

From always on to always there: Locative media as Playful Technologies

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Introduction

For quite some time the main influence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in our everyday life was captured by the phrase “anyplace, anytime, anywhere”. It was said ICTs weaken or even obliterate the importance of time and physical place (the “local”) in social relations formerly based on physical proximity and face-to-face interactions (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 308). In response to the ‘old’ new media paradigm, recent work in the field of mobile media shows that digital ICTs do not necessarily lead to placelessness. Often the mobile phone is tied to physical ‘real’ places and thus contributes to “a sense of place” (Nyíri, 2005, p. 17-18). The question “where are you” is heard more frequently than ever.

A few examples from literature illustrate this. The mobile phone is often used to coordinate physical encounters via the practice of “micro-coordination” or last minute arrangements. Thus, the phone is used as a prelude to actual face-to-face meetings (Ling & Yttri, 2002, p. 139). Most people are very aware of which situations are appropriate for making a mobile phone call, and what kind of topics are acceptable in that particular place. Physical places and local contexts still matter (Höflich, 2005, p. 160). The mobile phone helps to create a sense of nearness with other people. Familiar people are always in the pocket (De Gournay, 2002, pp. 201-204; Fox in

MobileLife report, 2006, p. 13). Nearness is created not only in communication between people but also in our relations with technologies themselves when the phone itself becomes part of the physical body (see for instance Fortunati, Katz, & Riccini, 2003, pp. 1-11). Mobile phones are used as an mp3-player or a Walkman, adding an aural layer to ones' experience of the physical places one is dwelling in or passing through. They offer an intense experience of one's environment through sound (Bull, 2005, p. 175; Bassett, 2005). Many migrants frequently make calls and text with family and friends overseas, maintaining a sense of 'home' (Paragas, 2005, p. 241).

Recent developments in mobile telephony include the convergence of global positioning system (GPS), multimedia capabilities, and online publishing software in portable devices. According to a Gartner forecast, by the end of 2010 almost 40% of mobile devices will be GPS-enabled (Gartner forecast, 2006). Telecom operators and content providers in turn are searching for the hen with the golden eggs in the promising field of location-based services (LBS). Such a 'locative turn' in electronic media is evident in the rapidly growing market for navigation. Another development is the rise of 'locative media' as a (artistic) practice that examines and visualizes the connection between media and physical space (see Tuters & Varnelis, 2006, for a history and analysis of locative media). And a third domain is that of locative games.

Digital games used to be largely set apart from the physical domain. Although digital games could be portable (e.g. PSP, Nintendo DS), involve bodily gestures (e.g. Wii), or be played at certain locations (e.g. in arcades), the play element of these games was confined to their own game spaces. Hand in hand with location-based technologies in mobile (phone) devices, we see the growth of location-based mobile games (LBMGs), which are games that are not purely played on screen, but also depend on the players' positions in the physical world. LBMGs involve the players'

interactions with particular locations as part of the game, so it actually matters where the player physically is. They often—though not necessarily¹—involve the use of portable digital technologies as interfaces between the digital and physical realm. LBMGs and urban games are rapidly growing in popularity over the last few years. Well-known examples, mostly created by media designers and activist collectives inspired by the Situationists², are *Botfighters*, *Can You See Me Now?*, *CatchBob!*³, *Pac-Manhattan*, *I Love Bees*, and the many ‘geocaching’ games—GPS based fox-hunting—played worldwide. Locative games as an emerging genre also appear to be picked up as part of “city-branding” strategies, to put a city as a creative and innovative center on the map (to use a spatial pun). This has occurred in such cities as New York, Perth, Amsterdam, London, Rome, Bristol, Tel Aviv, and Budapest. LBMGs blur and break “the traditional boundaries of games” (Montola, 2005, p. 1).

From looking at these developments of integrating locative technologies in mobile devices, one is tempted to state that physical locations will become even more important. This chapter aims at understanding recent developments in mobile and locative media. I depart from the well-known premise that each medium brings about its own particular spatial experiences and socialities⁴, to address two questions: (1) Considering the intimate relationship between mobile media and physical place, what are the implications of locative media for our experience of place and mobility? Since locative media involve mediation of ‘real places’, are we perceiving our movements in physical space in a different way? I will discuss how two characteristic elements of locative media—hybridity and immersion—shape mobility. (2) If our sense of place and mobility changes, what happens to social co-presence? I will argue that the way we imagine nearness to other people changes due to the pervasive character of mobile technologies. The line of analysis will center around the concepts of play and game

and the light they shed on these questions. My argument is that in order to understand the influence of locative media we have to understand them as playful. I will use Dutch locative media ‘playground’ *Bliin* as a case study to explore the above questions.

***Bliin*: A locative playground**

Bliin (www.bliin.com) is a locative platform that enables users to map their experiences of places by taking pictures and sharing these with others via the Internet (*geotagging*). *Bliin* users can also share their location and movements with other people (*social proximity*). They need a GPS receiver either integrated into the phone or a standalone device communicating to the phone via bluetooth. Registered users then install a Java program on their mobile device, which allows them to log in and automatically send geographical coordinates to the *Bliin* server in realtime over a data connection. *Bliin* users can capture photos with their phone camera (in the future also audio, video and text), attach descriptions and tags, and upload these images to the *Bliin* server. GPS coordinates are automatically attached to the published photo. The picture appears as a geographically positioned image or ‘geotag’ on the *Bliin* web interface based on Google Maps. Such a geotag is called a share. The main interface of the *Bliin* application looks like a radar that scans for proximity of both shares and other *Bliin* users. Via this interface users can navigate to shares in the vicinity. Comments on shares can be made via both the mobile interface and the web interface. The creator of the share who has logged in will receive an instant notification on the mobile and web interface of any new comments made. Users themselves decide whether their position, movement, and shares are publicly visible, restricted to friends, or private. There is a feed option to see the latest shares posted.

Taking the above description into consideration, the question is: can *Bliin* be considered a game? The terms *play* and *game* are often used one-on-one with Roger Caillois' concepts *paidia* and *ludus* (Caillois, 2001, originally published in 1958). Caillois (2001) separates four kinds of games: competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo (p. 12). With respect to how games are played, he distinguishes *paidia* (spontaneous, impulsive, joyous, uncontrolled fantasy) from *ludus* (absorbing, rule-governed, for its own sake and amusement, involving skill and mastery) as poles of a continuum (Caillois, 2001, pp. 27-35). Frasca (1999) points out that a game differs from play not because it is rule-governed but because it has a result. Games can be won. Play (*paidia*) has no predefined winning plot. Yet as soon as a player defines a goal for himself it becomes a *ludus* (Frasca, 1999, p. 2, 6). In the case of *Bliin* there is no end to the game. *Bliin* cannot be won. So *Bliin* is not a *ludus* in the strict sense but tends towards *paidia* or play.

Why does *Bliin* belong to the domain of play at all? In some respects *Bliin* is similar to the many types of location-based social software or recommendation services out there such as Jaiku, Whrrl, DodgeBall, Loopt, and so on. Yet other than these applications that have a defined purpose ("find the best restaurant in my neighborhood based on ratings by my friends"), *Bliin* does not have a clear aim. There is no specific purpose in *Bliin*, besides the one you create for yourself. Johan Huizinga (1955) says one of the most important characteristics of playing a game is that it is "free" in the sense of not being a need or task in order to achieve something else (p. 8). Huizinga (1955) is best known for his claim that playing takes place within the confines of a 'magic circle', which separates play from ordinary life (p. 19-20). In recent work it has been pointed out that play, and pervasive games in particular, may blur the boundaries of what constitutes the magic circle (e.g. Nieuwdorp, 2005;

Montola, 2005; Rodriguez, 2006). Nieuwdorp argues that as game interfaces shift from static screen space to more mobile interfaces, clear-cut boundaries between non-play and (free) play, and between play and games, are transformed into porous membranes (Nieuwdorp, 2005). According to Montola, pervasive games expand the spatial, temporal and social boundaries of the game. “[A] pervasive game is a game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play socially, spatially or temporally” (Montola, 2005, p. 3). And Rodriguez (2006) argues how in experimental game design “[t]he location of the magic circle is no longer taken for granted; it becomes the very subject of the game” (Rodriguez, 2006 p. 9). As a locative media platform, *Bliin* has all three of the characteristics Montola gives of a pervasive game. In the following analysis we will see how *Bliin* expands spatial, temporal, and social boundaries. We will also see that these boundaries are not completely abrogated, however “porous” these “membranes” may have become. They are still present in some form. Following Rodriguez and others it will be argued these boundaries even have to be discernible in order to turn the use of this locative platform into a playful activity by which meaning is given to places and social proximity. So *Bliin* resides somewhere in between non-play and a true game. That is why I consider *Bliin* a ‘playground’ for spatial and social exploration. On this playground itself little games may occur. This ambiguity makes *Bliin* a useful case to illustrate how locative media influence the experience of mobility and co-presence.

Expanding spatial boundaries: Hybridization

In recent studies mobility is understood as “meaningful movement”. Rather than being a displacement between point A and point B, and therefore wasted time, mobility itself must be seen as possessing certain meanings and values. Movement is

the dynamic equivalent of location, a position in abstract space, while mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place, a location imbued with meaning and power (Cresswell, 2006, p. 2-3; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

How can a locative platform such as *Bliin* change the way we perceive places and mobility? From the perspective of everyday reality, locative media are augmenting places and movements with additional layers of information and meaning. Players who participate in *Bliin* share their presence (I am online now), proximity (I am here), mobility patterns (I am going this direction), and personal experiences of certain locations (I am seeing this). Through the act of creating multimedia content, tagging, and sharing personal experiences of places and routes, users create additional informational elements for other users to see and act upon. Conversely, taking a view from within, the digital space is augmented by movements in the physical world. Real world information and experiences are added to the digital space and made accessible via the web interface or via the application running on the mobile phone.

The term augmentation may suggest that one type of space is the primary space, which is painted over with a veneer of the secondary type. The question is: does this quantitative (by this I mean additive) property of augmentation—an extra layer, more information, multiplying spaces—become a qualitative change, and if so, how? Do the locative media used in *Bliin* truly mediate spatial experiences and everyday mobility differently than before? In order to answer these questions we have to understand this locative media platform as a ‘hybrid space’, and the activities taking place there as playful. The term ‘augmented space’ denotes physical space with added elements from digital space (Manovich, 2005, p. 4). This presupposes a separation between these spaces. As already said, *Bliin* does not have a predefined aim external to the activity itself, like winning in classical games. There is no achievable result that

would make one type of space prevail over the other, for instance tagging physical space with as many digital elements as possible. Rather, a symbiotic relation exists between both spaces. Movements and activities in *Bliin* take place in both spaces at the same time. This constitutes a 'hybrid space'. Hybrid space abrogates the distinction between physical and digital through "the mix of social practices that occur simultaneously in digital and in physical spaces" (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 265).

How does mobility become hybrid through locative media? One of the main theorists of mobility, John Urry (2007) distinguishes five types of travel (p. 47). These are the physical movement of objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel, communicative travel, and corporeal travel of people. All five types of mobilities occur in *Bliin*, as will be illustrated by the following. I shot and shared a picture about a roadside Surinam eating-place I passed on my way to the Erasmus University Rotterdam. This geotagged image became an *object* that *moved* elsewhere. A geotagged image is neither a physical object in the sense of being tangible, nor is it a purely digital object like, for instance, online digital library objects defined by content, metadata, relationships with other objects, and behavior (e.g. Saidis & Delis, 2007). A geotag is not merely a digital representation of a physical world location. It is not a sign meant to point away from itself to something in the 'real world'. Increasingly the inverse is happening. Physical locations are often visited, defined and experienced on the basis of geotags and digital metadata⁵. Geotagged objects then become symbolic objects. They are laden with meaning and can be acted upon. Geotagged objects can be transferred, accessed over networks, copied, commented upon, and reconfigured by people elsewhere. As they are composed of a physical and a digital component, their movement affects both the physical and the digital realm.

Their movements become hybrid. A Dutch *Bliin* user who was in Japan at that moment noticed through the interface that I shared an image of a foodstall by the side of the road with a plaque saying “2x Roti €10” and someone waiting in front. She made a comment on my share that she felt like eating *roti* (Surinam food) after all the *sushi*. Although she was physically somewhere else, her simultaneous dwelling in digital space apparently triggered reminiscences of the Netherlands. She was making an *imaginative movement* to Holland. She also made a *virtual movement* inside the *Bliin* ‘game space’ by going to my share via the platform interface. Her comment addressed to me—typed in Japan and reaching me in the Netherlands in an instant—is a case of *communicative travel* made possible by the digital messaging system of the platform. And the fifth type of mobility is exemplified by another *Bliin* user who actually *corporeally moved* to the eating place I photographed, tried something out there and commented back it was indeed good food.

The previous example shows how various types of mobilities and social interactions are not reducible to either the purely digital or physical realm. They have become hybrid. But what exactly does this “hybridity” entail? In itself this term does not explain much yet. Like in identity studies where the term ‘hybridity’ has been used for quite a while to indicate the fact that people can have more than one group affiliation, it has to be made clear how two or more components relate to each other. Should hybrid space be understood as a seamless blend of the physical and the digital? Or rather as composed of separate entities that somehow intersect? In the case of a locative media platform such as *Bliin*, hybridity is not a perfect solution of the digital (the ‘virtual’) and physical (the ‘real’). It is not a mix of black and white into grey but a specific composite in which the distinct elements are still visible and their differences are important and meaningful to make it into a play-like activity. The

question is whether Huizinga's 'magic circle' is indeed shattered or whether the borders somehow remain important to demarcate play from the ordinary. Jane McGonigal (2007) says that in the case of pervasive or locative games, the 'seams' have to be visible for the game to be fun⁶ (p. 66). In the case of *Bliin*, would it be as enjoyable to explore our surroundings while we are on the move, or shoot and tag what we see, if we didn't feel to be moving in at least two different realms at the same time? Isn't part of the fun derived from doing something out of the ordinary, set apart from 'normalcy', something that previously hadn't been possible? And how can we experience joy in the ease of crossing barriers if we would forget or blur out the mere existence of these boundaries? As is suggested by Rodriguez (2006), central to the play experience in hybrid space is the play with boundaries. The playful experience consists in finding out what can be done with this locative play. It is a mixture of exploring both the boundaries of the 'game' itself, as well as exploring our everyday world and (online) social relations anew through this locative platform. The play element in locative media lies not so much inside the 'game space' itself but in the continuous movements between the digital world and the physical world. Part of the joy is the uncertainty of what actually belongs to either world. This locative platform creates confusion: in which space am I moving? Am I adding digital representations to the physical world? Or am I adding physical experiences of places to my online social network? This locative platform affords the mobility to continuously step through the porous membrane of the magic circle.

Expanding the temporal boundaries: Immersion

Moving around in this hybrid space becomes *immersive*. Usually immersion is used to describe the level of engagement with a game along the path of time (Brown &

Cairns, 2004, p. 2). A game is immersive when it ‘sucks’ in its players. According to Brown and Cairns, immersion ranges from engagement to engrossment and to total immersion as the highest level of involvement. Players describe total immersion as being cut off from reality and detachment to such an extent that the game was all that mattered (Brown & Cairns, 2004, p. 3). The players’ attention is completely focused and the sense of being present in the game world is taken as real. This suggests a strict boundary between the game space and the physical world, or between reality and fantasy. As we have already seen, that clearly is not the case here. Still there are elements of this locative media platform that make it immersive in Montola’s sense of expanding temporal boundaries and making the player keep on playing.

There must be a reason or attraction why people keep on playing. *Bliin* challenges players to participate both in the physical space and the digital space one is moving in. The platform opens up the possibility for continuous active involvement with one’s surroundings. Players can take photos, tag and describe their experience of places, share them with others, comment on other shares, communicate with other players, and visit geotagged places physically and/or through their handset. Immersion stems from the combination of technological affordances, the players’ intentions to be playful, and hybrid space as a space of possibilities. Writing about ubiquitous games, Jane McGonigal argues they are “transforming everyday objects and places into interactive platforms” and “activate players by making them more responsive to potential calls to interaction” because of “previously unperceived affordances” (McGonigal, 2007, p. 236).

Bliin is immersive in another important respect: its social character. New users setting the first step into *Bliin* are greeted by older users and their shares get comments. This raises expectations of reciprocity. Once ‘in’, there is a strong urge to

keep on playing. After the player has made a willing step into the playground, he in turn is being called into the play. Users are challenged to contribute to the greater whole of the playworld. A mildly competitive element of spatial conquest and social prestige arises. Who is the most mobile user? Who makes the nicest shots? Who is the first to share a new place? Who can still add something interesting about well-trodden places like for instance Amsterdam? Users for instance judge and comment upon the quality of each other's photos. And on *Bliin*'s weblog it was announced that someone would do "the first ever hot air balloon trip on bliin". This might signal a shift from play to particular games of conquest. Over a longer period, players create sequences of photos, descriptions and (recurring) mobility patterns. Sequences grow into meaningful little stories that make up the social identity of the player within the group. *Bliin* becomes a platform for narrative self-publishing: telling who you are by your ongoing contributions.

There is also a political side to this story-telling. Players may engage in "spatial tactics". De Certeau (1984) uses this term to describe the various ways people appropriate places on their own terms by a "clever utilization of time" as opposed to prescriptive "spatial strategies" imposed from above that try to establish a singular timeless place (pp. 34-39). He contrasts the *voyeur* who takes an elevated birds-eye view of the city space to the *walker* who finds himself on the ground. By the sheer act of walking, the latter creates an everyday practice out of the abstract concept of place (pp. 92-94). An often mentioned example is the 'elephant trail' (or 'desire line'), the worn out little paths in the grass made by people taking cutoffs outside the paved pathway produced by the park architect or maintainer. This may be seen as a kind of resistance against dominant spatial planning strategies that prescribe how places should be used. De Certeau's idea of writing the city through everyday spatial

practices has recently been well phrased by the term “read/write urbanism” (Greenfield & Shepard, 2007). With its connotation to how file permissions work in computing this term refers to “the idea that the city’s users are no longer bound to experience passively the territory through which they move but have been empowered to inscribe their subjectivities in the city itself...that those subjectivities can be anchored in place and responded to by those who come after.” (Greenfield & Shepard, 2007, p. 13). *Bliin* enables people to engage with place, attach personal and contextual experiences to it, share it with others, and thus modify or ‘write’ its meaning. Many well-known sites have so many shares attached that show a myriad of uses (at night, during festivals, different weather conditions, while under construction, etc.) that it becomes instantly clear there can be no single use or meaning of that location. Hybrid spaces offer read/write possibilities beyond the initial legibility and official reading of a site. It must be stressed however that this cannot be simply understood as a simple contrast between ‘fixed’ spatial strategies in physical space and ‘liberating’ spatial tactics in digital space. Consider the example of a person who shared a picture of a marijuana plant growing in a pot, probably in his own backyard since he posted many shares in the vicinity. Of course the picture had exact geo-coordinates attached. Although in the Netherlands possession of a few plants ‘for home use’ is allowed, he received a comment by one of the older members half-jokingly warning not to make it too easy for “uncle law”. Instead of a tool for the ‘liberation of place’, locative media may rapidly turn into a surveillance device.

Immersion is not a perfect mix of in versus out of the game. It is clear that at some moments the game is played, and at some moment it is not played. Yet the transition is not altogether clearly demarcated. It is not a binary switch between now I am in—now I am out. Playing means dragging physical world experiences into the

game world, and experiences from the game world into the physical world. The temporal segmentation between normalcy and being at play is constantly pierced. Everyday normalcy becomes part of the play and vice versa. This ongoing character stretches the boundaries of confinement in time that is part of ‘traditional’ games. Hybrid play is never really over. We have seen how *Bliin* expands spatial and temporal boundaries. Now we turn to the expansion of social boundaries.

Expanding the social boundaries: Pervasiveness

Always-on technologies such as the mobile phone alter what is perceived as co-presence, the experience of being near to each other. Under the influence of media, co-presence has changed from being solely based on corporeal nearness to being complemented—not substituted! —by imagined and virtual nearness (Urry, 2002). What happens when location-based technologies start mediating physical proximity? Always-there technologies, as they may be dubbed, help to pinpoint others and trace their movements and experiences in almost realtime. Co-presence becomes more *pervasive*. We know where the people familiar to us are. By following their ‘digital trail’ we are aware of what they are doing, what mood they are in, where they are heading next. *Bliin* exposes and visualizes the traces of other users’ past and current presence like a kind of digital graffiti. It makes us aware that other people participate in the same playworld. There is even the possibility of physically bumping into another nearby *Bliin* user. Game researcher Rhody points out that computer games create new points-of-view, since one’s game avatar can be seen from different camera perspectives (Rhody, 2005). *Bliin* offers a similar game-like over-the-shoulder perspective. Not only does one’s own seeing become visible but so does the seeing of others. Coupled with the realtime aspect, this sharing of perspectives creates a strong

sense of being near to others: “I see what you see now”.

Technologies that enable communication over great distance and in its wake produce imagined nearness have been called “technologies of absent presence” (Gergen, 2002, p. 237). It is possible to feel the presence of someone even while she is physically absent. These technologies create a temporal sense of co-presence, because the other potentially is always available. Locative technologies add a spatial sense of co-presence. Wherever the other is, he is always *there*. Co-presence emerges not only when potentiality turns into actual communication but also as an ongoing actuality. As always-on and always-there converge, we may see a doubled mediation of imagined nearness in the rise of ‘present presence’.

So if a sense of co-presence is extended beyond being here and now physically, what does this mean for the social boundaries of play in *Bliin*? Montola applies expansion of social boundaries to the sense of uncertainty about who is participating in the play and who is not. What is the boundary of playership (Montola, 2005, p. 2)? One of the problematic aspects is whether spectators are part of the game. “If we define the player as “a person having stakes in the game who influences its progression by taking actions within the constraints of the rules”, we can claim that ice-hockey spectators are actually players” (p. 2). Aside from the already discussed lack of a winning plot, this question still pertains to *Bliin*, since total strangers may look at shares via the web interface and in a sense be part of the experience of play. In the case of the person sharing his marijuana-growing hobby, this may even have serious consequences. The social boundaries of play also become blurry because it becomes unclear what playing together means. Social proximity is neither purely physical, nor purely imagined, but based on a pervasive kind of presence. In practice it remains difficult to grasp what this means. Who am I actually playing with? The

invisible yet present people who are participating on the same playground or the ‘real’ people in my vicinity who may be unaware of what I am doing on this locative platform?

“So what’s new?” one may ask. Aren’t mobility and co-presence always ‘augmented’, ‘hybridized’, and made ‘immersive’ and ‘pervasive’ through various media? ‘Old media’ like books or paintings for instance also enable a breach between experiences of place and actual physical presence. And haven’t we all felt really close to an imaginary character in a novel, almost like being present there with him/her? Typical, I believe, of a locative platform such as *Bliin* is that experiences can be exchanged in (almost) realtime. *Bliin* allows places to be continuously read and written by people on the move in hybrid space. Places are no longer primarily made up by their physical appearance and the social processes that occur there. More or less fixed ‘sites’ change into dynamic ‘nodes’.

Another difference is the form and content of our experiences of place. This argument follows the trend from textual to visual representation under the moniker ‘visual culture’. It is a shift in textual and visual content and language. Through earlier media representations we often try to capture the essence of a place. Postcards and the holiday photograph album for instance are used to offer representative images and stories of travel sites. They are genres that stress the spectacular, the beautiful, the lasting, and ultimately, they are broadly known cultural symbols of places. Postcards and the photo album portray generally known properties of sites (In Egypt we visited the pyramids...) and subsequently involve personalization into ‘place’ by writing something on the back of the card or by brief photo subscriptions (... and poor uncle Joe fell off a camel!). *Bliin* seems to follow an inverse route by making unique inner experiences (this is what I am seeing now) available to the outer world via shares put

on a map (and you may look too!). Locative media depart from geotagging as a practice of personalization and use mapping as a practice of generalization. The postcard uses place to be social, whereas locative media uses the social to experience places.

Bliin users seem to highlight the odd, transient, sometimes ugly or even banal side of everyday experiences. *Bliin*'s textualities (names, tags, descriptions, comments, nicknames) and visuals (photos, avatars, mobile and web interface) do not create coherent 'grand stories' about places that are meant to last. Rather, these stories are fragmented, fleeting, and self-referential. *Bliin* shares often refer to other shares. Many people have photographed their own laptop screen while displaying one of their own shares in a browser. They turn their initial experience of a place (I share this place) into a self-referential expression (I share this share), which can only be understood as meaningful from within *Bliin*. It is also shown by the practice of what on video-sharing sites like Youtube is called a 'tribute': reacting with a playful comment on an earlier share by somebody else. For instance, while I was passing a parking lot on the outskirts of the city I saw on *Bliin* that someone had made a photo of an old BMW with the description "nice car". I felt an instant urge to comment upon this by taking a similar angle shot of a very ordinary car in the vicinity and sharing this with the same comment. Although it is a reference to a physical object in the "real world", it is utterly senseless outside of the hybrid playground. You have to play along in order to see this as meaningful.

Locative media enable the exploration of the physical or 'real' world and the digital or 'virtual' world in conjunction. Locative media make it possible to intervene in what constitutes a place by questioning its boundaries. *Bliin* weaves physical and digital places together through social practices happening in hybrid space. As

meaningful locations, places are increasingly detached from their physical appearance and production. It is not necessary to be somewhere corporeally in order to inscribe a location with meaning. Because descriptions and inscriptions travel faster than before, it may be said that places become mobile. Places are under continuous change and revision by people elsewhere. When a geotagged share is created, uploaded and commented upon by others the place becomes an event, a certain moment or ‘happening’ in time. Oddly, the inverse seems to happen at the level of social proximity. People become more fixed and pinpointable. Interaction with others always has a certain element of presence as familiar people are always there. Synchronicity (being temporally available) and co-presence (being spatially near)—as well as the opposites absence and distance—may acquire new meanings. They are no longer based on their abstract physical properties: presence at one moment in time and in one point in space. Perhaps they are no longer even solely based on potential availability or imagined nearness made possible by always-on technologies. The basis for new sociality may shift towards actualization and may come to depend on the question: Are you playing or not? It remains to be seen whether this leads to further fragmentation of meanings, or whether it can be a tool to create new social ties.

Final thoughts: The end of serendipity?

When I tried out *Bliin*, I wondered whether it would take away some of the spontaneity and exploratory character in relating to place and other people.. It may seem so. *Bliin*'s location-based multimedia, tags, descriptions and comments pre-inscribe hitherto unknown places with other peoples' experiences. This makes us constantly aware that almost every place is suffused with human experiences and stories, and that traveling and discovering unknown places is perhaps nothing but a

romantic myth. The realization that places are constituted through generations of collective and sedimented memories may leave less room for a uniquely individual instant experience. Yet there is another side to the coin. Other *Bliin* users offer surprising new perspectives of places, breaking open places thought to be known. Further, *Bliin* induces spontaneity by stimulating users to divert from fixed paths, routes and plans. As the Surinam food stall example shows, users may let their mobility be guided by a playful mood afforded by the platform. Users may unexpectedly stumble upon someone's share or somebody in the vicinity. Moreover, an exciting sense of newness is reinforced by the 'double articulation' of locative media. Both its actual use and the emergent discourse about the potential of location-based services turn ordinary spatial experiences into extraordinary ones. Finally, as mentioned, *Bliin* adds a playful element of conquest. Earth can be mapped all over again. Not geographically but in a 'geosophical' way, as J. K. Wright proposed (1947, p. 9; also mentioned in Cresswell, 2006, p. 21). Wright, who was a geographer, realized that by the mid-twentieth century basically the whole earth had been mapped and therefore was 'known' to geographical science. He stretched the definition of what constitutes geographical knowledge by acknowledging that artistic practices and local folk knowledge are different but also valuable ways to understand places. This is certainly what happens when locative media are used to map experiences of places and mobilities. Hybrid mobilities, playful immersion, and pervasive co-presence in location-based platforms such as *Bliin* almost naturally bring such 'geosophical' knowledge to the fore. These elements afford users the ability to inscribe their physical and digital environments with their own routes and experiences and get absorbed in playful ways of place-making while in the enduring company of other people. Locative media open up new possibilities for mapping unknown territories

while at the same time creating new *terrae incognitae*.

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¹ Sometimes the interface is not a technological device itself but for instance a computer algorithm, such as in ‘psychogeographical’ walks like .Walk by Wilfried Hou Je Bek (see <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/dot-walk>). Of course this pre-programmed set of instructions for how to walk a city has only very rudimentary interactivity.

² Situationist roots can be seen in the fact that many of these games for instance stage theatrical interventions in everyday urban contexts, attempt to reclaim the streets, and involve mapping as a practice. See for an analysis of ‘asphalt games’ and their Situationist inspiration: Chang & Goodman, 2006.

³ For a more detailed analysis of CatchBob!, see Nova & Girardin’s chapter in this volume.

⁴ See for instance on the railway: Schivelbusch, 1986; on the landline telephone: Fisher, 1992; on the camera obscura: Ihde, 2007.

⁵ And even further, increasingly often our everyday physical mobility is defined through digital software sorting systems, which decide to grant or deny access to specific locations (Crang & Graham, 2007).

⁶ Locative media can be considered a strange marriage between the vision of ‘ubiquitous computing’ or ‘calm technology’ with the aim to completely integrate real world and computer mediated worlds into a seamless experience, and artistic practices based on Situationists’ playful performances which emphasize boundaries and limits of normalcy (see e.g Tutors & Varnelis, 2006).