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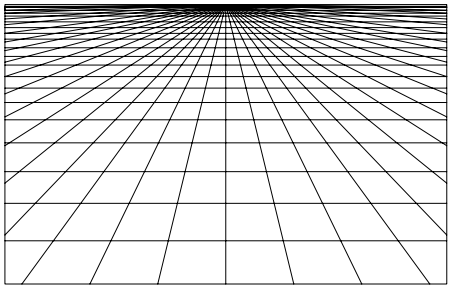

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Negotiating Boundaries:

A Study of Contemporary Mobile Phone Use in Public Places

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Technological Culture
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SYNOPSIS

Rapid diffusion of mobile phones in the last two decades has made mobile communication a part of everyday life of most people. Ever more areas, both public and private, are inevitably confronted with the technology. These encounters have given rise to divergent views. Side by side with the words of praise, critical voices have been raised because of what are perceived as dangers and misuses of the mobile phone.

In the light of the above this thesis explores the concepts “public” and “private” related to the introduction of the mobile technology. In this connection I examine how the boundaries of the public/private dichotomy are being negotiated by the involved parties in order to reach an agreement on what constitutes appropriate mobile behaviour. I look into how mobile users utilise the technical possibilities of the mobile phone and develop bodily strategies to manoeuvre more frictionless in public spaces. I also investigate the conflicts that arise in connection with these negotiations. Since norms guide our behaviour in all areas of life, I finally examine how norms of mobile use are constructed and to what extent formal regulations play a role when negotiating the boundaries.

When assessing the above, I employ an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses insights from various disciplines, such as sociology, ethnomethodology, media studies and science and technology studies. Qualitative interviews, observations and breaching experiments form cornerstones of the fieldwork.

Key words: mobile communication, the mobile phone, appropriate and inappropriate mobile behaviour, the public/private dichotomy, boundary-work, boundary negotiations, displacement of boundaries, blurring of boundaries, norm construction and formal regulations.

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1 INTRODUCING THE FIELD OF INVESTIGATION

1.1 Preliminary Reflections

The relationship between technology and society has been an object of research for many years. The introduction of a new technology frequently brings about studies that attempt to explain, criticise or justify the development. The mobile phone is a recent technology, but has within few decades become common property in large parts of the world. In the wake of its introduction and rapid diffusion there has been carried out a number of studies investigating the role of the mobile phone in contemporary society.

This thesis contributes to the existing research by exploring people's use of mobile phones in public places. The theoretical framework has been inspired by works of several disciplines, such as sociology, ethnomethodology, media studies and science and technology studies (STS). Hence the approach is interdisciplinary and provides an angle of the phenomenon under study that hitherto hasn't been employed. Likewise the use of breaching experiments as a method of investigation, contributes to the originality of this thesis. I will return to the thesis aims and approach in more detail, but first a brief outline of how the mobile phones became such a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society is appropriate.

1.2 The Mobile Phone – Suddenly Omnipresent

After an initial period in the 1980s with large, heavy and expensive mobile phones that in addition in many cases suffered from bad reception, a radical change took place throughout the late 1980s and the early 1990s. At that time the development of the GSM standard made

the various European mobile phone systems compatible (Ling, 2004). In the wake of this fresh gain marketing campaigns were launched and the sale of mobiles rapidly rose in Europe. Improvements in the physical appearance of the mobile phone can also claim some of the honour for this increase (Ling, 2004, p. 9). During the subsequent decade the mobile turned into one of the most widespread personal communication technologies of contemporary society. In a blistering pace this commodity became common property.

Despite the relatively short life span of mobile phones, there has been carried out quite a lot of both qualitative and quantitative research on mobile technology and mobile behaviour over the last decade. The American Richard Ling, sociologist and senior research scientist at Norway's largest telecommunications company, Telenor, is among those who have made a substantial contribution to the field of mobile research. He has written on mobile use in public arenas, like restaurants and streets, and has also introduced notions describing particular aspects of this use. He has taken special interest in how the coordination of everyday life has altered since the introduction of the mobile (Ling&Yttri, 2002; Ling, 2004).

Another contributor in the field is the British Professor of Philosophy, Sadie Plant, who wrote her study of mobile behaviour, *On the Mobile*, on behalf of Motorola. In it she pays attention to the role of the context when using the mobile phone, identifies archetypical ways of using the mobile phone and she also addresses the various strategies and rituals connected with mobile use, e.g. possible outcomes to receiving a mobile call in public (Plant, 2002).

The COST248 report, *Communications on the Move: the Experience of Mobile Telephony in the 1990s*, published in 1997 and edited by Professor Leslie Haddon, contains highly relevant articles on mobile use in public. Bassett, Cameron, Hartmann, Hills, Karl,

Morgan&Wessels, Fortunati, Haddon and Ling are among the contributors and I will return to them more in detail later on in this thesis.

Even though an abundant amount of studies have been performed in the last couple of years, it should be kept in mind that research on this technology and the society's responses to it still is in its early beginning, and that what we today experience as troubling aspects of the technology may only be children's diseases in the development process. Haddon states with regard to assimilating mobile phones into everyday life that it as with other ICTs can "give rise to a number of problems or tensions. They lead to situations where rules or understandings about their availability and use may have to be negotiated." (1997, p. 2).

Not many of the mobile studies focus on the broader context that the mobile evolves within. In his paper on setting an agenda for mobile research Haddon, though, stresses the importance of seeing mobile technology as part of the broader development of ICTs. He explores among other things how ICTs can be used to create private zones in public places and launches the concept of "the quality of public spaces". This is an analogy to "the quality of air" argument used in environmental discussions and is being used by Haddon to explain why people react to other people's use of mobiles in public (1997, p. 4).

Another aspect that is highly relevant in regard to questions about the interplay between the mobile phone and society is the pace of the development. Words like "explosion" and "proliferation" are often being put to use to describe the rapid diffusion of mobile phones. In addition new functionalities are rapidly built into the mobile and the pace of the spread doesn't seem to slow down shortly. Consequently it is difficult to decide whether mobile technology and behaviour have settled and stabilised among the users or not. Another aspect of importance is the possibility that some of the studies of the phenomenon conducted only a few years ago already can be, or be perceived as, out of date.

1.3 Tension Arises Around Mobile Phone Use

Rapid diffusion of mobile phones in the last two decades has made mobile communication a part of everyday life of most people. Previous experience shows that introducing new technologies can cause resistance among parts of the population, as it did with e.g. the fixed telephone. Professor of sociology Amparo Lasen has made a historical comparison of fixed and mobile phones and in it she states that “the [fixed] telephone is the first electric medium to enter the home and unsettle customary ways of dividing private and public spaces, family and community.” (2002a, p. 18). Lasen identifies “decline of traditional forms of interaction such as visiting”, “inconsiderate behaviour” and “blurring of distinctions” as examples of some of the social fears that arose when the fixed phone was introduced (ibid., p. 12).

Likewise there were, and are, social fears connected with the introduction of mobile phones. Side by side with the words of praise critical voices were raised because of what were perceived as dangers and misuses of the mobile phone. The complaints were diverse and concerned among other things costs, the disparagement of the importance of appointments, possible devaluation of the written language caused by abbreviated text messages and text messages using words with regional colouring, fragmentation of gatherings, the sonic disturbance and the increased exposure of private matters in the public.

The media also contributes to this howling chorus. The Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, received a lot of space in the newspapers after talking on his mobile during the Nobel Prize Dinner in 2003 (Langen, 2004). Likewise it was duly commented on in the press when a mobile phone rang just before the christening ceremony of the Norwegian Princess Ingrid Alexandra in April this year (Pettersson&Ludt, 2003).

Ever more areas, both public and private, are inevitably confronted with the mobile technology. Recent research indicates that this development has created a society where public places increasingly become arenas for exchange of private information and that many

of the users and non-users of the technology view this exposure as a disturbance (Bassett et al. 1997; Haddon, 1997; Ling, 1997, 2001). Yet continued and further insight into what constitutes the sources of tension and how society can and do contribute to ease the friction caused, are desirable.

Equipped with my personal experiences in the field and triggered by the deep sighs and frustrations expressed quite often through the media or other channels on this matter, I decided to investigate the phenomenon of mobile use in public places in more detail by making it the topic of my thesis. I wanted to gain more insight on how the mobile users negotiate public/private boundaries when using the mobile phone in public and to examine to what extent these negotiations have created and possibly stabilised the norms conducting mobile behaviour. Previous studies have looked into similar matters and their findings, which I draw on in my analysis, will be more thoroughly presented in chapter 2.

My interest has always been split between technology on the one hand and human interaction and communication on the other. I find it intriguing to observe how humans make sense of technology and possibly try to incorporate it in their lives, whether it's a technology like a ticket machine on public transport or a personal technology like an MP3-player. This fascination made me determined at an early stage in the outlining process of the thesis that I wanted to focus on technology in contemporary society and the social responses in its wake. In addition I found an extra motivation in choosing a technology that I was experienced with and thereby could relate to. Hence the mobile technology caught my eyes. Not only does it satisfy the above criteria, it also is a technology that was introduced to the masses less than two decades ago, and consequently, both for me and for most contemporary people, it is a new technology and related research is therefore in its outset. To enter into and contribute to the research at such an early stage is to me a challenge and source of motivation.

1.4 Revealing the Theoretical Viewpoint and Thesis Aims and Objectives

The relationship between technology and society, or more specifically technological change and social change, has throughout history been the origin of various models of explanation. According to Henwood, Wyatt, Miller and Senker, (2000, p. 8) this relationship can be understood in three main ways: technological determinism, technology as neutral and constructivism.

The first approach identifies a cause and effect relationship between technology and society, that is, "a technological breakthrough is claimed to have important social consequences" (ibid., p. 9). The technological deterministic view is the traditional approach to social research on technology and its focus is on "the 'effects of technology on society', its 'impact', its 'implications', and so on" (Edge, 1995, p. 14). The human factor of people being both the makers and users of the technology is left out of the causal relation and no interest is paid to what actually shapes the technological changes. According to this approach "our human role is at best to choose the most civilised variant of this technologically determined new society." (MacKenzie&Wajcman, 1990, p. 5)

The second approach sees the technology as nothing but a neutral device that people can use as they desire. Hence the human component is present to a greater extent in this approach than in the first. According to this technology neutral approach, the cause and effect relationship between technology and society is reversed compared to the first approach and what we witness is a social determination of technology. Langdon Winner criticises the concept of technology as neutral and the idea that "what matters is not technology itself, but the social or economic system in which it is embedded" (1986, p. 20). In his opinion technologies and artefacts have politics, that is, they "can be inherently political" (MacKenzie&Wajcman, 1990, p. 7).

The third approach, constructivism, is frequently applied within science and technology studies and it launches a view diametrically opposed to the technological deterministic. The core argument of this stance is that a technology is shaped by negotiations between different social groups and that this process takes place not only in the production phase of the technology, but also after the technology has been introduced to the society. Hence the mobile phone is not a neutral technology, but rather a sociotechnical artifact.

The Dutch Professor of technology and society, Wiebe Bijker, was among the first to advocate these thoughts and to establish the social construction of technology approach (SCOT), which proposes that "technical artefacts are described through the eyes of the members of these [relevant social] groups" (Bijker, 2001, p. 26). One of the cornerstones of the SCOT approach is the notion of "interpretative flexibility", that is, that "interactions within and among relevant social groups can give different meanings to the same" (ibid., p. 26). Following the same line of thought as Winner did above; Bijker argues that technologies have politics. He states that "the interpretative flexibility of an artifact makes clear that the stabilization of an artifact is a social process, and hence subject to choices, interests, and value judgements – in short, to politics." (ibid., p. 27). With these three distinct approaches outlined, I will in the following elaborate on which role the latter plays in this thesis.

In this thesis I will investigate the relationship between the mobile phone and contemporary society, especially how people use their mobile phones in public places and how the boundaries between what is perceived as "public" and "private" are being negotiated when mobile phones are used in public. The mobile phone will be treated as a non-neutral device that exists in a network of social relations and ongoing negotiations between the actors. Following the constructivist argument, the investigation will try to establish how the different social groups, that are, the mobile users and co-present people, negotiate the boundaries between the public and the private in order to reach an agreement on what constitutes

appropriate mobile behaviour. As a part of this investigation I will look into to what extent mobile users utilise the technical possibilities of the mobile phones to manoeuvre in public spaces. I will also explore whether or not the users evolve specific bodily strategies in order to cope with the multiple demands of the mobile phone and their surroundings. Since research indicate that the mobile use in public is a possible source of tension, I will also raise questions of whether the negotiations create any conflicts and, if so, how these are solved. The construction of norms is the focus of the second main question. I would like to explore what state the norms governing mobile behaviour are in and which factors influence them. Formal regulations of mobile phone behaviour have become increasingly visible in many public places over the last couple of years. Finally I will therefore try to find out to what extent formal regulations play a role when negotiating the boundaries. In sum, the main questions and related sub questions I would like to address are:

- How do mobile users negotiate and possibly displace the boundaries between the concepts “private” and “public” through use of mobile phones in public spaces?
    - Which role do the mobile’s various technical possibilities play in the negotiations?
    - Which specific bodily strategies among the users are encouraged by mobile use in public?
    - To what extent do the negotiations lead to a common understanding of acceptable mobile behaviour?
- In what state is the formation of norms related to mobile behaviour?
    - Which are the factors that contribute to the establishment of norms?
    - How do formal regulations interact with the norms?

With the central objectives made known the succeeding subchapter will contain a presentation of how these questions were operationalised, that is how the research was designed and which methodology was chosen.

1.5 Operationalising the Research

In order to assess the research questions in the best possible way I had to make careful deliberations when shaping the research design. I made allowance both for the distinctive characteristics of the research questions, my prior knowledge of the field, and the limited time and resources available to perform the research. How the research universe was narrowed down and which approach was chosen will be elaborated on in the subsequent.

1.5.1 Constructing a Research Universe

In order to investigate the above research questions it was necessary to focus on a specific context. Recent statistics performed by Telenor show that all Norwegians between the age of 16 and 21 have access to a mobile (Hver sjette sjuåring har mobiltelefon [Every sixth seven-year-old has a mobile phone], 2004). As for the rest of the population, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reported the percentage of mobile owners in Norway to be 82% in 2001. Hence Norway is among 22 countries in the world which has an adoption rate above 75% (Ling, 2004, p. 12). Even though the percentage might be a bit misleading as a result of e.g. people owning more than one mobile, it's no doubt that Norway is one of the countries in the world with the highest adoption rate of mobile phones. Correspondingly the use of mobiles can be said to be a common sight in public places in Norway as well as in other countries where mobiles are widespread and have been so for a while. In that respect the present Norwegian situation must be said to be a suitable point of departure for a study on mobile behaviour and the appurtenant development and consolidation of norms. I also, despite

the risk of cultural blindness, saw it as advantageous to carry out the observations in Norway because it gave me the benefit of understanding the language of the people I observed.

Yet Norway is a multifaceted society and the research universe needed further delimitation in order to allow a proper investigation within the required time. After careful deliberation students at the University of Oslo were singled out as the group to focus on. Students were, and are, an interesting group in relation to the research questions because many of them use mobile phones daily and therefore probably have encountered situations where there has been a negotiation of the public/private boundaries. In addition it was practical to choose a university I was familiar with and where I believed that the students would be accessible to me in terms of conducting interviews. Yet another argument in favour of choosing a group of young adults, was the idea suggested by the Norwegian Professor of media studies, Terje Rasmussen, that this age group more than the teenagers can be looked on as pioneers with regard to future mobile use. He founds this assumption on the fact that the young adults got their mobiles when they were nearly grown ups and consequentially have a certain distance to it and an awareness of the notion of discrete use (Rasmussen, 2003a).

But how, within the chosen context, should the research questions best be approached methodologically? A suitable framework was found within the social sciences and will be elaborated on below.

1.5.2 Approaching the Research Questions

I executed the search for answers to the research questions partly within the framework of ethnomethodology. The core of this approach is that scientific insight can be gained through the study of mundane activities and ordinary people’s behaviour. Since the aim of my research is to look into and analyse a phenomenon that has become part of people’s everyday life, namely mobile use in public places, the ethnomethodological approach fits very well.

Ethnomethodology is a social science developed by Harold Garfinkel in the 1950s through “his search of a theoretical framework which would directly catch at the procedures by which actors analyse their circumstances and device and carry out courses of action” (Heritage, 1984, p. 9). Garfinkel criticised the hitherto prevailing social theory of his teacher Talcott Parsons and “rejected absolutely the view that the ordinary judgements of mundane social actors can in any way, or under any circumstances, be treated as irrelevant or epiphenomenal in the analysis of social action or social interaction” (ibid., p. 34). Rather the opposite view was expressed by Garfinkel as he saw exactly these everyday judgements of ordinary people as a source to gain knowledge on how to understand social interaction. The term ethnomethodology was “originally designed simply as a label to capture a range of phenomena associated with the use of mundane knowledge and reasoning procedures by ordinary members of the society” (ibid., p. 4). It now refers to “the study of a particular subject matter: the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of a society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves” (ibid., p. 4). Hence this mobile study attempts to analyse and understand people’s use of mobile phones in public by investigating how these people themselves experience this particular situation.

To identify the underlying norms, Garfinkel’s central contribution is his breaching experiments. Through them he showed that ordinary conduct needs to be breached in order to become visible. He also discovered that “breaches of norms are commonly more revealing about the attitudes, motives and circumstances of other people than is conformity” (ibid., p. 116). Following in the footsteps of Garfinkel, breaching experiments were carried out as part of the fieldwork to expose the hidden norms of proper mobile conduct. The outcome of these will along with the remaining fieldwork be presented and analysed in subsequent chapters. In

what follows, though, I will describe in more depth why certain methods were chosen over others and how the fieldwork was performed.

1.6 Adopting Methods and Capturing the Field

To obtain knowledge on how public places are used as arenas for mobile communication, I performed a fieldwork in the month of May 2004 in Oslo. When I decided on my topic of investigation and my research questions I realised that qualitative methods were the most appropriate in order to obtain my project objectives. In search for knowledge about people's attitudes and opinions about a specific topic, in-depth answers are necessary and they are best obtained through qualitative research, especially qualitative interviews. In my opinion a quantitative research design would not produce the desired insight in these matters, since it's more focused on breath than depth. In addition the limited time available made a qualitative approach more practicable. The drawback of the qualitative approach is that the results are not valid for a wider population. Conclusions can be drawn only for the research sample and the possibility to generalise is very limited. Still according to my opinion the advantages of a qualitative research design outweigh the drawbacks in this case. Furthermore method triangulation enables a comparison of the various findings, a possibility that may also be an advantage. Hence the fieldwork performed includes the qualitative research methods of observations, breaching experiments and interviews.

1.6.1 Observing the Mobile Use

The observation sessions took place between May the 3rd and the 25th and were conducted at the university library, the café at the university library and on board the tram to and from the city centre to campus. As the observations proceeded I chose to put emphasis on the latter.

This decision was based on the experiences of the initial observations performed in all the locations and the feeling I then got of getting closer to the topic of my investigation on the tram because of the forced intimacy with other people that I observed there. Still I kept on observing on the other two locations, though on a smaller scale. Taken together these locations covered my desire to investigate public arenas where mobiles are allowed and public arenas where they are forbidden. The tram further adds the dimension of a truly public location as opposed to the university library where people might believe that you have to be a student or a university employee to have admission. In addition the tram is a location where people are forced to be rather intimate and where the possibility to retreat when receiving a call is minimal.

The purpose of the observations was to try to form a broad picture of how people act and react to mobile behaviour in these surroundings. Including a location where mobile use is prohibited, the library, opened up the possibility of evaluating to what extent formal rules have an impact on mobile behaviour. In a way the observations also acted as a preparatory exercise since I used the insight gained from the observation experiences when preparing the breaching experiments and the interviews.

1.6.2 Breaching the Norms

In addition to the observations I performed breaching experiments. The aim of doing so was to try to make the informal rules that regulate mobile phone behaviour in public visible, that is, to make the norms of mobile behaviour explicit by breaching them.

I carried out one of the breaching experiments on my own in between the various observation sessions. In this experiment I tried to obtain eye contact with a person that was engaged in a mobile conversation. I did these experiments mostly on the tram, but on some occasion I tried it out on people that were walking in the streets of Oslo.

To help me conduct the remaining experiments I had allied with two friends who would be the ones that actually carried out the experiments, while I observed. All these experiments took place on board the tram. We entered trams on several occasions in May and followed the same procedures every time within a time span of two to three hours.

During the first session my ally tested out various ringing tunes, didn't answer a ringing mobile phone and sent text messages with the key volume on. To avoid suspicion among the people that were exposed to the experiments, my ally and I entered the tram pretending not to know each other. I awaited his movements and when he found a seat, I sat down aslant him to have the best possible view of both him and his fellow travellers.

At a later stage I wanted to see if talking about something private on the mobile would be considered a breach with normal mobile conduct. As in most of the previous experiments this was also carried out on the tram, the first day between 0430 pm and 0630 pm and the second day between 0300 pm and 0500 pm. These are both periods where the tram is crowded due to the afternoon rush hours. My ally and I followed the same procedures as explained above when entering the tram and after a while my ally pretended to call one of her friends. We had agreed in advance that she would tell a fake story about a trip to another city. A lot of the things she told were quite harmless, e.g. about her movements, who she met with, what the weather was like, but at some point during the conversation my ally started telling about a mutual friend who she also met during the trip. She said things like: "He's a student now, I didn't know that and, you know, he lives together with his girlfriend too. He didn't tell me that when we made out…" or "He didn't tell me that he had a girlfriend when he slept over at my place last Christmas…" or alternatively "He didn't mention his girlfriend when we had sex…" or "He didn't tell me about his girlfriend when we kissed… But I want to see him again." After these statements the conversation normally went on for a while talking about

moving on and forgetting about this man, and then the conversation ended when my ally told her that she had to get off at the next stop.

During some of the conversations my ally raised her voice and explained to her friend that she was on board a noisy tram. On all the occasions my ally had several people sitting in her proximity and they were of all ages and both sexes.

1.6.3 Requesting In-Depth Answers

The interviews constituted the third cornerstone in my fieldwork. My initial thought was to obtain contact with the students through e-mail sent out by the University of Oslo, but this turned out to be a complicated and time-consuming task so I gave up that idea after four weeks. The problem was not to get the necessary permissions from the various faculties, but to get the e-mail sent out after receiving the permissions. The method though generated replies from two students whom I interviewed. The rest of the interviewees were found via friends of friends and put together the interviewees constitute the research universe; 12 students in Oslo. There is a fifty-fifty mixture of gender and background in technology and an age span from 21 to 31 years.

The interviewees were all experienced mobile users. Most of them had had their mobiles since 1998/99, the earliest in 1996 and the latest in 2001. They used their mobiles daily, mostly for what Ling refers to as “fundamental services of person-to-person communication” (2004, p. 11), that is, sending and receiving text messages and to make calls. A more thorough, yet anonymous, presentation of the interviewees and their background can be found as an appendix to the thesis. I refer to them by fictitious names. In my opinion the anonymity guarantee that I gave the interviewees might have made them open up more in the interviews than they otherwise would have done, and in addition referring to them by their real names wouldn’t have added anything vital to the thesis.

I conducted the interviews in different locations in Oslo, some at cafés and some at the campus. The interviews were semi-structured in order to give me as an interviewer the possibility to adjust the questions and improvise according to the interviewee's responses. To ease the workload during the interviews I got the interviewees' prior consent to tape the interviews on a minidisc. Later on I fully transcribed them. Since both I and the interviewees were Norwegian the interviews were conducted in our mother tongue. All quotes from the interviews used in this thesis are therefore translated by me.

When conducting the interviews I tried to establish a confidence-inspiring and relaxed environment. >From the outset I was frank with the interviewees on the purpose of my research in order to establish trust and to avoid alienating them from the research (Seale, 1998). I found it more important to match the interviewees and to have a friendly tone than to be a strictly objective and neutral interviewer. Nigel King supports this approach in his article on the qualitative research interview where he states that "the qualitative researcher believes that there can be no such thing as a 'relationship-free' interview" (King, 1994, p. 15). He continues his description of the relationship by saying that "the interviewee is seen as a 'participant' in the research, actively shaping the course of the interview rather than passively responding to the interviewer's pre-set questions." (ibid., p. 15). There is of course a risk to let go of neutrality like this. It increases the danger of having an interviewer effect on the interviewees, that is, to unconsciously reveal your own opinions on the subjects in question and thereby influencing the answers given by the interviewees. Yet I felt that the possible advantages obtained through being somewhat subjective would outnumber the possible drawbacks.

With this outline of the methods and fieldwork in mind it is time to move on to the succeeding chapters which focus on the theoretical framework of this thesis and the actual

outcome of the investigation. First of all though, I will draw a brief sketch of the structure of this thesis.

1.7 The Structure of the Thesis

To provide the reader with an understanding of how this thesis is organised I will in the following outline its structure. This introductory chapter gives a preliminary description of the topic and the aims of the thesis. In addition the reasoning behind the decision to write about mobile use in public is presented. In short chapter 1 is an attempt to set up the stage on which the remaining story takes place and to give the reader a glimpse of what kind of play that is in prospect. In the succeeding chapter a more thorough presentation of the various theoretical approaches and key concepts used in the thesis is given. Chapter 3 is an elaboration on the boundary negotiations in public initiated by mobile phone use and attempts to find answers to the first main question and appurtenant sub questions. The latter main question concerning the construction of norms and the interplay between formal and informal rules will be attended to in chapter 4. In the last chapter, chapter 5, conclusions are drawn based on the analysis in the two preceding chapters, and the thesis is rounded off with tentatively launching some thoughts on how work and research in this field can be carried on in the years to come.

I have chosen to use the terms “mobile”, “mobile phone” and once in a while “phone” synonymously throughout the thesis. Likewise “mobile use”, “mobile behaviour” and “mobile conduct” have been used interchangeably. This has been done simply to avoid repetition and monotonous language.

With the relevant notions and background knowledge on mobile technology and the practicalities of the fieldwork on board, it is time to move on to the next part of the dissertation, namely the presentation and closer scrutiny of the theoretical framework.

2 DELINEATING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CENTRAL CONCEPTS

2.1 Anticipating the Events

In the following I will sketch the theoretical framework that I draw on in the thesis and identify key concepts that will be relevant to the further analysis and discussion of my research questions. In outlining this framework I have been inspired by research done in various disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences, such as sociology, ethnomethodology, media studies and science and technology studies.

The idea behind combining insights gained in diverse fields when assessing the recent decades' development in mobile use, that is, to create an interdisciplinary approach, is to view the research questions posed in a more nuanced and complete way than the approaches of single-disciplinary studies often offer. The process of identifying the above disciplines as the building bricks of my theoretical framework began with a careful scrutiny of my research questions to be sure that they were leading my search for a suitable frame for my thesis. A closer look at the already performed studies in the area of mobile research was essential; likewise an examination of the sociological studies of human behaviour in public places and ordinary people's way of making sense of society was necessary. In addition the literature on boundary-work was explored so that the knowledge on boundary negotiations already established in that field possibly could be transferred to the area in question. Likewise perspectives on internalisation of norms were included to enable an examination of the construction and consolidation of norms. Taken together these approaches constitute the

theoretical framework that I will elaborate on in this chapter and within which I will conduct the analysis in the subsequent chapters.

2.2 Assessing Human Behaviour in Public

>From the ranks of the sociologists human behaviour in public has been an area of interest for many years. Sociology Professor Erving Goffman was among the pioneers to study everyday life and wrote books on the above issue already in the 1960s.

Among the relevant concepts launched by Goffman are “frontstage” and “backstage”, which refer to situations where you respectively perform because there is an audience, the public, or where you can relax because there is no audience, the private (1966). An example of this might be that a person normally pays more attention to the attire and the hair-do when in public than at home. In mobile phone terms such a “frontstage” will constitute of mobile use in the presence of others, a potentially difficult situation since the demands of the actual space and the virtual space can be conflicting. Sociologist Richard Ling even argues in his mobile studies that the two spaces and their demands create “two front stages” (2001, p. 11) since the mobile user must perform both for the co-present people and the person on the phone. To a much greater extent than in the past this performance involves a juggling of the private and the public. In addition the fact that mobile phones are almost omnipresent makes these juggling incidents rather frequent. A private moment can at any time be interrupted by a business call or the other way round and hence the boundaries between the public and the private become less clear.

Another term originating from Goffman is “impression management”, that is, how we try to control the impressions we give others. In such cases people tend to present themselves in a favourable light, but since the demands as mentioned can be contradictory this may be a

complicated task with regard to mobile use in public. On the other hand, such a situation isn't necessarily difficult only for the performer, but might be so for the co-present people too.

Goffman identified several responses given when people interact. One of them is "civil inattention" and the co-present people then pretend not to notice the offender's, e.g. the mobile user's conduct, when it potentially leads them to loosing face. In other words one pretends to be inattentive in order not to be embarrassed. Another strategy is "studied non-observance", which involves explicitly paying attention at something else, like a book or a newspaper, in order to communicate to the other person that you're not interested in what s/he is saying or doing. Other and more negative sanctions of other people's behaviour in public can be sighing, gazing or commenting.

Another of Goffman's concepts that is relevant in a discussion of mobile use is "involvement shield". It refers to how artefacts can be used as barriers to signal a distance to other people. A person listening to a walkman or reading a book on the tram indicates that s/he doesn't want to have contact with other people. It's a way of creating a personal space in public and today the use of mobile phones in public sometimes have the same effect.

Many of the mobile phone studies conducted in the last decade have references to Goffman and his concepts have, as already indicated, been extended to encompass mobile use in public, an issue that for obvious reasons wasn't commented on by Goffman himself. Many of Goffman's concepts still are of current interest and they will be further discussed below in the section on today's mobile research.

2.3 The Public/Private Dichotomy

As part of the background against which I later on in this thesis assess the mobile phone's role in the potential blurring of the public/private dichotomy, I will in what follows present the prevailing views on this topic expressed by other researchers. Subsequently I will introduce

another essential component of the theoretical backdrop, namely the theory of boundary-work developed by Thomas Gieryn.

2.3.1 Predominant Views Expressed in Previous Mobile Studies

In the introduction I stated research questions that were aiming at investigating the boundaries between the public and the private and the possible displacement of these. The blurring of the traditional public/private dichotomy triggered by the use of mobiles in public is an issue that also earlier on has been brought up in studies of mobile behaviour.

According to some of the authors of the COST248 report "the mobile phone places actions conventionally banished into the sphere of the intimate and private realm back into the realm of the public." (Bassett et al., 1997, p. 6). This relocation has implications for both theories of these spheres and for our understanding of negotiating these spheres. The authors claim that as the people appropriate mobiles the concepts of public and private become indistinguishable for them. Mobile phones throw "private talk-bubbles into a public world" (ibid., p. 8) and create a possibility of being overheard. The problem is that when we use the mobile in public we are private and public individuals at the same time. The authors say that "mobile telephony appears to alter perceptions of private and public spheres […]. What extent this could contribute to a wider technological mediated collapse of the private/public dichotomy, remains to be seen." (ibid., p. 11). These authors express quite explicitly that the boundaries are blurred due to the private entering the public via public mobile use.

The argumentation of the Italian researcher Leopoldina Fortunati has a slightly different interpretation of the alterations caused by mobile phones. She states that "the mobile seems to be contributing to dissolving the traditional separation of intimacy and extraneousness and of public and private." (2002, p. 48). She examines the relationship between the two pairs of words and concludes that the mobile phone is "the communicative instrument that helps these opposing concepts come closer together by unifying them." (ibid.,

p. 49). So what she observes is not a movement in the direction of public arenas being flooded by private matters, but rather a convergence and finally unification between the public and the private. She also states that “the use of the mobile amplifies the process already under way of ever more frequent exposure of private matters and intimacy in the public sphere.” (ibid., p. 48). This is an interesting remark indicating that the author sees the mobile phone as just one the factors contributing to the increasingly unclear boundary between the public and the private. Fortunati draws a historical line from the emancipation of women in the 1960s and 70s and the appurtenant focus on the private as a political theme, till today’s widespread exposure of the private in the public. When addressing the question of what facilitates such a development in the case of the mobile, Fortunati refers to and seems to agree with sociologist Georg Simmel’s theory that it is the anonymity of the co-present people in public places that allows people to speak freely about most topics on the mobile in public.

The Swedish sociologist Anders Persson writes about intimacy among strangers and states that “in public places the borders between public and private, visibility and invisibility and individual accessibility and inaccessibility are constantly tried and renegotiated. The mobile phone calls in public is part of this process.” (2001, p. 5). That the researchers seem to agree on the blurring of the boundaries are once again confirmed in Sadie Plant’s study where she says that “many mobile users can be seen displaying confusion and hesitation as the conflicting scripts of public and private conduct are invoked by the public receipt of a private call.” (2001, p. 50). Katz & Aakhus chime in on this when they state that “whenever the mobile phone chirps, it alters the traditional nature of public space and the traditional dynamics of private relationships” (2002, p. 301). In addition Rasmussen talks about a “collision between two worlds”, namely the physical and the virtual or the public and the private. To him the mobile phone is an indiscreet technology since “private communication becomes indiscreet in the density of the city when it ignores, even to some extent mock at, the

boundary between the public and the private" (2003b, p. 1). He states that the mobile phone makes evident and undermines the boundaries between the private and the public.

The private is often connected with the intimate and the domestic, e.g. what goes on inside the four walls of your home. How we behave, what we feel free to talk about and how we dress, are among the factors that can vary dependent on the degree of privacy. According to Fortunati "intimacy has been used as a synonym for privacy. However, the concept of privacy is more connected with the individual sphere." (2002, p. 49). She later on describes the public as "a dimension in which negotiation and collective contracting take place." (2002, p. 49). This collective bargaining leads to a common understanding of proper behaviour in public places. The mobile phone though seems to disturb this pre-existing agreement and hence new negotiations are needed.

Yet there is at least one voice raised among the researchers against this otherwise united view on the mobile phone as an indiscreet technology blurring the public/private dichotomy. Amparo Lasen criticises this stance and point out that "private conversations have always taken place in public" (2002a, p. 40). To her opinion "subjective experiences of the urban space don't mean its privatisation" and she goes on calling this "not only a very arguable, but also an outrageous Anglo-Saxon, self-centred statement" (ibid., p. 40). She thereby draws the attention to the fact that what is considered appropriate behaviour in public places differs a lot, not only in different parts of the world, but also within Europe. Lasen highlights these differences and believes they should form part of the basis on which we discuss possible alterations brought about by the mobile phone. According to Lasen "the use of mobile phones is probably better understood if we leave the separation between the public and private and consider it as a new space resulting from this connection between two different spaces" (ibid., p. 41).

2.3.2 Literature Investigating Boundaries

Since my research questions concern negotiations of boundaries I have included literature on boundary-work. The sociologist Thomas Gieryn has written important works in this field (1983, 1999). He describes boundary-work as “an ideological style found in scientists’ attempts to create a public image for science by contrasting it favourably to non-scientific intellectual or technical activities.” (1983, p. 2). According to Gieryn boundary-work can be productive to make ideological demarcations in other disciplines too and his research on boundary-work and negotiations between domains, especially “science” and “non-science”, will thus be a model for my examination of the negotiations between “public” and “private”.

To distinguish between the domains of “science” and “non-science”, Gieryn looks to the long struggle between the philosophers and sociologists of science on identifying demarcation criteria that set science off from other intellectual activities. The demarcation criteria should be unique and essential characteristics that clearly distinguish “science” and “non-science”. In this case the demarcation has to be made between the domains of “private” and “public”. A central question then is what the intrinsic qualities of these domains are. Do they really have intrinsic qualities or are those qualities constructed through the ongoing negotiations? In that case establishing demarcation criteria is dependent on the specific context and consequently they will be valid only for the phenomenon under study.

In his paper from 1983 Gieryn addresses the problem of demarcation and says that “characteristics of science are examined not as inherent or possibly unique, but as part of ideological efforts by scientists to distinguish their work and its products from non-scientific intellectual activities.” (p. 2). Hence the characteristics of a domain should not be seen as intrinsic, but rather as constructed by the context at the time in question.

This approach has implications for the understanding of the characteristics of public and private domains. What we perceive as “private” or “public” depend on several external

factors. According to Gieryn the boundaries of science are “ambiguous, flexible, historically changing, contextually variable, internally inconsistent, and sometimes disputed.” (ibid., p. 13). The same holds good of the boundaries of the public and the private. An analysis of a possible displacement of these boundaries must therefore take into account that the boundaries already from the outset are flexible and context dependent.

Gieryn also suggest that it might be useful to think of boundary-work as “a sociological parallel to the familiar literary device of the ‘foil’. Just as readers come to know Holmes better through his foil Watson, so does the public better learn about ‘science’ through contrasts to ‘non-science’” (ibid., p. 12). Likewise “public” will be understood and analysed by being contrasted to “private” in this thesis.

2.4 On the Construction of Norms

In the above subchapter I intended to establish an understanding of how the public/private issue has been expressed earlier and how it will be assessed and analysed in this thesis. Below I will repeat this exercise, this time though on the construction of norms related to mobile use. What have previous research revealed on this topic and which factors play a decisive role in norm construction? In addition to answering these questions, I will present a theoretical model on norm construction developed by the French Professor Michel Foucault that I will employ in the analysis of this phenomenon.

2.4.1 Prevailing Views on the Current State of Norms of Mobile Behaviour

The current state of the norms conducting mobile behaviour is often described as in flux. The reason launched in many cases to support this assertion, is that the norms in this field still haven’t stabilised due to the recent introduction of the mobile technology. Bassett et al. see responses to mobile use, such as embarrassment or irritation, as natural responses given the

fact that “the mobile – above all – disrupts established socially-defined boundaries and regulations concerning the use of space”. Therefore “new forms of social conduct and new regulatory mechanisms can be expected to evolve in order to contain the technological challenges to public/private divisions” (1997, p. 17). In Haddon’s paper the mobile is viewed as one of many technologies whose introduction is capable of creating problems and tensions. He indicates that rules and understandings about use and availability need to be negotiated (Haddon, 1997, p. 2).

One of the ways these norms are negotiated is through the responses or sanctions given to public mobile users. A gaze or a sigh in the direction of the mobile user from a co-present person may be a reaction to improper behaviour. The problem though is as Ling eloquently puts it “the misuse of public space is in the eyes of the beholder” (2001, p. 20), that is, there is quite often a lack of symmetry between what is perceived by the mobile user and the others. In Ling’s opinion the manners regarding mobile use “need to draw on broader social experiences before they also become a crystallized part of interaction that is no longer worthy of comment” (2001, p. 20).

Ling suggests however that the human capability to accommodate technologies and situations will make these situations less problematic in the future (2001, 2004). Palen, Salzman and Youngs’ findings support the view that the reason why people’s opinions on appropriate mobile behaviour vary to a large extent, is that the social norms in this area still are evolving (2001, p. 7). To shape and stabilize these norms, both the social setting and the individuals’ experiences are important.

2.4.2 The Location’s Role in Norm Construction

The mobile phone introduces a new element into behaviour in public, namely a personal, portable communication technology. Compared to previous communication technologies,

such as a fixed phone, it is portable and can thus be used everywhere; compared to other portable and private technologies, such as the walkman, it is a communication tool and hence more likely to be perceived a possible threat to the established social order in public places. The hitherto private space of a phone call is now forced upon co-present people. This much said it should be added that the walkman when introduced also was viewed as an obtrusive object, since it distanced and isolated the user from co-present others (Du Gay, 1997). Still there is a difference between the two technologies in the sense that the mobile generates conversations, while the walkman at the most creates some superfluous noise from the headphones. The degree of sonic disturbance to others in public therefore differs between the two and probably makes the debate and upheaval more intense in the primer case.

An interesting task in regard to the portability of the mobile phone is to determine which role the location plays in curbing or shaping the behaviour of the mobile user, e.g. the topic or the volume of the conversation. Are the norms related to mobile use dependent on the specific location of the mobile user? Plant's study identifies location as an important factor guiding mobile use. People easily name places where they consider mobile use inappropriate, such as airplanes, hospitals and cars (Plant, 2002, p. 36). Bassett et al. (1997) also conclude in their paper that location matters.

According to Persson (2001) the characteristics of the actual public place can play a role. People tend to be more indulgent to conversations taking place in locations were people are on the move than in locations where they're bunched together, e.g. on board a train. In a public place where people are close to each other for a period of time without the possibility of retreat, the issue of "forced eavesdropping" seem to come up more frequently (Ling, 2001). This is a term coined by Ling and it describes a situation where people are unable to avoid listening to other people's mobile conversations and the specific characteristic of this is that both parties may be embarrassed. The breach of manners in such a situation is occasioned by

the mobile user who is “imposing behaviour that is appropriate for intimates onto non-intimates.” (ibid., p. 19). Fortunati argues along the same lines and states that the problem in these situations is that the intimacy is forced upon others without their prior consent (Fortunati, 2002). Based on the irritation that surfaces in these situations, it seems likely to believe that location both has an impact on the behaviour of the mobile users and on the norms constructed.

2.4.3 The Panopticon – A Model of Norm Construction

Ideas and concepts developed by the French social scientist and historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, will form part of the framework for this exploration of norm construction and development. Foucault was one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century and his thesis *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish)* published in 1975 describes the birth and development of the Western system of prisons. The range of his thesis is though a lot more extensive than that. The theories launched are valid as explanations of the growth of the discipline in society as a whole.

The fundamental idea is found in Jeremy Bentham’s “Panopticon” which is “an architectural figure of this composition [of power]” (Foucault, 1991, p. 200). The model of the prison consists of a tower surrounded by an annular building, which is divided into cells and that has two windows, one facing the tower and the other facing the opposite direction. From the tower the supervisor has a panoramic, or panoptic, view to the cells and their inmates. The inmates, on the other hand, have no chance of seeing the supervisor. This architecture enables a situation of constant supervision and gives the inmates the feeling of constantly being controlled and observed even though they are not at all times.

According to Foucault “the Panopticon […] must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men.” (ibid., p. 205). The Panopticon is not merely a description of a prison, but also a picture of the power and controlling structures in contemporary society, also in the cases where there are no formal rules structuring the interplay. The techniques of the prison permeate society and make ordinary people act as prison officers in everyday life, adjusting and correcting each others behaviour. An example of this kind of behaviour in contemporary society might be giving a dog owner a harsh look or a comment for not cleaning up after his dog in the park. Regarding mobile use, the sighs, lifted eyebrows and comments that sometimes accompany the use, can be understood as attempts to enlighten or remind the other party of that s/he is not behaving in accordance to the norm. In a panoptic system there is a reprimand corresponding to every deviation and as these reprimands steadily are repeated, the norms stabilise. This development taking place is often referred to as an internalisation of external norms.

2.5 Conclusive Remarks

This thesis employs theories from different disciplines and doing so is not necessarily unproblematic. The theoreticians and researchers advocate views that might be competing or conflicting, such as different views on the role of technology. These differences should not be an obstacle to applying them, as long as the stance and origin of the research referred to is kept in mind.

Throughout this chapter various concepts and how they have been applied to other technologies or settings have been presented. The established theoretical framework is a perspective rooted in the examination of everyday activities based both on the works of

Goffman and Garfinkel. In order to reveal truths about the existing social order and norms and how they interact with the recently introduced technology of mobile phones, it is necessary to explore how ordinary people experience and react to such a change. In addition the knowledge developed through Gieryn's boundary-work can be extended to the realm of mobile behaviour and how concepts of public and private are affected by the introduction of mobile phones.

I will use the theories presented in this chapter to make sense of my empirical material and to confront my observations and findings with those of previous mobile studies. Likewise the notions and ideas of the STS studies and the constructivist view will be contrasted with those originating from the social science tradition of Goffman and Garfinkel. The latter tradition often pays attention to the social aspect of a development and treats technology as something that needs no further explanation. STS researchers, on the other hand, highlight the need to treat technology as something more than a black box. To them technology plays a vital role in the ongoing processes and changes. Similarly the mobile phone and its characteristics play a role in the construction and negotiation of boundaries.

In the succeeding chapters I will thus investigate and analyse how the boundaries between the public and the private are being challenged by the omnipresence of mobile phones in contemporary society. Likewise the norm development in the wake of this boundary displacement will be scrutinised using insight from Foucault's work on the Panopticon and its influence on norm construction in contemporary society.

3 ASSESSING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DICHOTOMY: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF MOBILE USE IN PUBLIC PLACES

3.1 Sketching the Coming Exploration

As already established in the introductory chapter the use of mobile phones is a common sight in public places in Norway as well as in many other countries where mobiles are widespread and have been so for a while. Yet mobile use in public locations often is the source of discussion, and disturbance caused by public mobile conversations is by many considered among the negative aspects of the mobile technology. Incidents where mobile phones ring in inappropriate situations are today familiar to most mobile users and they even hit the headlines every now and then when famous people are caught talking on the mobile where they are not expected to, as illustrated earlier on in the cases of the Swedish Prime Minister and the Royal Norwegian christening ceremony.

But why is the mobile perceived as intrusive when used in public? Is it the actual talking or sound making that is a disturbance or is it dependent on the topics discussed on the phone? Or is it the complicated matter of giving priority to either the caller or the co-present people that triggers the frustration? What is considered breaches of proper mobile behaviour? And is there a need for mobile etiquette in contemporary society?

In this chapter I will present and analyse my research material in order to find answers to the first main question and appurtenant sub questions posed in the thesis' introduction. Through the analysis I will show how the boundaries between the public and the private are part of an ongoing and constant negotiation both among the mobile users and between the

mobile users and their surroundings. I will point at how various strategies form part of the negotiations and how conflicts arise while negotiating.

3.2 Technical Adjustments

The fieldwork revealed that mobile users in different ways can, and do, adapt their mobile phones in order to decrease or avoid the potential friction caused by mobile use in public. Not only can the volume be lowered or modified, specific use of the various mobile phone functionalities depends on the context as will be demonstrated in what follows.

3.2.1 Switch the Mobile Phone to Mute or Off

My own experience as a mobile user has given me the impression that people very rarely switch their mobile phones off. The mute or discrete function is though in frequent use. The responses given by the interviewees confirmed this. All, except from one (who had a mobile without a mute function), said that they actively switched to mute to prevent friction when carrying a mobile in public or in locations where mobile use was restricted. None of them seemed to interpret the sign prohibiting mobile phones as an instruction to switch the mobile off, except in instances where there was a possibility that the mobile phone could interfere with other machinery.

The interviewees were concerned both with the audible disruption a call or a text message would cause to the people present, and the personal embarrassment such a disruption would reflect on them. Some stated that they occasionally switched their mobile off, but many admitted that doing so was a mixed pleasure. The feeling of inaccessibility dominated when they were asked to describe the condition you’re in when the mobile is switched off. Most interviewees wanted to be accessible and therefore disliked to switch it off. Some of them

though had no problem with switching the mobile off and did so every now and then in order to be left alone. Irrespective of the motivations for either switching the mobile off or to mute there seemed to be a common understanding that adjusting the volume of the mobile phone is an effective way of reducing the possible tension that often arise in connection with mobile use and that it is part of the negotiation of proper behaviour in public places.

3.2.2 Send Text Messages when in Public or Crowded Places

Another way of manoeuvring more silently in the public is to send text messages in stead of making calls. This is both a way of preserving privacy for the mobile user and of not invading the privacy of co-present others.

> Interviewer: What about text messages?
> John: I don't have any restrictions on that, as long as I turn it to mute. I don't have any specific restrictions on that.

> Interviewer: To what extent do you use your mobile in public places?
> Karen: You mean to call or?
> Interviewer: Well, it might be text messages too. Do you think there's a difference?
> Karen: Yes, because text messages can… I do that nearly anywhere. Nearly. I don't send text messages in the middle of the movie, but on the underground or tram or…
> Interviewer: But if you have to make a call, then you are more restrictive or wait till you get home?
> Karen: Yes, I can very well answer and ask… or check what it is about. If not, most often I ask if I can call back later… to make the call when I'm in another place, a bit more to myself.

The interviewees made a distinction between text messages and calls, as the above excerpts from the interviews with John and Karen shows. Sending and receiving text messages are in most cases considered a less disruptive technology than talking on the mobile phone due to the fact that it neither disturbs others nor reveals private matters.

3.2.3 “Soften” the Ringing Tunes

Mobile phones are the origin of various sounds and it was commented on among the interviewees that the sharp and penetrating sounds associated with the mobile phone were one of its irritating aspects. A couple of the interviewees though had bought a new mobile recently and were surprised and delighted by the new ringing tunes available to them. The melodious polyphonic tunes and the possibility of producing home made “tunes” of your own or other people’s voices were considered to be more in harmony with the general soundscape of society, than the older and plainer ringing tunes. More harmonious sounds make the mobile phones less threatening and disturbing and are hence part of the negotiations in public.

In sum there are several adjustments that can be made on the mobile phone itself to make it more acceptable to society, that is, to prevent the mobile phone and its use from deviating too much from the pre-established norms and rules of behaviour in public. All these adaptations constitute a necessary part of the negotiations of public places and challenge the public/private boundaries.

3.3 Bodily Strategies

In a way the mobile technology illustrates how a place can become public and private at once. This duality is made possible by various strategies that are available for the mobile user on how to create a private room within the public space. Which specific behavioural strategies among the users are encouraged by mobile use in public? Some of the commonest strategies are redirection or withdrawal of the gaze, closing of the body language and retreating from the premises. I will elaborate on these in what follows.

3.3.1 Withdrawal or Redirection of the Gaze

A well-known strategy to maintain privacy when using a mobile phone in public is to avoid eye contact. According to Ling “the tendency to avoid looking into the eyes of another person is quite strong.” (2001, p.16). Cooper et al. state that “phone users regularly displayed marked instances of a change in gaze direction when using the phone” (2002, p. 291). They interpret this as a possible way of displaying “the interactional boundaries between the public and the private” (ibid., p. 291). Redirecting your gaze can thus be seen as a non-verbal way of indicating to the others that you’re occupied and don’t want to be disturbed.

During my observations I experienced that people talking on the mobile were unwilling to focus on co-present people and that they rather just gazed out of the window or at their own finger nails or something of the sort. A similar reaction was seen in the breaching experiment where I tried to catch the eyes of co-present people that were talking on the phone. The idea behind this experiment was to test the tenability of the theory that people talking on the mobile prefer not to have eye contact with other people. My experience is that people whether sitting or walking are, probably unconsciously, avoiding eye contact. At least it was hard for me to obtain eye contact with them at all and in those cases where I did the people quickly withdrew their eyes and refocused on their conversation. I could not on all occasions hear the conversation but when I could I tried to hear whether it was noticeable in the conversation or not that I obtained eye contact with the person. On two occasions the person exposed to my experiment shortly lost track of the conversation. I take that as an indication that these individuals were surprised by the sudden eye contact and that they normally wouldn’t have eye contact with people while on the phone. In other occasions though, the sudden eye contact didn’t seem to disturb the people exposed to it to a great extent, so it might just have been a coincidence.

The overall tendency among the mobile users, confirmed both through the observations, interviews and previous mobile studies, is though undoubtedly to avoid eye contact in order to create a feeling of privacy while talking on the mobile in public.

3.3.2 Closing of the Body Language or Withdrawing from the Scene

Another strategy used to manage the boundaries is to alter your body language by either crouching or turning away from the co-present people. Tobias had observed such behaviour and commented on it like this:

> Tobias: […] I often observe that people try to create a distance when they receive a call. Either by stepping aside or by squatting down if they have no chance of withdrawing. I'm sure some people forget where they are, but with most people I know I have noticed that they crouch somewhat. It's a bit fascinating because you don't really hear any better by pulling the phone down towards your stomach, but people do it anyway. It seems like they try to protect themselves a little, that they turn their backs on those present in order to hide the conversation a bit. Maybe to create their own little sphere.

Behavioural strategies when receiving a public call is also mentioned in Plant's study. She differentiates between two bodily postures; "the speakeasy" – an extroverted use - and "the spacemaker" – an introverted use. The primer is an open and self-confident pose, while the latter tries to create a private arena by e.g. bow the head, walk in circles, to turn the body away from the others (Plant, 2002). My general impression from the fieldwork is that space making is a more common strategy than the other.

How people use space when they're talking on their mobile phones is also discussed by Ling (2001). According to his research there is a tendency to move to less trafficked areas and people seem to be eager to keep a certain distance to others when on the phone. This was also my impression when performing the fieldwork. During the observation sessions in the café I noticed that people left their companions when receiving a call to carry out the conversation

in a less densely populated part of the premises. Nor did the interviewees feel comfortable when talking on the mobile in crowded public places and their preferred solution to maintain privacy was often withdrawal:

> Interviewer: Well, I want to focus on mobile use in public places. To what extent do you use your mobile phone in public? On the tram or?
> John: I strongly dislike using the phone on the tram. I do so if somebody calls me. When I notice that I have a call, I answer, but quickly say that I'm on the tram, that I dislike talking on the phone there and look apologetic at the co-present people. Generally I try to withdraw; I guess I try to move away from people when I talk on the phone in public. Like leaving the place or move to a quite corner of the room or something like that.
> Interviewer: To shield the conversation from others?
> John: I don't know why I do it really, but it feels natural for me.

Even though John isn't able to pin down exactly his motives for withdrawing, he seems to be very conscious of the fact that he dislikes talking on the phone when surrounded by strangers. Hence withdrawal becomes the desired solution. John's statement is in addition an illustration of what Goffman termed "face work". The apologetic expression he puts on is an attempt to gloss over behaviour that the co-present people might find out of tune with mobile etiquette.

This concludes the investigation of behavioural changes and adaptations initiated by the use of mobiles in public. There are various alternatives available for the mobile user in the negotiations between the public and the private and it seems to be common and widespread to make use of them.

3.4 Common Understanding or Conflicts?

Having established that there are several strategies available and that they are being utilised, the next step is to investigate to what extent the negotiations lead to a common understanding of acceptable mobile behaviour or if conflict is a more usual outcome. As already indicated

there is a potential for conflicts when using mobile phones in public, but which aspects of this mobile use are considered the most problematic? Previous studies done on mobile use indicate several explanations. Ling identifies three areas where the use of mobile phones has a potential for disagreement: “settings where there is an extensive set of norms governing behaviour”, “in the context of interpersonal interactions” and “internal reactions” (2004, p. 125). These possible disagreements are instances where the boundary negotiations between the two domains fail or where further discussions are needed.

In the following I will further explore the negotiation of boundaries by paying attention to which irritants in regard to mobile use the fieldwork revealed, compare these to previous findings and existing theories and last, but not least, discuss how the public/private boundaries possibly are displaced on these occasions.

3.4.1 The Significance of the Context

The introduction of the mobile phones brought about a radical change of public places compared to the previous communication technologies. The wireless quality of the mobile phone and the consequential opportunity of talking anywhere at anytime, throws the spotlight on the context of the mobile use with unprecedented strength. The context itself is of course not an irritant, but a lack of understanding of how to weave appropriate mobile conduct into locations that already are heavily constrained by behavioural norms, might cause tension. Such locations with well-developed pre-existing norms might be restaurants, cinemas and public transport, which to a varying degree are public spaces.

I asked the interviewees about their experiences with mobile phone use in public places. I wanted to establish to what extent they noticed other people’s behaviour in such situations and if they ever got irritated by it. I also wanted to know what the cause of a possible tension was. All the interviewees stated that other people’s use of mobile phones could be irritating,

but their answers to what causes the irritation were not as unison. Karen focused on space and identified specific locations where she found use of mobiles a source of irritation:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' mobile use?
> Karen: Oh, yes.
> Interviewer: When?
> Karen: If they for example answer the mobile during a lecture or a wedding or a funeral or in the reading room or at the cinema, then it's very disturbing.

She also used words like "disrespectful" and "hopeless" when elaborating on the use of mobile phones in the above mentioned locations. Maria expressed herself in a similar manner:

> Maria: If people talk in a restaurant or at the cinema. If you answer the phone in the cinema… one thing is if you have forgotten to turn off the sound, but if you actually answer then I get very irritated. […] To me there are certain boundaries as to when one should talk on the mobile out of respect for the location one is in and others that are present.

The differentiation made by Maria was important to many of the interviewees: forgetting to switch off the mobile is pardonable; answering it exhibits bad judgement and is inexcusable. The primer was expressed to be tolerable because as a mobile owner you know how easy it is to forget such things. Only one of the interviewees made a reservation in this respect. Erik meant that answering and quietly saying that you were occupied and would call back was appropriate. In his opinion it was important to have trust in other people and take into consideration that you didn't know what was going on in that person's life and that special circumstances could make it necessary to take the call.

On the whole the informants seemed to consider mobile use in some locations and contexts irritating. A comparison of these findings to previous studies makes it evident that this is a general opinion. The location is significant and the problem is, in the words of Bassett et al., that "the mobile – above all – disrupts established socially-defined boundaries and regulations concerning the use of space" (1997, p. 17). Our prior knowledge on how to

behave in a public places is constantly challenged by the introduction of new technologies, like walkmans, minidiscs and mobile phones, but what distinguishes the latter is that it might demand your attention at any time, whether it's appropriate in the situation or not.

3.4.2 Devaluation of Presence

As indicated earlier there is more than the sonic intrusion in a location, and violation of prevailing norms of proper conduct in these, that can cause irritation. Ling's second area deals with the interplay between the mobile user and other people present (2004). How do people handle the possibly divergent demands of the mobile phone and those present? The following excerpt from the conversation with Thomas illustrates this problematic aspect of mobile phone use and his reaction to it:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' use of mobile phones?
> Thomas: Yes, definitely.
> Interviewer: In what way?
> Thomas: I can give you an example. I have a part-time job at a petrol station and I find it very irritating if the customers talk in the mobile while they're shopping. Many people do that.

When I asked him why this was so irritating he said it was because "it is irritating to talk to someone that simultaneously talks to others". What we see happening here is what Ling, following in Goffman's footsteps, refers to as handling two front stages simultaneously or "to juggle two parallel interactions" (1997, p. 11). Cooper et al. also examine this situation and refer to it as "the coexistence and management of distant and co-present communication in public and private spaces" (2002, p. 287). The customers at the petrol station try to manage two arenas at once, both the mobile conversation and paying for the petrol or other goods. Working behind the counter Thomas experiences that the customer doesn't pay attention to what s/he is actually doing, reacts slower and hence possibly creates a queue or some kind of misunderstanding. This is a difficult situation where the mobile user has to balance the

demands of the caller towards those of the co-present people. There is both the risk that either the primer or the latter might feel that they're not given priority to, and the risk that appropriate behaviour in one of the situations is not appropriate in the other.

Tobias has a similar kind of approach and finds the disruptions caused by mobile use irritating, both in formal meetings and in social gatherings, because they draw attention away from what's going on:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' mobile use?
> Tobias: Yes, definitely. First of all it is an irritation when meetings are interrupted. It's maybe unconscious, but when you turn off or switch your own mobile to mute, then you expect, conscious or unconscious, that others to do so too. Because then it is the meeting that is most important. […] A person who answers the phone and talks for a long time about something unessential when you're having a… whether it's a social gathering or not… When I meet a chap at a café and we're going to sit to and drink coffee and talk nonsense, then I don't find it the same to talk to somebody on the phone instead. Then it is more important to spend time on those that actually are present than those that are not.

Margaret also focuses on the need to pay attention to what you are doing and those you are with:

> Margaret: […] There's something I'd like to add and that I don't like. That is if you in a way, if the attention paid to the mobile phone or whatever might happen or who might contact you, if that dominates instead of what's actually going on around you, that I find really stupid.

There is no doubt that a rivalry between the demands of the actual and the virtual situation can occur. According to Plant receiving a mobile call in public has three possible outcomes: flight, suspension and persistence (2002). In the primer the mobile user flees the social setting, as already illustrated by John and his desire to withdraw when receiving a call on the tram. A suspension merely involves blocking out the surroundings in order to carry out a conversation. Persistence implies that the user tries to pay attention to both arenas. Tobias' café example is a reference to the second outcome, while Thomas problematic interaction with his customers exemplifies the third. The first outcome, flight, was, as already mentioned,

the most frequently chosen alternative when receiving a call in the university café where I did my observations. On those occasions where people did carry on a phone conversation in the café they picked out less trafficked areas of the café. The conversations were normally short, 1-2 minutes, and the individuals returned to their table after having ended the conversation. Some people sat at their table while talking on the mobile, but they were in most cases alone.

To contrast the statements made by the interviewees that in general concerned mobile use when accompanied by strangers, I asked them if awkward situations sometimes arose in the company of friends, e.g. if one of them received a call while hanging out together. Their answers gave me the impression that this was rarely problematic. Very few felt left alone when friends talked on the phone, with exception of extreme situations where the conversation lasted for a long time. There was of course individual differences in what the interviewees would tolerate or find appropriate, but within their group of friends a common understanding that guided their conduct and kept them clear of disagreement seemed to prevail. Kristin though commented that it varied a bit among her friends how considerate they were when they received a call. She said that she would normally leave the others temporarily when receiving a call, but that not all her friends did so. When I asked her whether the continued presence of the mobile talker during the conversation made any difference she said:

> Kristin: It matters a lot of course. If the person remains in our company and carries on a totally different conversation, then that… then you get distracted and start to pay attention to that conversation. I think that… well, most of the people I know would have left.

Plant's research indicates that the feeling of abandonment among the co-present people is less strongly felt in countries where mobile use is common and frequent. Mobile users in these countries have to her opinion a more discreet and considerate use than others (2002). This is also the main impression I got when my interviewees talked about interpersonal interactions and mobile use, but still some of them remained quite critical to the mobile use of strangers.

This probably indicates, not surprisingly, that the degree of tolerance is higher towards friends than towards strangers.

3.4.3 Filling the Air with Private Matters

The third area Ling mentions as problematic involves the emotional and internal responses of co-present people who are forced to listen to the conversation (2004). The forced intimacy of a tram or a bus might provide fellow travellers with unwanted knowledge about the mobile user and this can be the origin of a variety of feelings. One of the interviewees said that she most of all found it funny to listen to all kinds of conversations. Others thought many conversations were unnecessary or that topics were discussed that were of no interest to the co-present people and hence the conversations should have been carried on in more private surroundings. As Karen put it:

> Interviewer: If something about a mobile conversation irritates you, what is it that irritates you? Is it the location or the topic?
> Karen: It's most likely what people are talking about, topics that I have no interest in listening to. That can very well wait till you are at home. Those intimate stories, and yes, I've heard a lot of strange conversations.
> Interviewer: Have you got any examples of topics that can wait till you're at home?
> Karen: Things that only is of concern to yourself and the person you're talking to can just as well be told at home, not in a public place, because nobody has any interest in hearing it and you can't avoid hearing it.

As an extreme consequence the person forced to eavesdrop might end up feeling embarrassed on behalf of the mobile user. Ling distinguishes between various degrees of eavesdropping and labels the kind you're exposed to via mobile use in public "forced eavesdropping". The specific characteristic of this is that both parties (speaker and listener) may be embarrassed. The breach of manners in such a situation is that the mobile user is "imposing behaviour that is appropriate for intimates onto non-intimates." (Ling, 2001, p. 19) The following excerpt from the conversation with Markus nicely illustrates this point:

> Interviewer: Does it bother you? Do you feel guilty because you are eavesdropping to another person's conversation?
> Markus: No, but sometimes I can feel embarrassment… it's like I'm embarrassed on behalf of them. I don't feel guilty in any way, but I think "well, nice for you to have that conversation, but if I were you I wouldn't have had it with twenty others too." It's like that. It's funny because people can in a way get up and behave as if nothing has happened. […] Well, I find it a bit odd.

Among the other interviewees the tendency was to find some themes inappropriate, but still they didn't feel embarrassed when eavesdropping. Their reactions were more often surprise that other people wanted to compromise themselves to such an extent.

Some of the interviewees also emphasised that the topics discussed in a mobile conversation could just as easily have been the topics of a face-to-face conversation and that their reaction therefore had nothing to do with the fact that the conversation was carried out on the mobile phone. Erik was among these and he said:

> Erik: The way I formulate what I say is clearly influenced by the surroundings, but the themes… I don't bother to make any adjustments on those. But I use code words and things like that, so that people don't understand.

If the interviewees reacted to other people's mobile use it was merely because of the topic and not because of the form of the conversation.

It is of course hard to measure from only observing if people feel embarrassed on behalf of themselves or others, but in the breaching experiment where my ally carried on a mobile conversation on the tram I could observe people's reactions and at least check out to what extent people eavesdrop in such a location. What I observed was that people turned their heads towards my ally when she started speaking, as if to locate the speaker and to see what she looked like. They then resumed their earlier doings or at least pretended to do so. The reason I add the latter is that I on many occasions observed that they looked at my ally a second time when she got to the intimate part of her conversation. To me this is an indication that even though they were pretending not to listen to her conversation, they were doing

exactly that, or else it is quite a coincidence that she always got this second glance when she started on the juicy part.

Another thing I observed was that a person sitting next to my ally was fidgety throughout her conversation. That might indicate that he was uneasy with the situation. A young boy at the age of 12 or so practically jumped in his seat when my ally said “kissed” on the phone, but that might be because of his age. A woman in her forties stared intensely at her when she said “when we had sex”. A man in his late thirties, who was sitting next to my ally reading a book, was obviously irritated because of her mobile conversation: he looked at her repeatedly and wasn’t able to focus at his book any longer. His irritation rose when he tried to pass by my friend to exit the tram because she due to the conversation was inattentive when he tried to pass by her. Another man, probably in his thirties, was the only one that was openly eavesdropping to my friend’s conversation. He pricked up his ears at an early stage of the conversation and listened more and more attentively as the conversation proceeded. When the juicy details were revealed his eyes looked as if they were popping out of his head. But even though many people, at least to my judgement, paid attention to my ally’s conversation and didn’t look too happy about the forced eavesdropping, they didn’t comment on it, neither to her or to each other.

What conclusions can be drawn from this? My impression, both from the interviews and from the breaching experiments, is that people eavesdrop and whenever they do so there is a risk that they might end up hearing something that embarrasses or irritates them. In locations where a retreat is difficult either for the caller or the co-present people the situation tend to get more tensed, but verbal outbursts are overall extremely rare. The common expressions are looks and raised eyebrows.

3.4.4 Hearing Halves

Another interesting question is whether there is a difference in overhearing a mobile conversation and a normal conversation. Overhearing other people talk is a natural part of being present in the public. Still Norway is a country with a cultural tradition of being reserved in public and limiting the conversations to a minimum in these situations. If a stranger sitting next to you on the tram starts talking to you, the reaction, to put it mildly, is to be surprised. The introduction of mobile phones has unquestionably created a situation where people speak more frequently in public. People who talked to themselves were in the past thought of as crazy; today holding a mobile phone to your ear legitimates monologues held in public. As already revealed, some of the interviewees were of the opinion that the topics discussed were the same whether the conversation was carried on by two persons or by a person talking on the mobile. But do people react the same way when only hearing one side of the conversation? A recent British study conducted at the University of York, under the direction of Professor Andrew Monk, reports that their informants actually became more irritated when hearing half conversations (Curiosity fuels anger at mobile chat, 2004). The train and bus passengers in the study were exposed to the same conversation being held either by a couple sitting on board the bus or by a person talking on the mobile. The irritation was higher in the latter case and seemed to be triggered by curiosity. The inquisitive nature of man made the co-passengers want to know what was said by the other party.

The interviewees I talked to split in two when confronted with this scenario. Some of them didn’t see the difference and meant that if you had a problem with hearing only one part of the conversation, then you should stop eavesdropping. Others said they noticed mobile conversations more easily than normal conversations. They weren’t sure though that the irritation had anything to do with curiosity, in stead they launched explanations like having to spend more energy on the mobile conversations to make sense of them. The procedure of

filling in the gaps made it more tiring to listen to mobile conversations. Others simply didn't know why the mobile conversations were more irritating:

> Interviewer: […] Would one of the situations be more irritating than the other?
> Kristin: Yes, it is and I find that very strange, but I get a lot more irritated when somebody talks on the mobile phone. I don't know why. Maybe it's because if the aunt had been there, then I could have heard her answers too. Then I could have heard the whole conversation, unconsciously. But if she talks on the mobile phone with her aunt, then I only hear one side and fragments and I don't really understand it all.

Others again meant that being bothered by half conversations was a past phenomenon:

> Margaret: I guess it's easier… It's maybe easier to notice one person talking, because then it's only half a dialogue and in a way you know that, but I also think that as you get used to it, you don't react that strongly cause it becomes so usual. A couple of years ago I think one to a greater extent noticed people talking on the mobile, but now you're in a way used to the one-way dialogue.

There were also some among the interviewees that meant that mobile conversations had a tendency to be louder than normal conversation due to bad reception or surrounding noise and as a consequence they were noticed more easily. Despite disagreement on the reasons *why* almost all of the interviewees agreed on the fact that mobile phone conversations were more audible than normal conversations.

3.4.5 The Soundscape

Many of the complaints on mobile use in public have to do with the audible component of the mobile, whether it is the penetrating ringing or the actual talk. The sudden intrusion draws the attention away and in addition the artificial sound is by many perceived as shrilling. Anne and Kristin made these remarks:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' mobile use?
> Anne: Yes.
> Interviewer: When or where?

> Anne: As we touched onto earlier. I sat on the train from Oslo to Drammen once and typically two boys - one of them had probably a new mobile phone – tried out all the ringing tunes… The first five minutes it was okay, the next half-hour it was not all right.
> Interviewer: But why wasn't it okay?
> Interviewer: He could at least have lowered the volume a bit. It was very loud and it is a very irritating sound.

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' mobile use?
> Kristin: Yes, I do.
> Interviewer: When?
> Kristin: I get irritated if people sitting next to me on the bus are having long mobile conversations, talk loud about anything, about the weather, their inner feelings and really everything.
> Interviewer: So the fact that they are talking irritates you?
> Kristin: Yes, or having long conversations. In my opinion short messages or a short conversation is okay on the bus, but if people talk on the phone throughout a half-hour long bus ride, then I get irritated, and if they talk loudly. And the most irritating are people that try out new ringing tunes; that makes me crazy!

In Kristin's answer we see that to her the length and the volume of the conversation also matters. Many of the others agreed with her on that. As both Anne and Kristin mention, ringing tunes are an irritant. Fabio also commented on this when asked about inappropriate mobile behaviour. He said that "playing with ringing tunes is totally… […] Then you irritate absolutely everybody." Margaret also felt reluctance towards this and said that "I'm not very fond of ringing tunes. I'm not fond of ringing tunes at all. It reminds me of having to get up or having to do something or that something disturbs you." This stance coincides with the reactions of the tram passengers that were exposed to the breaching experiment trying out ringing tunes:

> Observation: My ally sat down in a part of the tram where almost all of the seats were occupied. Eight people sat close to him. After a while he started testing out various ringing tunes on his mobile phone. The response of the co-present people to the noise made by my friend was at first to look at him as if to identify the source of the sounds made. At first they looked at him curiously then with a more irritated look as he kept on doing it. Some of them looked at him repeatedly, but gradually they all just came to terms with this irritating person being on the tram. New people entered the tram and they reacted in the same way: first looking to determine who made the noise, then becoming more irritated as the noise continued.

An interesting observation is that no one commented on his behaviour, neither among themselves nor directly to him, but on one occasion a couple that was travelling together looked at each other and lifted their eyebrows. The reactions were similar when we moved on to testing the effect of not answering a ringing mobile phone. I called my ally's mobile, while he pretended not to hear it wearing headphones and reading a book. The other passengers obviously heard his phone ringing, because they turned their heads in his direction when the phone kept on ringing repeatedly. In my opinion the people didn't look as irritated as when we performed the previous experiment, but nor this time did they comment on it or make him aware that his phone was ringing. Cooper et al. refer to a similar experience in their study, where an unanswered mobile phone's constant ringing causes the co-present people to gaze or stare at the owner of the ringing phone (2002). They interpret the response as "suggestive of normal expectation concerning the length and time of a ringing phone deemed appropriate by others" (ibid., p. 292).

The above shows that a repeatedly ringing phone or another artificial sound made by the mobile can be enough to trigger irritation.

3.4.6 The Illusion of Privacy

Having established that many people react to other people's improper use of mobile phones it is tempting to reflect on who these "others" are and why they are out of time with their contemporaries. I tried to make the interviewees reflect on this. It turned out that many of them saw themselves as more restrictive and concerned with proper mobile behaviour than the population in general, but still they admitted to having made mistakes and blunders with their mobile phones. What's being revealed is nothing but the classical difference between theory and practice. In this respect Fabio's reaction was interesting since he was the only one that immediately reflected on the fact that he himself probably behaves exactly the way he describes as irritating:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' mobile use?
> Fabio: Yes. So annoyed!!
> Interviewer: How?
> Fabio: Well, there are people that talk loudly and they talk both in shops and on the underground and all those kind of places. And, of course, I also answer the mobile in those places and I'm sure I speak exactly as loudly, but I just forget myself. But it irritates me that people think that the whole world cares about what they're having for dinner, to put it that way.

I asked him to elaborate on why he seems to forget himself while speaking on the mobile and then he said:

> Fabio: Well, when you receive a call… you get so taken up with it that you disconnect everything else, you don't think… I simply don't think about it. But if you think "oh, now it's maybe time to hang up", then I hang up. The problem often is that that thought rarely is evoked during the conversation.

Markus described talking on the mobile as "being in a little world of your own, focusing on that. In a way you shut out everything else, so it's hard to remember it." Nina's experience was that "when you sit alone and don't have direct eye contact, then you get carried away". We have already learnt that Tobias' experience was that mobile users withdrew from the location, crouched or turned their backs on the co-present people. His theory was that they did this "to create their own little sphere". This tendency to create a private sphere in public has also been brought up in previous studies. Plant states that "the mobile allows its users to believe that they are entering a private space shared only by the parties on the phone." (2002, p. 51).

All these actions described above don't necessarily shield the co-present people from hearing the conversation, but altering your body language and using the mobile as a shield towards the public can give you an illusion of privacy and consequently delude you into revealing information or emotions that you normally wouldn't have shared with co-present others. As Plant phrases it "these illusions of intimacy can encourage mobile users to speak at

volumes – and of things – which might be entirely inappropriate in the ears they reach." (2002, p. 51).

Of course this is not always the case. During my observations on the tram there was one episode that illustrates this:

> Observation: A man in his fifties sits down on my right. After about five minutes he suddenly says "Hello!" in a loud voice. I discretely look at him, see that he holds his hand to his head and realise that he has received a call on his mobile phone. The caller is a member of his household. The man says that he is on the tram and that he will be home in twenty minutes. The person calling needs instructions on how to start the home computer. The man enters a long explanation on which buttons to push and what the login id is. Then he says "You know the password, don't you? I'm on the tram, you know." Then the caller says something and the man confirms that it is the right password. Then he hangs up.

This man obviously didn't forget that he was in a public place where people around him might be eavesdropping and therefore avoided giving away sensitive information. My observations though gave me the general impression that people feel free to talk about most topics on the tram and that the conversation topics vary immensely. I heard people talking about raising a loan of 5 million NOK; asking for the other person's address; the results of a medical appointment; future strategy when dating a specific boy; medical treatment; making plans for travelling; work procedures; applying for a job; rivalry with a friend; leisure time activities; lying to other people; informing that the person is delayed; strategy when bidding on an apartment; what's for dinner today; exam results; increasing power prices and who's to pay the electricity charges; arranging a surprise party etc. So there is definitely a variety of topics being discussed. This lack of restraint might be an indication either that people these days simply feel free to talk about most topics in public or that the mobile phone creates an illusion of privacy that makes people disclose more information than they normally would do.

3.5 Investigating the Displacement of Boundaries

In my exploration of contemporary mobile use I have chosen to focus on the possible displacement of boundaries that take place as a result of mobile use in public. Is there a noticeable change in the way people perceive public places after the introduction of mobile phones? Bassett et al. (1997) believe the development of discussing what hitherto has been understood as private matters in public, has implications for both theories of these spheres and for our understanding of negotiating these spheres. The mobile as a technology has given us a new and outermost audible way of being private and public individuals at the same time in public places. Nina touched onto the drawing and displacement of boundaries while explaining what could irritate her about mobile use:

> Interviewer: Do you ever get irritated by other peoples' use of mobile phones?
> Nina: Yes.
> Interviewer: In what way?
> Nina: I feel that when I got a mobile… those boundaries of what is okay with mobiles and not are moved all the time, you know. At that time you rolled your eyes if people talked in their mobiles on the train. There are more private places to talk than on the train. But now it's okay that people talk on the train. Now it's of more concern what people are talking about. […] I'm not as wary about it now as I was a couple of years ago when people are talking in their mobiles around me, but its more what they are talking about and maybe if they talk very loud and for a long period of time.

Nina obviously sees a change in the way we perceive mobile use now as opposed to four or five years ago. The attention is not as much on the fact that people talk on the mobile, e.g. on public transport, as on the content and other aspects of the conversation, e.g. the volume level and the length of the conversations. In her opinion there has been a turn from the physical action to the content of the action. Thomas agrees with her on this and says that "talking on the underground or on the tram, I think that is quite… nobody has any problems with that now, I think. Maybe more people reacted to it a couple of years ago."

But has there been a shift in which themes we find appropriate to discuss in a public place? Approximately half of the interviewees meant that whatever we discussed on the

mobile nowadays, it didn't differ in any significant way from the topics we discussed in the past. Their argument was that normal conversation in public could evolve around the same themes. So overhearing an intimate conversation on the tram had nothing to do with the introduction of mobile phones and a possible liberation in its wake. Some of them though agreed that due to the mobile phone the number of conversations in public was higher and thereby also the risk of overhearing a conversation. Others felt that there was a difference and that intimate information reached the ears of more people now than before.

Quite a few of the previous studies are vague on concluding in either direction. Rasmussen though takes a clear stance and says that "the mobile has created an expansion of the personal conversation and an increased amount of noise for the surroundings." (2003b). Lasen, on the other hand, brushes aside the allegations made about increased privatisation of public places as expressions of an ethnocentric Western view, and believes our understanding of mobile use would benefit from letting go of the dichotomy and instead talk about a new and unified space (Lasen, 2002a). The latter view coincides with Fortunati's statement on unification of the public and the private.

Following Gieryn and his boundary-work we find that the concepts of public and private get their meaning from each other and that how they appear is context dependent and might be changing over time. This makes it difficult to make any clear-cut conclusions on the displacement of boundaries. The public and the private are not single things with intrinsic qualities. Their characteristics are dependent on the interpretation made in the specific context. The fact that people adjust their mobile phones, and the way they use them, when they're in public indicates that not doing so would be a breach with proper manners and possibly also to introduce new elements into the public sphere. There is a chance that these elements are of a private character since talking on the phone in many cases traditionally has been a domestic occupation. This makes me believe that the mobile phone alters the pre-

existing perceptions of public and private and that less clear boundaries are the outcome, at least in a transitional phase.

It might be fruitful, though, to consider the possible boundary displacement within a larger frame, that is, to assess the general tendency in contemporary society on displacement of boundaries. The allegation is often made that ever more private matters become part of the public: the lives of famous people are scrutinised and revealed in detail in magazines and ordinary people share their innermost secrets with thousands of strangers in reality shows on television. In such a context the information leaked out through mobile conversations in public might seem harmless and insignificant. In a way one gets used to these revelations and cease to get shocked or affected by the sharing of private information. In the light of this the mobile phone's contribution to the displacement or blurring might be difficult to separate from the more extensive changes under way.

3.6 Bringing the Discussion to a Conclusion

The use of mobile phones in public places involves a negotiation of the prevailing norms in these places. People have an understanding of how these areas were used in the past and see that the mobile phone disturbs the scene when used inappropriately. To avoid these disrupting and sometimes embarrassing situations, the users have developed several tactics and strategies that they use to negotiate. Some of them involve adjusting the mobile phone's functions, others are bodily gestures. Either is effective and alleviates some of the friction. Yet not all potential conflicts are avoided and some themes seem to be recurrent. Those might be the topics discussed on the phone, the length of the conversation and the loudness. In these instances people sometimes feel that the boundaries are altered and that hitherto private matters are transferred to the public arena. On the whole, though, the impression is that young Norwegian adults of today are comfortable with the development and have found ways to use

mobiles in public. They admit that they find it irritating at times to deal with other people's mobile use, especially strangers, but generally they're not upset by mobile use in public.

Previous research in many cases touches onto the possible blurring of boundaries, but hesitates to conclude on the issue. Some though argue in favour of a displacement in the direction of the private (Bassett et al., 1997; Rasmussen, 2003b). Others are of the opinion that unification is a more accurate description of the development (Fortunati, 2002; Lasen, 2002a). Either way there has been a change of the pre-existing perception of the boundaries. What is public and what is private becomes unclear and needs to be redefined. Since the concepts, following Gieryn, get their meaning from the context and each other, they will be interpreted differently by different people. Lasen adds a valuable insight when commenting on the cultural differences in pre-mobile behaviour in public places and their relevance to the analysis of potential changes (Lasen, 2002a). Clearly this diversity makes the talk of alterations more or less apt dependent on the country or nation in question.

This thesis though has Norway as its point of departure and in my opinion the present characteristics of public places form a contrast to the more introspective and reserved characteristics typical of the Norwegian cultural tradition. Hence describing the outcome of the negotiation of boundaries as a blurring or displacement of the previous perceptions of the public and the private can be defended in a Norwegian context. It is important to keep in mind though that also within this context the findings are limited. They are valid only for the actual research universe. Another composition, with e.g. younger or older people, might have given totally different answers and thereby indicated other tendencies. The tendency indicated in this thesis, though, is a displacement of the public/private boundary. How the altered perceptions are incorporated in the everyday life of people will be subject to closer scrutiny in the succeeding chapter as the focus turns to the norms of mobile use in contemporary society.

4 EVALUATING NORM CONSTRUCTION: ARE MOBILE USERS OPERATING IN UNGUIDED TERRITORY?

4.1 Preliminary Remarks

In this chapter I will investigate the construction of norms related to mobile use. The previous chapter revealed that people experience a displacement of the public/private boundaries, but at the same time they seem to have a sense of how to behave when using the mobile phone in public. This can be an indication that the mobile users' behaviour are guided by a common understanding, or put more precisely, that they conform to the norms of behaviour. The purpose of this chapter is to determine which state the norms of mobile behaviour are in and which factors contribute to their establishment and consolidation. I will employ Foucault's model of norm construction to illuminate the role of such corrective mechanisms in contemporary society. In addition a closer look at the existing formal regulations and their interplay with the prevailing norms will form part of this examination.

4.2 Emerging Norms

Both through the interviews and the breaching experiments it became clear that norms have evolved and are evolving around mobile behaviour. The experiment where I tried out ringing tunes on board the tram and the subsequent head turning made visible that such behaviour is considered inappropriate and this was later confirmed by statements made by the interviewees. Likewise with the conversation of a rather intimate character that was carried out by my ally on the tram. The increasingly consolidated status of the norms of mobile

behaviour was evident in Tobias' reply when asked to identify norms governing mobile behaviour:

> Interviewer: Have you got any examples of unwritten rules [of mobile conduct]?
> Tobias: […] At least you should switch [your mobile] off when you're at lectures and at the cinema. A mobile that rings at the cinema is like walking around with your flies undone. At least I think so. Talking on the mobile while you're at the cinema is like going to town without trousers on.

He compares the breaches of proper mobile conduct with breaches of other behavioural norms and indirectly states that both would cause the same amount of embarrassment or irritation. To manage your mobile phone use in a smooth and unobtrusive way has become just as important as being properly dressed. This tendency is also commented on by Fortunati who states that "what has begun to give users prestige is knowing how to use the mobile with ease" (1997, p. 54).

But how are these norms established and how do people gain insight into what's appropriate and not? One possible way to obtain knowledge on the subject might be to discuss it with others and to observe their mobile use; another possibility is to improve your mobile skills by actually being rebuked by others. I will elaborate on these two options in the following.

4.2.1 Learning from the Experiences of Others

The interviews revealed that mobile use is not a common conversation or discussion topic. The interviewees said they seldom talked to friends or family about mobile use and hardly ever criticised their use. If the mobile phone was discussed, the conversations turned more often on the technical possibilities of the mobile, than on how to use the mobile phone appropriately. There was however a tendency to indirectly address the issue by sharing stories of other people's (mis)behaviour:

> Interviewer: Do you ever talk to friends or others about mobile use?
> Tobias: Yes, it happens. Giving examples of people that have made social blunders, like talking loudly on the bus or a mobile going off at the cinema or something like that.

Based on the interviewees' statements, I got the impression that the habit of stigmatising certain behaviour as socially unacceptable by making jokes about other people's mobile blunders is quite common. Bassett et al. noted a similar tendency in their study and stated that the informants "presented their own use and ownership of a mobile as standing in contrast to the spectre of a less well adjusted user – what we would call Mobile Man" (1997, p. 5). 'Mobile Man' is hence a stereotype used in order to contrast their behaviour as better or more mature. This figure has much in common with the image of clumsy mobile users that is created in situations like the one Tobias reports on above. To jest about the blunders of others can be seen as a way of demonstrating knowledge of the norms of proper mobile behaviour and simultaneously sharing these stories might contribute to further consolidating the norms.

As already mentioned, commenting or criticising the mobile use of friends or family is a rare thing. Nevertheless one of the interviewees, Nina, had been in a situation where she had felt the need to confront one of her friends on the issue:

> Interviewer: Do you ever talk to friends or others about mobile use?
> Nina: I have taken it up with a friend once. She's extreme. She sends text messages in the middle of intimate conversations… and that provokes me a bit. Sometimes it's just a bit too much and then I feel that "hello, now I'm the one that should be at the centre of the attention" (laughs) or… and well, then we had a conversation about that. That's the only occasion and it was triggered by the fact that I became somewhat irritated. Otherwise it's not much of a theme.

Nina goes on telling that her friend was surprised when she confronted her with her extensive and interruptive mobile use and adds that her friend wasn't aware of how her behaviour could irritate others. This led to me asking her about mobile use in general:

> Interviewer: Is the consciousness in a way being shaped by how other people use their mobiles? Does that trigger a reflection regarding one's own use?

Nina: That might be.
Interviewer: So having friends like the one you confronted might be useful?
Nina: Yes, it is. To be mirrored.

Hence being surrounded by other mobile users, watching their use and sharing their experiences might be a way of improving your skills regarding mobile use and simultaneously a way of consolidating the norms of mobile use.

4.2.2 Learning from Your Own Experiences

Likewise getting feedback from others on your mobile use might be a way of creating awareness on what is considered proper mobile behaviour. These feedback mechanisms can be sighs or harsh looks given off by strangers at the cinema or in the reading room or blunt criticism from fellow travellers on the train. According to Foucault this corrective behaviour is part of the panoptic that permeates society (1991). Precisely like in the prison or another institution the sanctions and reprimands given to improper behaviour intend to direct the future behaviour. The really cunning aspect of this system, though, is that merely the knowledge that people are paying attention to your behaviour makes you adjust your behaviour. Hence mobile users lower their voice, flee from crowded places or simply refuse to answer calls in public knowing that not doing so could be a breach with good manners and could produce negative reactions among the co-present people. Plant seems to agree with this and states that "people who judge or comment on other people's mobile use are often contributing to the collective cultural processes by which rules and standards of behaviour establish themselves" (2002, p. 34). Being a mobile user and receiving reactions from others are among the factors that contribute to the establishment of norms.

4.2.3 The Current State of the Norms

The above examination of possible learning scenarios in connection with norms gave no answer to which state the norms are in. Is the current state of norms stable or still in a state of

flux? According to Maria mobile use is not a social phenomenon that is being discussed nowadays. She says:

> Maria: It was more of a theme in the past. Two or three years ago one talked more about mobile use than one does now. Now I really think that it's worked into our everyday life that it in a way…
> […]
> Interviewer: Now there is some set of norms that people relate to?
> Maria: Yes, I think so.

As indicated in earlier chapters some studies of mobile behaviour conclude that norms are evolving, but that they seem to be in flux at present (Ling 2001, 2004; Palen, Salzman & Youngs 2001). Maria's impression exceeds this view. She thinks that norms have stabilised and that people therefore no longer pay that much attention to mobile etiquette. According to Maria the norms have been internalised, that is, they are now part of our inbuilt knowledge which we make use of in everyday life. In my opinion mobile use seems to cause too much friction in contemporary society for the norms to be fully internalised. There is no doubt, though, that norms in this field are emerging and that they are more stabilised now than a few years ago. An indication of this can be found in previous mobile studies. The studies performed in the late 1990s are concerned with the need to develop norms and Bassett et al.'s statement "new regulatory mechanisms can be expected to evolve" illustrates this (1997, p. 17). More recent studies refer to norms of mobile behaviour as being in flux and thereby acknowledge that norms have emerged (Ling, 2004; Palen, Salzman&Youngs, 2001). Another indication of the increasing stabilisation of mobile norms is Tobias' earlier comparison of breaching mobile norms and other, and more longstanding, social norms. My general impression is that the norms of mobile behaviour are in a fair way to being internalised in the Norwegian society, but that the friction present indicates that more time is needed before they are a totally integrated part of our everyday life. Yet it is important to bear in mind that an increased stabilisation and consolidation of these norms doesn't imply that their state is fixed

for ever. The state of norms, or boundaries for that matter, will always be dependent on the context and can thereby be undone in case the conditions of the stabilisation alter.

4.3 Formal Regulations

Along with the emerging, or already emerged, set of norms there are more formal rules that try to influence mobile behaviour and possibly also the norm development. The interviewees had diverging views on whether these formal rules had an impact or not. Some meant that mobile use was less frequent in places where mobiles were forbidden, like cinemas, reading areas and air planes and that the formal boards and signs therefore had an actual effect. Others said that those that follow the rules in such places probably would have done so anyway because their good manners and prior knowledge would have guided them. Likewise it was their impression that those that break the rules don't really care at all, thus to them the presence of a formal rule doesn't make a difference.

Another phenomenon that was brought up was the possibility of collectively breaking a rule, like using the mobile phone in the reading rooms even though it's forbidden. During my observations in the university library I noticed that mobile use was quite frequent despite of the formal signs prohibiting it. The students seemingly did not bother about neither the mobile phone beeps nor the sudden movements they brought about when people rushed out to answer the call. Some of the interviewees were a bit surprised by the widespread use of mobile phones in those areas at the university, but admitted that it was hard to comment on other people's rule breaking when their own behaviour weren't at all times consistent with the rule.

> Margaret: The reading room is a strange case because I feel that everybody has a mobile phone there. It's sort of forbidden, but everybody has it and it's seems to be okay. I don't know why. I think one should not bring the mobile there. Everybody does.

> Everybody have their mobile phones there. And I feel they receive calls quite often. And the phones beep. People carry their mobiles to the reading room.

Most of the interviewees accepted the formal regulations conducting mobile use, but still they weren't sure if they would have reacted if somebody broke the rule. It turned out that they felt that it was an unpleasant task to direct other people's behaviour. They were reluctant to raise themselves to the role of a judge, a police man or being an authority person when dealing with fellow human beings. Anne feared that it would reflect badly on her and said that she would use a flippant tone to gloss over the fact that she was correcting others. Markus bluntly said that he wouldn't comment on other people using the mobile in the reading room, because who was he to decide that they couldn't do that? According to him their common status as students didn't give him the right to direct the others. Some of the other interviewees strongly objected when they were confronted with this statement and Kristin even said:

> Kristin: […] If a reading room guard said it because it was part of the regulations and that it was prohibited, then I would have felt that it was a less good reason. But if it was a fellow student, then I would have accepted it.

The idea behind formal rules directing mobile use was also an issue brought up as a theme in the interviews. Many of the interviewees stated that it was easier to comply with a rule if you understood and believed its grounds. An illustration of this is reflected in their views on the rule prohibiting mobile use in airplanes. Some were of the opinion that the danger involved was very much exaggerated and hence they wouldn't comment on people breaking the rule. Their argument was that if the consequences were as fatal as often described, then the supervision wouldn't be as sloppy as it is today. Others said they would feel insecure and obliged to react if somebody used a mobile phone on board an aircraft since there was a chance that the mobile could interfere with the aircraft's machinery.

Mobile use can clearly be a controversial issue also in those places were it is regulated. Either because people disagree with the rules and thereby don't follow them or if the rules are interpreted differently by people. But how do the norms and the formal rules interact? John stated that "Whether you follow a rule because you feel morally that it's correct to do so or because there is a sign on the wall. It's hard to decide sometimes." Obviously it is an advantage if the formal rules harmonise with the emerging norms and this is very likely the intention of those that come up with the formal rules too. Possibly the formal rules in this way can contribute to a strengthening of the unwritten ones.

4.4 Closing Comments

When the above expressed views are taken into account one gets the impression that the norms of mobile behaviour nearly seem to have reached a stage of stabilisation in the Norwegian society. Most people are aware that norms have evolved and some even compare breaching them to breaching other and longstanding norms of behaviour. The norms are continuously constructed and cemented as people directly or indirectly correct each others' behaviour according to Foucault's model. Conforming to the norms of mobile behaviour seems to be of importance for the users and being able to manage the mobile use smoothly is a desired skill. Yet there is a potential for greater awareness. The formal regulations have an impact on people's behaviour, but determining their true influence on people is difficult because of the interplay with the norms and the uncertainty to whether it is the norms that stimulate the behaviour or the formal rules. In sum the findings of this and previous studies seem to be consistent. Mobile norms have evolved in contemporary society and a stabilisation of them is under way.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD

5.1 Preliminary thoughts

The starting point of this thesis was the research questions posed in the introductory chapter. They crystallise the aims and objectives directing the thesis and were examined by means of an interdisciplinary approach. First I explored mobile use in public places and the upheaval this technology potentially causes in relation to the public/private dichotomy. Then I examined the norms guiding mobile use in public and how the formal regulations on mobile use in public places relate to the informal ones. Through the analysis in the preceding chapters empirics and theories were woven together in order to find answers to the research questions. In the succeeding I will return to some of the findings of this study and evaluate the insight created through the analysis. After this recapitulation and assessment, the thesis will be rounded off with tentatively launching some thoughts on how the results possibly can be extended and how work and research in this field can be carried on in the years to come.

5.2 Adapting to New Conditions

Through their statements the interviewees gave off the impression that they adjust their mobiles and also their own physical behaviour when using the mobile in public or in the presence of others. These technical and bodily adaptations have also been commented on in previous studies (Ling, 2004; Plant, 2002) whose observations are highly consistent with those of this study. The fieldwork revealed that it is very common to switch the mobile to mute in situations where mobiles explicitly are forbidden. Very few though switch it off at

any time. Regarding the soundscape of the mobiles it turned out that the possibility of personalising the ringing tunes is another way of reducing the irritation caused by mobile phones. The above indicate that people adjust their mobiles and thereby also their own behaviour dependent on the context. Yet very few of those interviewed, when asked explicitly, said that they utilise the technical possibilities of their mobiles. This might indicate that these adjustments no longer are a matter of deliberate considerations, but simply have become a natural and integrated part of the mobile use.

The mobile users and my observations of them also reported other behavioural changes to keep the privacy of a call even when in the presence of others. Withdrawal of the gaze is possibly the most common strategy, but a closing of the body language is also a strategy that seems to increase the feeling of privacy. The ultimate option though is to leave the location and carry on the conversation in another and more spacious location.

5.3 Often Tension, Seldom Conflicts

The general impression of the fieldwork is that mobile use seldom causes conflicts. At least the interviewees were very reluctant to say so and both the observations and the breaching experiments support this comprehension. But even though the mobile use seldom triggers open conflicts there is no doubt that it is a source of tension in many situations. Violations of what is perceived to be the prevailing norm set, like talking loudly on the mobile or carry on a conversation for a long period of time in public, are frequent irritants. The interviewees stated very consistently that the above were examples of improper behaviour and since there never, or at least very seldom, are any formal rules forbidding loud or long talks it might indicate that well-developed norms are attached to this kind of behaviour.

With regard to location there seems to be a consensus on where mobile use is appropriate and not. Places where mobile phones are forbidden were frequently mentioned by

the interviewees as examples of the latter. Due to the fact that these locations have formal rules explicitly guiding the mobile conduct, it is hard to decide whether the formal or the informal rules are directing the behaviour. Most of the interviewees though said that they understand the need for formal rules in those instances where they exist and that they in most cases agree with the regulations. So the friction caused in these instances is more often caused by people breaking the rules than by the rules themselves.

Also in places where there is a lack of formal rules it is interesting to notice that mobile use can be considered irritating, almost to a greater extent than in the above situations. Public transport and (most) shops are places in which norms are the only rules guiding the behaviour. Even though norms to a great extent have developed on how to behave in such places, some of the interviewees meant that not all mobile users are aware of this or possibly care about it. At the same time the interviewees stated that commenting on other people's behaviour is very difficult, especially in situations where there are no explicit rules to point to.

Other aspects of mobile use in public mentioned as possible irritants were the actual content of the calls and the distinct characteristic of a mobile call, that is, the one-sidedness. The one-sided quality of mobile conversations was a source of irritation to some of the interviewees and they believed the irritation had to do with the need to fill in the gaps. Not many of them stated that their curiosity was triggered to a greater extent by mobile conversations, so my findings aren't totally consistent with those of the British study on half conversations (Curiosity fuels anger at mobile chat, 2004). There was a disagreement among the interviewees on whether the topics of the mobile calls were of a different character than those of normal conversations. Some meant that the conversations were of the same nature as those performed otherwise, while others felt that more intimate and private details were thrown into the air in public places during mobile conversations. Those that stated the latter

didn't seem to know exactly why this happened, but indicated that it might have something to do with the behavioural strategies and the illusion of privacy they cause.

But to what extent does this ability to get into the spirit of the mobile conversation result in a boundary displacement of what is perceived as public and private? The succeeding subchapter will look into that.

5.4 A Blurring of Boundaries

Mobile use is a source of tension in contemporary society. The interviewees didn't hesitate when questioned on this issue. But it is also a source of boundary displacement? Previous studies have in most cases indicated blurring of the public/private boundaries as a consequence of increased mobile use in public places. In my study the interviewees weren't expressing an unambiguous attitude towards this. Some of them felt that the air of public places to a greater extent was filled with private matters and viewed this as a reduction of the "quality of public places" (Haddon, 1997). Those that felt that intimate details were exposed more frequently in public agreed that there was an ongoing privatisation of public places. Hence these people could relate to the idea of the boundary being displaced in the direction of the private. Other interviewees opposed this idea strongly and said that the matters discussed on the mobile in public places are no different from those discussed during normal conversations. Hence there is no increased displacement of boundaries initiated by mobile use according to these interviewees.

The question then is how, with such diverging views expressed, to conclude on this issue. Even though many of the interviewees didn't see the mobile phone as the cause of boundary negotiations or possibly blurring of boundaries, they didn't necessarily mean that there were no such negotiations going on. Their main argument was that the mobile phone was not the sole triggering factor. It was just one of many artefacts and circumstances that

created a change or need for negotiations of boundaries. The general impression is then that the mobile phone might conduce to a blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private, but that it is not the only contributing factor in this respect. Other personal and portable technologies, such as minidiscs and MP3-players also play a role in the displacement of boundaries. Likewise the increased public exposure of private matters in the media is another factor influencing the displacement of the public/private boundary.

5.5. Well-Developed Norms

Almost all of the mobile users I interviewed saw themselves as more restrictive and conservative with regard to mobile use than they experienced others to be. One of them explicitly said that his inner set of norms in any case is stricter than the general norms and that he therefore doesn't worry about how he uses his mobile in public. He knows his behaviour will fall within the limits of what is perceived as appropriate mobile use. Some of the interviewees specified younger people as more likely to behave improper, while others meant that those that yet hadn't figured out how to use the mobile in an appropriate way were people that very likely weren't able to behave according to social norms on any occasion.

The interviewees' evaluation of their own mobile behaviour compared to others might to some extent be influenced by the tempting possibility of presenting themselves in a favourable light. Yet again it might be that my small sample is eschewed in the conservative direction. Any way I see no reason to discount their statements all together. Since the interviewees all are young adults they belong to the group which according to Rasmussen might be setting the standard for future mobile use. The fact that they experience themselves as more competent mobile users might be that they were introduced to the mobile at a later stage in life and that they therefore have a built-in distance to it that e.g. younger people lack.

The investigation has given me the impression that the norms connected with mobile behaviour are relatively well-developed, but not totally internalised. My general impression is that the mobile users I encountered knew exactly what they found appropriate and not and that these statements were consistent not only with each other, but also when compared to the observations and breaching experiments. The mobile users were also quite consistent on what constituted proper behaviour in those cases where formal rules were absent. Long or loud conversations in public were for instance mentioned by many as improper. I interpret these consistencies, and the accordance with previous studies, as indications that there, at least among people in their twenties, is a common understanding of the do's and don'ts of the mobile, or phrased differently, an understanding of which norms apply in this field.

5.6 Extending the Scope

As in all qualitative research, the possibility to generalise from the research findings is very limited. My conclusions are fully valid only for the research universe of my thesis, 12 young Norwegian adults studying in Oslo, yet statements about the mobile use of the whole population of young students living in Oslo can be defended as long as they are read as a presentation of tendencies within the research material. Findings in earlier studies might support or contradict the findings of this study and hence strengthen or weaken the conclusions respectively. Likewise the results of studies carried out in other countries or cultures might add insight on whether these phenomena are culture specific or not.

A master thesis written last year by Jo Anders Heir deals with "the mobile telephone and its role in everyday life from a consumer perspective" (2003, synopsis). Even though the focus of his thesis isn't merely on the use of mobile phones in public places, the topic is discussed in one of the subchapters. His research universe consisted of international students in the Dutch city Maastricht and their views on the intrusive potential of the mobile phone and

its effect on the public/private dichotomy are in many ways similar to the ones expressed by the Norwegian students in my study. They did, like the Norwegians, consider “that certain spaces and situations were unsuitable for private conversations, and some did not allow mobile communication at all.” (ibid., p. 61). In general there is a high degree of unity in these two studies on what is inappropriate, where and why despite their different cultural backgrounds and this may justify a certain generalisation of the research findings, at least at a European level, since all the students in Heir’s study were from European countries.

It is interesting though to notice in Heir’s thesis that “the general consensus was that many still showed little regard for their surroundings, and that improper behaviour remains a common nuisance.” (ibid., p. 64). This statement about the misbehaviour of many is somewhat stronger than the ones expressed in this thesis where the interviewees seemed to think that most people know how to behave and that only younger people or people with poorly developed social skills are likely to behave improperly with their mobile phones. This might indicate a cultural difference or simply that a year has gone by since Heir’s study and that the mobile phone within that period has further consolidated it position.

5.7 Looking Ahead

Keeping the above conclusions in mind it is tempting to speculate a bit on how the field of mobile studies can be further developed in the years to come. There are already an increasing amount of studies performed, and attention is paid to many aspects of the mobile technology. Yet more knowledge is needed. On the public/private issue which has been scrutinized in this thesis, there are several unanswered questions that need examination. What kind of experiments can be carried out in order to increase the knowledge in this field?

Breaching experiments seem to be a rather rare method in mobile studies. Ling reports to have “carried out a handful of good-natured ‘experiments’ in order to tease out people’s

reactions to the use of public space" (2001, p. 3), but otherwise I haven't stumbled across any such experiments. In my study I focused on breaching norms and performed such experiments with varying success and degree of feedback from the people exposed to the experiments. A proposal for future study might be to breach norms in other situations, like talking on the mobile while queuing or when you're in a meeting. A further step might be to break formal rules regulating mobile behaviour to see if that possibly creates a stronger response from the co-present people. Possible experiments might be to talk on the mobile phone at the cinema, in the theatre, in a 'silent car' on the train or in other locations where mobile phones are explicitly forbidden. Ignoring the prohibitory signs in hospitals or air planes might be a way of stretching the patience and tolerance of the co-present people further. Even though some of the breaching experiments I performed did seem to provoke, the response was limited to people turning their heads and raising their eyebrows. Despite the fact that this thesis has shown that people are reluctant to do so, breaking a formal rule might cause them to respond verbally. Carrying out such a study could generate more insight into how people respond when other people break the rules, not only how they say they would respond.

Likewise further investigation of the topic of this thesis could be done by extending the scope to encompass other groups of informants, e.g. other age groups, people without academic background, less experienced mobile users or other nationalities. Such a study would enable a comparison with the findings of this thesis and an evaluation of which are the predominant factors shaping mobile use.

Envisioning future developments is a difficult task. So is also the case of mobile phones and appurtenant boundary negotiations. The current tendency of integrating more and more technology in the mobile phone, making it compatible with other technical equipment, doesn't seem to halt. Whether this will contribute to a further challenge of the public/private dichotomy already under pressure, is hard to foresee. Prospective developments might take

into consideration the concerns expressed in contemporary society and have built-in technological adjustments making them less intrusive. On the other hand, new inventions have a tendency to create a stir in any case and might therefore be subject to resistance because of the novelty no matter what amendments are made. Thus the future trends of mobile technology and mobile behaviour are uncertain and further investigations are needed, both to illuminate present developments and to understand those of the past. In any case future mobile research will benefit by treating the mobile phone as an artifact which is shaped by negotiations between different social groups.

Appendix – List of Interviewees

Markus (26), male student of Psychology, mobile owner since 1998, interviewed at Café Onkel Donald, Oslo, on May the 14th 2004.

John (25), male student of Psychology, mobile owner since 1998/99, interviewed at Café Onkel Donald, Oslo, on May the 18th 2004.

Thomas (22), male student of Mathematics, mobile owner since 1998/99, interviewed at Café Onkel Donald, Oslo, on May 19th 2004.

Nina (27), female student of Psychology, mobile owner since 1998/99, interviewed at Egon Paleet, Oslo, on May the 20th 2004.

Tobias (25), male student of Informatics, mobile owner since 1997, interviewed at Egon Paleet, Oslo, on May the 20th 2004.

Karen (26), female student of Informatics, mobile owner since 1998, interviewed at the Institute of informatics, Oslo, on May the 21st 2004.

Erik (31), male student of Informatics, mobile owner since 1998, interviewed at Blindern Student home, Oslo, on May the 22nd 2004.

Maria (24), female student of Political Science, mobile owner since 1996, interviewed at Café Onkel Donald, Oslo, on May the 24th 2004.

Margaret (21), female student of Art History, mobile owner since 2001, interviewed at Brasserie 45, Oslo, on May the 24th 2004.

Fabio (22), male student of Marketing, mobile owner since 1997/98, interviewed at Café Onkel Donald, Oslo, on May the 26th 2004.

Kristin (25), female student of Electronics and Computer Technology, mobile owner since 2000, interviewed at the Institute of Informatics, Oslo, on May the 27th 2004.

Anne (23), female student of Microelectronics and Informatics, mobile owner since 1997/98, interviewed at the Institute of Informatics, Oslo, on May the 27th 2004.

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