of information through mobiles are understood as ways of revealing. In the next section I will discuss various theories of the neighbourhood – pertaining to mobile

phones and mobility – as a way to set up my argument that a WhatsApp chat group constitutes a site that produces a certain affective notion of the neighbourhood.

### **Neighbourhood as a Site of Study**

Historically, scholars in the field of urban geography have been divided on the relevance of the neighbourhood as a site of study. The importance of the neighbourhood underpinned early scholarship by the urban sociologist Ernest Burgess (1925) and the land economist Homer Hoyt (1939), who placed emphasis on the effects of the neighbourhood on social life. They highlighted topics such as residential segregation, which constituted a substantial body of literature in urban studies and from which scholarship still continues to grow. Indeed, policies aimed at solving social problems are often still addressed at the neighbourhood level though programmes such as social integration housing in many European cities (Van Kempen and Wissink, 2014: 95). For other scholars who worked on topics such as ethnic integration, social mobility and social capital, the neighbourhood was also central to understanding effects of these processes (Van Kempen and Wissink, 2014: 97). In this vein, researchers, policy makers and institutions used neighbourhoods ‘as categories through which people and organizations ... give meaning to their reality and through which they structure action’ (Van Kempen and Wissink, 2014: 95).

However, as Robert Merton wrote in the late 1950s, there are certain cosmopolitan groups of highly mobile middle-class professionals for whom the neighbourhood does not stand in the centre of social relationships (1957: 447). In addition, for Claude Fischer (1982) and Doreen Massey (1991), to equate concepts of the neighbourhood with a sense of community is also too simplistic. In *To Dwell Among Friends*<sup>32</sup>, Fischer argues that ‘personal networks are not inherently bound to a particular area. Some are deeply involved with their neighbors, some with friends a continent away, and others with both near and far associates’ (1982: 8). Fischer states that ‘community feeling and social capital should not focus on the neighbourhood alone’ (1982: 8). In addition, Van Kempen and Bart Wissink raise questions about how the neighbourhood can be conceptualised in the age of mobilities (2014: 96). They argue that theories that link forms of social bonding and geographic proximity are radically disrupted by various communication technologies, most recently mobile technology and chat applications like WhatsApp (Van Kempen and Wissink, 2014: 101). The authors argue that questions about the relevance of the residential neighbourhood in urban studies

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<sup>32</sup> The full title is *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (1982).

continue to persist with the introduction of these technologies that allow people to maintain social relationships at a distance, and outside of the neighbourhood and that this creates 'additional alternatives to social relationships with neighbours' (Van Kempen and Wissink, 2014: 101).

This emphasis on mobility in neighbourhoods emerges from a broader theme amongst scholars that pertains to the flows, movements and connections of people, things and ideas. This theme, or what some authors term a 'mobility turn' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 209), draws contributions from various fields and authors including, amongst others, anthropology (Tim Ingold), cultural studies (Sara Ahmed), geography (Nigel Thrift, Saskia Sassen, Doreen Massey), migration studies, science and technology studies, tourism and transport studies, and sociology. In their essay 'The New Mobilities Paradigm' Mimi Sheller and John Urry argue for how neighbourhoods can be theorised, eschewing what they describe as 'sedentary' theories that privilege and normalise aspects of social research such as stability, meaning and place over other aspects, such as distance, change and placelessness (2006: 208). Broadly speaking, the turn to mobility emphasises 'that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an "island"' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 209). In this networked and relational paradigm, topics such as shipping routes, traffic flows, SMS messages and the movement of images in the media present topics of interest (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 212). In a new mobilities paradigm Urry and Sheller argue for 'going beyond the imagery of terrains as spatially fixed geographic containers for social processes' (2006: 209).

In *Splintering Urbanism*, Simon Marvin and Stephen Graham state that 'modern urbanism emerges as an extraordinary complex and dynamic sociotechnical *process*' (2001: 8, original emphasis). Focusing on the concept of networked infrastructure – constituted by the wires, ducts, highways and technical networks of a city – the authors articulate urban life as a 'ceaseless and mobile interplay' (Graham and Marvin, 2001: 8). They argue this interplay happens on many different scales from the micro (body) to the macro (globe). Further, interactions mediated by various networks, including telecommunications are the 'connective driving forces' of globalisation (Graham and Marvin, 2001: 8). Similarly, Doreen Massey urges theorists to think of place as a process, not a thing. She too articulates her concept of place, in part, through social interactivity. She writes that these 'interactions themselves are not motionless things frozen in time. They are processes' (Massey, 1991: 29).

This notion of place as process is re-affirmed by Manuel Castells in what he terms the 'space of flows', which he articulates through the 'dominant practices of the Information

Age' (2009: 442). Castells defines the space of flows as 'the material organisation of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political and symbolic structures of society' (2009: 442). Castells claims one of the first elements of material support for the space of flows is the circuit of electronic exchanges made possible by micro-electronic- and telecommunication devices (2009: 442). His larger argument is that the 'network of communication is the fundamental spatial configuration: places do not disappear, but their logic and their meaning become absorbed in the network' (Castells, 2009: 443). In Castells' 'space of flows' he posits elites as 'those who form their own society, and constitute symbolically secluded communities, retrenched behind the very material barrier of real estate pricing' (2009: 446). In this sense a gated community can be understood as a 'spatially bound, interpersonally networked subculture' (Castells, 2009: 446).

I would like to borrow these two ideas: firstly, that place be considered a process not a thing, and secondly, that the configuration of space emerges through communication networks. Further, I would like to add yet another dimension to these ideas, that while networks include data and information exchange, they also entail a wide array of affective attachments. In *Networked Affect*, Susanna Paasonen, Ken Hillis and Michael Petit argue that 'the fluctuating and altering dynamics of affect give shape to online connections and disconnections, to the proximities and distances of love, desire, and wanting between and among bodies' (2015: 1). The authors argue that networked communication is far from a neutral process but, as a form of cultural practice, is 'underpinned by affective investments, sensory impulses, and forms of intensity that generate and circulate within networks comprising both human and non-human actors' (Hillis et al., 2015: 1). Hillis and his colleagues focus on what can be gained from turning to affect theory in questions of media and mediation. They argue that affect theory indeed offers 'ways to understand and explain the implications of the particular technological conjuncture at the which the "networked society" now finds itself' (2015: 2). Similarly, sociologist Imogen Tyler argues that 'affect is channelled within and across media with political consequences and we need to theorize these affects as not only unpredictable ... but also as strategic and performed' (2008: 89). Following these claims, I argue that to pay close attention to, even foreground, the affective dimensions of a communication network offers a way to further examine its political dynamics.

In the context of the neighbourhood these political dynamics pertain to various acts of social inclusion and exclusion as well as the maintenance of a boundary line to maintain forms of homogeneity and so-called order. Notably, models of mobility are often only applicable to a privileged affluent few in economically developed parts of the world (Tomlinson, 1999: 132). In this context, issues are raised concerning 'the unequal power relations which unevenly distribute motility, the potential for mobility' (Hannam et al., 2006: 15). Similarly, Morley asks in *Home Territories*: 'If we take mobility to be a defining characteristic of the contemporary world, we must simultaneously pose the question of why (and with what degrees of freedom) particular people stay at home and ask how, in a world of flux, forms of collective dwelling are sustained and reinvented' (2000: 13). Sustaining this question of the politics of mobility, I suggest that the neighbourhood be re-imagined as 'the location of the moorings of many mobilities with very different scales' (Van Kempen and Wassink, 2014: 104); where a WhatsApp chat group can be considered as one such mooring.

A mooring, as defined by Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry is a fixed form that is crucial to enabling the fluidities that characterise neighbourhoods, towns and cities in an age of globalisation (2006: 3). In this regard, they describe systems of moorings that include certain nodes such as airports and train stations (Hannam et al., 2006: 3). I want to add to this concept of mooring by emphasising what I perceive to be an establishing practice or stabilizing influence enabled through mobiles. In this sense I understand a mooring as a both a fixed form amongst flows but also an affective source that creates feelings of stability, perhaps even safety and comfort. More so, stations and airports – as part of moorings – implicate contact and connection: where people and luggage connect, where people make flight connections, meet other travellers or encounter rules and restrictions regarding movement. Indeed, in the context of the neighbourhood, Van Kempen and Wassink point to a particular gap within research that pertains to the understanding of 'where, when and how contacts develop ... We need to know where individuals actually live, meet, and develop their social contacts' (2014: 104). The duo goes some way to suggest that contacts are mediated by electronic devices, where meetings are forged in a virtual setting (Van Kempen and Wassink, 2014: 105). Taking this further I argue that through WhatsApp group chat the neighbourhood becomes a particular virtual anchor for the community, based on the group members' investment in their particular location.

## **Holding a Community**

Affect is afforded very little coverage in urban literature and is often left unaddressed even in cases of ‘issues of identity and belonging which quiver with affective energy’ (Thrift, 2004: 57). Valerie Walkerdine also argues for foregrounding affect in examinations of communities. As argued in the Introduction I claim that aspects of affect theory – alongside mobility theories as outlined above – provide an entry point for theorising the dynamics of mobile communication. As noted in Chapter 1, I borrow the concept of ‘holding’ from Valerie Walkerdine. To recap, Walkerdine articulates emotional holding as an embodied, relational and unconscious process, analogous to a baby being held close to a warm body and being fed (2010: 95). For Walkerdine, a sense of holding is an affective process enacted through a collection of neighbourly ‘doings’ – people experience feelings of being held or contained, countering other ‘feelings of the fear of being uncontained, unsafe or dying’ (Walkerdine, 2010: 95). The idea of holding is particularly pertinent in a neighbourhood that often experiences instances of panic and fear about potential crime, but what I am missing from this concept is how it relates to the movement and flows that seem inherent to a neighbourhood. The neighbourhood would appear to demand a slightly different articulation of holding, one that emerges out of the discourse of flows and movement of urban studies. So, while an affective mooring may enact some of the same dynamics as Walkerdine’s practice of holding – such as stability and safety – it is located in a paradigm that is more attuned to the affordances of mobility. As discussed in the latter part of this chapter, the affordance of mobility is not a simple issue as it tends to be unevenly distributed amongst social groups, forged through categories of class and economic power. Simply put, where some people are afforded more freedom of movement than others.

In the context of media studies, Morley examines a similar notion of domestic ontological security through the medium of television. He argues that television in a domestic setting offers a certain predictability and reliability in terms of scheduling and its ceaseless presence in features such as 24-hour news that ‘performs a reassuring function’ (2000: 128). Drawing on the work of Roger Silverstone and Raymond Williams, Morley argues that while communication technologies such as the telephone and television may deliver threatening outsider images and narratives to the home context, they simultaneously give people ‘access to the wider world of shared or imagined communities through which we construct our feelings of security’ (2000: 129). In the context of Johannesburg, neighbourhood chat groups often circulate bulletin-style messages of petty thefts, violent crimes like car hijackings and what members term home invasions (burglaries), detailing the

time, date and events of the crimes and alerting other neighbours to look out for the getaway car. This can be seen in Morley's terms as 'hostile and threatening' information 'from the outside world into the private world' of neighbours (2000: 129).

I argue that this information potentially generates fear and paranoia, which can be amplified by others who feel the same way. In this sense, neighbours begin to feel like they are 'in this together', in a shared experience of fear of the outside world of crime and criminals. Therefore, in the space of flows of the neighbourhood, there is a mutual co-constitution of neighbours and WhatsApp on a sensory level – for example, as neighbours experience the sensation of something proximate and foreboding – as well as the emotional level, where expressions of fear and paranoia emerge in the chat group. However, I argue that amidst this sense of precarity in the neighbourhood, neighbours also experience feelings of being held or contained in the safety of a collective presence in WhatsApp in the same vein as in Walkerdine's case study. Therefore, both feelings of insecurity and containment are seen to emerge through WhatsApp group chat. This particular contradiction is an aspect I would like to develop further in the context of WhatsApp group chat in the next part of this chapter. Most notably, this concept of containment is complicated, as it implies not only certain instances of protection and care but is also premised on particular ideals of exclusivity of place and expelling alterity.

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**NEWS FLASH: 29 September 2015, London**

***SOUTH AFRICA 'A COUNTRY AT WAR' AS MURDER RATE SOARS TO NEARLY 49 A DAY*<sup>33</sup>**

***The police minister said South Africa needed 'to tackle the violence within our communities. To think we can resolve the issue of murder on our own is effectively just hallucination in a sense, because it's a social problem. It's a problem that's got to be tackled at the level of family units,' Nathi Nhleko said.***

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<sup>33</sup> Extract from GUARDIAN. 2015b. *South Africa 'A Country at War' as Murder Rate Soars to Nearly 49 a Day* [Online]. Guardian News. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/29/south-africa-a-country-at-war-as-rate-soars-to-nearly-49-a-day> [Accessed 18 January 2017].



## Neighbourhood A

Neighbourhood A is a leafy, affluent area in north-western Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa. The neighbourhood is characterised by its vantage point, located on a small ridge with impressive views of the city. Properties have high-perimeter walls and an omnipresent private security company, CSS Tactical, patrol the streets in large black sport utility vehicles. Neighbourhood A is an enclosed neighbourhood<sup>34</sup> which means visitors can only enter by passing through one street entrance, using a security-controlled boom where a security guard is stationed 24 hours a day. Much like other enclosed neighbourhoods in the country, all in-roads to the suburb have been closed off with palisade fencing in an effort to prevent crime. Various gates allow pedestrians to enter and are required to be left unlocked, even at night, by the city. When the traffic increases another road is opened and then locked again. With limited traffic flow, the streets are quiet and neighbours can be seen walking their dogs and children riding their bicycles. In the course of researching neighbourhood surveillance, a friend, Claire, offered to share information with me about Neighbourhood A where she lives with her family. She invited me to read their WhatsApp neighbourhood group chat. As the convener of the group Claire coordinates information between residents. She was elected by the neighbourhood to share information between the group and outsiders, noting any points to be raised and acted upon in neighbourhood meetings. Notably, the head of the security patrol unit for neighbourhood A is also a member of the WhatsApp group.

All group members have been notified of my access to WhatsApp chat content. All names of group members have been anonymised to protect their privacy. However, when it comes to my method of working, it is important to note that the content of this group has provided me with valuable *narrative leads* for a more critical cultural analysis of the group's communication. In this sense the content of the group has served as the *inspiration* as well as the *affective backdrop* for my examination of the affects and emotions that have circulated in the group, and for what is at stake in their circulation. I am invested in unpacking the kinds of affiliations and allegiances that exist in the neighbourhood as part of my affective way of working and I have considered my own responses to the group's messages as constitutive elements of the storying process. The story has been guided, perhaps even

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<sup>34</sup> Urban design scholar Karen Landman defines enclosed neighbourhoods as, 'existing neighbourhoods that have controlled access through gates or booms across existing roads. Many are fenced or walled off as well, with a limited number of controlled entrances/exits and security guards at these points in some cases. The roads within these neighbourhoods were previously, or still are public property and in many cases the local council is still responsible for public services to the community within' (2000: 3).

mobilised by my affective responses through the selection and inclusion of events in this chapter.

According to South African municipal record, Neighbourhood A is part of a ward area which consists of a number of different parts, including park land, a botanical garden, sports fields, residential properties, shopping precincts and a cemetery. According to South African census data from 2011, 55% of the ward's population are white, compared with the national average of 9%. Fifty-eight percent of the ward speak English as their home language, compared with the national average of 9% (Census, 2011). The ward's median annual income is nearly 10 times higher than the rest of the country, making it significantly wealthier than the national median income.<sup>35</sup> In terms of education levels, 44% of the ward's population have a university degree compared with the national average of 7%. In addition, Neighbourhood A occupies only a very small area of the larger ward area, and the house prices are some of the highest in the city, imbuing it with a level of exclusivity. Accordingly, house advertisements are often framed in terms such as 'those lucky enough' to own property in this 'enviable location', or even as a 'best kept secret'.

Indeed, throughout history Neighbourhood A has been considered an enviable location and a site of contestation, even as far back as the early 1800s when Dutch settlers drove the Ndebele King Mzilikazi from the area where he had established a number of kraals.<sup>36</sup> Later, in latter half of the 1800s the Dutch applied for, and were granted, the land rights for the area, originally titled Braamfontein farm. During the South African war (1899 - 1902) the British used the same vantage point around Neighbourhood A to maintain a gun placement against the boer army. Subsequently, the farm land changed hands many times, during the gold rush era of Johannesburg. During this time, Neighbourhood A, alongside other neighbourhoods in the city, became the reserve of a few wealthy land owners, desired for its good views, large stands and absence of shops.

Nowadays, Neighbourhood A, like many other areas in South Africa, has experienced significant levels of crime. In the period from February 2013 to February 2014 neighbours reported 13 burglaries, 17 robberies and 10 car thefts to their local police station.<sup>37</sup> In some

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<sup>35</sup> Average annual household income in the ward is R230 700 per annum, compared with the national average of R29 400 (Census, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> A kraal is a 'traditional African village of huts, typically enclosed by a fence' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> These statistics have been retrieved from the South African Police in Johannesburg. The difference between robbery and burglary in South African law is that the former is a contact crime and the latter is a property crime. 'Simply put, a robbery occurs when there is a direct threat or use of violence between a victim and the perpetrator while a burglary occurs when there is no contact at all between a victim and the perpetrator'. BRODIE, N. 2013.

of these instances, neighbours appealed to the WhatsApp chat group for help, fearful of being attacked in their homes. In another instance, group members reported a car hijacking in the neighbourhood that involved children. Neighbours anxiously recounted scenes of housebreaking. Often, messages were sent to the group to verify strange sounds and account for cars and people in the neighbourhood. However, in the early set-up phase of the group, members also expressed feelings of safety. One group member remarked, 'Feeling more comfortable and at ease already' (2013), another said, 'It makes one feel a little better knowing everyone is on watch' (2013). Group members have often availed themselves of others in the neighbourhood. In one instance a neighbour wrote, 'I'm quite far away from home just seen my fence alarm go off. I got security to go out but if anyone else is able to just drive past and see if okay I would appreciate it and owe u one' (2013). Various group members replied to this call for help, showing the group's responsiveness to its members.

As Doreen Massey notes in her essay 'A Global Sense of Place', it is not only capital and its development that determine our understanding and experience of space, but race and gender also exert influence (1991: 24). In this context, anxiety about crime and issues of race inequality feature together in many discourses about South Africa (Demombynes and Özler, 2005: 265). More than twenty years after the first democratic election, South African artist William Kentridge claims that, 'Race and class divisions are with us as strongly as ever. A happy ending is by no means assured. There is a daily, low-grade civil war at every stop street. The incidences of racial, verbal and physical abuse alert us to the rages that still burn inside. They are shameful to all of us' (2014). Kentridge names some of the seminal divisions and issues that exist in contemporary South African society and some of which have presented in the chat group. The most prominent of the issues is race relations, which, when set against a historical backdrop of institutional racial segregation in South Africa, presents a very unique case study. Another issue is a 'low-grade civil war', which alludes to both social antagonisms and the resulting horrors that emanate from physical violence between South Africans. In part, this case study discusses some of these societal antagonisms, but within a localised assemblage of mobile phones and neighbours.

Notably, another often-cited aspect of contemporary South African society is a persistent economic inequality (Landman, 2000: 4). To illustrate this point, Neighbourhood A has four times the median annual income of its immediate neighbouring ward, where 23%

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*Guide: Understanding Crime Statistics in South Africa* [Online]. Africa Check. Available: <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/a-guide-to-crime-statistics-in-south-africa-what-you-need-to-know/> [Accessed 14 March 2017].

of that ward's population have no household income (Census, 2011). Some neighbourhoods in South Africa employ private security companies to patrol and guard streets and houses. These private security companies, alongside residents, have come to determine how notions of space and movement are reconfigured in the neighbourhood, facilitated by the neighbourhood's mobile communication. This reconfiguration creates a certain privatisation of urban space, which is not only a South Africa phenomenon, but a global one (Minnaar, 2004: 41). However, in South Africa the practice of privatizing urban space can be more uniquely considered. As a result of the pressure of maintaining a presence in all neighbourhoods of post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, police were redistributed to previously under-policed black areas. As a result, wealthier, formerly whites-only neighbourhoods turned to private security to manage access control and crime prevention (Minnaar, 2004: 33). Sara Ahmed's idea that the very concept of a neighbourhood enters public discourse as an entity 'already in crisis' can almost certainly be better understood in the context of Neighbourhood A's history and current situation. But, more significantly her idea also problematizes the concept of the neighbourhood as simply being an entity delineated and bound by economic and class commonalities. Beyond those parameters the neighbourhood is also bound together as a site of shared resistance.

The WhatsApp conversations of Neighbourhood A reflect the general sentiment of South Africans who report feelings of insecurity and fear about crime after the first democratic elections in that country (Minnaar, 2004: 24) (Lemanski, 2004: 105). More transparent crime statistics and media reports on violent crime have contributed to a siege mentality, where South Africans "retreat" into private "fortified enclaves" and are willing to submit themselves to a comprehensive range of security measures and procedures, under constant security surveillance and control and more often than not giving up individual freedoms such as open access, free movement and privacy' (Minnaar, 2004: 8).<sup>38</sup> However, some theorists argue that this enclave living only further contributes to aspects of mistrust and paranoia in neighbourhoods, as residents limit social mixing (Lemanski, 2004: 108). The Neighbourhood A mobile group exemplifies the panicky potential of neighbourhoods driven by both the threat and perpetration of crime. It is important to emphasise that fear of crime in South Africa is not a uniquely white affair, as it is 'equally prevalent across all

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<sup>38</sup> The term 'siege' is interesting to note, as it feels more appropriate to a war zone than a neighbourhood. In addition, as already noted, security companies and neighbours in Neighbourhood A describe home burglaries as 'home invasions'. Media articles have adopted this same terminology to report on crime. Seemingly these references have become normalised in popular discourse about neighbourhood crime in South Africa.

socioeconomic and race groups' (Lemanski, 2004: 109). Notably, panic arose at a very specific time in Neighbourhood A, as the neighbourhood experienced a significant increase in crime and was in the process of trying to close off streets to the neighbourhood to limit and control access.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, issues of controlling the so-called breached boundary lines of the neighbourhood were directly related to feelings of anxiety and fear expressed in the group.

This fear and anxiety may also relate to how Neighbourhood A perceives a threat. Brian Massumi argues that fear can be seen to enlarge any existing or implied threat (2010: 54). In this case study of the neighbourhood, fear and paranoia mediated through WhatsApp appear to accelerate the urgency of the security situation and amplify the perceived notion of neighbourhood precarity. Massumi claims that in this way, affects can be elevated above facts or even come to stand in for them (2010: 68). He writes that, 'The felt reality of the threat is so superlatively real that it translates into a felt certainty about the world, even in the absence of other grounding for it in the observable world .... The affect-driven logic of the would-have/could-have is what discursively ensures that the actual facts will always remain an open case, for all pre-emptive intents and purposes' (Massumi, 2010: 55). Anxiety and paranoia are related to security issues and the existing or implied threat these pose. These emotive responses are entangled in the history of race politics and spatial order in South Africa, as examined in the next section.

### **Ghosts From The Past**

As already noted, 'the assumption that we can tell the difference between strangers and neighbours which is central to ... Neighbourhood Watch programmes, functions to conceal forms of social difference' (Ahmed, 2000: 3). Ahmed's line of thinking implies that to examine neighbourhood surveillance is to also examine the dynamics and history of social difference. Both concepts of the stranger and the other are particularly significant in the national context of South Africa as a country with an especially fraught history concerning otherness, race and border maintenance. As border control implies relations of power, it is critical to reflect on the 'historical awareness of our present circumstance' (Foucault, 1982: 209). Arguably, South African society is most influenced by two significant periods of history. The

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<sup>39</sup> A note regarding the timeline of events in Neighbourhood A: at the time of writing this dissertation the neighbourhood was already an enclosed neighbourhood. The messages that related to a crime wave in the neighbourhood circulated before the city of Johannesburg gave permission to the residents to close off their streets.

first period is the more recent chapter of South Africa (1948 - 1994) marked by apartheid, a system of legalised segregation of races and severe boundary control first legalised under the Group Areas Act of 1950.<sup>40</sup> The second period is a broader history that dates back to colonialism, when South Africa was first colonised by the Dutch (1652) and later the British (1815) (Porter, 2011).

However, I am not referencing South Africa's colonial and apartheid histories as a way to provide context and thereby somehow explain the nation's existing social dynamics and tensions. Rather, in using terms such as 'post-apartheid' and 'post-colonial' I stress their problematic implications. The prefix 'post' should not be considered merely as a label for demarcating periods of history. This approach is too universalising and carries the assumption that aspects of that period of history are relegated to the past (Ahmed, 2000: 11). Similarly, 'post' should not imply that history is neatly bound up in its own 'inadequate temporality' (Ahmed, 2000: 11). Therefore, while a term such as post-colonial clearly refers to a particular period succeeding colonial rule, its pernicious effects continue to determine and influence contemporary 'social and material existence' (Ahmed, 2000: 11). Following this argument, I employ terms such as post-colonial and post-apartheid in this chapter to reinforce the complexity of the relationships they imply – relationships between history and contemporary acts of resistance that I argue, still haunt the neighbourhood.

Specifically, I allude to historic mechanisms of boundary division – bolstered by fears of the black peril – that engender forms of neurosis and moral panic amongst white South Africans. The concept of black peril is not unique to South Africa. As literary scholar Gareth Cornwell writes, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century black peril was found in 'well-documented parallels' that 'range in place and time from the southern United States in the late 1860s to Papua in the 1920s' (1996: 441). Also, after the First World War, Britain saw a rise in instances of black peril as communities and the media perceived the presence of black men on British streets as a threat to white masculinity (Smith, 2008: 20). Descriptions of the black peril can be found in literature and media reports dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as whites settled in Southern Africa. Cornwell writes, 'The Black Peril was an important constant in the moral economy of the white South African *ethnie*' (1996: 441). Decades later under apartheid the black peril was dubbed into Afrikaans as 'die swart gevaar' (the black danger) and became

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<sup>40</sup> The Group Areas Act of 1950 was one of the central components of apartheid policy, which aimed to 'eliminate mixed neighbourhoods in favour of racially segregated ones which would allow South Africans to develop separately' SOHA. *Group Areas Act 1950* [Online]. South African History Online. Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/sthash.hQUmVWut.dpuf>. [Accessed 7 October 2016].

one of the ‘backbones of racial repression’ (Kunene, 2016). As a propaganda technique during apartheid, *swart gevaar* produced ‘irrational and unjustifiable’ fear, even hysteria, amongst minority white South Africans at the perceived threat posed by the majority black citizens (Kunene, 2016). Journalist Elisha Kunene goes further, to suggest that *swart gevaar* also motivated fear in black South Africans, as ‘the embodiment of anti-black hatred and authoritarianism. The Nats [Nationalists] assured all South Africans, black and white, that tucked in the psyche of every black man hid weapons of mass destruction’ (2016). Functioning as part of a divisive political strategy, *swart gevaar* performed well in the production of collective panic during apartheid.

In a blog post titled ‘Harfield I’m Out’ blogger Terry-Jo Thorne discusses this kind of black fear in a contemporary suburban setting (2014). In the post Thorne chronicles her experiences as a black woman who lives in a neighbourhood in Cape Town that she describes as ‘built on lies and bad history’ (2014). Her writing forms part of the fleeting moments, extracts and comments on social media that challenge the naming of those who belong to a neighbourhood. I emphasise this as part of the larger static that emerges from so-called fringe voices venting frustrations at communication between residents in neighbourhood social media. Relevant to this chapter, Thorne’s narrative rests on historical traumas associated with issues of boundary control and demarcations of space. Under the Group Areas Act (1950), blacks were forcibly removed from newly designated whites-only areas under apartheid rule and Thorne’s father was forced to leave Harfield Village. Later, under a new democratic dispensation Thorne relocated to her father’s old neighbourhood.

Thorne writes that in Harfield Village, ‘people openly ask others what they’re doing there’ (2014). Her writing navigates the rising panic in her neighbourhood (‘Black man running in the direction of the train station – could be dangerous’) and her own reactions to ‘cute names like “Harfielders” for those in the “in” group’ (2014). In *Home Territories*, David Morley articulates sentiments such as Thorne’s as the regime of the fictive “We” (2000: 185). Writing about television, he argues that the medium offers an illusion of sharing the present moment with others in a metaphysics of presence. In other words, a sense of community is built, based on a constructed ‘we’ in the present and the excluded outside (Morley, 2000: 185). Quoting John Ellis, Morley suggests that daytime television is characterised by a tone of ‘syrupy intimacy, in-jokes and gags apparently shared by people who all seem to be on familiar first name terms’ (2000: 186).

Similarly, in the context of WhatsApp, O’Hara and his co-authors remark that the construction of a sense of we’ness between a couple can be made through communicating

about ‘things they both like or need ... things they both need to contribute to ... things that will become constituted in their home and in the way they live together ... that can be part of their evolving identity together’ (2014: 10-11). Echoing both these claims of a constructed- and fictive ‘we’, Thorne blogs that she has ‘lost it’ with claims of appropriation, ‘this is not ‘their’ village. Not ‘their’ streets’ (2014). Her emotional register claims a different perspective on the neighbourhood, displacing existing notions that strangers are compelled to account for their presence. Indeed, Angelika Bammer argues that both nation and home are:

fictional constructs, mythic narratives, stories the telling of which has the power to create the “we” who are engaged in telling them. This power to construct not only an identity for ourselves as members of a community (“nation”, say or “family”) but also the discursive right to a space (a country, a neighbourhood, a place to live) that is due us, is – we then claim, in the name of the “we-ness” we have just constructed – at the heart of ... “the profound emotional legitimacy” of such concepts as “nation” or “home”. (1992: ix-x)

Thorne’s blog unsettles the dominant neighbourhood surveillance narrative that demands a certain stranger vigilance and social legitimacy, based largely on race, as she chronicles the foibles of misidentification in the neighbourhood. She writes, ‘The local priest had her picture taken when she, suffering from a back injury & walking in the rain wearing a hoodie, had a picture of her sitting on the ground trying to tie her shoe posted on the community page with the caption listing a “dodgy coloured<sup>41</sup> woman” in the area’ (Thorne, 2014).

Thorne describes dynamics in the neighbourhood as kind of madness, brought to bear in conversations about strangers and their so-called markers of criminal appearance and movement. Her blog post emits a persuasive affective charge, one that speaks of the discord and tension in the neighbourhood. She writes, ‘You know ... Fuck you. All of you. It’s public, fucking space. It’s our space, it’s their space. We own NOTHING. Even the houses we live in are stolen. So stop whining ... Stop being a damned creeper and taking pictures of people doing things that are none of your business’ (Thorne, 2014). Contemporary forms of fortification and surveillance in neighbourhoods such as those Thorne describes, have been likened to new kinds of influx control reminiscent of apartheid (Landman, 2000: 21).

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Coloured’ is an official term used (albeit contentious) in South Africa to denote a person of mixed race.



Significantly this form of control also pertains to perceptions of place as ‘people feel that certain areas were off limits to them because of their race’ (Frye, I. quoted in Farber, 2014).

While in the past influx control was performed through analogue measures – such as a passbook that black citizens were legally obliged to carry – subtler forms of influx control can be seen to emerge as residents monitor and verify others through mobile surveillance. In this way, practices of the group – ones that constitute a form of we’ness – suggest that for the neighbourhood to hold itself, certain acts of alienation are implied, towards those who supposedly do not belong. As Morley succinctly notes, ‘to expel alterity beyond the boundaries of some ethically culturally civilisationally purified homogenous enclave ... the crucial issue in defining who or what “belongs” is, of course, also that of defining who or (or what) is to be excluded as a “matter of place”, whether that matter is represented by impure or foreign material objects, persons or cultural products’ (2000: 3).

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**5:45:31 PM: Kate: Did anyone just hear a gunshot?**

**5:46:04 PM: Jane: Sounded like one for sure**

**5:46:33 PM: Peter: Yes did hear a loud bang - not sure it was a gunshot**

**5:46:57 PM: Claire: Heard it**

**7:22:58 PM: Dave: Chill, it's fireworks**

*(Neighbourhood A WhatsApp Group - 19 November 2013)*

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**9:01:25 PM: Dave: Everyone ok out there? I hear shouting ????**

**9:01:54 PM: Steve: Nothing here**

**9:03:08 PM: The Hamiltons: I heard fireworks?? I think it was fireworks.**

**9:08:55 PM: Dave: I've been outside to listen.**

**Fireworks and kids playing Marco Polo!**

**Sounded like people screaming but all ok!**

*(Neighbourhood A WhatsApp Group - 5 January 2014)*

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## Black Man Running!

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, a mobilities paradigm insists on the study of a neighbourhood with consideration for certain flows and movement of bodies and information. As security studies in South Africa note, criminals tend to travel to wealthier neighbourhoods where the returns for their efforts will be highest (Demombynes and Özler, 2005: 265). In this sense, movement is therefore already an implicit part of that which constitutes criminality. Indeed, movement is also pertinent to the neighbourhood security apparatus, as developments in security software are able to code certain movements provided by surveillance cameras as strange or outside of the norm – termed ‘unusual behaviour detection’ – and thus markers of potential crime.<sup>42</sup> In Neighbourhood A’s WhatsApp group, members describe cars that ‘hang around’ or ‘drive slowly’. Accordingly, movement is not only a marker of stranger-ness but also of criminality. As Ahmed writes, ‘Community is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but becomes established *as a way of moving through space*’ (2000: 34, original emphasis). Indeed, certain ways of moving through the neighbourhood are more accepted than others in the community. As Massey notes, issues of power are always implicit to flows and movement. She writes, ‘Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey, 1991: 26). Similarly, Marvin and Graham note that the ‘construction of spaces of mobility and flow for some, however, always involves the construction of barriers for others’ (2001: 11).

In this sense, a kinetic elite<sup>43</sup> emerges as those ‘in charge’, to use Massey’s phrase, of assessing movement in the neighbourhood, where WhatsApp becomes part of systems of surveillance. Members of the WhatsApp group evaluate movements – where the chat group can be understood as a cultural site of mutual negotiation – and determine what is accepted

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<sup>42</sup> iSentry is a software employed by many South African security companies to monitor movement in a camera’s view. ‘It measures the size, shape, speed and direction of motion of every object it sees. From this it builds a model of behaviour, which it considers normal. When an object behaves in a way that does not fit the normal model, iSentry identifies it as unusual’ and notifies human patrol agents. (CSS. 2017. *iSentry* [Online]. Available: <http://www.csstactical.co.za/service.html> [Accessed 19 January 2017].

<sup>43</sup> ‘Kinetic elite’ is a phrase used by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas during an interview with journalist Gary Wolf for *Wired* magazine in June 2000 for a feature titled ‘Exploring the Unmaterial World’. Koolhaas claimed to borrow the phrase from the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk but no proper attribution was given, however the phrase has been subsequently cited in various titles such as *Splintering Urbanism* by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin.

as normal and/or ordinary. In one instance in Neighbourhood A, a resident raised concern about a parked car in one of the streets: '3 black males in white honda outside no 7, anyone know anything.' Members of the group responded by calling the security company to 'check it out'. The resident continued '1 is now walking up tugela [street], anyone around?' A few minutes later the security company reported to the group that the men were builders collecting their tools. While some group members seemed satisfied with the response, another asked, 'Are we sure? Did they check with the owner of the house they are "building" for?'

Racial profiling has, in many contexts and throughout history, been implicated in policing, where young black youths are often pre-formed as suspects of crime. As Lemanski argues, in South Africa, 'whites have long used fear of crime as a euphemism for fear of blacks' (2004: 109). These so-called markers of difference (or crime?), and stranger-ness are further given semiotic form through codes in mobile-mediated surveillance in the neighbourhood where neighbours describe people using coded phrases such as 'bravo male' or abbreviations such as 'BM' to indicate black males (Farber, 2014). These assessments of movement and race serve as markers to objectify subjects in the neighbourhood. This practice which hinges on what makes some people more suspicious than others, is part of what I argue is a 'dividing practice' where the subject is divided from others: such as the 'criminals' from the 'good boys' (Foucault, 1982: 208). The ideological function of interpellation is that individuals are transformed into subjects (Ahmed, 2000: 23). Interpellation assigns certain people 'different value in social contexts' and the 'subject comes into being' through being recognised and thus produced as a stranger (Ahmed, 2000: 23-24). 'The recognition of strangers brings into play relations of social and political antagonism that *mark some others as stranger other others*' (Ahmed, 2000: 25, original emphasis).

In one instance a stranger, allegedly drunk and stoned, stumbled into Neighbourhood A and a response from neighbours was coordinated via the WhatsApp group. Neighbours were able to pinpoint the movements of the stranger as he walked through the streets and passed by their homes, circulating this information to the rest of the group. The person who came to the rescue was figured as a hero, protecting the neighbourhood from imminent danger and cementing the notion that the streets are vulnerable to the threat of strangers. This form of neighbourhood policing alongside the heroic tendencies it evoked figured the 'good citizen built on the image of the strong citizen' (2000: 31). This act constituted a performance in the group chat as ordinary neighbours became extraordinary

people, keeping up the moral good of the community. More so, ‘the good citizen [was] figurable primarily as white, masculine and middle-class, the heroic subject who [could] protect the vulnerable bodies of weaker ones’ (Ahmed, 2000: 31). In both instances, the immediacy of feedback about whether danger was contained or not, was established in the group chat, reconfirming the group as a site of collective decision making and affective containment. More so, the WhatsApp group served as an apparatus of legitimation and consent, where the presence and also actions of people were determined as acceptable or not.

As suggested in this chapter, boundaries and the surveillance entailed in maintaining them often implicate class, race and economic relations. Therefore, in the context of the neighbourhood, one that is patrolled and under surveillance, ‘the stranger takes on spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the homeland’ (Ahmed, 2000: 3). I consider this notion of Ahmed’s further: mobile technologies as embodied and spatial technologies are part of locating, confining and/or resisting strangers. They might also be used to theorise how neighbourhoods establish certain practices of community and ultimately belonging.

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**As to the appearance of the lurking fear, nothing could be gained from the scared and witless shanty-dwellers. In the same breath they called it a snake and a giant, a thunder-devil and a bat, a vulture and a walking tree.**

*- H. P. Lovecraft (2014: 244)*

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### **Neighbourliness**

Despite the core premise of the mobilities discourse – that is, the theorisation of issues of place in terms of movement and flow – people still have the need for some sort of attachment, even rootedness, ‘whether through place or anything else’ (Massey, 1991: 26). I closely consider this attachment in this chapter, through the practice of WhatsApp group chat, which I argue constitutes an affective mooring point for a neighbourhood community. As an established practice and a stabilising influence, WhatsApp group chat offers

neighbours a sense of being metaphorically held in times of perceived precarity,<sup>44</sup> that emerges through and is perhaps even amplified by the group chat. Importantly, mobile phones and WhatsApp are not incidental to this experience but are central to producing the environment of the neighbourhood as people affirm their feelings of fear, paranoia or safety about a particular place in a group setting. Therefore, this practice, one that can be paradoxically termed ‘mobile mooring’, is felt through experiences of symbolic proximity and a sense of collective presence generated through the affordances of the technology. Perhaps, this practice can therefore be understood as producing a certain mobile affective notion of place. In this view, mobiles, as part of a close and intimate relationship with the corporeal body and its environment, are at the centre an examination of the neighbourhood, as the vehicle through which neighbours experience a sense of place.

However, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the very concept of neighbourliness involves a somewhat complex entanglement of ideals of protection and acts of cherishing. As James Clifford asks, ‘What does it take to defend a homeland? What are the political stakes in claiming (or sometimes being relegated to) a “home”?’ (1997: 36). I argue that neighbourliness, enacted and enabled through WhatsApp group chat, is also a form of politics that is hinged not only on experiences of being held but is also based on acts of exclusion – that is, to expel those things and people who do not belong to the neighbourhood. Indeed, the concept of neighbourliness has been used to obscure acts of exclusion in the name of so-called ‘good’ neighbours who recognise differences between each other as a means to supposedly live both ethically and separately. This concept has problematic political antecedents. Prime Minister of South Africa (1958 - 1966), Hendrik Verwoerd once claimed in 1961, that apartheid was merely an act of ‘good neighbourliness’ whereby people accept that ‘that there are differences between people, that while these differences exist and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time you can live together,

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<sup>44</sup> A note about precarity, or more specifically, a question about precarity: whose precarity am I writing about? I argue that precarity – defined as a sense of uncertainty or insecurity – exists on two levels in Neighbourhood A. Firstly, my focus is on the perceived level of precarity that the neighbours feel, exacerbated by the WhatsApp group chat, that perhaps even exceeds the circumstances that exist. However, fear and anxiety – as expressions of precarity – that circulate in the group are also based on material evidence, that is, the crimes that have taken place and continue to take place in the neighbourhood. In this way, a sense of danger is constituted by a feeling of foreboding, but it is also grounded in the very real and material historic evidence of violent burglaries and hijackings in the neighbourhood. Secondly, there is the precarity of those people – marked as strangers – who supposedly do not belong to the neighbourhood. They are identified via the group chat and forged through categories of race and appearance. The precarity of these individuals emerges as they are often expelled from the neighbourhood, sometimes violently, to ensure that the threat of danger is stemmed and notions of so-called normativity are preserved. These strangers, through their unwanted presence and ultimate expulsion from the neighbourhood, come to embody the structural precarity of the South African context, as a country that suffers from enormous levels of violence and an under-resourced and overburdened policing and legal systems to deal with these issues.

aid one another but that it can best be done when you act as good neighbours always do'(2010). Though, as Chantal Mouffe claims, 'politics aims at constituting a 'we' in the context of diversity and conflict [and] to constitute a 'we' must always distinguish it from a 'them' (2017). In the neighbourhood, this distinction between 'we' and 'them' creates a site of antagonism. WhatsApp group chat, as an affective mooring point, can be seen to further produce a certain notion of the neighbourhood, reinforcing and normalising ideals of neighbourliness – through which an imagined 'we' is established; a we that assumes differences in appearance, movement and race – as devices for marking the exclusivity of place.

In the following chapter I will re-examine issues of alienation, belonging and mobility albeit in a different setting, adding further dimensions to the concept of affective mooring. This chapter examines an informal migrant camp at a train station in Budapest in 2015 at the height of a mass migration of Middle-Eastern refugees to Europe. In this case study I argue that the act of alienation – performed through a process of shaming – was countered by information sharing, enabled by an informal Wi-Fi network at the station. Here, mobile communication offered a form of heterotopia, perhaps even resistance, however small, for those who found themselves alienated and shamed. In this process of resistance, I will argue that mobiles and the affective mooring that they enable, constitute a sense of agency amongst migrants. Migrants are thus ensured some semblance of choice and control in otherwise constraining circumstances.

*All names of members of the Neighbourhood A WhatsApp group have been changed to protect their privacy.*

## CHAPTER 5: BUDAPEST, MIGRANTS AND THE 'STRONGMAN' FIGURE

### Mobiles and Migrants

The figure of the migrant in the so-called migration crisis in Europe in recent years has been shaped, perhaps even defined, by mobile phones. Following the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in mid-2011, migration, especially from the Middle East to Europe, has occurred on an unprecedented scale compared to previous periods of history.<sup>45</sup> English-language mainstream media and news sites tend to place the mobile phone at the centre of migration journeys, as an enabling technology and a 'migrant essential' (Gillespie et al., 2016: 23). In particular, the phrase 'mobile phone wielding refugee' – first coined by *The Irish Times* – has often been used in the media to articulate how the smartphone has become a complicated symbol of threat, even a weapon that migrants employ to navigate their journey and mobilise groups (Gillespie et al., 2016: 9). The subtext of this popular discourse concerning the entanglement of mobiles and migration is that the technology becomes an 'active agent in the refugee crisis' (Gillespie et al., 2016: 23).

Migration is nothing new to society, indeed, the history of homo sapiens rests on migratory movement (Bauman, 2016: 3). However, the influence of mobile technology on forced migration provides a nascent area of research – recently referred to as 'digital migration studies' (Leurs and Smets, 2018: 1) – especially as it pertains to the hierarchies and systems of power implicit in mobility and communication systems. This chapter, positioned within this still-emergent field, aligns with those scholars (Borkert et al., 2018) (Smets, 2018) (Badran, 2018) who articulate how some forms of agency, however limited, are exercised through media within migrant communities. Moreover, I heed the recent calls within the field to avoid approaches to migration studies that fetishize either migrants or technology (Leurs and Smets, 2018: 8). To do this I draw on the work of media scholars working on migration research – Marie Gillespie, Mellissa Wall and Saskia Witteborn – as authors who foreground the affective dimension of mobiles in their research on migrant, refugee and asylum seeker journeys. Gillespie and her co-authors argue that the definitions of mobile affordances in migration studies need to be extended beyond the technical, to include the

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<sup>45</sup> In this chapter I refer especially to 2015, which The United Nations High Commission for Refugees terms 'The year of Europe's refugee crisis'. The agency reports that, 'As of December 7 [2015], more than 911,000 refugees and migrants had arrived on European shores since the year began and some 3,550 lives had been lost during the journey. Over 75 % of those arriving in Europe had fled conflict and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq' (SPINDLER, W. 2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis. Available: <http://tracks.unhcr.org/2015/12/2015-the-year-of-europes-refugee-crisis/> [Accessed 19 February 2018]).

affective and imaginative (2018: 7). I have relied specifically on the field work done by Witteborn (2011) (2011a) (2014) (2015) to delineate one of the most dominant manifestations of affect amongst migrant communities: shame.

Specifically, I argue that mobiles provide a way for forced migrants to create a heterotopic space in extreme conditions – where heterotopia refers to a space as a counter-site that is located in opposition to the ‘normal’ or accepted norms of society (Foucault, 1997: 332). By analysing a case study of an informal refugee camp that was formed at Keleti station in Budapest in September 2015, I argue that migrants are affectively moored by mobile media practices that enable feelings of familiarity and ontological security. These practices not only constitute a refuge for migrants but also provide a form of resistance, however small, towards the stigmatization and shaming they experience.

Researchers studying migration often express their feelings and thoughts regarding their subject matter in a highly affective register. That is to say, many authors seem to be emotionally engaged with their work, not only as researchers but also as advocates for refugee rights. In a talk given by Marie Gillespie at a conference in Bilbao, she recounted her feelings of waking up in the morning, only to hear reports via WhatsApp groups of the number of people who had died at sea during the night (2017). Indeed, the affective dimension of migration – as an embodied practice with various scenes, noises, information, smells, pressures that move through the body and give rise to emotive responses – is a transformative force, not confined to the personal experiences of migrants but rather extending to other bodies, including those of researchers, the public and the political, amongst others. The relationships between bodies – as they relate to a very specific place and time – mediated through mobile technology is a major focus of this chapter. Indeed, in the migration process the bodies of migrants are important sources of information in the maintenance of borders – as the body is submitted to biometric scanning and other technologically mediated controls (Dijstelbloem et al., 2011: 5) (Ajana, 2013b: 90). More specifically, I will aim to show how mobile technology has a paradoxical role in the context of migration as a technology that unsettles the temporal, cultural and physical security of some citizens but also serves to secure and confirm feelings of ontological safety amongst migrants.

My analysis proceeds by reading and examining an archive of media reports about the camp from the BBC, *The Guardian*, Aljazeera and Gawker.com, alongside social media commentary from the Facebook page of Telekom HU – a German-owned telecommunications company with a local subsidiary in Hungary. My cultural analysis of



these media texts have been informed by my interview with a key volunteer and academic at the camp – Kate Coyer – who was responsible for the Wi-Fi set up there. These narratives about the migrant camp are further contextualized in relation to Hungarian politics. In the first section of this chapter I will outline various issues of definition and labelling of migrants; thereafter I will discuss what are considered to be two of the most dominant affects in the migration process, fear and shame. I will examine these affects as a way to set up my argument that the Hungarian government halted the journey of approximately 2,500 migrants at the Keleti train station as a way to make the so-called imminent threat of the migrant ‘other’ more perceptible to Hungarian citizens. I perceive the station to be a site of contestation, even a microcosm of the broader European political landscape, as migrants, the government, Hungarian citizens, university activists and the mobile industry struggle against one another around issues of connectivity. In the latter part of this chapter I will examine, through social media commentary, how mobile technology is at the core of this othering process as Hungarians protest the provision of free Wi-Fi to migrants. Some historical context is offered in relation to the rise of the Hungarian populist regime led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In addition, I will show how migrants, use the free Wi-Fi zones at Keleti station to create a heterotopia to counter the shame and inertia they experience.

### **Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

Within the field of migration studies, issues have arisen regarding the definition and labelling of people who migrate from their country of origin. Saskia Witteborn (2011a) and Roger Zetter (2007) have argued that labels are discursive and political tools, loaded with affective and socio-political valences. Often, but not always, categorisation arises out of bureaucratic necessity, where the label of ‘refugee’ is a way to ensure and enshrine human rights under the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951. But as Witteborn claims in her ethnographic studies of migration to Germany, the term ‘refugee’ is also a mark of resistance against associations of lack and neediness that have become attached to other labels such as ‘asylum seeker’ (2015: 7). She contends that the term ‘refugee’ therefore becomes a discursive tool in itself, used for political mobilization and action (Witteborn, 2015: 13). I find these issues of definition a source of unease, as the very need to categorise (or is it interpellate?) a person raises the question of what motivates and influences the formation of a category in the first place. More so, migrants are not a homogenous group that can be ‘captured’ or ‘labelled’ easily, but include people from different political, social, cultural, religious orientations and digital literacy levels (Gillespie et al., 2016: 2). With the knowledge that labelling is a

contentious issue, I adopt the rather broad term 'forced migration' from the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) glossary throughout this chapter as a way to define 'A migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes' (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011: 39). Following this definition I use 'forced migrant' or simply 'migrant' to refer to asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, development displaces, environmental and disaster displaces, smuggled people and trafficked people (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011: 39). As this chapter will also discuss, the regulatory category of 'forced migrant' is often questioned and resisted. These sceptical narratives tend to implicate mobile phones as markers that somehow nullify the 'genuine' needs of migrants.

However, it is important to stress that these labels have extended beyond bureaucratic necessity in problematic ways, especially where the migrant tends to be associated with undue separateness, even cultural 'otherness' that demands special needs. While the considerations of food, shelter, clothing and communication are essential in the context of forced migration, they are, at the same time, also essential human needs. Pointedly, there exists a tendency in the public discourse to turn considerations for migrants into an objectification or at worst a fetish. More so, there is the danger that the body of the migrant becomes a metaphor for 'an instrumentalised and interchangeable object' (Witteborn, 2011a: 13). For example, a collection of fashion items titled 'Design For Difference' by American fashion student Angela Luna offers oversized cape-like fashion garments for Syrian migrants that, once taken off the body, also function as a tent or a backpack (New-School, 2016). My concern is that this tendency perhaps inadvertently marks migrants as outsiders and becomes part of an unintentional process of othering. By contrast, an interviewee at a migrant centre in Germany remarks, 'I do not put asylum seeker or refugee or anything like that on my Facebook page or talk about it during chats as I am also something else. I want other people to treat me like a regular man, not a political problem' (Witteborn, 2015: 8-9).

In the context of technology, and mobile phones in particular, this consideration of unintentional othering is especially pertinent. As Koen Leurs claims, migrants' 'use of technologies is repeatedly distinguished from normative use through interpreting it as dangerous, foreign, exotic and alien' (2016: 24). An example of this distinction is a custom-designed emoji character set designed by a Dutch advertising agency as part of a project for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees using the hashtag #realpeople (SuperHeroes). I argue it is exactly the insistence that refugees are real people – where 'real'

is presumed to be a kind of same-ness – but somehow also in need of a special emoji set, that presents a contradiction in terms. My assertion is that examinations of forced migrants and their mobile practices should be done by *not* placing them in a separate category of mobile user. As migration researchers have noted, migrant centres are often filled with people who are checking Facebook, watching YouTube videos and sending emails, and that there is often nothing extraordinary about these media practices (Witteborn, 2014: 75). Forced migrants often experience long periods of waiting and this can mean there are often periods of listless internet consumption to pass the time. Perhaps then the challenge for media scholars is to not overstate migrant mobile practices as a point of so-called difference and therefore also as a way of further alienating migrants, but simply to say that mobile practices, while in and of themselves not unique, may well occur in unique and often extremely precarious contexts.

Broadly, this case study examines how mobile phones have become entangled with the process of migration. Indeed, as migration research shows, the majority of these journeys are enabled by mobile phones and so it cannot be denied that this technology is an intrinsic part of navigating certain migration experiences. Migrants use GPS on their phones to navigate sea and land crossings (Gillespie et al., 2016: 5); they use their mobiles to stay in touch with family back home (Witteborn, 2014: 75); they seek out new social networks in adopted countries (Harney, 2013: 542); use translation tools and access crucial legal and medical services (Gillespie et al. 2016: 5). However, while a mobile phone is often framed in this context as ‘a crucial resource akin to food’ (Wall et al., 2015: 2); the phone has also come to mark migrants as ‘inauthentic and undeserving’ (Leurs, 2016: 23). In this vein, internet memes circulate via online anti-migration groups that use the migrant mobile phone user as a way to discredit claims for asylum. The assertion within these groups is that victimhood and ‘genuine’ asylum claims are somehow at odds with those who can afford mobiles (Leurs, 2016: 16). Mobiles in the context of migration extend far beyond being simply tools, but rather perform as potent symbols of resistance and agency. The entangled processes of migration and mobile practice are complex and quite ambiguous, often resulting in sites of contestation, as this chapter will argue. As with previous chapters in this dissertation, my focus is not only on the technical affordances of mobiles but also places emphasis on the affective dimensions of the technology. The following section will examine specific affects, such as fear and shame, that are dominant in the migration process as well as in the literature on the subject.

## Shame and Fear in the Migration Process

In 2014 on a trip to Venice I was struck by a particular incident. A young African man walked past me in the middle of a small piazza. While I only had a minute or so to observe him I noticed how he avoided lifting his gaze from the ground. While I looked directly at him and our bodies passed each other quite closely, his gaze seemed to stick quite steadfastly downwards. His mannerisms seemed to indicate a level of purposeful inattentiveness; a measured disconnect. The word *extracomunitari* is often used by Italians to describe those outside the European community and the term has been further accentuated by increased encounters between locals and migrants (Harney, 2013: 3). This 'outsider' status was further delineated in 2008 when irregular migrants<sup>46</sup> were declared criminals by Italian law and liable to pay a fine of 10,000 EUR (Harney, 2013: 6). As Nicholas Harney claims in his study of African migrants in the city of Naples, the work of migrants is especially risky and their everyday existence is punctuated by precarity and uncertainty. One of Harney's interviewees remarks that 'Neopolitans don't really see us, and those who do I think, well, many are scared of Africans' (2013: 8). Indeed, a central theme in migration to Europe is the stigmatization that migrants endure, marking them as shameful or discredited from society (Bauman, 2016: 40). In *Strangers at Our Door* Zygmunt Bauman extends this notion of shame further, claiming that shame leads to acts of self-contempt and self-derogation amongst migrants (2016: 42). Indeed, shame often features in studies of migration not only as part of a process of stigmatization but also as a technique of control.

As Witteborn contends, shame is a critical shaping and formative force in migration (2014: 78). She articulates numerous instances of shaming in her examination of migrant centres in Germany and Hong Kong. Her focus on the institutional space of the asylum or refugee centre highlights the techniques of shaming and ultimately control that exist therein. For example, asylum seekers in Hong Kong were often made to share ablution and toilet facilities with little or no regard for issues of privacy and discretion. The case study further described an unhygienic practice in which male migrants were issued second-hand razor blades by the migrant centre (Witteborn, 2011a: 13). In both instances the body became a source of shame, as something objectified and disregarded, pointing to the idea that the

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<sup>46</sup> While no universal definition for an irregular migrant exists, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines the irregular migrant as follows: 'A person who, owing to unauthorized entry, breach of a condition of entry, or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country. The definition covers inter alia those persons who have entered a transit or host country lawfully but have stayed for a longer period than authorized or subsequently taken up unauthorized employment (also called clandestine/undocumented migrant or migrant in an irregular situation). The term "irregular" is preferable to "illegal" because the latter carries a criminal connotation and is seen as denying migrants' humanity (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011: 54).

body and embodiment are central components of shaming in the migration process. Specifically, as a technique of control and degradation, the 'asylum seeker body becomes a deindividualized object which is not entitled to privacy, dignity or health' (Witteborn, 2011a: 13).

Contraventions of religious customs and social norms surrounding modesty were other sources of shame in the migration process, for example in the mixed-gender computer rooms at migrant centres in Germany. Women, mostly from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, were often addressed directly and publicly by men, which made them feel ashamed (Witteborn, 2014: 74). This shame related 'especially when they imagined other people familiar to them observing them. Men also tended to talk loudly and sometimes gestured towards obscenities on their screens, disrupting the women's engagement with digital space and interpellating them into the male gaze and fantasies' (Witteborn, 2014: 78). Many women wanted to use the computer rooms in the migrant centre but their presence in this space alone was often associated with notions of promiscuity and deemed inappropriate by others in the centre (Witteborn, 2014: 79). In addition, migrant centres are often noisy, overcrowded, busy places with shared facilities, making living conditions stressful, with little or no privacy. In Germany, migrants live in centres for prolonged periods of time, even years. These centres become home for many migrants, even though the residents are not afforded any of the privacy or autonomy associated with a 'normal' home.

In one of Witteborn's studies a woman admits, 'I feel ashamed not to offer you any tea or food like we do back home for guests' (2011: 1148). Another woman comments that her children are ashamed to live in the migrant shelter and never invite friends home to play (Witteborn 2011a: 8). When migrants call their families back home they report feelings of shame, especially when their family has certain expectations. 'My friends and family think life in Europe is great. They don't want to believe how I live here and therefore I don't talk much about it. I am ashamed to still live in this small room in the accommodation, not having a job, not having money, not knowing whether I can stay or will be deported' (Witteborn, 2015: 11). In some instances migrants send selfie images with city skylines and brands in the backdrop as signifiers of excess in order to maintain the expectations of family back home that 'everything is okay', thereby avoiding the shame associated with conditions of living (Witteborn, 2017). Shame as described in these examples can be seen to collectively bind migrants in acts of discipline and codes of conduct. Shame as a powerful political and affective force also serves as an ordering mechanism, a way to create a hierarchy. As a potent affective force shame conditions the bodies of migrants into the institutional norms and

accepted forms of behaviour. Here, the unruly migrant body is conditioned, much like that of a prisoner, into patterned institutional rituals that diminish individuals and stabilize a collective body.

In addition to shame, fear is a dominant affective force that further regulates everyday experiences of migrants (Gillespie et al., 2018: 1). Fear stems from a number of sources, foremost the precarity of the migrant existence, where shelter, food and safety are not guaranteed. Furthermore, there is the constant fear of displacement, when asylum or refugee claims are rejected (Witteborn, 2011: 1152). Surveillance is also a major source of fear, especially as it relates to the migrants' country of origin. Surveillance as a perceived threat is more of a concern for Syrian migrants, as the country's primary mobile network SyriaTel is owned by President Assad's cousin (Wall et al., 2015: 7). Refugees claim that in Syria mobile calls are monitored by the state and that if a foreign call number is archived in a handset it can be cause for arrest (Wall et al., 2015: 11). Other migrants from China, Iran and Cameroon report similar feelings of fear of surveillance (Witteborn, 2014: 80). Further, lack of information is a cause of anxiety, where information can help migrants navigate away from difficult situations with the authorities or receive information about border crossings.

In this context of fear and scarcity, the mobile phone can be conceptually framed as a technology of precarity. Precarity as defined by Judith Butler 'designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (2009: ii). This sense of uncertainty is set against the kinds of support offered previously by the welfare state, indeed if such a welfare state existed in the first place. Precarity in the context of refugee journeys is multi-dimensional. Precarity relates to the status of the migrant as someone who is seeking asylum in a new country and whose capacity for movement and access to work and financial means is therefore severely restricted (Witteborn, 2015: 2). It can also refer to information, or what Melissa Wall and her co-authors articulate as 'information precarity' – a concept that describes the unstable and insecure access to particular sources of news and personal information (2015: 2). Wall and her co-authors' research amongst Syrian migrants in Jordan found that access to certain strategic information helped refugees avoid violence and surveillance by the state or police (Wall et al., 2015: 2).

More so, the entire migration journey is a strenuous and physically treacherous process. These journeys are often, but not always, navigated through mobile technologies. As the photojournalist Grey Hutton notes, 'Each refugee seemed to connect differently with

their phone, but one thing they all had in common was that they were terrified of losing theirs' (2015). If mobiles are used in the journey process they come to represent the precarity of refugees as they encounter issues of signal reception, sim card access and problems with charging the phone battery as scholars within migration studies have already noted (Wall, 2017) (Greene, 2017). In some camps like Zaatari in Jordan there is limited and sketchy access to mobile reception (Wall et al., 2015: 6). In Greece refugees have to stand outside of their housing containers (sometimes in the rain) to access the camp's Wi-Fi signal (Greene, 2017). Despite the numerous forms of precarity experienced by migrants, in the next section I want to suggest that mobiles are also part of the opposite process – that is, part of establishing feelings of security. This tension is what Gillespie and her co-authors refer to as 'a dialectical tension between the possibilities for benefit and harm for refugees' in the context of mobiles and migration (2018: 9).

### **Mobile Data and Surveillance**

Migrants and refugees are – as is the case with anyone who uses a mobile phone – subject to hidden processes of surveillance, often enabled through the applications and tools we use for our most intimate communication. Here mobile surveillance can take a number of forms: state surveillance, border surveillance, platform surveillance, as well as the intimate surveillance practices that ordinary citizens perform on each other in everyday communication. Forced migrants are perhaps more susceptible to all of these practices of surveillance. For example, during highly dangerous moments in the migration process, such as a sea-crossing, mobile-mediated surveillance and its associated visibility are highly desired by migrants due to issues of safety. This example is contrasted with other moments in the journey when migrants prefer to be invisible, for example at border crossings. In some of these instances border guards ask migrants for their social media passwords and review media activity to assess migrants' claims for asylum, political affiliation and religion (Wall, 2017). Indeed, an inherent paradox presents in these examples, as mobiles enable and support some parts of the migration process while also resisting and eroding others.

Surveillance is a major source of fear in forced migration, especially as it relates to issues of nationality. As already noted, surveillance is a perceived threat amongst Syrian migrants, as the national mobile network infrastructure is affiliated with the country's president (Wall et al., 2015: 7). Refugees claim that in Syria mobile calls are monitored by the state and that if a foreign call number is archived in a handset it can be cause for arrest (Wall et al., 2015: 11). For this reason some migrants have even opted out of using a mobile

phone at all (Wall, 2017). This issue occurs amongst other migrants from China, Iran and Cameroon who report similar feelings of fear of state surveillance (Witteborn, 2014: 80). I emphasise this form of mobile surveillance as it presents a particular organizational form, a mode of governance specific to the information age (Wood and Monahan, 2019: 2). This mode of governance and its associated relations of power have a direct bearing on affective mooring. To reiterate, affective mooring is defined as a binding force which is mobilised through mobile technology and which fixes people in differing positions of power. The process of data collection during migration – or the datafication of migrants -- is a highly affective act. Data collection for surveillance is a source of both fear *and* reassurance for migrants. This kind of affective bearing further accentuates relations of power which are directly tied to how and when migrants use their phones.

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***If you were light skinned, well dressed and did not speak Arabic, or if you could show a European or American passport, you could exercise a sort of first-world privilege — the police would usher you to the front of the express line, ahead of the migrants, mostly Syrians.***

- The New York Times *special report on Keleti station (Hartocollis, 2015)*

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### **Resistance and Heterotopias**

While mobile phones have been called technologies of precarity in the context of migration, they are also seen as tools of resistance or counteraction in that same context, as they form part of a process of re-balancing power relations between migrants and institutional and bureaucratic powers. More specifically these acts of resistance are techniques for migrants to unsettle news narratives and so-called authority voices concerning migrants' experiences (Wall et al., 2015: 10) (Witteborn, 2015: 9). These authority voices, often generated through camp administrators, the media and institutional authorities, tend to overshadow migrant narratives (Malkki, 1996: 386). 'Refugees suffer from a peculiar kind of speechlessness in the face of the national and international organizations whose object of care and control they are. Their accounts are disqualified almost a priori, while the languages of refugee relief, policy science, and "development" claim the production of authoritative narratives about



the refugees' (Malkki, 1996: 386). Migrant centres can be located outside of cities and, as such, migrants are often relegated to areas in the country separated from local communities by fences or agricultural land and isolated from the wider dynamics of the society they are hoping to join (Tyler, 2006: 194). To subvert or overcome this isolation, for example in Germany, migrants often use digital technology to learn German, to seek information on the asylum process and to socialise with friends on Facebook (Witteborn, 2015: 1-2). Similarly, mobile phones are intrinsically part of information sharing processes that can enable migrants to share experiences and, when needed, to also mobilise collectively. In sharing information about similar experiences migrants are afforded a way to recast themselves, outside of being seen as victims, as actors with agency (Witteborn, 2011a: 17). 'Virtual practices enable people who are forcibly displaced to position themselves legally, socioculturally and politically' (Witteborn, 2015: 6).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, mobile groups such those formed in WhatsApp can provide a form of stabilization, a feeling of being emotionally held during times of uncertainty and, as such, the virtual becomes a digital dwelling defined by a sense of safety and solidarity, albeit only for *some*. In a similar respect, Witteborn argues that cyber cafés and internet rooms in migrant centres enable a particular digital heterotopia for migrants where 'forced migrants can cope with physical isolation and social isolation and mobilize for political action' (2014: 73). However, she also argues that digital heterotopias that offer connection and information sharing are not immune to the dynamics of control that still persist through the conditions of institutions within which they operate and/ or refugee self-censorship (2014: 80). As theorised within urban studies, place can be understood less as a static object and more as a process constituted by sets of relations and interactions (Massey, 1991: 29). Similarly, Michel Foucault argues that we live 'in a set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed' (1997: 331). Foucault's claim forms part of a broader argument about a heterotopia as a counter-site, 'in which all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned' (1997: 332). Examples of heterotopias include prisons or psychiatric hospitals characterised by a presumed deviance, where those spaces are set in opposition to the 'normal', or accepted norms of society (1997: 333). By contrast a garden as a microcosm of the world is a sort of 'felicitous and universal heterotopia' (1997: 334). Foucault further highlights how time is a central characteristic of heterotopias, specifically as time can be found accumulated or assembled in histories, such as those archived in museums or libraries. Further, heterotopias are bounded by systems of

opening and closing that demand either a form of enforced entry in the case of a prison, or membership, ritual or permission to join (1997: 335).

In the context of migration, migrants can be understood as spatially constructed through bureaucratic labelling as well as assignment to heterotopias (Witteborn, 2011: 1142). Migrant centres are positioned as places of deviance, outside of the normal functioning of the society they are part of, but not integrated with. Asylum seekers are often figured as outsiders who pose a threat to the national integrity of a country and their illegal status makes them somehow deserving of exclusion (Tyler, 2006: 191). 'Strangers at our door are embodiments of the collapse of order ... of an order that has lost its binding force' (Bauman, 2016: 15). It is within this atmosphere of exclusion and so-called deviant heterotopia that mobile communication offers a space for counteraction and resistance, where, following Bauman, the virtual suspends the anxieties of life. The online world offers the 'promise and expectation of liberation from the discomforts, inconveniences and hardships' of life (Bauman, 2016: 104). Migrants find a heterotopic space that transcends any definitions of lack by being affectively moored by social interaction within their online community and contacts. I argue that this mooring takes place despite the institutional constraints that are placed on migrants' interaction with technology.

Migration as a process that is unsettling and often violent not only includes the movement of individuals and their belongings but is also accompanied by a shift in notions of identity and understandings of the past and future (Schaffer and Smith 2004: 6). 'Such dislocations of identity unsettle psychically experienced understandings of time (the before, the now, the possible future), space (the old place, the new place), subjectivity (the me I used to be and the me I am becoming), and community (the ones to which I used to belong and the ones of which I am now a member)' (Schaffer and Smith, 2004: 6). Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith point to the practice of storytelling as a way to navigate and cope with these new understandings of time, space, subjectivity and community. Specifically the authors claim that through storytelling some people are able to 'work through the political and social, psychic and embodied residues of trauma and loss' to establish new identities of belonging (Schaffer and Smith, 2004: 6). In Zaatari, a large refugee camp in Jordan, Wall and her co-authors encountered Syrians who stored photos of deceased relatives and family on their phones and, as such, carried with them the embodied proof of violence that they and their families suffered, as a way of making perceptible the suffering that had been dismissed or denied in official reporting (2015: 10). 'Phone cameras are used for "citizen witnessing" of

violence and harassment by authorities, smugglers and combat forces' (Gillespie et al., 2016: 9).

Considering these examples, mobile communication would seem to enable a certain type of heterotopia constituted through contact with friends and family, the sharing of stories of journeys and public posts on social media platforms. This heterotopic space is mobilised rather than constrained through affects such as fear and shame; it serves to temporally suspend people from the difficult past and their uncertain future; and it provides a sense of agency to people. I draw on these concepts – of mobile heterotopias and mobiles as agents of resistance – to develop my argument in the next section of this chapter. I suggest that a mobile heterotopia can be seen to emerge at Budapest's Keleti train station in September 2015 as a way to resist the affective force of public shaming.

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***I think about my country during the Second War ... We are going ... from here to America, and Austria and other countries. Every other country gave me money, maybe food and drink. I am Catholic...Islam, Jewish — I don't care. These are children, families. This is not normal. I am living here, and I am crying.***

*-Valeria Horvath, Hungarian commuter at Keleti as quoted in The New York Times (Hartocollis, 2015)*

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### **Keleti Train Station, Budapest**

Keleti train station is notable for its grand if not imposing architecture dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Inspired by other major European stations at the time, Keleti contains an assemblage of architectural styles – including Baroque, Gothic, Renaissance and Romanesque – that serve to create an impression of power and bureaucratic authority. Viewed from the square directly in front of the station, the 43-metre high entrance contains multiple towering columns, ornate glass facades and sculptures of deities and historical figures (see Fig.9). One of the side entrances to the station is replete with gilded marble columns and large-scale frescos by well-known Hungarian artists, depicting mythical scenes of powerful industrial processes enabled by railway transport. Spanning almost 17,000 square metres, the construction of Keleti station was completed in 1884 as a symbol of prowess for Hungarians during the nascent rise of industrial capitalism and a rapid expansion of the country's railway network (Molnár, 2001: 220). Built during the rule of the Austrian-

Hungarian monarchy, a prestigious hegemony in Europe at the time, the station emerged during a call by the ruling class for a renewed sense of Hungarian identity within the sovereignty (Molnár, 2001: 208). The station survived two World Wars, although still partially damaged, and therefore might be understood as a symbol of Hungarian resilience during periods of outside hostility. Declared a heritage building in 1984, Keleti station is located to the east of the centre of Budapest, hence its name: translated from Hungarian to English, it means 'Eastern Station'. Keleti is the busiest transport hub of Hungary, with 410 trains arriving and departing from it daily (Csáki, 2016). In September 2015 amidst an unprecedented forced migration of people from the Middle East to Europe due to the conflict in Syria, the Hungarian government issued a moratorium on travel. More specifically, many asylum seekers and refugees travelling by train from Turkey or Greece through the Balkans, transiting through Budapest to reach their final destinations in Austria and Germany, were suddenly stuck at Budapest's Keleti train station.



*Figure 9: Exterior views of Keleti station showing the upper and lower walkways and the main entrance to the station. (Photos: copyright Natalie Dixon).*

When analysing the migration process I am aligned with David Morley's argument that the choice of transport and the theories of mobility in this regard are highly pertinent. More specifically, the intersection of mobile media studies and studies of mobility is vital to understanding the migration process. I am particularly interested in Morley's claim that 'Transport choices are made in the broader context of our social and cultural identities and we have to consider questions of affect, emotion, and symbolism in this realm as much as any other' (2017: 86). As one Syrian migrant explains, travelling by train is by no means the easiest choice, as 'people [waiting for the trains] are so violent. They pushing each other, they hitting each other. If you stay in the line, if you respect yourself, you won't get on the train. You have to be violent. You have to push people. You have to be uncivilized. So, this is

a big problem'(Cameron, 2015). Indeed, as the previous chapter illustrates, differing scales of mobility exist where some segments of society are afforded more ease of movement over others. More so, as I argue in this chapter, mobility, especially in cases of forced migration, is co-constituted with mobile communication where mobile phones provide network capital to refugees that can be seen to enable increased capacity for movement. Here, network capital is defined as the capacity to produce and maintain those social relations which enable emotional, financial and practical benefit (Urry, 2012: 27).

John Urry goes as far as to claim that the 'entanglements of physical movement and communications ... have become highly bound up with each other, as contemporary twins' (2012: 27). In the context of migration, 'When refugees do not have access to local sim cards or reliable power supplies this technology maintenance impacts negatively on their network capital' (Gillespie et al., 2016: 32). According to the Hungarian government, the moratorium on travel at Keleti station was a way to enforce European Union law – whereby anyone who travelled into the Union had to do so with a valid passport and appropriate visa (BBC, 2015a). The stoppage meant that migrants were effectively stranded at Keleti (Connolly and Nolan, 2015). In the days that followed, the station remained closed to international travel and migrants were made inert, unable to travel further and forced to camp on the lower level of the station. The station became a highly charged, albeit static, affective node in a broader migration transport network. Many migrants with valid train tickets were frustrated by the travel ban and police patrolled the area as tensions rose. A line of police barred migrants from entering the main entrance. Migrants gathered in front of the station chanting 'freedom' and 'Germany' (BBC, 2015b).

The design of Keleti station is of significance, as I will discuss further in this chapter. Passengers can access the train station on two levels, the first is at street-level where pedestrians access the front entrance of the station. On this level pedestrians can glance down to the lower-level walkway where metro and train pedestrians also make their way to the station. It was here on this lower level that migrants created an informal camp, where the infrastructure consisted of a tiled floor and only partial cover from the outside elements. Between two and three thousand migrants, their baggage and belongings occupied almost the entire lower level of the station (BBC, 2015b). This area of Keleti station had two toilet facilities, ordinarily both require payment for use. One facility contained two basins and five toilets. Additional portable toilets were brought in. There was only one electricity charging point available for public use. One newspaper report described Keleti station as a 'defacto refugee camp' characterised by chaos and squalor (Hartocollis, 2015). Another journalist

summed up the scene as ‘the centre of the shitshow that has a country in crisis’ (Cameron, 2015).

Migrants tend to be defined through spatial terms such as transit, entry, return, stuck and isolated (Witteborn, 2011: 1143). In the process of migration – one intrinsically defined by its motion and the goal of reaching a particular destination – to be blocked and made inert is an emotionally painful and physically stressful event. More so, to be stuck in Hungary under the Dublin Regulation<sup>47</sup> meant that any claim for asylum may be examined in Hungary instead of Germany, which migrants wanted to avoid as this almost certainly meant they would be deported ‘home’ (Cameron, 2015). Keleti effectively became a place of ‘entrapment’ for migrants (Coyer, 2018). More so, many of the migrants stranded at Keleti station had little access to running water or clean clothes. Some people needed medical treatment, most were exhausted and others had depleted their monetary funds. Make-shift water outlets were made available and migrants were able to cool off and clean their belongings. Highlighting the shame that attached to the bodies of migrants in this instance, a national correspondent for *The New York Times* wrote,

When Ahmad Majid (30) saw the cool running water, he walked over and dunked his head under the stream, then drank deeply. It was the first day since leaving Macedonia about five days before that he had not put on a clean shirt. In Belgrade, he managed to find a pristine white shirt with the logo of the Serbian humanitarian organization that was handing out clothes. For this proud and fastidious man from Syria, not having a clean shirt to wear seemed a small sign of how arduous his trip here had been. (Hartocollis, 2015)

While the migrants were confined by police to the lower level informal camp of Keleti, Hungarian commuters were able to pass through a side entrance of the station to board trains (BBC, 2015a). Indeed, the station was filled with Hungarians travelling to local destinations seemingly with some sort of purpose and somewhere to go. There are very few waiting zones at Keleti station, in fact it is a place defined by transit with numerous escalators, train tracks and metro passengers. Even the station’s cafés are devoid of seating, opting instead for a take-away service or in rare instances standing space is offered to customers to eat. According to the neoliberal rhetoric of productivity and busyness as

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<sup>47</sup> The Dublin Regulation is a European Union law that determines which member state is responsible for examining asylum seeker claims; this is ordinarily defined as the first European Union member state that an asylum seeker enters (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011: 30).

desirable marks of success, to be seen waiting for prolonged periods of time tends to be considered as a wasteful and undesirable activity. At Keleti migrants were made to wait in full view of local Hungarian pedestrians who passed the camp as part of their daily commute. Shame circulated as migrants became part of a public spectacle. Mothers changed nappies on the street. One news report showed a small child holding a piece of paper that read: 'We are human, what about me?' (Guardian, 2015a).

The corporeal dimension of the refugee journey – as bodies are shamed, controlled and monitored – is significant. As Btihaj Ajana emphasises via Giorgio Agamben: the notion of a camp has problematic antecedent forms where biopower is exercised over bodies which have been stripped of their political and legal rights (2013a: 578). Further, systems of control, within which the body occupies a central place in refugee journeys, have been extended through technology as seen in biometric identification systems such as fingerprinting, eye retina scanning and facial pattern recognition at border crossings (2013b: 3). In these processes the figure of the asylum seeker accrues various undesirable qualities, such as disgust, anger, fear and mistrust (Tyler, 2006: 191). Moreover, as Morley argues in *Communications and Mobility*, there is a politics attached to the act of waiting (2017: 86). 'Articulated through a "productivist" discourse in which speed, hyperactivity, and multitasking are assumed to be the ideal state of being, "waiting" is, by contrast, understood as a temporal void (or regrettable aberration) of "dead" or "suspended" time' (Morley, 2017: 86). As an embodied corporeal experience waiting tends to be associated with 'a passive and acquiescent body' and seen to be a 'withdrawal from the world' (Bissell, 2007: 278). 'It is somehow "better", culturally, economically, or politically, to be mobile than immobile' (Bissell, 2007: 280). However, mobility is also contingent on the economic and social status of travellers, where concepts such as speedy boarding, priority boarding, or fast lane access come at a premium and those who can afford these premiums rarely have to wait. This accelerated mobility is often at the expense of other travellers who have to contend with their immobility while waiting in queues or transit spaces.

In this context of confusion, inertia and information precarity, the mobile phone is a crucial technology. Some migrants at Keleti station became the victims of scams at the station and in the process family members were separated and lost each other (Cameron, 2015). Families as large as 14 people travelled together, so staying connected on this journey required constant mobile contact. Without local Hungarian sim cards, knowledge of the Hungarian language or disposable funds to buy airtime, migrants were largely reliant on Wi-Fi as a way to maintain their network capital. However, at that time no public Wi-Fi existed

at the station. In response to this need, media scholar Kate Coyer from the Central European University<sup>48</sup> purchased hardware – partially funded by a crowdsourcing effort by Jillian York of the Electronic Frontier Foundation – and set up a Wi-Fi network named ‘FREE\_WIFI-PLEASE\_NO\_YOUTUBE’. The volunteers further provided a series of battery packs for charging phones. The Wi-Fi initiative was documented on a blog (Keleti-connected.tumblr.com) showing multiple volunteers walking around with mobile routers in backpacks allowing migrants access to the internet.

Coyer observed that the network was predominantly used for one-to-one or one-to-few communication mostly on WhatsApp, Skype and Facebook Messenger as migrants used these messaging applications to inform family members of their whereabouts. ‘People mostly wanted to talk to their friends and their family who were awaiting their arrival or were back home and to talk to people who were travelling and give them information about routes’ (Coyer, 2018). With access to data, migrants were also able to read trusted news sources in their own language; use translation and currency exchange applications; share information and plan routes using Google Maps – some at Keleti opted to walk to the Austrian border (Coyer, 2018).

Generally, most migrants arrive in Europe only with a mobile phone as a way to access valuable social media networks such as Facebook, which they use to ‘crowd source information – refugees share maps, contacts and advice in both public and private groups’ (Gillespie et al., 2016: 19). Many migrants use WhatsApp and Viber, which are considered secure due to encryption technology to ‘recruit fellow travellers, contact smugglers, report on their journeys and highlight opportunities and dangers’ (Gillespie et al., 2016: 19). Migrants often store important documents such as digital copies of their passport or identification on their mobile phones (Wall, 2017). Google Maps is used to navigate alternative routes, especially as the border crossings and border control become more restrictive (Gillespie et al., 2016: 19).

At Keleti, access to Wi-Fi became not only part of a communicative act, but also a political and emotive one that offered some form of agency, even resistance, towards the inertia and stasis migrants experienced. While the informal camp might be understood as a heterotopia of deviance to which the so-called unwashed and unwanted migrant body was relegated, I argue that the free Wi-Fi zone provided a counter-site, a heterotopia offering a sense of possibility and relief through mobile communication. In this sense mobiles also

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<sup>48</sup> A side note about the Central European University: In April 2017 the Hungarian government threatened to close the Central European University. Many critics of the government believe this threat was part of a larger government strategy to silence liberal voices within the Hungarian academic community (Kean, 2017).



functioned as spatial technologies, where they served to create new spatial practices or ways of resisting existing restrictions on mobility. For migrants this spatial practice often hinged on their network, as others gave tips and advice on border crossings. Therefore, the Wi-Fi zones at Keleti formed part of a communicative act of defence in the face of existential, physical and emotional insecurity.

Mobile phones enable an image and text archive of the migration journey, thereby offering a powerful collection of memories for migrants that help maintain transnational family relationships and intimacy (Gillespie et al., 2016: 25). In his photo essay of mobile screensavers on migrants' phones, Hutton commented that 'For some, their worth lay in storing photographs of the homes they've lost and the loved ones they've let behind; others were simply using them for practical things like navigating rickety boats towards Europe' (2015). One photo depicted a stock image of a mother and child as the screen wallpaper of a 16-year old migrant. He said, 'I chose this background because it reminds me of my mother ... this photo is my only way of staying in touch with my family and friends' (Hutton, 2015). In her research at a migrant camp in Greece, Alexandra Greene found that migrants often stored photos on their mobiles that depicted scenes of nature, especially wide-open spaces and the sky which engendered feelings of freedom, escape and calm (2017). Greene's assertion was that this affective image production and retrieval can be a coping mechanism for migrants who were confined to refugee camps and waiting for news or possibilities of moving on from 'here' (2017).

Mobile media artefacts (text, image, video) are complicated. They are a source of potential comfort as they conjure up and confirm feelings of safety and intimacy for migrants, but images and videos can also implicate refugees in problematic identity issues and country-of-origin stories with border police. Border police routinely confiscate phones at crossings to search through photo galleries and social media profiles for evidence. In some instances migrants who have recorded their journeys, especially the human rights violations they and others have experienced, can be negatively implicated with the police. These acts of 'civil witnessing', stored and retrieved via mobiles, leave traces of their journey and pose a serious threat for migrants (Gillespie et al., 2016: 9). This threat may explain why some migrants have opted instead for stock images, or the more benign images of nature and scenery, rather than family photos as a way to avoid being victimised by border guards. In Syria police regularly demand Facebook passwords at check points to establish migrants' allegiances (Gillespie et al., 2016: 29). In the following section I will expand on how the

process of othering and the subsequent affective atmosphere of shame developed at Keleti station, in part, by offering some socio-historical context to this Hungarian case study.



Figure 10: Photos of Keleti station at night showing the lower level of the station where migrants were camped (September 2015) (Photos: copyright Mauricio Lima).

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***'In Europe, they're treating us like ISIS did, beating us up. Either take me to Germany or just send me back. I don't care anymore. Fingerprint me and get me out of here.'* At this, Mr. Saadoun started weeping and had to cover his face. Another migrant standing next to him flung his arm around Mr. Saadoun's neck and gave him a big kiss on the cheek to try to comfort him.**

-The New York Times report on Keleti Station, September 2, 2015

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***Are you going to give this help to those who are legally crossing the border?  
Maybe this service is [only] for illegal border crossing?***

- Comment on the Facebook page of Telekom Hungary

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### **Making the Migrant Perceptible**

In 2016 the Hungarian government announced plans for the construction of a fence along the 177 km southern border with Serbia and Croatia, to slow down the process of migration (Guardian, 2016). Conflating the figure of the migrant with the terrorist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán claimed, 'Immigration and migrants damage Europe's security, are a threat to people and bring terrorism upon us' (Guardian, 2016). In that same year, Orbán's populist-nationalist Fidesz government rejected a European Court of Justice ruling that Hungary and Slovakia should accept their countries' compulsory quota of migrants as issued by the European Union (Byrne, 2017). The Hungarian government held a national

referendum to gauge public opinion on refugee relocation in 2016. The central message of the government's information campaign leading up to the referendum succinctly summed up their position on migration: that migrants pose an imminent threat to the Hungarian people. The Facebook page of the Hungarian government, various billboards, radio and online advertised the official campaign messages. These messages included: 'Did you know that since the beginning of the migrant crisis, more than 300 people have died in Europe in terror attacks?' and 'Did you know that since the beginning of the migrant crisis, harassment towards women has steeply risen in Europe?', as well as 'Did you know that the Paris attack was carried out by immigrants?' (BBJ, 2016). In a research survey conducted in 2016 by the Pew Research Centre, Hungarians were found to associate migration with terrorism, more than any other European country surveyed. The same survey found that 76 % of Hungarians believed that hosting refugees increased the likelihood of terrorism — the highest rate among 10 countries sampled (Poushter, 2016). Indeed, 87% of Hungarians supported Orbán's decision to build the fence (Bauman, 2016: 32).

'In the current Central and Eastern European debate, "populism" usually refers either to emotional, simplistic, and manipulative discourse directed at the "gut feelings" of the people (Krastev, 2007: 59). In this spirit of emotional appeal, Orbán is the 'strongman' that rallies the anxious class and promises to protect them (Bauman, 2016: 49). He seals the border, builds fences and sounds the alarm against migrants (Bauman, 2016: 88). In this process Orbán strips migrants of respect and protection and labels them as threats — shifting the focus from questions of ethics and morality to questions of security threats and crime prevention (Bauman, 2016: 86). In Orbán's view, migrants and migration undermine the nationalist ideals of an 'ethically, culturally and linguistically homogenous population' (Bauman, 2016: 63). 'The populists of today have a passion for their own community, for those who are just like us' (Krastev, 2007: 61). This theme of homogeneity and its associations with national pride are key points for consideration for 'what is at stake' in the context of Hungary.

Central and Eastern Europe is experiencing what has been described as a moral panic. Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev describes this phenomenon as 'the feeling that the world as you know it does not exist anymore; you have so many vast changes that people cannot orientate themselves and they are very much in a position to overreact' (2018). I want to suggest that this moral panic is related to the notion of Hungarian national identity and, at the risk of condensing centuries of Hungarian history to make my point, I want to emphasize one important theme here, that is, of foreign occupation in Hungary. More accurately, I argue

that Hungarian identity has been forged through centuries of national defence against foreign occupation. In the first instance this occupation can be traced back to the Ottoman rule of Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Later, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Hungarians battled the Hapsburg Empire and this occupation lasted until the 19<sup>th</sup> century only to be followed by Soviet occupation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which lasted until the Hungarian republic was announced on the 23 October 1989 (Molnár, 2001: see Chronology) This history of occupation may further contextualize the defensive stance of many Hungarians towards the decision making structures of the European Union as an outside form of governance. More so, this defensiveness finds form in massive territorial fences and the closing of borders, to keep migrants from entering the country. Here Hungarians emerge as a precariat who are fearful of 'losing their cherished and enviable achievements, possessions and social standing' (Bauman, 2016: 15). At the same time Viktor Orbán reinforces his role as a protector of national values, of what it means to be truly Hungarian, cementing his image as the strongman politician.

In addition many Hungarians perceive their democratic institution to be at stake. By this I refer to the perception amongst many European transition regimes<sup>49</sup> that their democratically elected governments are not afforded choices by the European Union with regards to decision making, for example on migrant quotas (Krastev, 2007: 61). The Fidesz-led government of Hungary often plays to this perception, as evidenced in their campaign slogan in the 2018 national election: Hungary First. In addition, the rejection of the migrant quota by the Hungarian government is supported by certain right-wing media narratives that disavow the severity of forced migration. In these narratives migrants are framed as economic opportunists rather than forced migrants. This narrative is germane to the focus of this dissertation, as migrants are often framed in this vein in relation to mobile technology. As Koen Leurs writes, news headlines and social media tropes commonly question Syrian refugees who arrive in Europe carrying smart phones (2016: 16). One such headline from an Internet meme that circulated in 2015 claimed: 'Nothing Says Traumatized Refugee Like a Grinning Selfie Taken on the Latest Samsung Phone'.

In the case of the border fence and the stoppage at Keleti station, the aim of the authorities appeared to be the restriction of mobility and movement of migrants. The role of government shifted from being the provision of infrastructure and networks of transport to the 'function of ... a valve, modulating the mobility regime' (Morley, 2017: 81). This act can be seen as more than simply restricting movement, but also as a process of making the

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<sup>49</sup> By 'transition regimes' I refer to those countries in Central and Eastern Europe which transitioned from communism to democracy after 1989.

so-called threat of migrants perceptible to the Hungarian public. The rhetoric of mass migration as an uncontrollable 'influx' or 'flood' of people became realised as migrants encountered a bottleneck in their journey and were forced to camp en masse at the station. The Hungarian government made migrants perceptible, parading the deviant, unwashed Other for people to witness. The migrant, now visible (and numerous) became 'the imaginary figure of an alien or external collective "other"' (Balibar, 2005: 25). At the same time this other was 'reified' as an object of domination and knowledge, and became "fantastic" as a threatening double, or an essential enemy, when the self receives its identity from the relationship established with the other' (Balibar, 2005: 25).

The figure of the migrant was constituted and shaped by the so-called imminent threat migrants posed, 'brought into the awareness of the common citizen' through 'the media spectacle, bureaucratic labels and heterotopias' (Witteborn, 2011: 1155). This threat fuelled right-wing political rhetoric whereby politicians could promise the restoration of order. Through what can be perceived as a manipulation of affect – where the presence of migrants generated anxiety and fear – politicians could introduce a particular siege mind-set and logic for protection and defence of the country. This emotive atmosphere tempted voter empathy for the restoration of order (Bauman, 2016: 17). Indeed, governments were 'not invested in allay-ing their citizens' anxieties', they were interested instead in amplifying the 'anxiety arising from the future's uncertainty and the constant and ubiquitous sense of insecurity' (Bauman, 2016: 30). In this affective atmosphere of fear and anxiety the leading Hungarian telecommunications company, Telekom HU, a subsidiary of the German telecommunications company Deutsche Telekom, announced the provision of free Wi-Fi at Keleti station.<sup>50</sup> On the 7 September 2015 the company wrote on their Facebook page: 'Our company is trying to help with its own tools. Now that the locations of the transit zones are known, we'll start building free Wi-Fi. We hope that refugees can start to use the service as quickly as possible, which will help them to communicate, to obtain information. We also provide power distributors to make sure charging phones don't cause difficulties'(TelekomHU, 2015).

More than one thousand comments appeared after the announcement was made on Facebook, some congratulating the company on the offer, while many others offered negative feedback. One user welcomed the initiative, 'It's a very good idea, finally a company that is acting according to European values! #Respect' (TelekomHU, 2015). Echoing the government's narrative of threat, another user wrote, 'Well, if it goes on like this, Hungarians

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<sup>50</sup> It is unclear whether the company ultimately provided free Wi-Fi to migrants at the station.

have to get out of here. Thank you Telekom for letting them stay in touch with the terrorist centers. When they shoot at us from every direction, we'll remember who helped them to get their orders' (2015). Casting doubt on the need for the service, another user commented, 'Refugees and poor, but they have a full phone! They could buy a mobile internet with euro' (2015). Many users asked, 'I also use the internet for contacts. Why don't I get it for free?' (2015). One Facebook user provoked the company by asking, 'Why don't you give them a phone for free??' Telekom HU responded: 'According to our information, they [migrants] usually have a phone - as a single tool of communication -, but they can't use it without the basic power and wifi. We wouldn't be credible if we didn't help them ... we posted a few weeks ago to "connect Europe"' (2015). Angry responses followed: 'Telekom HU you will never "connect" Europe. Never! Europe doesn't have to be connected, it's not broken...'. The Telekom responded, 'To help homeless people, we don't think it's unethical, especially after a marketing message, when we said, "we're connecting Europe". We don't talk politics, we install wi-fi stations' (2015).

These extracts of dialogue from the Telekom's Facebook page show how the figure of the migrant was not only conflated with terrorism but also with mobile networks. The 'issue' of communication became politicized as a determinant of the level of threat posed. Acts of connection took on much broader scope beyond that of Keleti station and can be perceived as a metaphor for the larger issues of the European Union and the tensions and fissures that existed in this sphere of community. Anger and frustrations that arose from migrants and mobile communication can be understood as symptomatic of the deeper issue at stake, that of national identity and self-protection.

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***Shaded by a concrete barrier, the group sat on a delicate, persimmon-colored blanket, embossed with gold flowers. Like many Syrians, they maintained a sense of decorum by removing their shoes before sitting on their blanket. Yes, perhaps they could rent hotel rooms in Budapest, the friends said. But at this point, if they spent their money on hotels, they would have none left to move on. They said they resented being called eyesores and being blamed for trash. This was not their true nature, they said.***

- The New York Times report on Keleti Station, September 2, 2015 (Hartocollis, 2015)

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### ***Don't Hungarians need help?***

*Comment on the Facebook page of Telekom Hungary (TelekomHU, 2015)*

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## Unproducing Difference

In this chapter I have presented a case study that intersects concepts of mobility, migration, affect and mobile phones, examined within a very specific cultural, political and historic context. Keleti train station as a critical node in the migrant journey can be perceived as an affectively charged point for political action and a site of contestation for migrants, who are made perceptible as the inert and chaotic other by the Hungarian government. Here, migrants 'are embodiments of the collapse of order' (Bauman, 2016: 15). As migrant bodies were made visible they were also paraded and shamed by the Hungarian government. As Judith Butler argues, 'politics and power work through regulating what can appear, what can be heard' (2004: 147). At Keleti station, normative power could be seen to work through the dominant narrative of the dangerous migrant, as a way to make tangible to Hungarians the alterity they feared. Authorities produced a visual spectacle of migrant bodies in the process of othering, where the spectacle relied on affective registers of chaos, disruption, even litter and dirt, to produce its desired effects. This issue of visibility is complex in migration journeys, as migrants vacillate between wanting to be visible (to aid agencies and coast guards in times of danger) and invisible (at border crossings) during their journey. Indeed, many migrants at Keleti preferred *not* to be seen in Hungary to avoid the Dublin Regulation and risk their claim to asylum; in this way Budapest was merely a transit point in their onward journey to Germany or Austria.

I want to sustain this idea of visibility of migrant bodies and expand on the deeper ethical reason for doing so. For Butler, drawing on the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, 'what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avoid or avert' (2004: 130). I argue that the precariousness of migrants at Keleti constituted an ethical demand, it assumed a responsibility. As Butler claims, this demand is about being 'awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself' (2004: 134). The call to responsibility for the bodies and lives of others – in particular, precarious others who lack means of making their own voice heard – is significant here. For the Hungarian government, the migrant spectacle at Keleti offered a tactical manoeuvre, a way to manage the optics of the migrant crisis. Migrants represented 'that sought-after bottom located even further down; a bottom that may render one's own lot less than absolutely demeaning' (Baumann, 2016: 14). However, the precariousness of migrants was not universally read as a threat to security as the authorities intended; it also constituted a demand for empathy and dialogue. Indeed, those academics from the Central European

University understood migrants' needs for a voice and visibility at a crucial time, by means of the preferred medium of communication – mobiles. As this chapter argues, mobile technology can thus play a role in actively 'unproducing difference' (Witteborn, 2015: 15), where the migrants at Keleti were able to strategize and reorganise their routes, make their plight more widely known and warn other migrants. In this way, I posit that the attachments between migrants and their mobiles can be framed not only in the context of precarity but also within a space of ontological security or even resistance. It is also by choosing this case study that I make my own intentions and mediation clearer: to probe further, that is, to ask better questions firstly about why we write in the first place, and secondly, about how mobiles can be read in the context of ethics and responsibility. Indeed, if left unscrutinised and unchallenged, the practices of controlling and 'othering' migrants can simply become normalised (Ajana, 2015: 68). Framing the migrant question in terms of ethics and responsibility perhaps offers some resistance towards the well-trodden narratives of fear-mongering and presumed migrant threat as claimed by populist regimes.



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

At the start of this dissertation I made a concerted effort to try and avoid the sort of pessimism I perceived in the extant mobile theory. Here I refer specifically to the foundational mobile research at the turn of the millennium, in which I saw a tendency amongst theorists to create causal links between mobiles and the disintegration of interpersonal relationships. In general, I saw these same kinds of thoughts and arguments reflected in contemporary media commentaries on technology, tarnishing popular mobile discourse with somewhat ‘ugly feelings’ – a term I borrow from the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai. Ugly feelings describe the less theorised but nonetheless compelling emotions such as irritation, paranoia and anxiety that circulate between bodies and that speak to different registers of ideological and sociohistorical problems that exist (Ngai, 2005: 3) My aspiration was for developing a more uplifting mood and tone in which to speak about mobiles, one that promised a different future for the field of mobile studies by placing emphasis on affect theory as a reaction to the somewhat depressing-sounding literature on the topic. Despite the fractious and tense discussions that characterise affect theory, I perceived this field of research to be a critically productive one, even uplifting, offering me a way to examine emerging technological kinships and adapted forms of sociality. In this vein I first titled this dissertation ‘Mobile Story: A Travelling Cultural Romance’, which alluded to my excitement, the dynamic quality of affect, the stories that mobiles inspire and the close attachments that I perceived to exist between human and non-human bodies. My writing was inspired and supported by the literature of an emerging group of mobile researchers writing around the time of Facebook’s launch in 2006, whose research focused on intersecting mobile theory with concepts of embodiment, affect and the senses.

My initial title often drew favourable comments at postgraduate symposia. After all, what is not to like about romance, especially one that travels? It was at these same academic symposia, however, that I most often felt a sense of unease. This feeling emerged as I listened to my academic peers who presented graphs and tables of data and spoke confidently about equations in their research. By comparison, my dissertation seemed to refuse a neat methodological calculation and resisted being reduced to a succinct one-line description of methodology. At the same time, my dissertation always did seem to resonate or at least demand a reaction from people. Whenever I mentioned my subject to anyone, they would usually reply with a story, often unprompted, sharing personal feelings and anecdotes about their experiences with their mobile phone. Mostly, people berated themselves for how they had lost control over their phone habits. They also recounted angry

tales about how invasive mobile messaging groups were. Some described their disappointment at how their kids refused to play outside anymore, preferring the company of their iPhone instead. Mobiles, as I have come to critically evaluate through the writing of this dissertation, illicit strong affective and embodied reactions from their users and these are important signifiers of larger structural issues.

It must be said though that these kinds of passionate and embodied reactions are not unique to mobile phones. Indeed, the affective tones and atmospheres that characterise stories of telephony were noted in a short story by Walter Benjamin in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, simply titled 'The Telephone'. In this short essay, he recounted some of the same kinds of embodied reactions to the landline telephone that seemed to have travelled onward to its contemporary equivalent, the mobile phone. He wrote about the telephone that 'not many of those who use the apparatus know what devastation it once wreaked in family circles. The sound with which it rang in the afternoon, when a schoolfriend wished to speak to me, was an alarm signal that menaced not only my parents' midday nap but the historical era that underwrote and enveloped this siesta' (2006: 49). Benjamin wrote about early disagreements with switchboard operators, not unlike contemporary stories of arguments between users and mobile network operators. I particularly enjoyed Benjamin's account of his father's full body involvement in the cranking of the telephone, 'nearly forgetting himself in the process. His hand, on these occasions, was a dervish overcome by frenzy' (Benjamin, 2006: 49). This account, and especially Benjamin's literary way of delivering these different scenes, reinforces for me how mobile phones are positioned within a much broader technological lineage, where affects served then, as they do now, as markers of various forms of inter-generational politics as played out, for example, in the domestic setting. It is interesting to look again at these narratives and be reminded of what exactly has changed in our relationship with telephony, going beyond the obvious changes that were introduced with the mobile phone – that is, new technical affordances and a closer proximity to the human body.

Throughout the process of writing, my feelings and responses to mobiles have guided my argumentation and choices, and helped me to notice certain moments in mobile culture. In this way, affective responses, anecdotes and social media commentary amongst others have provided me with narrative leads to develop theories and concepts about the technology. I have allowed my own affective participation – through selection and interpretation – in this research process to become a way to think through many of the case studies contained within this dissertation. Yet trying to eschew the 'ugly feelings' that

seemed to attach to mobile theory was much more difficult to achieve than I had anticipated. Indeed, on the completion of this dissertation I noticed a dark turn in my subject matter – as if a slightly ominous shadow was being cast over my writing where feelings of anxiety, paranoia and shame dominated the case studies, despite my initial aspiration to veer away from them. It was around this time that I changed the title of this dissertation, in part to reflect this transition. Perhaps these particular feelings are somehow more resilient and prevalent than others. More significantly though, and apropos to the question of what has changed in our relationship with the technology, I am faced with additional questions: why do these ‘ugly feelings’ persist? How are they technologically sustained and to what end? Can feelings such as unease, discomfort, shame or anxiety or even the fear of missing out, be read as signs of discrepancies in power rather than signs of a so-called invasive and harmful technology?

This question of power differentials has led to one of my foremost conclusions in this dissertation, namely that an emphasis on affect in mobile practice can offer mobile studies a way to connect the technological, the personal and the political. Or, as Larissa Hjorth and her co-authors claim, mobiles are part of ‘the multiple seams that bind and unbind the personal to the political and the intimate to the public’ (2018: 68). This connection was made tangible during a conference I attended on forced migration and media in Bilbao organised under the auspices of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) in 2017. I consider this conference and my time spent in Spain as a key turning point for my research – especially regarding how I conceptualise affect. I listened to impassioned talks from media theorists about the centrality of mobiles in the journeys of forced migrants. Their arguments positioned mobiles as affective lifelines during periods of extreme danger and familial isolation. I observed researchers’ active engagements with the affective dimension of mobile practice that included their own deeply felt responses towards the technology and those using it. These scholars seemed to immediately grasp the significance of affect and mobiles in the investigation of forced migration and their work was imbued with a kind of intimacy and sensitivity.

The opening keynote address by Marie Gillespie was particularly poignant, as she described the kinds of terror and dangers that are entangled with mobile practice during forced migration. She discussed how some migrants were punished, tortured or even killed for the content discovered on their phones by border police. She also described her work at the European Commission, where she consults on issues and rights of refugees. Gillespie recounted how when she woke in the morning she checked her WhatsApp messages for

details of migrant deaths at sea. At other points in her day she made appeals to the European Commission for a more sustainable response to the needs of migrants during the European refugee crisis of 2015. What struck me about this talk and its affective register was that researchers are deeply engaged on a personal, emotional and corporeal level with mobiles and that this engagement shapes their research agenda and the kinds of questions that they pose. More so, with the influence that researchers seem to have on regulatory bodies as Gillespie describes, however small, changes to migration policy are directly at stake here.

I have reflected on this talk in the context of my own way of working – a narrative unearthing which requires a similarly attuned and reflexive mode of listening to stories about mobile practice. This narrative-based mode of working has reinforced how I understand the construction of knowledge. What I mean by this is that mobile technology seems to demand an active engagement from researchers on a felt, lived, sensory, physical and emotional level and this is an implicit part of how knowledge about technology is produced. My point is that these felt, emotional and sensory experiences shape and exert pressures on knowledge agendas. Moreover, in the anxious atmosphere of global populist movements that foreground affects and their manipulation in the pursuit of political power, questions regarding the relationship between feelings and media technologies become especially pertinent. As William Davies argues in *Nervous States*, ‘we need to get better at listening to [feelings] and learning from them. Instead of bemoaning the influx of emotions into politics, we should value democracy’s capacity to give voice to fear, pain and anxiety, that might otherwise be diverted in far more destructive directions’ (2018: xviii). As a media and cultural studies scholar I am focused on the practices of media as a way of life, and how that way of life is an expression of certain values and meanings. Through the three case studies presented in this dissertation I have examined how mobiles play a role in the establishment and reinforcement of a collective ‘we’ through distributing, archiving and even amplifying the affects that shape this collectivity and its political identity. In the process, sites of contestation have been identified, ranging from the precarious working environment of the mid-1980s in the U.S, to a neighbourhood amidst rampant crime and a train station where competing forces vied for a share of voice.

In the past six years of writing this dissertation I have often evaluated how I articulate my own participation in my research process. More accurately, my participation is tied to questions about the kinds of demands that are placed on me as a researcher. My sense of this more meta-level questioning of my place in the research process relates to the ethical imperative to tell stories that might not be pretty or uplifting, but that tells us something

about bodies, and more accurately how some bodies have come to matter more than others (Butler, 1993: xi). Even though I have not addressed ethics explicitly, I have arrived at the conclusion that it is the ethical and political implications of affect within mobiles studies that have concerned me most in this dissertation and that I argue offer further scope for study.

It is also this guidance-through-affect that has informed my choice of case studies. Each case study has demanded a response from me, as they related to displaced actors, issues of legitimacy, threats (real and imagined), submerged narratives or a form of silence. In this way I mounted a challenge to the displacement of strangers who supposedly do not belong to a neighbourhood, while at the same time interrogating the concept of the neighbourhood (Chapter 4). I questioned the silencing of migrants that took place through acts of shaming (Chapter 5) and the gendering of mobile technology (Chapter 3). Each of these case studies emerged through specific 'attractors' (Blackman, 2015: 33) – a text, object, event, news story, comment – that set me on a trail that would help unsettle and perhaps even recast some of the assumed narratives about our relationships with mobiles and each other.

### **Affective Mooring**

In the three case studies in this dissertation affective mooring has been used as a conceptual tool for examining mobile technology as it relates to ideological concerns of gender, race and acts of othering. I specifically sought out moments where affects – predominantly fear and shame – tended to spill over, became amplified by technology, and stuck to texts and bodies. All three case studies, in some form or another, presented a site of contestation between individual actors, groups or communities. The case studies were aligned in emphasising issues about freedom of movement and its relationship to larger structural concerns such as conditions of work, or border privileges and access control. Importantly though, the concept of affective mooring was developed through the case studies in different ways.

In the first case study, the early adoption of mobiles phones in the United States was framed as an instance of affective mooring, as mobiles offered early adopters a sense of security and of being psychically 'held' – premised on masculine notions of busyness and productivity. This feeling of security was further insinuated with American ideals of middle-class success and power. While this case study examined mobile adoption – as it was forged in the public imaginary according to the ideals of Western white males – these were still the early days of this technology, and the locative and more advanced spatial capacities of mobiles were indeed still to come. The spatial capacities of mobiles were addressed in the

second case study of the neighbourhood. Here I capitalised on contemporary usage of smartphones as spatial technologies that define the dimensions of the neighbourhood, as a form of digital dwelling. This spatial aspect was crucial for me as I turned to the existing discourses in urban geography related to flows of people to further develop the concept of affective mooring. The role of mobiles in addressing the production of a neighbourhood as a space for *some*, was a central part of how I advanced my concept. Thus, affective mooring developed beyond being about a feeling of collective presence and shared purpose. Instead, in line with relational theories of media, affective mooring was constituted through an exchange with the environment – through the noises, movements and scenes of the neighbourhood.

The final case study, while sustaining the themes of freedom of movement and the spatial capacities of mobiles, also added two vital dimensions to the concept of affective mooring. Firstly, the Keleti case study implied an ethical response to the plight of migrants, in a way that turned my writing further inward on me as the researcher *and* agent of change. In this context Koen Leurs and Kevin Smets have even referred to a separate category of ‘social justice orientated researchers’ working on migration studies, whose focus extends beyond technophilic accounts of migration to include a focus on race and gender (2018: 8).<sup>51</sup> Secondly, I argued in this case study of Keleti station that mobiles offered a sense of agency to the migrant community. In other words, I posit that the Wi-Fi network and the subsequent communication it enabled, formed a type of heterotopia for migrants that constituted a form of agency, no matter how small, to refuse the shaming and othering they experienced and gave the community a way to mobilise away from their position of stasis.

Most significantly, the concept of affective mooring addressed what I perceive to be a gap in mobile studies, namely, how to attend to the affective dimension of mobiles in a very specific way – as both ideological and relational technologies. My intention was never to present a definitive concept of affective mooring; indeed this is still a concept-in-the-making that invites further application and definition. My aspiration is to see how other media scholars might further adopt affective mooring as a conceptual tool for examining ideological concerns in our relations with mobiles.

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<sup>51</sup> To provide some contextual detail to this notion of social justice research: as of July 2018 the Hungarian government criminalised the act of aiding any illegal migrant in that country KINGSLEY, P. 2018. *Hungary Criminalizes Aiding Illegal Immigrants* [Online]. The New York Times. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/world/europe/hungary-stop-soros-law.html> [Accessed 5 November 2018]. In addition, the Central European University, under pressure from the Hungarian government, announced its re-location to Vienna. ECONOMIST. 2018. *The Central European University is Moving to Vienna* [Online]. The Economist. Available: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/12/05/the-central-european-university-is-moving-to-vienna> [Accessed 24 December 2018].

Affective mooring can be understood as a historically shifting concept that is contingent on the contexts of particular moments in mobile history. In this way, affective mooring is less of a static concept and more of an ever-evolving one that is constantly fashioned and refashioned by social and technical forces. Considering this contingency, I would also like to explore the idea that affective mooring, as a conceptual tool, is remediated through mobile phones themselves. Here I am referring to the very material form of the device itself. The first portable handheld device in the United States, the DYNA T-A-C 8000X, weighed almost a kilogram and measured 25cm in height including its bulky aerial (Motorola, 2019). Promotional videos often featured a businessman using a briefcase to transport the DYNA T-A-C. It was impossible to store the phone in clothing pockets, but was instead placed much like a display piece, standing upright on tables, ornamentally occupying space and demanding attention. The DYNA T-A-C's form resonated with burgeoning yuppie culture that characterised the 1980s. In this way the phone can be perceived as actor with noticeable weight and presence invoking a deliberate sense of importance amongst users.

Arguably, contemporary mobile devices primarily made from glass, occupy a slightly more fragile, but no less elevated status amongst users. Phones can easily crack, break and splinter as they tumble from our hands. Notably, glass is also imbued with an ambiguous sense of transparency. Sarah Kember writes in *iMedia* that glass 'is promoted as an intelligent skin, covering and protecting the data subjects, objects and environments of imedia by making everything (equally) clear, open and transparent' (2016: 32). To a degree, the material form of many mobile devices -- as a seemingly transparent (for whom?) and somewhat fragile object -- shapes and influences mobile subjectivity. I am referring to mobile-mediated subjectivities, characterised by fear and paranoia, that emerge in relation to new forms of information flows, including breaches in personal mobile data security and pervasive online surveillance. This moment in the cultural history of mobiles, punctuated by a lack of clarity about the privacy of information, might allow for some speculation about future embodied relations with technology. Glass, with its allure of efficiency, responsiveness, beauty<sup>52</sup> and calm becomes the conduit for affective mooring, by inspiring feelings of containment and order.

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<sup>52</sup> At the launch of the iPhone X in September 2017, Phil Schiller, Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing at Apple Inc. invited the audience to admire the glass and stainless-steel design of the phone. While various close-up visuals of the glass body played in the background, Schiller remarked, 'It's beautiful to look at, incredible to hold ... look how the glass and stainless-steel form a continuous surface from front to back, there has never been

Familiar mobile gestures such as sliding, pinching and swiping over glass invite questions about emerging subjectivities, as human bodies become further entangled with mobile interfaces. This future may entail wearable devices with even closer proximity to the body, such as the (never-quite-launched) Google Glass eyewear piece; or an instance where the device itself recedes into the background and information is commanded through bodily gestures of swiping air and pointing to interfaces that appear on various glass surfaces. This future, where technology seems to recede in its form, but not in its practical or ideological effects, presents a pretence of unmediation where, like glass, technology is 'making itself seen and felt precisely in the attempt at self-erasure' (Kember, 2016: 42).

### **Writing Process**

In my process of writing, noticing and reflecting on affective aspects of mobile culture I had to actively guard against trying to command affects. What I mean by this is that affects are not 'things' that, when treated with enough analytical rigour and attention, suddenly reveal an insight. I agree with Ngai that it is not through analysing but rather through mobilising affective concepts that we can extend the range of socio-political dilemmas that we can investigate (2005: 8). It is within this domain of affective research that feelings merit attention and prompt ethical discussions about why they are pertinent and relevant in the first place. Indeed, the connection between mobile-mediated affects and larger structures of power are central to this dissertation. As my case studies show, there are tangible links to be drawn between fearful, paranoid and shamed bodies and the kinds of structural relationships of power, systems of hierarchy and subordination that exist in society. It is perhaps in this way – through an affective reading (or re-reading) of the technology – that a shift can take place within mobile studies, one that grants more emphasis and relevance to the feelings that tend to persist in practice and the discourse.

While there have been some guiding forces in the writing of this dissertation – such as aspects of ethnography and phenomenology and concepts of embodiment – each chapter has been uniquely influenced by certain factors and written within different contexts and timeframes. I mention timeframes because I think they are of particular relevance, as the temporal span of each chapter did not necessarily hinge only on my level of academic

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anything like it' YOUTUBE. 2017. *Apple Special Event 2017 - iPhone X Introduction* [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zku26BQNkh4> [Accessed 15 May 2019].



acumen at the time of writing: rather, the contents of each chapter seemed to demand a particular attentiveness and thus duration. I have come to understand that a mutually constitutive relationship exists between writing as a process and the affects that mobilise it. This process entails more than merely giving a sense of paranoia or creating an atmosphere of fear but requires rather taking time in the writing process, to encourage a felt and lived experience of those affects from the writer as well as the reader – and to allow it to develop into an argument.

For example, Chapter 3 was written, albeit intermittently, over five years. Initially the focus of this chapter seemed clear – that is, the chapter dealt with how mobile adoption had been shaped and influenced within the context of emergent neoliberal subjectivities (and vice versa) at the end of the 1980s. Yet this chapter took many revisions and I often thought about abandoning it. On reflection, these kinds of tensions I felt may have had something to do with the complexity of the early human entanglement with phones and its concomitant gender and power dynamics – which took effort to analyse. More so, this difficulty might be attributed to the normalisation of certain ways of being within neoliberal culture that relate to male bias, the acceleration of time and the always-on productivity that is facilitated by mobile phones. In other words, our mobile subjectivities – originally driven by masculine bodies that are ‘always on’ – have become somewhat taken for granted in popular discourse. The quote I used to preface Chapter 3 sums this sentiment up very succinctly and is worth repeating here to underscore the point: ‘I use my phone when I’m on the train to feel like I’m doing something. It’s better than doing nothing’.

Chapter 3 thus re-affirms the constant feeling of personal lack that the neoliberal system engenders, perhaps most especially for women, whereby any sense of value and achievement is to be found in the ceaseless activities of work. Another anecdote always springs to mind when I review this chapter. A few years ago, in a co-working area of a popular London hotel, I overheard a woman make calls on her mobile to friends, acquaintances and colleagues. It appeared that she was a freelancer, who, as part of her daily routine, was reaching out to her professional network for the prospects of job offers and new ideas. I was in close earshot of these conversations and I remember that I was left with a sense of her anxiety as she seemed to seek and confirm her value and place in a precarious network of people working remotely. Her affective mooring – that is, a sense of containment in the precarious world of freelance work – was affirmed through reaching out to others like her. Her establishment of a ‘we’ that was ‘in this together’ took place in – and was mediated through – her mobile phone.

The writing of Chapter 4 was a very intimate process, as it drew on many of my own fears and apprehensions of crime and otherness in my birth country of South Africa. It was written in a unique context compared to the other chapters, as I have felt and experienced first-hand much of the dynamics that I described in the neighbourhood group chat. I worked through many of the historical problems and dilemmas, including notions of ‘the black peril’ that I was enculturated to perceive to exist while growing up in suburban Johannesburg during apartheid. The conclusion to Chapter 4 set a blueprint for me in terms of how I would like to pursue further mobile research. It was very tempting to just label the neighbourhood group chat in this case study as hostile and openly racist, but indeed the larger challenge was (and still is) to pose better questions about existing concepts and constructs within society, such as the neighbourhood, through the lens of affective mooring. The point is that a more nuanced approach to this case study – one deeply embedded in the cultural, social, political and historical dynamics of the neighbourhood – rendered a richer and more textured conclusion. Notably, this chapter eventually produced one of the key concepts of this dissertation, affective mooring, to describe a sense of grounding and even ontological stability that mobile technology offers to people amidst so-called precarious situations. More so, this case study has confirmed my approach to affect as a process that although biologically grounded in the body, is continuously shaped, influenced and constructed by history, culture and politics.

Chapter 5 was written in a very short space of time as affective mooring gave me a conceptual tool for addressing questions of subject positions and dynamics of power. Here, I was concerned with the somewhat scant literature that dealt with shame in the context of mobile studies. Arguably, this area of research is still quite fledgling and poses an issue for the field of mobile scholarship. Shame has received a fair bit of focus in cultural studies; here I refer to Elspeth Probyn’s ‘Writing Shame’ (2010), *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005) and ‘Everyday Shame’ (2004) or Sally Munt’s *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (2007). While shame is a somewhat prominent affective force within mobile culture – as evidenced by the many reports of slut shaming and mobile bullying (see Kofoed, 2018) – theories of shame within mobile studies have been slow to emerge. Returning once more to my experience in Bilbao and the ECREA conference that took place there, I was struck by the valuable contributions that can be drawn from the intersection of the fields of media and migration studies – and here I refer to Saskia Witteborn’s writing on shame amongst migrant and refugee communities and its relationship to technology – that influenced much of my thinking in this chapter. Media scholars working on migration, including Witteborn and

Gillespie, tend to privilege the affective affordances of mobiles and the subjectivities (including shameful ones) these produce *above* the usage patterns and platform politics that seem to still preoccupy much of extant mobile theory. The point is, my affective perspective as a critical component of my research within media studies has been informed and constructed through interdisciplinary conversations with scholars working in migration studies. This has allowed me to work through this particular literature gap, especially concerning the subject of shame in mobile studies.

Similarly, much of my influence in the development of the concept of affective mooring was drawn from the field of urban geography, especially the writings of Mimi Sheller and John Urry. Urry and Sheller's argument for the dialectical relationship between – and not opposition of – concepts of mobility and stability offered me a way to think through mobile technology as a spatial technology offering both a sense of unabated movement and ontological mooring and stability. Many of the case studies and the vignettes I used to theorise and conceptualise affective mooring were derived from observations I made in trains or transit zones such as an airport lounge or a train station. These moments, crystallised in the vignettes presented in Chapter 2, presented a chance for me to better contextualise and analyse media practice in everyday scenarios. I felt as if I reached a conceptual limit within affect theory when it came to analysing these aspects of mobility and movement that were so clearly part of my research. In this respect, mobility studies provided some much-needed theoretical tools in my concept of affective mooring.

Again, at the risk of labouring the point about the virtues of interdisciplinary conversations, I was very much influenced by the writings of Valerie Walkerdine, especially her work on affective practice in communities. Her work, based in the psychoanalytic tradition, allowed me to better understand aspects of ontological security enabled through mobiles. I borrowed her idea of a community forged through affective practices as a way to theorise how mobiles create a sense of 'being in this together' in different groups. What I aim to show with these aforementioned examples is that seemingly disparate fields have been linked in this dissertation – including media, affect and urban geography – by foregrounding the felt, sensory and embodied aspects of mobile practice in my research agenda.

As noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, the cultural archive of mobile phones, as a relatively new technology, is still in the making. Many of the stories that constitute this rich and vibrant collection are yet to be told. Affects will continue to enliven this burgeoning mobile archive for further research. Excitable queues of consumers will no

doubt continue to form outside Apple stores ahead of new iPhone releases. Rage will continue to burn as stories emerge of new kinds of mobile data privacy issues that users will have to grapple with. The affective entanglement of bodies (even dead ones)<sup>53</sup> with phones will continue to deepen. And the sometimes complex but sometimes amusing affective landscape of mobiles will continue to fascinate me. As I write this, the Unicode Consortium, the body that governs the universal rendering of emojis to handsets, has announced that their latest character set will include a female supervillain. The future is bright.

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<sup>53</sup> For more on this theme of death and the after-life in mobile studies see *Haunting Hands: Mobile Media Practices and Loss* (2017) by Larissa Hjorth and Kathleen M. Cumiskey.

## Epilogue

*After writing this dissertation, as I suppose happens with many PhD students, I still seek out articles about mobiles that relate to my research questions. I have kept a blog of all these articles and I often browse through them to keep track of the myriad of ways in which mobile-mediated affects are finding new forms of expression and producing different subjectivities. For a while I have been following the story of a band of Spanish men who were part of a WhatsApp group (self)titled Wolf Pack. In the group the men shared stories, sometimes also video footage, of their night-time activities. In one instance a few of the men in the group posted their rape of a young woman at a Spanish festival. The footage made it into the public domain, which led to their arrest and the footage was subsequently used as evidence in their court trial. The men were sentenced to a short jail term and released shortly afterwards resulting in a large outcry from the Spanish public. I was struck by one recent article that claimed that the men, upon visiting a public swimming pool, were recognised by other bathers and chased from the facilities.*

*I mention this story because it underscores a feeling I have of how increasingly our sense of self and sense of community are formed through mobile media. What I mean by this is that the mediation of experience – in this case revealing how toxic practices of masculinity<sup>54</sup> are affirmed and even stabilised through a mobile chat group – are given potent new dimensions through mobiles. This example is also a very interesting case in point, as I see certain life events as being imbued with media qualities. Acts of violence are transformed into things that travel between digital networks accruing different affective qualities such as disgust and disbelief. An act of violence becomes an event that we watch on phone screens in our home, as if it was a public broadcast. Foremost, the public experiences the rape-event through media and the public are ethically activated and mobilised through technology. More so, in this process ‘we’, as the public, are directly exposed to the darker recesses of society, producing ugly feelings that move ‘us’ to alienate others. This response is not without problems, in cases of vigilantism the power of mobile media can just as easily perpetuate undue violence. But what I find interesting about this example is the ethical demands that are placed on people, as a form of awareness of the closeness of violence and injustice towards certain bodies that reveals a different sense of the world. This kinds of mobile mediation brings public concerns of safety and the unjust into your*

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<sup>54</sup> Here I refer to Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt’s argument that ‘hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men’s engaging in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting’. CONNELL, R. W. & MESSERSCHMIDT, J. W. 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking The Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), p.829-859.

*pocket, your phone, impacting your eyes, ears, senses, body. Researchers, as people who are also part of public media experiences, can offer a sustained scrutiny of media practices that can reveal how new relations and levels of accountability are becoming established. This accountability pertains not only to the structures of community as members shame and alienate offenders but also in a legal sense as mobiles are more routinely included as evidence in courts. It is perhaps at this moment that an agenda for future research emerges: that is, to develop affective vocabularies and concepts in mobile studies that can better articulate the shaping of communities, their new forms of accountability and the implications these will have on society.*

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## Appendix: Chapter 4

### List of Source Material

#### WhatsApp Conversation

This chapter was inspired by neighbourhood A's WhatsApp group. The message archive was dated from 19 November 2013 – 1 September 2015. Two extracts from this group appear in this chapter. The names of members have been changed to protect the privacy of residents.

#### Newspaper extracts

NDABA, B. 2007. Gang Tortures Woman with Boiling Water [Online]. IOL.co.za. Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gang-tortures-woman-with-boiling-water-351212> [Accessed 6 April 2016].

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## **Blogs**

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## **Online Resources**

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## Appendix: Chapter 5

### List of Additional Sources

My analysis in Chapter 5 proceeds by reading and examining an archive of media reports about the informal migrant camp at Keleti station from the BBC, *The Guardian*, Aljazeera and Gawker.com, alongside social media commentary from the Facebook page of Telekom HU – a German-owned telecommunications company with a local subsidiary in Hungary. My cultural analysis of these media texts has been informed by my interview with a key volunteer and academic at the camp, Kate Coyer, who was responsible for setting up the make-shift Wi-Fi at Keleti. I have listed these sources in this Appendix to be more explicit about my method of working – which does not proceed by direct observation but rather uses a textual engagement with these media sources.

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### **Interview Material**

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### **Social Media**

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