The "urban" in "urban media"
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> *With instant electric technology, the globe itself can never again be more than a village, and the very nature of city as*
> *a form of major dimensions must inevitably dissolve like a fading shot in a movie.*
> *(McLuhan, 1964: 378-379)*

Many terms have been coined that tie together digital media tech and the city, like "urban new media", "urban informatics", the "media city/hybrid city/smart city", and so on. By now the point is well made that the city has become an amalgam of the physical and digital. The inverse proposition however has so far received less attention. Why this focus on the city in understanding new media?

'The city' is a notoriously difficult notion. Therefore before answering this question it is helpful to first identify several 'levels' on which the city is usually conceptualized and understood.

1. The city is a politically and juridically defined legal entity. The city in this view is a municipality with its own jurisdiction, political constellation, elections, and so on.
2. The city is a geographical entity with particular spatial, demographic and economic characteristics. The city in this view is a spatial concentration that occupies a wide territory, has high population densities, and a large number of inhabitants. Cities often have a well-defined center (or several centers) and a periphery, and are composed of distinct neighborhoods. Many cities are characterized by distinct functional areas (living, working, recreation, shopping, traveling, meeting) and spatio-economic clusters (e.g. industrial areas, leisure zones, parks, marketplaces, electronics shops, red-light districts, high-end fashion streets, financial districts, etc.), and by being tied to (often global) webs of economic and cultural flows.
3. The city is a sociological entity harboring specific ways of life. The city in this view is characterized for example by the heterogeneity of its people, anonymity and life among strangers, a mode of dealing with differences, weak social ties at the local level, physical and social mobility, migration, ethnic clustering, fostering many (youth) subcultures.
4. The city is an environment that stimulates a range of - usually extreme - experiences at the cognitive and emotional levels. The city in this view is constituted by particular phenomenological experiences and frames of mind, fostering a sense of place that is chaotic, fast, mobile, dirty, liberating and tolerant, exiting and tempting, lonely, dangerous, competitive, a pressure cooker for experimentation, creativity and innovation, identity play, causing sensory overload, etc. Mental experiences like these are frequently seen to stem from factors grouped under point 2 and 3, like high density, large number of people, mobility, heterogeneity.
5. 'The city' is a mediated and discursive term that is used in staggeringly diverse ways. The city figures in a variety of media as backdrop or actor; from sermons and books, to cinema and television, to video games and as the design metaphor for website navigation and organizing online communities. Thanks to an array of mediations the word 'urban' may be associated with, or used in reference of, for example musical genres, dress codes, speech patterns, street cultures, food consumption, alternative or deviant lifestyles, refinement and civilization, a worldy outlook, the latest trends, artificiality and disingenuousness; and carries racial connotations, and connotations of (technological) modernity and futurism. Rhetorical opposites then include nature, rural life, folk, simplicity, natural life, authenticity, normalcy, lack of refinement, backwardness, etc. In addition, metaphors and analogies are used widely to understand the city: "the XX city", or "the city as YY". These may pertain to urban economic functions, like Mumford's 'courttown', 'commercetown', 'coketown' (Mumford, 1961: 446-474), spatial form and mode of production, like Sassen's 'global city' (Sassen, 1991), mental and poetic aspects, like Raban's 'soft city' (Raban in: Hannerz, 1980), or even the lack of any local specificity, like Koolhaas' 'generic city' (Koolhaas, 1995).

Hopefully this provides a somewhat clearer view of the multifaceted notion of the city. Yet it leaves open difficult questions of complexity and delineation. More than ever, cities are caught up in webs and networks and exist on multiple geographical scales, ranging from the local to the global. Spatial or social definitions tend to simplify the city by taking a static and localized 'container view' instead of understanding it as a dynamic networked entity. Attempts at definitions in terms of phenomenological experiences make it hard to rigidly delineate what precisely is meant by the city. Indeed some argue that urban modes of life and attitudes have percolated down into all but the most remote areas. What then exists outside of, or opposite to the urban? Nature, rural areas, suburbia? How can we avoid using 'the urban' as a vague catch-all notion? Despite these concerns about the lack of a clearly definable urban essence, we

are a bit better equipped to answer the question how the city is connected to digital technologies and why this matters for our understanding of new media.

Theoretical argument: the technology-urban nexus in academia and art
There is a long-standing western academic tradition of theorizing the city in relation to media and technology (e.g. de Lange, 2010). Early modern thinkers at the beginning of the 20th century questioned how (at that time) new media technologies were shaping city life. Simmel and Benjamin for instance saw media technologies and the city as dialectically connected (time schedule, script-image, photography, film). They understood media technologies in the context of an emerging metropolitan capitalism. For both, media and the city were not radically disjointed realms. Media and the city constitute one another. Urban life is a mediated life. Later on from the 1960s, media scholars like McLuhan, de Sola Pool, Virilio and many others studied the effects of electronic media such as the telephone on urban spatial patterns and behaviors (McLuhan, 1964; de Sola Pool, 1977; Virilio, 1997). They concluded that technologies acted as *substitutes* for urban life. The assumption was that being in a place no longer matters, since ICTs enable people to communicate with anyone and find information from anywhere. The city as a location would be obsoleted by 'placeless' media technologies.

Since the mid- and late 1990s scholars again realize that ICTs and the city are intimately intertwined and constitute one another instead of being substitutes. Early internet research was founded on two ontologies, the real and the virtual, that were fundamentally different. Much current (mobile) media research questions this separation. The mobile phone and other technologies are used in everyday 'real life' situations, no longer just from a fixed location at work or home, like the mainframe and PC. Mobile media shape the uses, perceptions, and ultimately also the designs of urban places (e.g. McCullough, 2004; Graham, 2004; Shepard, 2011). Similarly, media art has turned from early 'net art' explorations of a distinct online realm to more situated and performative locative media practices, frequently harking back to a Situationist legacy of providing ludic critique on urban consumerist spectacles (e.g. Paul, 2008; Tuters & Varnelis, 2006; Tuters & de Lange, 2013).

Empirical argument: the urban in new media history
We live in an urban world. According to United Nations Population Fund statistics, the majority of people since 2008 live in cities. This is predicted to grow to 60% in 2030 (UNFPA, 2007: 6; observe that statistics define the city as under point 1). Cities act as hubs for global flows of information and communication. ICT networks tend to convergence materially and physically in 'global cities', branching out further into national, regional and local centers. The very embodied and spatial infrastructures needed for digital media have their basis in urban settings.

From the early days on digital culture has evolved from urban culture. While Silicon Valley itself might not be the most metropolitan of places, it is part of the larger San Francisco region. This has been the hotbed for experimentations in techno-utopian counterculture (Himanen, 2001; Turner, 2006). Furthermore, digital media are part of a predominantly urban consumer culture. New technologies often are designed, developed, marketed, launched and initially spread in urban settings where urban populations tend to be a little more affluent and have a consumption-oriented lifestyle.

Much policy attention and money has gone to strengthening the relationship between cities and technologies. Since the late 1980s/early 1990s a 'creative clusters' and 'creative cities' policy agenda has been drafted (e.g. Castells & Hall, 1994; Landry & Bianchini, 1995; Florida, 2004). Richard Florida's tremendously influential notion of the creative class, based on the 3Ts of Talent, Technology, and Tolerance, was distinctly urban. Since the mid-2000s it has been succeeded by a 'smart city' business, policy and design agenda that is aimed at improving services and livability through technologies and supporting infrastructures like urban labs, and is rapidly gaining foothold in cities worldwide (e.g. Hollands, 2008; Caragliu, Del Bo & Nijkamp, 2011).

The city is the prime locus of contemporary tech-driven tendencies in society. These can be summarized under the 3 Cs of control, consumption, and capsularization (de Lange & de Waal, 2013). First, since the September 11 WTC attacks, a wide range of new control technologies have been deployed in urban settings with troubling lack of public debate. Under the aegis of safety and security, urban landscapes in many western nations have become thoroughly militarized with CCTV and software algorithms that detect suspicious behavior or known offenders, data-driven intelligence, (unmanned) arial vehicles, etc. (Crang & Graham, 2007; Crandall, 2010). Second, the techno-urban landscape caters to an intensified consumer culture, through in-store marketing, narrowcasting, customer loyalty cards, location-based services, and again big data. Third, the ubiquitous use of personal mobile devices allows people to retreat into their own cocoon, at the expense of engaging with their surroundings or other people. These three developments give rise to critical questions about mediated urban life.

At the same time we must be careful with such claims. As we have already seen under point 5 above, there is an often implicit discursive relationship between technologies and the city. 'The urban' is used as a rhetorical device to conjure up images of modernity. For example, Japan and other East Asian countries are often portrayed as trailblazers

of a projected near-future techno-urban society (Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda, 2005). The choice of studying media practices in the city means that we also must be critically aware of an implicit rhetoric of modernity (quite similar to studying media among young people).

Pragmatic argument: strategic research & design agenda [unfinished]
- Research into new media and urban culture is closely connected to the designing disciplines (architecture, design, media tech, etc) and the creative industries. This is a field with many potential crossovers between academia and industries. Much current funding (national, European) goes to these crossovers.

- Ethical imperative: responsibility of humanities and social sciences to help advance urban new media beyond tech-centered 'solutionism' to contribute to truly livable and lively cities.

Conclusion [unfinished]
All this is not to deny or exclude from analysis the profound ways in which ICTs have shaped rural life (e.g. Fisher, 1992). It is a matter of bringing a specific focus and context into the research and debates about new media. Seen in this light, a plethora of discussions that belong to the canon of media studies - e.g. from visual culture and immersion to the public sphere and privacy - need to be revisited in relation to theorizing urban life. For example, I have looked at how cities have been the classic settings for highly reflexive identity constructions and expressions, and tied this to an investigation of how mobile media shape identity construction in playful ways (de Lange, 2010). …

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