



Universiteit Utrecht

MA program New Media & Digital Culture

Urban Mobile media

The myth and messiness of connectivity



Block 2, 2018-2019

1. Course information

Course code and title:

MCMV17005 Urban Mobile Media: 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:

Thursdays 10:00 – 12:45, [ISRAELSLAAN 118](#) room 1.07

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 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 around intensive weekly class meetings, and self study. The course approaches mobile/social media as situated technologies, and explores their connection to urban life. This happens through weekly themes:

Week 1. Mobile media as urban technologies: field & key concepts

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 typically structured:

1st part - The week team lead a 30 minute session (presentation + moderated discussion). This is followed by group feedback (ca. 10-15 mins).

2nd part – Interactive lecture by the course instructor, connecting and discussing 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 the final paper, which can be posted as a pdf). 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.

All assignments must contain your name, student number, title, full references.

1) Individual work - 70% of total

The individual work consists of two parts:

1a. Weekly propositions

Six out of seven weeks students create and put on Blackboard two propositions (max. 200 words in total, ex. references; 12 propositions in total). The propositions must be grounded in the 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.

Tips for propositions:

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*.

The propositions are a course prerequisite and not graded separately, however quality and being on time counts toward the final grade of assignment 1 (\pm one point).

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 teams need 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 have to post a written assignment.

1b. Academic essay (2000 words)

In a short academic essay of 2000 words (\pm 10%) you will develop an original argument that relates to the overall course scope. 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 a try-out to develop your academic voice, by exploring an original idea. In an essay you develop your own academic position, often by departing from a personal idea or opinion, which is then underpinned by sound evidence, solid reasoning and well-selected academic sources.

Deadline: Thursday 24 Jan. 2018 23:59, via Blackboard and printed in the pigeon hole on the Muntstraat (by post is also possible, ask for home address: m.i.delange@uu.nl).

Developing ideas for your essay

You need to find an angle or 'hook' for your essay. Tips to get you started early:

- 1) **Theoretical hook**: Look at 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). What are current discussions? What do you personally find interesting (or annoying!) about this?
- 2) **Empirical hook**: Observe what you see happening around you in everyday situations. How do people use mobile devices in specific (urban) settings? Can you

see salient common patterns, or outliers? Combined with theoretical reflections, empirical observations can generate surprisingly rich material. It can expose the sometimes strained relationship between pervasive myths about what media 'do' and the messiness of actual practices. This disjunction can be food for essays.

3) **Discursive hook:** Another great source of inspiration for your essay is the critical investigation of media representations and popular discourses about mobile media technologies. Popular media may include newspapers, television, radio, weeklies, commercials, industry research, consultancy reports (Nielsen, Gartner, etc.), NGOs (PewInternet.org, ITU, etc.), business development, pressure/lobby groups. What promises do they make? What implicit or explicit views underpin these arguments, and what do you think about this? As always, reflect critically on the use of sources!

2) Team work - 30% of total

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

2a. Teams contribute a relevant curated text pertaining to their weekly theme. This text should be read by everyone before class. Teams posts a link to the text on Blackboard on Wednesday 12:00 at the latest + a short 'curatorial statement' of ca. 100 words why you feel that this is important material. The text may be academic, an industry or policy report, a recent commentary, or otherwise, as long as it is relevant to the weekly theme and overall course. Incorporate this text into the presentation.

2b. Each team leads one week with a presentation + discussion at the beginning of class. This takes ca. 30 minutes in total (15 mins for each). 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. This is followed by a brief reflection in class.

Hints

Do not provide summaries. Everyone has read the texts. Contextualize texts, place them within relevant theoretical and historical fields. Zoom in on similarities and differences. Scrutinize arguments. Connect texts to everyday life by bringing in concrete cases, observations, even interviews. Explore correspondence and divergence between theory and practice. Use audiovisual material and pedagogical 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. Students who miss more than one assignment on time cannot complete the course.

- Students have participated in the team assignment, 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 more than once cannot complete the course unless with a specific reason.

4. Course schedule

4.1 Calendar

Week 1	15 November	1. Introduction course & key notions
Week 2	22 November	2. Past
Week 3	29 November	3. Places
Week 4	6 December	4. Interfaces
Week 5	13 December	5. Data
Week 6	20 December	6. Relations
		<i>Holiday break</i>
Week 7	10 January	7. Cultures
Week 8	17 January	Non-mandatory individual meetings
		Deadline essay Thursday 24 Jan. 2018 23:59

4.2 Weekly literature

Week 1. Introducing 'mobile urban media'

This week provides an initial foray into the key notions of this course: urban mobile media. We see how mobile technologies evolve from being mostly point-to-point communications devices to increasingly often mobile computational devices that connect object-place-person. Through short readings we get acquainted with basic notions and the scope of the field.

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>.

Light, Ben, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay. 2018. "The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps." *New Media & Society* no. 20 (3):881-900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438>

McQuire, Scott. 2016. *Geomedia: Networked cities and the future of public space*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. <http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4675591>. Introduction "From media to geomedia", p. 10-20.

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.

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.

Weiser, Mark. 1991. "The Computer for the Twenty-First Century." *Scientific American*: 94-100. <http://www.ubiq.com/hypertext/weiser/SciAmDraft3.html>.

Wigley, Mark. 2001. Network fever. *Grey Room* -: 82-122. <http://cast.b-ap.net/arc590s14/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2014/01/wigley.pdf>.

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.

McQuire, Scott. 2016. *Geomedia: Networked cities and the future of public space*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. <http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4675591>. Ch. 1: "Transforming Media and Public Space", p. 22-49.

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>.

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>.

Richardson, Ingrid, and Rowan Wilken. 2013. "Parerga of the third screen: Mobile media, place, presence." In *Mobile Technology and Place*, edited by Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin, 181-197. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. <http://uunl.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1181063>.

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?).

Greco, Kael. 2014. "Seeing the City through Data / Seeing Data through the City." In *Decoding the city: urbanism in the age of big data*, edited by Dietmar Offenhuber and Carlo Ratti, 125-142. Basel: Birkhauser Verlag. <https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/viewbooktoc/product/428087>.

[see concise online version here: <https://www.citymetric.com/horizons/seeing-city-through-data-449>].

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>.

Lupton, Deborah. 2018. "How do data come to matter? Living and becoming with personal data." *Big Data & Society* 5 (2):1-11. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053951718786314>.

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.

Mascheroni, Giovanna, and Jane Vincent. 2016. "Perpetual contact as a communicative affordance: Opportunities, constraints, and emotions." *Mobile Media & Communication* no. 4 (3):310-326. <http://journals.sagepub.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/pdf/10.1177/2050157916639347>

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

Finally, 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 scale?

de Lange, Michiel. 2015. "Playing life in the metropolis: Mobile media and identity in Jakarta." In *Playful Identities: The ludification of digital media cultures*, edited by Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens, 307-320. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
<http://www.oapen.org/record/524070>.

Sugiyama, Satomi. 2015. "*Kawaii meiru* and *Maroyaka neko*: Mobile emoji for relationship maintenance and aesthetic expressions among Japanese teens." *First Monday* no. 20 (10). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i10.5826>.

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

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)

Utrecht University 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.

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.

Read more: <https://students.uu.nl/en/practical-information/policies-and-procedures/fraud-and-plagiarism>.