



Universiteit Utrecht

MA program New Media & Digital Culture

The Mobile, The Social, and the Urban

The myth and messiness of connectivity



Block 2, 2016-2017

1. Course information

Course code and title:

MCMV16046 *The Mobile, The Social, and the Urban: the myth and messiness of connectivity*

Instructor:

Dr. Michiel de Lange, Kromme Nieuwegracht 20 room 2.10A, m.l.delange@uu.nl

Office hours:

Any general questions about the course can best be asked on Blackboard in the forum "Questions about the course". Otherwise, the quickest way to get in touch is via e-mail: m.l.delange@uu.nl.

Class schedule: note the inverse order of working groups!

WG2 Thursdays 10:00 – 12:45, [D25 103](#)

WG1 Thursdays 13:30 – 16:15 [Ruppert 140](#)

2. Content & learning objectives

In a relatively short timespan our communication patterns and computing habits have been 'mobilized'. Mobile and social media have rapidly become part and parcel of urban life. They shape how we live, work, travel, spend leisure time, and meet. This has profound consequences for our sense of place, social relationships, and our sense of self. Moreover, mobile/social media technologies today are part of the infrastructures, practices, and institutional arrangements on which urban life itself is based. So-called "smart cities" experiment with digital media, like sensors, data, the internet of things and social media dashboards, to help improve urban life. In this course we focus on this amalgamation of telecommunications devices, portable computational devices, and smart and connected objects in urban settings. We investigate how the social is mobilized, and at the same time how mobile media are tied to urban places, situations and developments.

The aim of the course is to enhance your theoretical understanding of key issues in the developing field of urban new media; identify dominant approaches in this field (academic, but also policy, industry and civic initiatives); develop an original research approach for your individual assignment and matching methodology; present your results in written and oral form according to academic standards; and acquire insight into the job market through for instance a guest lecture or event visit.

You will develop an in-depth understanding of the ways mobile/social media technologies shape urban life. You shall become familiar with main themes, concepts and approaches in the multidisciplinary field of urban new media research, and with adjacent fields of research. Furthermore, you will learn to report on research results obtained through small fieldwork assignments in both oral and written form, to position yourself academically and develop an original approach to question, analyze and reflect on mobile/social media in relation to city life.

3. Course proceedings

The course is based on three-hour class meetings. The course approaches mobile/social media as situated technologies, and explores their connection to urban life. This happens through weekly themes:

- Week 1. Concepts: mobile, social, urban technologies
- Week 2. Past
- Week 3. Places
- Week 4. Interfaces
- Week 5. Data
- Week 6. Relations
- Week 7. Cultures

An indication of how class meetings are structured:

- 1st part - The week team lead a 30-35 minute session (brief presentation + discussion). This is followed by group feedback.
- 2nd part – Short lecture by the course instructor, discussion of literature and week theme.
- 3rd part - Seminar to discuss research projects. We use this time to work on research projects, individually, in teams, and plenary.

Expected from you during class

- Active participation and an inquiring attitude
- Equal contributions to team work
- Contributions to overall group dynamics in a collaborative spirit

Expected from you outside of class hours

- Reading of weekly literature
- Individual writing of weekly and final assignments
- Finding additional literature as part of team work
- Convene with your team at least once outside of class to prepare team work

3.1 Assignments

All written assignments must be posted in Blackboard's discussion forum in a single individual thread, as inline text (no attachments, except for mid term assignment and final paper, which may be posted as pdf or other). For your first assignment, please begin by starting a new thread titled with your name. Proceed by posting the other assignments as replies to yourself.

Assignments must always contain your name, student number, group number, title, references.

1) Individual portfolio - 70% of total grade

Students make a personal portfolio. The portfolio consists of two elements:

a. Six weekly propositions

Six out of the seven weeks students post two propositions (max 200 words in total, ex. references). The propositions must be grounded in all compulsory texts. Propositions are not questions but arguments that spur the discussion. During class you should be ready to present and initiate the discussion based on your propositions so have them available at hand.

Hints

Depart from your own research interests and use them to develop ideas for the final essay:

- 1) Analyze and relate the texts to one another, tease out striking parallels or differences.
- 2) Critically reflect on the argument(s), method(s) and conclusion(s) of the assigned literature. Try to expose hidden assumptions, methodological biases, flawed analysis or conclusions. Indicate where it needs additional evidence.
- 3) Provide alternatives or possible solutions to these shortcomings, e.g. by referring to other relevant research, your own observations, cases, literature, authors, theoretical schools.

In short, show that you know how to academically *analyze, criticize* and *create*.

Deadlines: each week prior to class on Wednesday 12:00, via Blackboard in your own portfolio thread in the Discussion Board Forum > Assignments. Please post on time, the week team needs your input for the discussion!

Exception1: in week 1 the assignment can be handed in on Friday after class, 17:00.

Exception2: in the week of your team presentation you do not need to post a written assignment.

b. Essay (2000 words)

In a short essay of about 2000 words you will develop an original academic argument that somehow relates to the overall course subject. Essays differ from classical academic papers in that they are more argumentative and contain a more subjective personal angle to a topic. An *essay* – quite literally – is an “attempt” to develop your academic voice, by “trying out” an idea. In an essay you develop your own academic position, often by departing from a subjective feeling or idea, which is then underpinned by sound evidence, reasoning and selected sources.

Deadline: Friday 31 January 23:59, via Blackboard and printed in the pigeon hole on the Muntstraat (by post is also possible, ask for home address: m.l.delange@uu.nl).

Developing ideas

- 1) Explore articles in journals like *Mobile Media & Communication* (<http://mmc.sagepub.com/content>), *Wi: journal of mobile media* (<http://wi.mobilities.ca/wi/>), and applied research in mobile technology at the ACM (Association for Computing Machinery) website (<http://dl.acm.org>, e.g. using the search entry "mobile media" to see what others write about).
- 2) Observe what you see happening around you in everyday situations. How do people use mobile devices in various settings? Can you see salient differences and patterns? Such observations when tied to more theoretical work may yield surprisingly rich and detailed material, and expose the sometimes strained relationship between pervasive myths about what media 'do' and the messiness of actual practices.
- 3) Another great source of inspiration for your final paper is investigating media representations and popular views of the mobile phone. Popular media include newspapers, television, radio, weeklies, commercials, industry research, consultancy reports (Nielsen, Gartner, etc.), NGOs (PewInternet.org, ITU, etc.), business

development, pressure/lobby groups. As always, reflect critically on the use of sources!

2) Team presentation - 30% of total grade

In the first week six teams are formed of 2-3 students. Team tasks:

a. Teams find one relevant additional text pertaining to their weekly theme. This text shall be read by everyone before class. Teams posts a link to the text on Blackboard on Wednesday 12:00 at the latest. The text may be academic, an industry or policy report, a recent commentary, or else, as long as it is relevant to the weekly theme and overall course. Incorporate this text into the presentation (why read?).

b. Each team leads one week with a presentation + discussion at the beginning of class. This takes ca. 30-35 minutes in total, and is followed by a brief group reflection. In the presentations, teams critically discuss the course literature, and relate it to their own original observations of mobile media use in everyday (urban) life. In the ensuing group discussion, teams select and moderate two or three important and relevant points for discussion.

Hints

Do not provide summaries. Everyone read the texts. Instead, contextualize texts, place them within relevant theoretical and historical fields. Zoom in on similarities and differences. Scrutinize arguments. Connect texts to everyday life through observations and even interviews. Explore correspondence and divergence between theory and practice. Use audiovisual material and educational tools when needed.

3.2 Assessment and feedback

Students are graded on their ability to 1) develop specialized knowledge of and insight into mobile/social media studies, 2) independently identify, analyze, and criticize relevant research problems that relate to current debates in both media theory and media practice, and 3) present their findings to an audience composed of specialists as well as non-specialists in written and oral forms of academic expression.

3.3 Course conditions

The course is successfully completed if students meet all of these conditions:

- Students have handed in on time all required weekly assignments, with a minimum grade of 5.5 (scale ranges from 1 to 10). Failure to hand in an assignment on time will result in an irreparable 1. Students who miss more than one assignment cannot complete the course.
- Students have participated in the team assignments, with a minimum 5.5 grade.
- Students have handed in their final essay on time, and a minimum grade of 5.5. Students have the right to repair a 4 or higher within 2 weeks after receiving the grade. Only the final essay can be repaired.
- Students have attended all class meetings. If students miss class they notify the instructor in advance and compensate with an extra assignment. Students absent from more than one class cannot complete the course unless with a specific reason.

4. Course schedule

4.1 Calendar

Week 1	24 November	Introduction course: key notions Mobile, social, urban technologies
Week 2	1 December	Past
Week 3	8 December	Places
Week 4	15 December	Interfaces
Week 5	22 December	Data
		<i>Holiday break</i>
Week 6	12 January	Relations
		<i>No class on 19 Jan.!</i>
Week 7	26 January	Cultures
Week 8	31 January	Deadline essay Tuesday 31 Jan. 23:59

4.2 Weekly literature

Week 1. Mobile, social, urban technologies

This week provides an initial foray into the key notions of this course: mobile, social, and urban. We see how mobile technologies evolve from being mostly communications devices to increasingly often computational devices on the go. Through short readings we get acquainted with basic notions and the scope of the field.

Couldry, Nick, and José van Dijck. 2015. Researching social media as if the social mattered. *Social Media + Society* 1 (2): 1-7.
<http://sms.sagepub.com/content/1/2/2056305115604174.full>.

Ito, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe, and Ken Anderson. 2009. Portable Objects in Three Global Cities: The Personalization of Urban Places. In *The Reconstruction of Space and Time: Mobile Communication Practices*, ed. Richard Ling and Scott W. Campbell. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers. 67-87. Draft version available from: www.itofisher.com/mito/portableobjects.pdf.

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. 2013. What's mobile in mobile communication? *Mobile Media & Communication* 1 (1): 26-31.
<http://mmc.sagepub.com/content/1/1/26.full.pdf+html>.

Week 2. Past

This week provides a historical/ archeological overview of communications technologies as the object of (academic) study. We focus on some thematic lineages and recurring discussions.

Pool, Ithiel de Sola. 1983. *Forecasting the Telephone: A Retrospective Technology Assessment*. Norwood, N.J.: ALEX Publishers. Ch.2 "Effects of the Telephone on Patterns of Human Settlement", p. 41-57. Download from http://thorngren.nu/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Sola_Pool_Ithiel_1982_Retrospective_Technollog_Ch_2-3.pdf.

Note: Take a look at the table of contents of the entire report, which is very helpful to understand recurring *topoi*! Download from http://thorngren.nu/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Sola_Pool-Ch1..pdf. Glance through the *Introduction* (p. 1-17) to understand Pool's approach.

de Vries, Imar O. 2012. *Tantalisingly close: An archaeology of communication desires in discourses of mobile wireless media*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Available from <http://oopen.org/search?keyword=9789089643544>. Ch.4 "Mobile Communication Dreams", p. 125-162.

Week 3. Places

The study of mobile technologies as pervasive and ubiquitous media has been key in challenging the "anytime, anyplace" paradigm in media studies, arguing for the importance of space, place, location and context. We see how digital media are understood as situated media.

Özkul, Didem, and Lee Humphreys. 2015. Record and remember: Memory and meaning-making practices through mobile media. *Mobile Media & Communication* no. 3 (3):351-365.
<http://mmc.sagepub.com/content/3/3/351.full.pdf+html>.

Salim, Flora, and Usman Haque. 2015. Urban computing in the wild: A survey on large scale participation and citizen engagement with ubiquitous computing, cyber physical systems, and internet of things. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 81: 31-48.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2015.03.003>.

Week 4. Interfaces

In this week we investigate a variety of ways in which mobile/social media interface with urban life. In today's cities our everyday lives are shaped by digital media technologies such as smart cards, surveillance cameras, quasi-intelligent systems, smartphones, social media, location-based services, wireless networks,

and so on. These technologies are inextricably bound up with the city's material form, social patterns, and mental experiences.

Mattern, Shannon. 2014. Interfacing Urban Intelligence. *Places Journal*, <https://placesjournal.org/article/interfacing-urban-intelligence>.

Verhoeff, Nanna. 2012. Mobile Screens: The Visual Regime of Navigation. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Ch. 4 "Urban Screens", p. 99-129. <http://www.open.org/download?type=document&docid=413033>.

Week 5. Data

Up to this point the predominant focus has been on digital urban technologies as objects of study. This week we see how urban media can be used as tools for research, and what new questions may arise from that. In other words, in this week we shift from ontology and phenomenology to epistemology (how do we understand the world through our digital mobile devices? what new forms of knowledge and knowing are possible?).

Kitchin, Rob. 2014. The Real-Time City? Big Data and Smart Urbanism. *GeoJournal* no. 79:1-14. <http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/5625/1/RK-Real-time-City.pdf>.

Shelton, Taylor, Ate Poorthuis, and Matthew Zook. 2015. Social media and the city: Rethinking urban socio-spatial inequality using user-generated geographic information. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 142: 198-211. <http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/science/article/pii/S0169204615000523>.

Week 6. Relations

This week we look at how mobile media shape relations with other people and the self. Students gain a deeper understanding of how social relations and identity are shaped by mobile media.

Gilmore, James N. 2016. Everywear: The quantified self and wearable fitness technologies. *New Media & Society* 18 (11): 2524-2539. <http://nms.sagepub.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/content/18/11/2524.full.pdf+html>.

Schwartz, Raz, and Germaine R Haleboua. 2015. The spatial self: Location-based identity performance on social media. *New Media & Society* no. 17 (10):1643-1660. <http://nms.sagepub.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/content/17/10/1643.full.pdf+html>.

Week 7. Culture

This week we look at cultural specificities of mobile media practices in urban contexts. To what extent are mobile media absorbed into existing cultural practices, or creating new practices? What similarities and differences can we discern between cities? What tensions, conflicts and clashes arise from the rapid spread of mobile media? Can we speak of mobile media in universal singular terms or should we take into account divergent paths and development histories? How are cultural patterns and desires “mobilized” on a global ?

Gordano Peile, Cecilia, and Adela Ros Híjar. 2016. Immigrants and mobile phone uses: Spanish-speaking young adults recently arrived in london. *Mobile Media & Communication* 4 (3): 405-423.

<http://mmc.sagepub.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/content/4/3/405.full.pdf+html>.

Hjorth, Larissa, and Heewon Kim. 2005. Being There and Being Here: Gendered Customising of Mobile 3g Practices through a Case Study on Seoul. *Convergence Journal* 11(2): 49-55.

<http://con.sagepub.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/content/11/2/49.full.pdf>.

5. Course materials

Please check the UU BlackBoard area for this course regularly for updates and announcements. All compulsory readings can be found in the weekly outline above, and are accessible online. All the assignment materials created by the students will need to be posted in their individual thread on BlackBoard.

6. Course evaluation

Since this is a new course within our programme, we are very keen to receive your insights and feedback on what went well or you found meaningful, what perhaps went not so well, and how to potentially improve upon it. We may discuss this in the last week of the course, and you are also requested to fill out the online Caracal evaluation at <https://caracal.science.uu.nl>.

7. Fraud & plagiarism (the fine print)

Academic integrity is the foundation of scientific learning. Utrecht University therefore considers any form of academic dishonesty to be a very serious offense. Utrecht University expects each student to be familiar with and to observe the norms and values that ensure academic integrity. The most serious forms of deception that can impair this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of fraud and is defined as the wrongful appropriation of another author’s work without proper citation. The text below provides further elaboration on what may be considered fraud or plagiarism, along with a number of concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If the university discovers a case of fraud or plagiarism, then the study programme’s Examination Committee may implement sanctions on the offender. The most serious sanction that the Examination Committee may implement is the submission of a request for expulsion to the Executive Board.

Fraud may include:

- copying answers from another person during an exam. The person providing the opportunity to copy is considered an accomplice to fraud;
- possession of tools including, but not limited to: pre-programmed calculators, mobile telephones, books, syllabi, notes, etc., during an exam, unless the possession of such has been expressly permitted;
- allowing others to complete all or part of an assignment;
- acquisition of the questions or problems from an exam prior to the time the exam is to take place;

- fabrication of survey- or interview answers or research data.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of another author's works, thoughts, or ideas and the representation of such as one's own work. Writers must always accurately cite the sources of ideas or insights used in a work, and must always be alert to the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarizing. They must be exercise extreme care in citing the sources of information, not only when using printed sources, but especially when using information gathered from the Internet. The following are some examples of what may be considered plagiarism:

- copying and pasting text from digital sources, such as encyclopedias or digital periodicals, without using quotation marks or footnotes;
- copying and pasting text from the Internet without using quotation marks or footnotes;
- using excerpts from printed material such as books, magazines or other publications or encyclopedias without using quotation marks and referring to the source;
- using a translation of the texts listed above in one's own work, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing from the texts listed above without a (clear) reference: paraphrasing must be marked as such (by explicitly linking the text with the original author, either in text or a footnote), ensuring that the impression is not created that the ideas expressed are those of the student;
- using another person's audio, video or test materials without reference and in so doing representing them as one's own work;
- resubmission of the student's own earlier work without source references, and allowing this to pass for work originally produced for the purpose of the course, unless this is expressly permitted in the course or by the lecturer;
- using other students' work and representing it as one's own work. If this occurs with the other student's permission, then he or she may be considered an accomplice to the plagiarism;

- when one author of a joint paper commits plagiarism, then all authors involved in that work are accomplices to the plagiarism if they could have known or should have known that the other was committing plagiarism; - submitting papers provided by a commercial institution, such as an internet site with summaries or papers, or which have been written by others, regardless of whether the text was provided in exchange for payment. The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describes the formal procedure to be followed in the event of suspicion of fraud or plagiarism, as well as the sanctions that may be implemented as a result. Ignorance is not an excuse. Each student is responsible for his or her own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student is familiar with the definition of fraud and plagiarism. For its part, Utrecht University ensures that students are instructed in academic principles early on in their study programme and are informed of the institution's standards for fraud and plagiarism, in order that students may know which norms and values they are expected to uphold.