Networked Sociability and Individualism:

Technology for Personal and Professional Relationships

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Chapter 9

Checking in at the Urban Playground:
Digital Geographies and Electronic Flâneurs

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ABSTRACT

Taking its point of departure in a critical discussion of the imagined dividing line between physical and digital spaces, this chapter demonstrates a socio-spatial turn in Internet studies and sets out to explore the meaning of locative technologies as an illuminating example of how such spatial boundaries increasingly collapse. Being empirically grounded in an analysis of twelve qualitative interviews with users of the applications Foursquare and Gowalla, this chapter focuses on the interplay between what is termed electronic flâneurs and digital geographies, and demonstrates in what ways the use of locative technologies provokes changes at two levels in the social realm: first, by adding a communicative digital layer to the spatial organisation of physical space, and second, by adding a spatially bound layer to interactions in digital space.[1]

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the early days of Internet studies, a problematic detachment between physical and digital spaces has been a recurring theme, often conceptualised in ontological rather than practical terms. Even though the conceptual division between "online" and "offline" could plausibly refer to the practical conditions of social interaction (which is how it is used in this chapter), it has often been understood as designating a difference between "virtual" and "real". Having operated as the dominant assumption for several years,

predominantly through the trope of "cyberspace", this imagined dividing line is nowadays rarely regarded as a feasible construct. On the contrary, it has become a widespread assumption that physical and digital spaces increasingly merge thus blurring the boundaries between online and offline modes of interaction, which in turn renders the overused dichotomy between "real" and "virtual" terminally obsolete. The last few years have witnessed significant changes in the nature of online communication, not the least because of the proliferation of (mobile) social network sites (SNS) which points at the de-domestication of Internet use as well as a fundamental intertwining of physical and digital spaces. Taking these changes seriously and further elaborating an understanding of their social implications, this chapter considers the emergence of what could be termed the "socio-spatial turn" in Internet studies. Particularly focusing on the possible relationship between digitally mediated social interactions and physical (urban) space, the initial parts of this chapter deal with earlier perceptions of the Internet as a facilitating factor in the articulation of identities and social relations without necessary interdependence on either temporal or spatial boundaries. As will be demonstrated, the previously prevailing era of online anonymity and thereby associated corporeal absence was altogether forgotten and substituted by a regime of personally centred networks by the early 2000s. Significantly, in 2006, Time Magazine tapped into these processes of change when awarding "You" the honour of being the person of the year (Han, 2010). This example from popular discourse does not only suggest that the era of anonymity had ended but also, in consequence, that the Internet had gone through a fundamental make over. Much has happened since the birth of "the social web" and nowadays, traversing the informational highway is no longer confined to take place from the security of domestic spaces but is increasingly performed through mobile devices. In conjunction with the increment of mobile Internet access, the

development of "locative technologies" and the use of "locative mobile social networks" (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2010; de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2009) have experienced a nearly immeasurable upsurge which has troubled predominant perceptions of interactions in digital space profoundly.

As of today, there are a handful of locative technologies and among these, Foursquare and Gowalla are the most widely used.[2] Substantially, these are mobile applications that allow users to engage in location-based interaction by means of mobile devices through which place-specific information can be created, consumed and shared. Although these applications are different regarding graphical user interface and basic functionality, they are both promoted as a facilitator of interaction through a communicative layer intimately bound up with physical spaces and places. Foursquare as well as Gowalla are said to make it possible for users to share their location with friends by "checking in" at digital spots (i.e. a digital representation of places), provide commentaries on others' locations and urban activities while at the same time receiving rewards of different sorts. Their basic functionality is thus a question of adding different forms of metadata to geographically identifiable places for distributing social interaction in digital spaces to various sites in physical space and vice versa. Locative technologies such as Foursquare and Gowalla are often depicted as providing a platform for exploring the city, establishing interpersonal relations and keeping up with current events in the urban landscape.

Gowalla (2010) is presented as a service through which it is possible to "[k]eep up with your friends, share the places you go, and discover the extraordinary in the world around you". The core graphical user interface consists of the "Passport" in which it is possible to collect stamps from visited places. Gowalla informs that "[i]t's pretty much like stamping your passport in real life. Only without the jetlag and customs forms". One of the crucial features is the possibility to interact with the places and the information posted from your

friends' check-ins. Taking and sharing photos, commenting on places and sharing highlights, make such an interaction possible. Occasionally, upon check-in, users can find virtual items that function as digital souvenirs. These items are added to the Passport in which information is provided about what items are carried and which ones that are missing. In a similar vein, Foursquare (2010) invites its users to "unlock your world and find happiness just around the corner" and, furthermore, become "more aware of all the incredible things around you". The application is explained through a six step process that consists of "finding friends", "checking in", "learning tips", "getting out", "gaining power" and "using it everywhere". It is a way of gaining knowledge about where your "friends are hanging out" and it is possible to see if they are geographically nearby looking at their recent check-in. One special feature is the ability to become "mayor" at places visited frequently which functions as temporary label for demarcating that the user in question is the most regular client. The ways in which both Gowalla and Foursquare are depicted clearly point at the assumption that these applications are designed for use in conjunction with physical space. However, even though these descriptions of Foursquare and Gowalla are commercially viable and remarkably enchanting, it is nevertheless vital to further explore to what extent the users of these applications perceive a difference between forms of interaction in physical as well as digital spaces.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which the locative technologies Gowalla and Foursquare are deployed in everyday life and how users understand their utilisation of these technologies as a (social) practice. It will highlight different challenges to the distinction between physical and digital spaces by addressing the act of "checking in" as a social process through which socio-spatial information is gathered and interpersonally shared. The increasing use of locative technologies points at a fundamental change of the urban landscape and the possibilities to navi-

gate it by means of mobile devices. As a result of the consolidation of physical and digital spaces, the urban landscape shows signs of turning into a digitally fostered playground on which social interaction through check-ins, exchange of messages, images and video lay the foundation of a new way of experiencing urban life (de Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009). It appears that the city dweller, using locative technologies, literally turns into an electronic flâneur with a possibility to transgress and reinterpret physical as well as geographical boundaries through the creation, use and sharing of digital spots.[3] Putting a digital geography into play, digitally mediated interactions provide a challenge to current understandings of the social as well as built environment (Zook, Dodge, Aoyama & Townsend, 2004). Are we thus facing an extension of physical space and perhaps even the emergence of a regulating layer that operates socially on the level of playful interaction? This chapter suggests that users of locative technologies, to a large extent, strive a striking a balance between digital and physical spaces as integral parts of their everyday lives. Rather than understanding digital space as a detached social realm with a proper set of discursive regulatory mechanisms and procedures, the emergence of a highly playful but inescapably commercial geography is located. It is thus not a question of a playground without social and discursive constraints but rather one by which social interaction and the presentation of self is both regulated and disciplined.

Methodological Remarks

The arguments pursued in this chapter are empirically grounded in an analysis of twelve qualitative and thematically organised conversational interviews with users of Gowalla and Foursquare in the urban area of Malmö, Sweden.[4] Departing from the fact that a vast array of research demonstrates the increased importance of new media and social technologies for social interaction (Crang, Crosbie & Graham, 2007), this study has aimed at an em-

pirical grounding of theoretical arguments. Taking their point of departure in a general discussion of SNS and the perceived differences between online/offline as well as their embedding in everyday life, the interviews focused perceptions of locative technologies, strategies for self-presentation and interpersonal communication, mainly by focusing of the practice of checking in at different places as well as partaking in the creation and consumption of information that forms the basis of digital geographies.[5] The empirical material aims at providing a nuanced understanding of the ways in which these technologies are used as communicative devices and as a means for interacting with people and places. This is a vital example of emerging forms of social interaction and establishment of interpersonal relationships that provides a significant contribution to an understanding of networked sociability as well as the blurring of the boundaries between digital and physical spaces. The importance of doing empirical studies within this field of research has been underscored by Hine whom maintains that "[a] key challenge for the future is to develop forms of ethnography that take seriously the social reality of online settings, whilst also exploring their embedding within everyday life" (2008, p. 258). Whilst Hine's suggestion should be taken seriously, much has clearly happened during the few years that have passed since its publication. During the last year or so, a number of locative technologies have emerged that constitute a challenge to the formerly popular distinction between online and offline space and this development has functioned as a rationale for this study.

BACKGROUND

Ever since the early years of Internet studies, sci-fi narratives and metaphorical figures such as "cyberspace" (Gibson, 1984) have been important sources for envisaging possible implications of the rising network society and the socio-structural

changes that it is assumed to provoke. Exploring the history of Internet studies, Wellman (2004) maintains that it is distinguished by three different "ages". Initially, the Internet was regarded "a technological marvel" (p. 124) assumed to not only transform the world but also provide a foundation for global connectivity beyond the constraints of time and space. Subsequently, researchers moved away from the "eloquent euphoria" (p. 127) of the first age, by studying Internet communication as a phenomenon embedded in everyday life activities. Wellman contends that is was a time in which the population of the Internet had changed "from a world of Internet wizards to a world of ordinary people routinely using the Internet" (p. 125). The second age was thus characterised by social scientific studies and documentation of the constant proliferation of users as well as uses of the Internet. These studies demonstrated that Internet use seemed to foster offline social relationships and strengthen social ties in offline settings. Finally, the third age of Internet studies is characterised by rather different conditions which allow for a theoretically driven analysis that can seriously take into account that "[t]he Internet is helping each person to become a communication and information switchboard, between persons, networks, and institutions" (p. 127). Although the field of Internet studies has undergone quite dramatic changes, it is vital to acknowledge that the early "cyber-theorists" of the first euphoric age frequently regarded digital space as a distinct social realm, not only assumed to be spatially unbound but also characterised by the absence of corporeal matter. Putting terms like "cyberspace" and "virtual reality" into practice, leading theorists such as Rheingold (1995), Turkle (1995) and Benedikt (2000/1991) gave voice to a utopian futurism that routinely desired social interaction to take place without any necessary reliance on either space, place or time as impeding factors. In this sense, cyberspace was often positioned as not only the antithesis of urban space but also, and perhaps more intriguingly, as its very antidote. Instead

of getting stuck in traffic, delayed by public transport and consumed by the hubbub of urban space, urban dwellers were assumed to resort to cyberspace where they, leaving their bodies and troubles of everyday life behind, could traverse the digital highways as electronic flâneurs. These ideas have led several commentators to propose that digital communication would threaten the cultural and social life of the city (Light, 1999; Mitchell, 2000/1995, 2003). However, arguing that this conception has no significant bearing, Graham (2004) makes clear that urbanisation and the intensified use of digital communication are mutually supporting factors in processes of cultural and social change. Even though this appears to be a plausible interpretation, historical accounts of communication and interaction in digital space were often underpinned by a rather different presumption.

Understanding cyberspace as an immaterial environment, it was frequently considered to be "an apparently anti-spatial world where digital streams of information, data, images and video […] seemed to operate like some giant nervous system for the planet" (Graham, 2004, p. 7). It could be argued, as Batty (1993) among others has done, that digital space (or "cyberspace" as he prefers to term it), due to its invisibility to our direct senses, is a different form of space that might become interwoven with and layered on top of the foundations of geographic space. On the whole, early attempts to theorise cyberspace reverberated McLuhan's (2001/1964) vision of the emergence of new social forms through the rise of the "global village" which was unavoidably expected to put the city in a rather problematic situation. In this account, spatial proximity was rendered both undesirable and purposeless in the era of digital communication and replaced by the newborn pleasures of spatially unbound interaction. Understanding the above mentioned interpretations of the Internet from a present-day perspective, they clearly expressed more of a

visionary image than a realistic portrayal. It is worthwhile to observe, however, that several interpretations of this kind are typically marked by a futurism that is routinely bringing "nerdwords" into play (Gauntlett, 2004). This state of affairs stem from the fact that Internet studies, whether scientific or commercial, as Holmes (2005) asserts, often strive at capturing a sort of "cybergeist" and thus, as Cavanagh (2007) suggests, conform to a "cult of the new". Even though it is tempting to immerse oneself in futuristic sci-fi narratives, it is decisive to remember that the Internet and interaction in digital space necessarily need to be grasped considering the social and political reality of everyday life in the offline sphere (Robins & Webster, 1999).

From Cyberspace to Everyday Life: A Social Turn

The past few years have witnessed an increased criticism towards the distinction between physical and digital spaces of interaction and several researchers have attuned to the changing conditions by understanding digital space as an integral part of everyday life (see for instance Bakardjieva, 2005; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). In contrast to the notion of digital space as a separate social realm, current conceptualisations increasingly situate digital space as deeply embedded in everyday life and as a challenge to the contemporary modes of societal organisation in physical space.[6] At this point, the Internet is thus frequently recognised as an infrastructure that to a large extent is used for bringing into play the social web through which people immerse themselves in activities such as sharing, sorting and categorising data that is reviewed and commented upon. The social web can be regarded as a "cluster of technologies, devices, and applications that support the proliferation of social spaces in the Internet" (Castells, 2009, p. 65). These changes suggest that the popular view of online communication as mediated through

portals (Lash, 2002, 2006) needs to be read in light of Wellman's idea that "[t]he person has become the portal" (2004, p. 127).

One of the core features of the social web is found in the phenomenon of SNS which, according to boyd and Ellison (2007), demarcate a shift in the ways that online communities are organised. In their account, SNS are portrayed as applications on the social web that allows for the construction of a public or semi-public profile through which it is possible to put on display a list of shared social connections which, in turn, makes it viable to browse the social connections of other users. Research has demonstrated that SNS are mainly used to maintain and sustain offline relationships (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). This thought is further validated by Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2006) whom make clear that the searching for people to which the users of SNS already have an offline relation is vastly more frequent than the act of flickering through the profiles of strangers as a means for establishing a social relationship. Following this line of thought, Vergeer and Pelzer (2009) maintain that online and offline networks supplement rather than replace each other and these findings are further supported by Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) whom argue that engagement in SNS enhances social relationships in the offline realm (see also McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002). Similar ideas have been elaborated by Boyd (2008b) whom suggests that SNS can be regarded as a "networked public" that support social interaction in the same sense as offline spaces would do. In overall terms, the primary function of SNS is the facilitation of communication with people that are already part of one's extended social network. Understood in such way, the emergence of SNS implied a fundamental shift from social interaction in thematically organised online communities to SNS that are centred on people's personal, or as Boyd and Ellison (2007) put it, "egocentric" networks. In this sense, they maintain that SNS do not primarily

serve to initiate relationships with strangers but rather to articulate and make one's social network visible. By demonstrating the social connections to others, an establishment of latent social ties is facilitated and thus, as Haythorntwaite (2005) has demonstrated in depth, a form of connectivity emerges that makes otherwise unconnected others connect.

As indicated above, the basic advantage of SNS is the ability to establish social relationships and perform a self-presentation, observe each other and exhibit social relations through the graphical user interface. Following this line of thought, Beer and Burrows maintain that SNS can be regarded as "dynamic matrices of information through which people observe others, expand the network, make new "friends", edit and update content, blog, remix, post, respond, share files, exhibit, tag and so on" (2007, p. 2.1). Importantly, however, this kind of social applications provide, as Kozinets has put it, a "new level of voyeurism and exhibitionism" (2010, p. 71) that is substantially different from the interactional scene in physical space. Being assumed to facilitate social interaction and collaboration, the social web has triggered several theorists to argue that the culture of today is a participatory one (Jenkins, 2006) largely inhabited by the prosumer (Beer & Burrows, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) which, in turn, not only constitutes a new social category but also, and more surprisingly, is nearly perceived of as a form of life with a radically different kind of individuality and a lust for shouldering the conditions of late-modern communicative capitalism (Dean, 2005, 2010a, 2010b). Beer and Burrows (2007) underscore the importance of understanding SNS in the context of what Thrift (2005) has termed "knowing capitalism". Thrift argues that "software has come to intervene in nearly all aspects of everyday life and has begun to sink into its taken-for-granted background" (Thrift, 2005, p. 153). Following this line of thought, Beer and Burrows point at the importance of recognising

SNS as commercial spaces since they routinely are used to harvest information about the users, thus pointing at a problematic aspect of their being free to use.

The rapid emergence of SNS has prompted researchers to discuss the possible implications of the modes of social organisation it allows for. Even though a vast array of issues are being considered in this research context, the relationship between processes of impression management, friending strategies and privacy concerns stand out as the most important themes. As mentioned earlier, one core characteristic of SNS is the public display of connections and this is a feature that allows for a negotiation of self while at the same time serving as a means for connecting with others (Boyd, 2004) and provides a possibility to validate the identity information that is found in other users' profiles (Donath & Boyd, 2004). Understood in such a way, different parts of the public profile can be regarded as mechanisms of self-presentation (Boyd & Heer, 2006), not the least since it has been demonstrated that "wall postings" on Facebook is an important part of how profile owners are perceived (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman & Tong, 2008) and that their listing of interests functions as an arena for taste performances (Liu, 2008). Clearly, people carefully construct their online self-presentation and it is often performed considering anticipated offline interaction (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006). Importantly, however, it has been pointed out that there is a certain discrepancy between social popularity online and offline and this is a factor that provides a problematic aspect of SNS as a means for self- presentation (Utz, 2010).

Evidently, there is a large amount of factors outside the immediacy of personal action that affects the processes of self-presentation. An important aspect of this state of affairs is that SNS, in contrast to common practice offline, allow for the creation of a very large extended network. Making a distinction between "Friends" on SNS and the "friends" of everyday life, Boyd (2006)

argues that the first kind provides a means for users to imagine an audience that, in turn, serves as a guide for their action. Criticising such a distinction, Beer (2008) calls for an understanding of SNS as changing the understandings of friendship in general which, since SNS are becoming part of the cultural mainstream, could be remediated and indeed shaped by the version of friendship provided by SNS. Due to the recent upsurge of SNS as well as mobile and locative technologies, Beer argues that social life as such has become mediated to such an extent that the notion of life "offline" is no longer a feasible construct. Furthermore, he maintains that "these technologies are so mundane and integrated in how we live, why try to understand them by separating them out of our routines, how we live, how we connect with people and form relationships and so on" (2008, p. 521).

During the last few years, privacy concerns on SNS have been widely discussed, not the least because of the inherent risk that personal information could be harvested and used for commercial purposes. Early accounts of these issues illuminated a disconnection between users' desire for privacy protection and their actual behaviour (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Even though Stutzman (2006) have pointed out that the public nature of SNS remains unknown for a large number of users, the level of desired privacy appears to relate to perceived trust and usage goals (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). Technological changes, by which the users of Facebook, for instance, have been haunted regularly during the last few years, affect the notions of privacy, not the least by disrupting the users' sense of control over impression management (Boyd, 2008a). However arguing that SNS can threaten personal privacy, Debatin et al. (2009) assert that the perceived benefits of online social networking most often compensate for the risks associated with the disclosure of personal information. In addition, they argue that the use of Facebook is deeply integrated in everyday life to such an extent that it has its own routines and rites.

This thought is further elaborated by Sadeh et al. (2009) in arguing that privacy concerns in mobile social networks depend on the time spent using a specific application since users tend to be more comfortable with disclosing personal data over time. Measures for enhancing the conditions of personal integrity has been taken in different forms and, as Boyd and Ellison (2007) make clear, the majority of SNS demand a bi-directional confirmation process for the establishment of friendships. Importantly, the development of location aware mobile technologies that are equipped with camera devices could possibly provoke a shift in the ways that privacy concerns are understood since they, in contrast to regular SNS, facilitate a detailed place-specific tracking of other individuals (de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2009).

Making Place Matter: A Spatial Turn

The enormous increase in mobile communication that has become reality during the last few years has changed the use of the Internet and particularly the use of SNS since people increasingly use mobile devices to connect to each other and their extended networks. If the development of the social web and SNS marked a social turn in the history of the Internet, a tentative suggestion would be that the emergence of locative technologies, correspondingly, marks a spatial turn. Understanding contemporary society and culture as characterised by an ephemerality while arguing that communication and space are deeply bound up with each other, Jansson and Falkheimer (2006) point at the necessity for a general spatial turn in media studies (whereas Soja [1999, 2009] calls for a general transdisciplinary spatial turn). This necessity is further illuminated when the intersection between mobile technology and SNS is considered. Several researchers have suggested that the boundaries between public and private are blurred because of mobile communication technologies (for instance Höflich, 2006; Puro, 2002; Sheller, 2004; Sheller & Urry, 2003) and

Wilken (2008) has called for an examination of the ways in which these technologies shape (the experience of) places while mobile communication increasingly becomes integrated in everyday life activities.

When online communication is no longer confined to the security of domestic spaces but rather ubiquitous and intensely used in conjunction with urban life, the imagined boundary between physical and digital spaces increasingly appears to be implausible. Importantly, earlier studies have demonstrated that mobile technology accelerates the informational exchange which in turn has deep effects on the "urban metabolism" (Townsend, 2000). Along with other researchers, Humphreys (2010) understand the proliferation of mobile social networks as an important factor in the transformation of social interaction and maintains that it can provide the foundation for a rearrangement of socio-spatial practices and a negotiation of public space since it facilitates novel informational flows. Arguing that mobile social networks make it easier to interact in public with others, Humphreys suggest that this kind of technology needs to be positioned in the relational borderland between communication technology and urban life. Although the use of mobile social networks primarily consist of online communication, their ability to facilitate the exchange of social or locational information catalyses offline interaction.

What is here termed a spatial turn in Internet studies cannot be reduced to the increasing use of mobile technology but rather needs to be understood considering more overarching questions of media, mediation and late-modern social processes. Numerous researchers have endeavoured to theorise the conditions of late-modern society with certain respect to its increasing mediatisation. In this context, Giddens (1991) positioned the dissociation of time and space as a significant attribute of late modernity along with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) whom positioned processes of individualisation at the heart of late-

modernity (see also Han, 2010; Harvey, 1990). More specifically, Meyrowitz (1985) provided an early account of how electronic media affected people's perception of space and provoked changes at the level of community and social roles. These are but singular examples, but it seems that contemporary society is not so much bound up with institutional arrangements as it is concerned with network connections which, by default, emphasise individuality.

Elaborating these thoughts profoundly, Castells (2001/1996) argues that a new spatial logic which he terms "space of flows" follows the rise of the network society. Positioning space and time as deeply intertwined, Castells notes that space normally brings together practices that are temporally simultaneous. Partly due to the increasing number of circuits of electronic exchange, space as well as time have taken on new characteristics which provide the foundation for a transformation of the urban landscape. Although people continue to live in "the space of places", social practices are nowadays supported and structured by "the space of flows" which implies that the meaning and social dynamic of places is heavily altered. In a similar vein yet focusing specifically on the interrelationship between media and modernity, Thompson (1995) underscores that any understanding of communication networks needs to reconsider the idea that its singular function is to transmit information. Instead, he suggests that it intervenes in the social world by allowing for new forms of action and interaction which fundamentally reorganise the social realm. Arguing that "the use of communication media transforms the spatial and temporal organization of social life" (p. 4), Thompson maintains that social bonds that include physically absent others are established. Consequently, these developments have "resulted in the uncoupling of space and time, in the sense that spatial distanciation no longer required temporal distanciation" (p. 32). An important aspect of Thompson's argument is that these changes has paved way for a "despatialized simultane-

ity" which has profoundly expanded the spatial horizons in contemporary society thus altering the conditions for experienced belonging and perceptions of time and space. Following this line of thought, communications media transform social action to by transcending the boundaries of the immediate social context thus making it potentially directed towards an indefinite range of recipients.

Understanding locative technologies while taking into account the theoretical framework above, their practical meaning clearly needs to be situated in a broader social context as well as regarded as an important mediator of symbolic content. An early account of this kind of technology demonstrated that it facilitated the experience of closeness in the urban setting while at the same time providing a means for congregation as well as avoidance (Humphreys, 2010). Asserting that the use of locative technologies simultaneously involve a combination of communication, collaboration and social interaction on both a physical and digital level, de Souza e Silva and Sutko (2009) propose that it provides an opportunity to engage in novel forms of exploring (and navigating) urban as well as digital spaces. Although they largely understand the use of such technologies in the context of socio-spatial gaming, de Souza e Silva and Sutko provide a functional nomenclature for understanding the meaning of applications like Gowalla and Foursquare. Suggesting that locative-mobile social networks facilitate the establishment of a dynamic relationship between physical as well as digital spaces and the people that populate them, they claim that this state of affairs results in the emergence of a "playful layer that is formed on top of physical spaces" which consequently leads to a "reconfiguring [of] urban spaces into ludic experiences" (2009, p. 6). In order to develop this thought further, they bring the metaphorical figure of the flâneur into play since it, as they maintain, draws attention to the possibility of playful activity to reshape urban space thus calling for an understanding of

the city as consisting of "spaces to be explored, rather than circulatory spaces, in which the main purpose of movement is to travel from point to point" (2009, p. 6).

Understanding the flâneur as an actor whom aimlessly and without any explicit destination traverses the urban playground, de Souza e Silva and Sutko maintain that his (or her) "wandering and detracted gaze" leads to a reterritorialisation of the city by means of merging "the "serious" space of the city (designed to promote the circulation of people) with the ludic activity of casual walk, thus eliminating the boundaries that separate a distinct and separate playful space from ordinary life spaces" (2009, p. 7). The idea that locative technologies provide an additional communicative layer to the geography and social topography of urban space is worthwhile only when considering urban space as a multilayered phenomenon. In his Production of Space, Lefebvre (1999/1974) sets out to grasp the complexity of spatial arrangements. Understanding the city as divided into different yet interrelated levels, he provides a foundation for conceptualising the meaning of locative technologies in a contemporary urban setting. Drawing on his understanding of space as a product of social action, de Souza e Silva and Sutko argue that the playful spaces that emerge from the use of locative technologies correspond to his notion of lived space. This thought can be further elaborated by turning to Anderson (2004) whom, by using the term "cosmopolitan canopy", maintains that spatial location implies an inclination to act in a manner that corresponds to a shared assumption about the place in question.

Even though locative technologies facilitate the emergence of a playful, or at least communicative, layer through which physical and digital spaces are allowed to intermingle, this chapter pursues an understanding of these technologies that is underpinned by Huizinga's (1998/1944) suggestion that play always implies a certain amount of seriousness. As will be demonstrated later on in this chapter, locative technologies such as Four-

square and Gowalla are used in a manner that is not only playful but also firmly interlaced with preoccupations of (prospective) social transactions in physical space. It is often maintained that the act of checking in at different places is accompanied by a certain degree of anxiety and desire for pleasing a digitally present yet spatially distant other. These technologies appear to provide more than adding a digital layer to urban space, as de Souza e Silva and Sutko (2009) suggest, since they also, and what is more important, are adding a spatial (and thus physical) layer to digital space. It appears to be the case that "[t]he information order is inescapable. It gives us no longer an outside place to stand" (Lash, 2002, p. xii).

CHECKING IN AT THE URBAN PLAYGROUND

Although several research reports (for instance Medierådet, 2010) demonstrate that interactions in digital space are perceived as an integral part of everyday life, it is important to remember that some fundamental differences between physical and digital spaces persist. The absence of corporeal matter in digital space limits the interactive mechanisms to the sensory faculties of sight and hearing, but this state of affairs does not imply that bodies (or places, for that sake) are rendered unimportant. On the contrary, the very prerequisite for the intelligibility of locative technologies hinges on the fact that people, with their bodies and senses, are (not) located at certain places. This entails that an exploration of the ways in which locative technologies are used in different social contexts is significant. In so doing, it is crucial to question whether interaction in digital space renders spatial proximity purposeless and/or undesirable and, furthermore, to examine if such an interaction takes place at a radical distance from the social realm in physical space. In the following sections it will be demonstrated that the use of locative technologies involves a dual

social process since they are used for sharing place-specific information, on the one hand, and gathering such information from members of the personal social network, on the other hand. These aspects of the utilisation are linked through a multitude of network connections, interconnected social networks and flows of social interaction in different forms and intensities. The remainder of this section endeavours to explore these notions in depth to establish an understanding of how locative technologies are used in everyday life and to what extent such applications contribute to the amalgamation of experiences in physical and digital space.

Dissolved Boundaries, Embedded Social Action

In almost every case, the interviews were opened up by discussing the personal experiences of online interaction and most of the interviewees touched upon the division between digital and physical spaces when conversing about questions of anonymity and privacy concerns. Clearly, the complexities of such a division were something they had carefully reflected upon and, in overall terms, the prevailing thought was that digital and physical spaces are largely inseparable. At several occasions, the interviewees returned to the idea that these spaces have become fused into a communicative social realm and expressed an inclination for striking a balance between experiences gained in digital and physical spaces. Jessica, a 30 years old communications officer, recalls the earlier situation and suggests: "nowadays, the digital wild and crazy of the 90's has started to collide with reality". In a similar vein, and relating to notions of anonymity, Amanda, a 26 years old communications manager, maintains that there is no significant difference between these spaces since they are equally a playground for initiating and sustaining relationships, "but through other channels and slightly different ways of expressing oneself". Following this thread, David, a 28

years old graphic designer, recalls his early days of browsing and chatting on the Internet and asserts that in his case, anonymity has never been an issue. Instead, he explains, using the Internet was a means for establishing social ties based on interest rather than geographical proximity. Even though he clearly understands the Internet as all but anonymous, David contends that some properties of digital interaction makes it different from its physical parallel. Suggesting that interaction in digital spaces puts the actor in a social "safe-mode" in which, at least to some extent, a "pre-talk" is facilitated, David appears to understand SNS as providing a functional filter through which the other is scrutinised. In his account, it appears to be a question of evaluating the other from a safe distance or, as David explains, pointing at the current situation, "the idea that people friend each other on Facebook and chat a bit on Facebook and then sort of become a couple […] I think that has made quite a lot for people's close relationships". David's view of digital communication is vastly similar to the accounts provided by the other interviewees and it points at the idea that digital interaction is to some extent characterised by rationalisation and calculability. As several researchers have argued, for instance Ritzer (2004), these are significant facets of late modern society and provide an important context when David explains that interaction in digital space allows for an evaluation of other people, thus making it easier to meet them in person (or decide not to do so).

Understood in such a way, what happens in digital space does certainly not stay digital but on the contrary materialise, penetrate and act on processes and events in physical space. It is thus often assumed that actions in digital space demand a perceived authenticity by the subject acting "back stage" (Goffman, 1990/1956). This idea is backed up by Amanda whom says: "you have to live up to what you give the impression of; if you check in at the arts gallery, you kind of have to live up to that […] maybe it sounds a bit

harsh, but you should at least have an interest". Similarly, Michael, a guy in his thirties, makes clear that providing information about offline actions and places necessarily implies that he stands as a guarantee for its validity. In line with this understanding, several interviewees maintained that on SNS it is appropriate to be "personal, but not private" and it appears to be the case that this is said as a precaution and a strategy for keeping a distance between what occurs in digital and physical space. Subjected to the gaze of the other, the "private" thus never comes into the limelight but is rather reduced to the fictionalised and highly narrated notion of the "personal". This, however, is not an easy task but rather, as Jessica explains, "a balancing act" and it is thus not very surprising that check-ins with a potential to evoke a desired social response are preferred in favour of others, as will be demonstrated later on in this chapter. It is in this context that locative technologies such as Gowalla and Foursquare need to be understood. Even though these applications are but examples of mechanisms that challenge the imagined division between digital and physical spaces, their entrenchment in physical space draws this thought to its extreme.

Checking In: The Electronic Flâneur, a Botanist of the Digital Sidewalk

Taken together, the interviews provide a rich account of the practice of "checking in" and give voice to a conceptualisation of locative technologies as a mechanism through which a complex interplay between self-presentation, social interaction, space and place is put into play. In contrast to the anonymous and disembodied subject of "cyberspace", the trope of the electronic flâneur is here deployed to comprehend actors that are deeply involved in complex social relationships, wandering on the frail boundary between digital and physical spaces. In so doing, the electronic flâneur challenges the very feasibility of such a boundary since both of these spaces appear to be

interwoven and subjects of mutual penetration. Elaborating these ideas further, this section is devoted to three interrelated themes, namely the check-in as a device for social filtering, distant interaction and strategic self-presentation.

On the surface, the act of "checking in" is often presented in a very instrumental manner. Even though the interviewees often explained that the use of locative technologies had some primary purpose (such as gaming, keeping up with friends, trying to figure out new business ventures or simply using it as a pastime), they all expressed a view of these technologies as fundamentally social and deeply embedded in everyday life activities. One of the basic tenets of the practice of checking in appears to involve the establishment of social relationships to a variety of places which are used as a means for sharing information about oneself as well as visited places to the members of one's extended network. Although sharing place-specific information, providing suggestions or simply being amusing could well be regarded as ways of providing others with a "social surplus value", as Amanda puts it, checking in often comprises an early stage of a social process which occasionally results in an offline encounter.

In the interviews, several ways of conceptualising this aspect of the check-in surface and most notably, both David and Jennifer, an advertising creative in her thirties, explain that it can be understood as an invitation for meeting up, whereas Amanda makes clear that it is an invitation to dialogue. Several interviewees provide examples of how the check-in have resulted in different forms of serendipitous gatherings of which some have blossomed out to friendships while others have simply remained a temporary acquaintance. Understanding the check-in as related to the establishment of social relationships is crucial since it lays the foundation for comprehending questions of self-presentation and social presence in digital space. Checking in at different places involves the marking of a simultaneous presence at a vast array

of places thus increasing the number of potential social contact surfaces independent of time and space. This implies that the imaginable recipients of check-in data fluctuate in character and number since there is always an indefinite range of potential recipients involved, as Thompson (1995) suggested, although in a context very different from this. Being used as a means for establishing relationships of different kinds, the check-in thus metaphorically becomes a way of scattering breadcrumbs in the trails of one's journey through the urban landscape while simultaneously laying the foundation for a spatial dispersion of the self. Taken together, these ideas point at a relationship between self and other that appears to be sustained by and bound up with places of different kinds.

A majority of the interviewees make clear that these technologies are used as a means for navigating not only the urban landscape but also, and what is more important, there and others' social network. In overall terms, check-in data facilitates the sorting out of people with similar interests and tastes, since it provides information about movement patterns in physical space that are considered to be important for experiencing a similarity. Understood in such a way, these technologies allow for a filtering of the flows of information in people's extended networks thus making it possible to differentiate between individuals with whom one could possibly experience either strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Importantly, places serve as a nexus in the social and informational flows thus being an important factor in the filtering of social interactions. At several occasions, the interviewees suggested that the check-in, to some extent, contributes to a sense of order in an otherwise disordered social context characterised by a multitude of actors, messages and potential social relationships. In this sense, shared places help discerning similarities between actors thus allowing for a "pre-talk", as David expresses it, and other forms of interpersonal evaluation prior to the establishment of a social interaction offline. Michael maintains that

checking in at the same places as other individuals is part of such an evaluative procedure since a shared place can function as an important piece in a social jigsaw puzzle. Explaining that it is often a question of discerning patterns of movement to find out a commonality of interests, David says: "you check out who've been around at a place […] for example, it's possible to see who've been here a couple of hours ago". At several occasions, the interviewees explained that checking in facilitates the establishment of social relations, not the least by flickering through other people's check-ins for discovering mutual friends and place-specific relationships. One illuminating example of these processes is the spontaneous emergence of social ties through ousting the "mayor" of a place in Foursquare. Amanda concludes that such an experience provides an impression of commonality and says: "if a person has checked in there many times, then we have to have something in common". This sort of events often trigger an urge to embellish such an embryonic social relationship through, as Amanda maintains, "checking out the person in question just to see what other places this person's got". If the check-in should be regarded as an utterly social practice, then it follows that the electronic flâneur, to achieve a meaningful existence, unceasingly depends on the others' activity. Taking part of other people's check-ins, an increased knowledge of both people and places emerges and clearly, checking in at the same place as others indicates a commonality since, as Amanda puts it, "it has to lie something in the fact that they check-in at a certain place". This assumption is often operationalised in a strategic fashion since being at the same places as other (influential) people and checking in there provides a foundation for establishing a relationship in physical space.

Following this line of thought, it does not come as a surprise that a number of the interviewees pointed out that the possibility to comment upon other people's check-ins is an important feature.[7] Arguing that this is one of the most significant

aspects of locative technologies, David maintains that it allows for "exploring the city and spreading information about lovely places". Similarly, Jessica as well as Robert, a tech savvy 35-year old, explain that commenting on check-ins is an important part of these technologies since it establishes social interaction, to some extent. Facilitating distant interaction this way, these technologies enable a communicative flow that is deeply bound up with places without the necessity of bodily presence. Although checking in at places which correspond to an actual locale in physical space is common, there is a possibility that people check in at imaginary places (such as for instance "the rabbit-hole to China" or "the world's ugliest fountain") which implies that, as will be further elaborated in the next section, place-specific interaction is not always bound up with the actual geography of physical space. Rather, space appears to be constructed by flows to a higher extent than it is linked to the space of places which entails that the digital geography as such appears to be an important point of reference.

Even though the possibility to mediate communication and interaction through places in digital space is an important feature of locative technologies, their ability to make physical and digital space interpenetrate is significant. This state of affairs provides a foundation for one of the most important aspects of the use of locative technologies that surfaced in the interviews, namely their significance for strategic self-presentation. To a large extent, the interviewees suggest that checking in at places is, however performed routinely, associated with a great deal of reflection and sometimes even meticulous preparation. For instance, Jessica maintains that she puts down "quite an effort in formulating myself on the Internet because it increases the chances to receive funny comments […] just so that someone will see it and think it's amusing". It is thus important, she adds, not to simply deliver information or images but rather, "to create some sort of narrative of the things you publish". A similar account is

provided by Amanda whom explains that she often chooses not to check in at all places to which she pays a visit, "but rather choose the ones that will strengthen my personal brand the most, so to speak". Understanding places as an important part of her self-presentation, Amanda makes clear that places as such are integral parts of her personal "brand". This entails that the check-in serves at, as Humphreys (2010) has demonstrated (even though not sufficiently accounting for the socio-structural circumstances involved), facilitating the meeting up with friends as well as the possibility of avoiding certain social encounters. Being aware of which places that are selected for check-in does thus not primarily appear to be a question of privacy concerns as earlier research on SNS has demonstrated but rather implicates a connection to possible outcomes in the offline social realm. When sharing check-in data, it is not primarily the intrinsic qualities of the place that are at stake but rather the possible reaction from one's social network.

Checking in at a place is an act that is directed towards other individuals and, similar to what one could expect from a setting in physical space, certain positive aspects of the user's urban life are revealed. At times, this is achieved by checking in at some places but avoid doing it at others and is a question of, as Jessica maintains, "glorifying life a bit, no one need to see the failures". Facilitating a favourable self-presentation of this sort, the use of locative technologies could be understood as a means for legitimising one's social network. Amanda, for instance, points at a complexity in the relationship between check-ins and the social network in arguing that checking in a certain places has a possibility to "confirm that you're doing right in having each other as friends" and that fighting over mayorships on Foursquare might provide a feeling of being "right in your context". In a similar vein, Jessica asserts that it is more favourable to check in at socially accepted and/or desired places and informs that "one becomes a bit cocky being at the gym and noticing that one is top

of the leader board […] It doesn't mean anything but [...] it's just in your face!". This theme was discussed by several interviewees and Michael, for instance, makes clear that these technologies are used to construct a "myth" about oneself; about the places you visit, your journeys". Similarly, Rebecca maintains that they are used as a means for shaping one's identity, which is a perception comparable to Jennifer's whom argue that they are used for "telling other people who you are". Self-presentation and places are thus intimately connected and Daniel, a tech geek in his late thirties, explains that he avoids checking in a certain places since some information is simply not meant for others and it is important to remain in control. Yet another way of handling these issues is expressed by Jennifer whom reveals that she occasionally checks in at nearby places that are slightly more "cool" instead of checking in at the place where she is actually situated. Clearly, locative technologies are not simply used as a means for connecting with existing friends but are rather associated with a possibility to establish spontaneous connections and interactions. Checking in must therefore be situated in a complex web of interrelated factors that, taken together, provide a means for self-presentation. It does thus not come as a surprise that the interviewees often suggest that actions and interactions in digital space are performed strategically to evoke desired effects in physical space. Andrew, a 37 year old Internet entrepreneur, provides an illuminating example of this inclination and maintains that checking in is associated with calculation and tactics since it, one way or the other, serves at generating some sort of social surplus value. A similar thought is expressed by Jessica whom explains that it is a question of putting on display "all that raises your status […] you have a desire to share positive experiences".

Linking up the statements above, it becomes clear that locative technologies and the act of checking in is of a complex nature. It could certainly be regarded as a mechanism that allows individuals to not only extend their personal social network but also provides an opportunity to facilitate distant presence at digital representations of places in physical space. Hence, these technologies make it possible to be digitally present yet spatially dispersed. Such a dispersed presence provides an opportunity to engage in a strategic self-presentation that transgresses temporal as well as spatial boundaries although they are deeply bound up with the geography of physical space. The possibility to engage in self presentation in different yet parallel contexts is an important feature of locative technologies and provides a foundation for understanding the electronic flâneur as an inherently playful, yet notoriously conscious actor. Clearly, locative technologies are largely used in a fashion that implies a rationalisation of social relations while at the same time being subjected to a commercialisation of both the social realm and the self. Checking in is often surrounded by a high level of calculability and is thought of as deeply related to potential offline encounters. In contrast to self-presentation on SNS, locative technologies seem to foster a self-presentation that is performed by establishing relationships to places which are put on display. It is thus a question of strategically sharing place-specific occurrences online to evoke (and avoid) certain effects in the offline social realm. In Baudelaire's original account of the flâneur, it was often assumed to be a "botanist of the sidewalk" and, in a sense, an observer that was always detached from the immediate social surroundings while strolling the urban neighbourhoods. Traversing urban space as a digital billboard, the electronic flâneur differs from this figure quite dramatically since it is highly regulated and always on guard to protect its fragile yet valuable personal brand. At hand, is thus an actor which could simultaneously be regarded as a stroller of the city streets thus participating in and portraying the city as well as an actor that not only experiences the city reflexively and with a high level of calculability but also participates in a social context through

which the city and the urban landscape is provided with meaning. This does not only prove the distinction between physical and digital space to be fundamentally blurred but demonstrates as well that actions and interactions in physical space are often governed by the social and informational flow in digital space (and vice versa).

Checking Out: Digital Geographies and Spatially (Un)Bound Pleasures

Traversing the urban playground, checking in by means of locative technologies and thus being distantly present on a vast array of places, the electronic flâneur establishes social relationships in a variety of ways. An integral part of the processes associated with the act of "checking in" is, curiously enough, the act of "checking out" other people and places. As a whole, the interviews suggest that digital interaction is seldom performed without spatial references but is rather intimately connected with the digital representation of physical space. Several examples of how these spaces converge and interpenetrate are found in the interviews and by illuminating some of them, an understanding is established of the complexity attached to locative technologies and the emergence of digital geographies.

The use of locative technologies and the creation of spots allow for the emergence of a digital geography and this is a theme that was touched upon in a number of the interviews. Commenting her use of these technologies, Jennifer states that "there's sort of a virtual map over Malmö, like a layer or a web" and in a similar fashion Robert explains that "it's like a digital layer on top of the city; there's a darn lot of information that we get mobile access to". Sometimes the spots are intimately bound up with the physical geography of the city whereas the other times take the form of imaginary places. Even though some of the interviewees find the humorous creation of imaginary spots desirable, others, such as Matthew, an entrepreneur in his late 20s, and Daniel make clear

that the correspondence to the physical geography is essential. Arguing that social organisation in digital space is characterised by a certain degree of undesired "messiness" and exemplifying with the possibility to create geographical spots through locative technologies, Matthew declares that "there is something missing in these applications; they aren't rooted in reality and I don't fancy the anarchy in people's adding of places". In contrast to his view, Jennifer underscores that part of the fun with locative technologies disappears when there is too much of a similarity between the physical and digital geography. Although Daniel explains his view of locative technologies as providing "a map on top of the map" he finds it decisive to strive at a precise digital cartography. Arguably, this view needs to be understood while considering the fact that several interviewees declared that they use locative technologies to gain an extended knowledge about the city. Rebecca, for instance, reveals that she finds it hard to remember street addresses and thus uses the digital "map" to find a café or a restaurant whenever necessary. Importantly, however, she explains that gaining knowledge about a certain place is not only a question of browsing nearby spots but is something that includes her social network for validating purposes. Understood in this way, the place in itself is not sufficient for attracting her interest since the members of her network also need to have some sort of relationship to the place in question. Traversing the urban playground thus becomes a question of, as Rebecca puts it, "following in the footsteps of one's friends".

Although it is often argued that these technologies are used to gain knowledge about the city, it appears to be done in a rather passive and socially subjected fashion. Several informants state that they seldom search for information about places actively, but are rather inclined to be affected by actions performed by the members of their personal social network. An informative example of this state of affairs is provided by Jessica whom maintains that it is more a question of taking notice

of other people's check-ins than actively browsing the place archives. Although she receives this information passively, she clearly states that it has an impact on what places she chooses to visit. A similar conception is expressed by Christopher, a 20-year old computer science student, whom points out that check-ins are quite useful when it comes to learning about the city since they can be regarded as "recommendations from like-minded people". In this sense, gaining an understanding of the city or, more correctly, apprehend the behavioural patterns of the individuals that form your extended network is quite easily done. Jessica exemplifies this thought, saying: "you can see where people check in even if you're not friends on Twitter or Facebook". Taking this idea one step further, Robert explains that these technologies make him move around in the city and that they serve as a map for finding out where to buy pizza, for instance.

Several interviewees shed light over the fact that locative technologies prompt a curiosity and spark an interest for acquiring further information about the city due to the ability to take part of other, known as well as unknown, people's check-ins. A reason behind this state of affairs is not the least that checking in at the same place as others lays the foundation for the occurrence of unexpected social relations. Jessica, for instance, tells the story of how she once took notice of another person regularly checking in at places similar to hers which made her wonder, as she puts it, "who the fuck is that person? We've almost got exactly the same movement patterns!". Similar experiences are described by several interviewees and could well be contextualised by Rebecca whom explains that checking in is "a way of making yourself public; it is like a public business card with a photo". Even though the users rarely search for places actively by means of locative technologies, the majority of the informants agree that they have contributed to an increased knowledge of the city. It appears to be the case, however, that they inform themselves indirectly by looking, gazing and taking notice of

where the other is located. Despite the fact that this indicates a certain degree of passivity, Jessica explains that the use of locative technologies easily develops into a social mechanism through which it is not only possible to keep a check on what is going on but also to experience, to some extent, a distant presence: "even though not acting […] you experience a participation despite the fact that you're not actually interacting with those people for real". A similar thought is expressed by Jennifer whom explains that she frequently partakes in other people's activities at a distance but often ends up thinking "oh my god, it would be fun being at [a night club], but where to find an instant babysitter?"

Relating interpersonal communication to places and thus dissolving the boundaries between physical and digital spaces, locative technologies and their mediation of distant interaction facilitate the experience of community without being dependent on proximity in time and space. As was discussed in the former section, the interviewees shared stories about the possibility to being distantly present, such as for instance hanging out with friends without leaving the comfort of one's home. Several informants explain that they make use of locative technologies to find out where their friends are located thus making it possible for them to coincide. It could well be argued that a presence at multiple sites becomes facilitated this way with a possibility to transgress geographical obstacles in order to experience a spatial proximity. Importantly, it is not a question of being geographically situated in physical space but rather of establishing a digital connection to a place and the social interactions occurring at it. In this way, the physical geography is by no means rendered futile but rather, a transmutation of physical space is provoked by the enmeshment in the digital communicative layer provided by locative technologies. Hence, it is again possible to return to the idea that locative technologies facilitate a distant presence and this thought is further illustrated by Amanda whom informs

that "sometimes you don't know what to do on a Friday evening and sometimes you're too tired to do anything but then it feels like you can partake in the night out even if you're staying in". Understanding the use of locative technologies as a means for taking part in social situations at a distance, Amanda maintains that "you feel a lot less lonely these days". However accentuating a rather different aspect of this state of affairs, Rebecca explains that checking in is a way of telling her friends where she is and says that she uses these technologies in order to figure out what other people that are present in the same locale as she is. In a sense, she thus endeavours to explore the immediate offline setting by means of online technology.

Providing a possibility to partake in different and, at times, parallel social settings at a distance, locative technologies can be used as a means for experiencing a sense of community. A number of interviewees touched upon this theme while suggesting that these technologies allow for keeping a check on people in the extended network thus shortening the temporal as well as spatial distance to others. Importantly, this occurs, as Jennifer makes clear, on two different levels since it is a question of relating to both known and unknown people. Furthermore, Jennifer explains that locative technologies can provide a sense of community, even though there are clear limitations. Sharing a story about being situated in a large crowd at one of the city squares while noticing how a large amount of her friends checked in at the same place, she tells about the frustration in not being able to find her friends among all the other people. However, it is clear that the very experience of being at the same place as others is strengthened when mediated by locative technologies. A similar idea is put forward by Amanda whom continues her reasoning about the possibility to be digitally together with her friends that are having a night out in town: "if my friends have spent a night out and I feel like; no, I'm just too tired, then I still have the possibility to see

where they've checked in and […] the dialogue is so much closer than just asking, yeah, so what were you up to?". Considering these statements, it seems fruitful to understand locative technologies as a mechanism that facilitates a certain form of intimacy and feeling of community. It is not only a question of being able to see what other people are doing, but rather that their actions, so to speak, are delivered automatically.

In line with what was touched upon earlier, several informants frequently return to the idea that the personal "feed" is of crucial importance to their social practice and use of locative technologies. It is not unusual that this is understood as an automatised condensation of a generalised other that constantly supplies response and information (Lash, 2006). Taken together, the statements above suggest that the digital geographies that emerge from the use of locative technologies are utterly social. The electronic flâneur, traversing digital and physical spaces while "prosuming" these geographies is largely a passive observer, expecting to be guided by the social feed and the activity of others. This intricate manifestation of a tension between a digital voyeurism and exhibitionism makes it plausible to question from where the activity comes if the majority of users are only passively engaged or, as Amanda indicated, acting to entertain people. When it comes to locative technologies, the feed often takes a peculiar form since it is not simply a question of automatic delivery of social updates but also the deliverance of socially anchored representations of space. The electronic flâneur is thus situated in a rather strange situation since no effort is demanded to partake in the urban events but instead, they can be conveniently received from a safe distance. Hence, an example of passive activity or, to use a more suiting concept, interpassivity (cf. Dean, 2010b; van Oenen, 2008; Žižek, 1999) surfaces. In place of the individual flâneur, the digital representation of the city appears to act on its own thus providing, as Žižek puts it, a "sense of being active through another subject who does the job

for me" (1999, p. 104). It seems fair to ask if the electronic flâneurs are checking out the activity of other users or if it could possibly be that they are the ones who are being checked out by the social feed and by the gaze of a system that increasingly gives the impression of sustaining an interpassivity rather than invigorating social interaction, critical dialogue and mutual recognition.

In the above, two major themes have surfaced that are equally important for understanding locative technologies and the emergence of digital geographies. First, it has been demonstrated that locative technologies allow for a distant presence thus transgressing spatial boundaries. Taken as a whole the arguments above indicate that the use of locative technologies supports an alternate understanding of the urban playground that challenges earlier assumptions of interaction in digital space. In contrast to the assumption that interaction in digital space would render spatial proximity unnecessary, locative technologies clearly involve social processes through which geographical spaces are interpenetrated by digital communication and, vice versa, that online interactions are bound up with representations of physical space. This, in turn, makes up a serious challenge to the imagined distinction between digital and physical spaces. Second, these technologies are largely dependent upon informational feeds and thus promote an interpassivity rather than interactivity. In overall terms, these technologies facilitate the rise of an array of geographies which, when converging into a "cosmopolitan canopy" (Anderson, 2004), provide an altered perception of the city while at the same time rendering possible diverse modes of social interaction in, through and by means of the city in as a point of reference.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are several important research themes that go beyond the scope of this particular study but nevertheless prove to be closely related to its core arguments. Researching the Internet and its social appropriations is a tricky endeavour since there are different temporal logics at play. This is why it is important not to forget basic social processes and sociologically viable categories such as actor, structure and agency, for instance. In the case of locative technologies, further research of the importance of the feed and the notion of interpassivity is needed. It is important to elucidate whether the technological development is making it easier to interact, collaborate and participate in social settings or if it is rather an example of systems of knowing with an automatised feed that are acting in place of the individual actor. In conjunction with this important question, it is pivotal to further investigate the significance of communicative capitalism that increasingly appears to make up the very foundation of SNS and similar applications.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this chapter, previous discussions about the problematic division between online and offline social spaces were introduced. It has been demonstrated that checking in at the urban playground is a fundamentally social act that brings together different aspects of physical as well as digital spaces. It is not, however, a question of a playful use of locative technologies but rather one that is deeply associated with a constant awareness of the other and of the social mechanisms of late modern society. The use of locative technologies brings forth an electronic flâneur that is partly strolling and partly sneaking around while observing the actions of the other.

Even though these technologies are intentionally used as a means for interaction and overcoming spatio-temporal obstacles, they also position the actor in a state of interpassivity through which the social network acts on its own behalf. Locative technologies thus not only entail a mechanism that makes it effortless to traverse urban space but also the establishment of a regulatory device that puts individual patterns of movement on display while simultaneously monitoring individual self-presentation and the virtual co-presence of other individuals. In other words, it is a question of processes similar to what de Souza e Silva and Sutko (2009) have termed "co-surveillance".

Despite the difficulties associated with the use of locative technologies, they are often used in a range of imaginative ways. Most importantly, they allow for a social filtering and a distant presence at places that transgress temporal and spatial boundaries while facilitating a presentation of self that is dispersed and scattered around the urban landscape. Most importantly, the interviews suggest that drawing a boundary between digital and physical spaces is a difficult task since they are often understood as parallel and intertwined. At the same time, however, digital space appears to be founded on its own logic with an apparent relationship to communicative capitalism. The electronic flâneur appears to be quite lonely yet highly interconnected and, in a sense, very anxious; as if its very existence hinges upon social recognition, in digital as well as physical space. In a similar vein, locative technologies facilitate the emergence of digital geographies through which physical spaces are understood and traversed with the social network and the check-ins of other users as points of reference. In overall terms, the deployment of locative technologies such as Foursquare and Gowalla provokes changes at two levels in the social realm. First, it adds a communicative digital layer to the spatial organisation of physical space. Second, it adds a spatially bound layer to interactions in digital space thus connecting the flows of bits and bytes to places in physical space.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Electronic Flâneur: A metaphorical figure used in order to encircle the actor that traverses urban space by means of locative technologies.

Digital Geography: Geographical metadata that is added to the physical geography which bears a possibility to both correspond and diverge from the actual appearance of physical space.

Digital Space/Physical Space: A conceptual dichotomy that refers to different yet interrelated social realms and that could be regarded as closely related to online/offline.

Locative Technologies: Mobile applications allowing users to create, share and consume place-specific information and engage in location-based interaction.

Online/Offline: A conceptual dichotomy that refers to the practical conditions of social interaction as being either mediated by the Internet or not.

Social Network Sites (SNS): Online communities centred around the individual which often include a public or semi-public profile and the public display of social connections which facilitate the browsing of others' personal network.

Social Web: A series of applications that in different ways allow users to share, sort, review, comment and categorise user generated data which in turn supports the emergence of social spaces.

ENDNOTES

1 The research for this chapter was made possible by financial support from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.

2 Internationally, Foursquare is closing in on 6.5 million users and attracts more than 25,000 new users every day. Every day, over 2 million check-ins are performed around the globe. Foursquare does not provide usage statistics by country but reveals that 40% of the users are situated outside of USA (Cross, 2011). However not providing any specific numbers of active users, Gowalla informs that Sweden has the second highest user base worldwide for Gowalla, after USA and that Malmö is a city with very high check-in activity (Bell, 2011). Worth mentioning is that Facebook launched "Places', a service similar to those of Gowalla and Foursquare, during the writing this chapter (however subsequent to the fieldwork).

3 The concept of "electronic flâneur" was originally formulated by Mitchell (2000/1995) and has been deployed by several researchers in a range of studies (for instance Atkinson & Willis, 2007; Featherstone, 1998; Hartmann, 2004; Shields, 2006). Originally, the trope of the flâneur was formulated by Baudelaire but has been theoretically elaborated by theorists such as Benjamin (1990) and Simmel (1950). See also Weinstein and Weinstein (1991) for an important review of Simmel's significance.

4 Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden and is situated in the Øresund Region, a transnational region in which Copenhagen, capital of Denmark is the largest urban area. In total, the region has a population of approximately 3.7 million habitants. However not being the largest city in the area, Malmö has in recent years undergone a fundamental transformation from industrial to postindustrial city and is nowadays regarded as an important venue for the media industry.

5 The interviews included 8 men and 4 women in the ages between 20 and late thirties (not all interviewees agreed to disclose their actual age) that all could be considered to be early adopters of locative technologies. The majority of the interviewees worked within the media, communications and/or the creative industry. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 to 100 minutes (mean 70 minutes). All quotations have been translated from Swedish to English and are moderately rephrased for linguistic reasons.

6 It is not unusual that the implications of the social web are interpreted in commercially popularised accounts (such as Li & Bernoff, 2008; Qualman, 2009; Shirky, 2009, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2008) which could be termed, following van Dijck and Nieborg (2009), "Web 2.0 business manifestos".

7 At the time of undertaking the fieldwork this was a possibility for social interaction that was exclusively provided by Gowalla. Recently, however, it was recently implemented in Foursquare as well.