

Mobile presence and intimacy—Reshaping social actions in mobile contextual configuration

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Abstract

Mobile communication has putatively affected our time–space relationship and the co-ordination of social action by weaving co-present interactions and mediated distant exchanges into a single, seamless web. In this article, we use Goodwin’s notion of contextual configuration to review, elaborate and specify these processes. Goodwin defines contextual configuration as a local, interwoven set of language and material structures that frame social production of action and meaning. We explore how the mobile context is configured in mobile phone conversations. Based on the analysis of recordings of mobile conversation in Finland and Sweden, we analyze the ways in which ordinary social actions such as invitations and offers are carried out while people are mobile. We suggest that the mobile connection introduces a special kind of relationship to semiotic resources, creating its own conditions for emerging social actions. The reformation of social actions in mobility involves the possibility of intimate connection to the ongoing activities of the distant party. The particularities of mobile social actions are discerned here through sequential analysis that opens up contextually reconfigured actions as they are revealed in the details of mobile communication. In this way, we shed light on the reformation of social actions in mobile space–time.

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1. Introduction

Mobile telephony has been widely linked to ‘time–space compression’. Indeed, the ubiquity of mobile phones potentially enables an intimate connection to any moment of social life. Mobile communication through different media – text, talk and images – may become so frequent and multiplied that co-present interactions and mediated distant exchanges become woven into a single, seamless web (Licoppe, 2004). Mobile media integrate the ‘virtual’ as a pervasive presence in everyday practice and place by combining remote and networked relations as co-presence (Ito et al., 2005). The merging of remote or mediated relations and physically co-present relations creates the ambient mobile presence and a condensed mobile time–space (Arminen, 2008).

There is a consensus that mobile communication has accelerated information exchange between people, contributing to changes in social networking. The perpetual mobile connections are the new third space (Katz and

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Askhus, 2002). Social contacts have become increasingly frequent but shorter, as new technologies allow for new forms of incipient talk (Szymanski et al., 2006). Despite consensus on accentuated mobile time–space, there is no agreement on the details of emerging social structures and their significance. On the one hand, optimists claim that mobile tools empower people (Rheingold, 2002). Castells et al. (2007) envisioned quite far-reaching political impact from mobile communication: “wireless communication considerably increases the information and communication power of people at large, making them more independent of formal sources of information” (Castells et al., 2007:256). On the other hand, communication technologies have been seen as ‘anonymizing’ and socially erosive. This process has been referred to as ‘balkanization’ (Ling, 2004; Geser, 2005); social disintegration and breakdown due to the rise of hostile, competitive sub-units. Although some researchers, such as Gergen (2002), suggests that mobile communication reverses the trend towards anonymization that has followed the weakening of face-to-face community, Ling and Geser, among others, claim that mobile communication allows people to escape immediate situations to interact with like-minded people. The strengthening of egocentric networks may lead to the tragedy of the commons, in which communication takes place only among ‘the inner circle’. Thus the revival of community with the help of mobile communication has been claimed to involve the danger of the balkanized world in which the tyranny of the like-minded prevails. Broader social causes will suffer, which is in stark contrast to the utopias envisioned by Castells et al. (2007).

The disagreement on the future direction shows that the research has not yet been sufficient. Much of the research making such claims has been based on theoretical arguments or empirical data from indicators on group level data, statistics or surveys. These studies have failed to look at the everyday use of mobile technologies or have remained largely metaphorical in their accounts. The mobile phone is a mundane matter, used for a range of different social and informational purposes, and it has to be considered in its context of use. Schegloff (2002:298) has, indeed, emphasized the importance of studying new technology in its natural setting, as it provides “naturalistic versions of experimental stimuli”.

This paper is based on the analysis of recordings of naturally occurring mobile phone conversations from Finland and Sweden, amounting to findings on the ways in which the mobile phone is applied in mundane routines, such as making invitations and offers. Through detailed attention to the achievement of social actions we try to open seen-but-unnoticed features (Garfinkel, 1967) that illuminate the changing nature of social actions in the mobile context. We use Goodwin’s notion of contextual configuration (2000) as an analytic tool to elaborate, review and specify the reformatting of social actions under mobile conditions. According to Goodwin, the contextual configuration can be defined as a situated set of language and material structures, including technologies that frame the social production of action and meaning in interaction. We argue that the mobile context achieved via mobile ICT is a particular configuration of social action—a mobile contextual configuration.

2. Data and methods

The analysis is based on over 100 recordings and ethnographic observations of mobile phone conversations in Finland and Sweden. Ethnomethodological, ethnographic and CA methods have been combined to capture mobile co-presence.

The Finnish data was recorded in summer 2002, including 74 complete calls and 8 partial recordings. Calls were recorded with a recording device in the mobile phone itself. The mobile calls of two women and two men (aged 23–38) were taped during 1 week. The data consists of about 40 dyads when the communication partners are taken into account. The set covers almost all calls from the subjects, about 4 h of speaking time (only a few calls were deleted). It covers mobile-to-mobile and landline-to-mobile or mobile-to-landline conversations. Most of the calls were between friends and relatives, but some were work-related. Additionally, 107 Finnish landline-to-landline telephone calls from the 1980s and 1990s were obtained for comparison, revealing the differences between landline and mobile calls (Arminen and Leinonen, 2006). In addition, over 200 SMS messages were collected in 2005, allowing an inspection of the communicative structure of text messaging.

The Swedish data was recorded as part of a larger study of mobile phone conversations. Four people were studied over 2 weeks, and their conversations were recorded using the Autorecorder enabling the automatic recording of all in- and outgoing mobile phone calls (Axelsson and Leuchovius, 2003). The people participating were four 24–28 years old male university students. They were also observed part of the time. Ethnographic notes were taken, and SMS

messages saved. The Swedish data also contains mobile-to-mobile calls as well as landline-to-mobile or mobile-to-landline conversations.

In deference to privacy, consent and anonymity the participants have been in control of what data to hand over to the researchers in both data sets. All names of persons appearing in the conversations have been changed. The calls were transcribed² and analyzed in detail using CA methods and standard transcription conventions (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

CA methodology offers tools and methods for understanding communicative behaviour also in mobile contexts, allowing the study of sequential aspects of social actions in real time and real settings (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Arminen, 2005b). It can identify and specify social patterns that contribute to establishing the world as perceived. Mobile communication is explored to reveal its distinctive features (Szymanski et al., 2006). The emergent social realities afford us an opportunity to learn more about the potential, conditions and limits for new applications (Dourish, 2001; Dourish and Button, 1998).

3. Mobile contextual configuration

Duranti and Goodwin (1992) pointed out that the progress in linguistics made by constraining studies to the level of individual sentences has had a high price: neglect of language use as a constitutive aspect of social affairs. Consequently, more dynamic views on the relationship between language and context have been developed. Through his notion of contextual configuration, Goodwin (2000, 2007) explores the way in which the social, cultural, material and sequential structures figure together in the organization of human action. He stresses that social actions do not take place in a vacuum. People attend to both wider activity contours and relevant aspects of their current environment in order to accomplish actions as being relevantly coupled with the situation. In this fashion, talk-in-interaction is not a separate plenum but a site for orchestrating the use of socio-cultural and material resources. Through their embodied conduct, people display their orientation to a set of resources and maintain focus on the relevant aspects of the surroundings to build up cohesive social actions. Talk and gestures can foreground aspects or entities as relevant for the constitution of action, and relegate other features to the background. Social action is always embedded in its spatio-material environment, deploying a multitude of socio-semiotic structures.

Contextual configuration refers to the actors' orientation to the surroundings by which the current action is shaped and accomplished. It frames and constitutes the ongoing action as a situated achievement. The contextual configuration is always dynamic; the actors' shift of orientation changes the resources available and transforms the contextual configuration accordingly. As a whole, this perspective opens up the situated relationship between actors and context. It also enables the scrutiny of the uses of communicative media and technology as a salient aspect of social action (Goodwin, 2000).

Mobile technologies afford new possibilities for people to act in the course of their spatiotemporally organized everyday life (Weilenmann, 2003; Arminen, 2005/2006, 2007, 2008). However, there is not yet a comprehensive understanding of the reshaping of social action with the help of mobile communication. Much research on mobile communication has addressed mobile actions through metaphors alluding to the generation of meaning in mobile practices (see Arminen, 2007). Notions like the 'third space' or 'interspace' aim at capturing the specificity of mobile time-space, but have not reached the fine-grained composition of mobile action. Neither have the few existing CA studies on mobile communication agreed on the nature of mobile social action, partly because there is not yet consensus on how to study talk in relationship with other activities performed via various other media (Arminen, 2005a). The notion of contextual configuration provides us with analytical resources for studying the way in which socio-material environment figures in the organization of action.

Mobile contextual configuration affords conditions for the emerging social action and it arises out of a special relationship to semiotic resources. Mobile communication provides contact between distant parties who are not limited to definite locations or stationary positions. Mobile contextual configuration allows communication between two (or more) potentially mobile actors. It forms a heterotopia, in which resources from distinct spatial settings coexist, bringing together practical and symbolic elements from those settings (Goodwin, 2000). Distant parties can realize a joint action or project through mobile channels involving semiotic resources from multiple settings. This heterotopic mobility allows a shifting focus between co-located actions and a joint action with the distant parties. For

² The Finnish data were transcribed by Minna Leinonen, and the Swedish data by Alexandra Weilenmann.

instance, mobile messages and talk can be appropriated as a part of local interaction and mobile communication can be shared by taking turns in talking on a mobile phone between group members, or sharing text messages within a group (Weilenmann and Larsson, 2002). The accomplishment of mobile action, however, requires the party to make the relevant frame of action and its changes recognizable so that the distant party can follow communication and understand “why that now” to discern the relevant messages from local contingencies. The heterotopic elements that display changes of framing of action can be found in mobile talk. For instance, a distant party or action can be made relevant to those co-present as in the call below, where the caller is identified for the answerer’s co-present parties.³

Excerpt 1: “The longhaired guy”

(I: 2002-07-07_10-30-41; A = answerer, C = caller)

- 1 C: *päi:vää,*
 go:d afternoon,
- 2 A: *päi:vä[ä.*
 go:d afterno[on.
- 3 C: [(h)(h)e (h)e (h)e (h)e (h)e
- 4 *anteeks että herätän* *vahing[oss.*
 sorry to wake you up by [accident.
- 5 → A: [se pitkähiuksinen
 [the longhaired
- 6 → kaveri j[oka-
 guy w[ho-
- 7 C: [(h)e (h)e (h)e *noh mitäs*
 so what’s




At lines 5–6, the answerer’s characterization of the caller informs his co-present parties about who is calling, thereby providing the caller with a cue about the answerer’s social environment. The caller’s laughter (at line 7) shows his appreciation of the amusing characterization as well as offering a place to close this side-sequence and move on in the call.

Co-present activity may at times become more relevant than the mobile action, and the mobile communicator may shift and balance between orienting to the co-proximate situation and the mobile communicative action. Extract 2 below is from a video of a person driving a car while talking on his mobile phone.⁴ The driver balances between focusing on traffic and driving, and on the conversation (see also Haddington and Keisanen, 2009). At times, he lets the person at the other end know that he is driving and is in a tricky situation. By sharing information about what is going on at his end the recipient can understand his situated communicative challenges, thereby loosening his communicative obligations temporarily. Mobile contextual configuration allows a person to foreground the phone talk or the handling of the ongoing situation alternately. The sharing of the present activity accounts for features of communication that might otherwise be considered inadequate, e.g., long pauses, repetition of words, etc. In the excerpt below, the turns revealing communicative challenges or local circumstances are in italics, while driving operations and the traffic situation are explained in separate columns.

³ No separate ethnography was collected for this part of the study, but the series of cITIs themselves offer plenty of contextual information, and a rich picture of the people involved emerges. The call is a part of a set of calls made in the context of a Hot Rod festival. Several calls display an orientation to the mobile actors as being a part of the group, such as identification of a caller to overhearers. Identification of the caller to those co-present appears to be a systematic practice if co-present parties display an interest in who is calling, which we at times may infer even when we do not hear co-present parties’ voices.

⁴ The data does not include both parties in the conversation, but still shows the mobile contextual configuration, and the shifts between co-located action and the mobile communicative action.

Excerpt 2: “I’m at Västermalm”⁵

Time	Conversation	In car	Traffic situation	Pictures
02:43	Vad skulle jag säga:: :eh::: <i>What was I going to say:: eh::</i>	Turns left. Using his left hand, in which he also holds his phone book.		
	(2.7)			
02:47	Ja ja (.) ja:: Yes yes (.) yes:: (4.4)			
02:51		As soon as he drives straight on the street, he lets go of his phone book. Throws it on the seat to the right. Lets go of the steering wheel, and takes the phone in his left hand.		
02:54	Ja Yes (2.7)	Changes gear with his right hand. Takes the phonebook with his right hand.		
02:57	Ja jo jo Yes yes yes (4.1)	Hits the indicator with his right hand, through the steering wheel, while holding the phone book.		
03:00	Vad skulle jag säga::: <i>What was I going to say:::</i>	Puts the phone book back on the seat. Takes the steering wheel with his right hand. Looks to the left at the intersection before turning right.	Decreases speed. There is a car to the left, who lets him pass.	
	(5.5)			
03:06	Jag måste hålla tungan rätt i mun <i>°I have to keep my tongue in the middle of my mouth°</i> (idiomatic expression: I have to be careful)	Looks to the right while making a right turn into a bigger street.		
	(3.8)			
03:11	Jag är på Västermalm där det är så jävla trångt <i>I'm at Västermalm where it's so damn narrow</i>			
	(2.8)			
03:16	Vad skulle jag <i>What was I</i>	Lets go of the steering wheel with his right hand, scratches his right ear.		
	(1.2)			
03:18	Nej en medium blå No one medium blue	Moves his right hand back to the steering wheel, but immediately moves it to the gear stick. Changes gear. Looks to the left at the intersection.	Slows down before passing the intersection. Continues straight ahead.	

⁵ Data previously published in Esbjörnsson et al. (2007).

The description of the traffic situation and its requirements accounts for failures to attend to the conversation, and orients the distant party to the ongoing situation (Esbjörnsson et al., 2007). In this fashion, mobile contextual configuration mediates the orientation between requirements of proximate and distant actions.

In the main part of the article, we consider the way in which ordinary social actions, such as invitations and offers, are carried out in mobile talk. In particular, we address pre-sequences; a sequential location enabling parties to insert information relevant for the accomplishment of the subsequent action (Schegloff, 1980, 2007; Terasaki, 2004). There are particular kinds of pre-sequence that relies on the mobility of the participants.

4. Reciprocal sharing of contexts

Mobile contextual configuration allows making relevant at least three contexts for the ongoing action—the caller’s, the recipient’s and their mutual context. Mobile heterotopia is not restricted to the one mobile party, since the contexts of both parties may become salient for the ensuing action. This ability to fuse contexts is the strength of mobile communication as well as a rigorous requirement for the action. Parties may communicate at length about their do- and whereabouts to establish a basis for their action. In particular, any context feature is dynamic, being interwoven with the ongoing action, talk and knowledge of the other aspects of the context. When an aspect of context changes, the meaning of other aspects may also change (Greenberg, 2001; Dourish, 2004; Arminen, 2005/2006). Context features may have to be articulated to be relevant for just this event at just this moment (Esbjörnsson and Weilenmann, 2005; Laurier, 2001; Weilenmann, 2003), since the knowledge of where the actor is, or what the ongoing activity is, may not as such be sufficient. Reciprocal sharing of context information is often a prominent part of mobile communication.

In Extract 3, the caller invites the answerer to a restaurant. The invitation is preceded by extended inquiries into the answerer’s availability. The answerer’s and caller’s contexts are made relevant during the call.

Excerpt 3: “A gin and tonic actually”

(A:Feggan 2003-12-9 15.59.39; A=answerer, C=caller)

1. A: tjena,
hi,
2. C: tja:.,
he::y,
3. A: >hallå vad gör du<
>hello what are you doing<
- 4 (0.1)
- 5 C: sitter å tar en gin å tonic faktiskt
sitting having a gin an’ tonic actually
- 6 A: o↑j det är inte illa
o↑h that’s not bad
- 7 C: nä::, [(.) du själv då
no:: [(.) what about yourself
- 8 A: [(xxx)
- 9 A: nej jag tar det lugnt sitter och surfar lite,
no I’m chilling and surfing a little,
- 10 C: surfar du porr igen
are you surfing porno again
(laughter in the background))

- 11 A: ja:, som alltid vettu,
ye:s, like always you know,
- 12 C: ja (.) det är det enda du gör
yes (.) that's the only thing you do
- 13 A: ja,=
yes,=
- 14 C: =du?
=listen?
- 15 A: =ja?
=yes?
- 16 C: du eh::: va va gör du i- va är du hemma?
listen eh::: what what are you doing to- what are you at home?
- 17 A: ja
yes
- 18 C: a ska du me::d (ut) till Lilla London och käka lite
yeah will you come (out) to Little London to have a bite
- 19 (senare)
(later)
- 20 A: nej det går inte jag och tjejen har jubileum:::
no that's not possible it's me and my girlfriend's anniversary:::
- 21 (0.1)
- 22 C: jubileum?
anniversary?
- 23 A: ja::: vi har varit iho:p så länge
ye:::s we have been to:gether so long
- 24 C: nja::: ((said with a teasing voice))
oh:::

At line 5, the caller describes his current activity as having a drink. This is positively received, which sets up a favourable environment for a proposal, but the caller reciprocates with his inquiry of do-about of the recipient (line 7), which subsequently shows up as being a pre-invitation for the invitation proper at line 18. The answerer responds at line 9 with “chilling and surfing”. After some joking (lines 10–13), it turns out that the caller still orients to his lack of sufficient knowledge of what the recipient is doing, or perhaps rather lack of understanding of what these activities mean in terms of his availability (Weilenmann, 2003). He begins by asking what the answerer is doing tonight, but reformulates his question to where he is (line 16). In that way, the caller displays that for him “chilling and surfing” can be done in various locations, and can mean different things in terms of availability. The reformulation also makes it apparent that knowing where the other party currently is located is relevant for anticipating his willingness to join. Once the recipient has said he is at home, the caller launches his invitation, asking if he wants to join him for dinner (line 18). Here, the caller is sensitive to the answerer's whereabouts, knowing that he is within possible reach of the restaurant in mention. The fact that the caller is at home is treated as a sign of availability, which it then turns out not to be.

Mobile contextual configuration involves the parties sharing knowledge of their contexts, and designing their actions accordingly. However, contextual information turns out to be polymorphous and dynamic; the meaning of individual aspects of contexts depends on other aspects. This opens up potentially extended sequences of inquiries concerning the nature of the context, and what this means in this specific situation (see Cromdal et al., 2008). Parties aim at gaining sufficient knowledge of the ongoing activities, location, etc. to achieve successful organization of social actions. Mobile contextual configuration is significant for parties in as much as it allows sharing relevant aspects of contexts and semiotic resources for the action in question.

5. Seductive place formulations

Heterotopia, the intermingling of semiotic resources from more than one context for the benefit of mutual communication, is a key aspect of mobile contextual configuration, allowing distant activities going on to become a resource for talk and mutual action. For instance, a group of teenagers talking to another group via a mobile phone can share the context they are in and let the others know what they are up to for their practical purposes. As in the case above, a person driving a car can make his local situation a resource for mobile communication, letting the person at the other end know that there is a tricky traffic situation coming up, forcing the driver to focus more on the driving than on the conversation.

The very mobility of the mobile phone can also be used as a resource for enhancing social actions. Here we consider the particular practice of what we call *seductive place formulations*, in which a party informs the other about her/his location to make the socio-emotional, symbolic qualities of the place relevant (cf. Extract 3). In this way, it is possible to establish favourable conditions for the subsequently proposed action. In technical terms, a seductive place formulation appears to be a particular form of ‘pre-sequence’, in which the preliminary action makes a contingent projection of the subsequent action depending on the reception of the ‘pre’ (Schegloff, 1980, 2007) projecting the first part of the subsequent action. The seductive place formulation builds a beneficial environment for the realization of the next action, such as an invitation or an offer.

In Extract 4, the caller announces that she is on the beach to reciprocate the answerer’s response about her location. The caller does not appear to mention her location to invite the answerer to join her at the beach, but the connotations of ‘beach’ as ‘having fun’ are made relevant for their consecutive action. A symbolic sense of location thus becomes consequential for interaction and subsequent social activities. The caller’s mention of being at the beach lures or seduces the recipient to join her later. Laughter and other non-lexical items indicate the parties’ orientation to the social significance of their mutual activity. Here the location-telling sets up an invitation produced as a form of “tease” (Drew, 1987). As we will see, this complex activity is a friendship ritual.

Excerpt 4: “I’m actually here at the beach”

(I: 2002-07-13_14-00-15.wav; A = answerer, C = caller)

- 1 A: kotosal,
(I’m at home) (idiom)
- 2 (1.4)
- 3 →C: joo mä oon itse asias tääl rannalla #tääl
yeah I’m actually here at the beach #here
- 4 → Hietaniemessä nytten,#
in Hietaniemi now,#
- 5→ A: aa:i, (h) (h) (h)e
I see::, (h) (h) (h)e

The caller volunteers to tell her location “being at the beach” to reciprocate and build a contrast with the recipient’s “at home” (line 1). The answerer attunes affectively to the location told; her response is a prosodically strongly marked change of state token followed by laughter (5). Through this display of emotional stance, the party shows her recognition,

6 (0.2)

7 → C: joo tota, (0.3)
yeah well, (0.3)

8 → e(h) nii et sä tänää sit o- lähössä £mihinkää illallah,£
uh so you're not goin' £anywhere tonighth,£

9 (0.6)

10 → A: voim mää lähteekkih, (h)e (h)e⁶
I CAN go::, (h)e (h)e

11 C: ä(h)ä(h) (h)e (h)e (h)e .hii no ku £sä sanoit,£
u(h) u(h) (h)e (h)e (h)e .hii well cause £you said,£

12 A: em mä mitä suunnitellu ollu mutta kyllä [mä lähteev voi-,
I hadn't planned anythin' but sure [I can go::,

13 C: [(h)e (h)e(h)e

14 A: y(h)(h)e

15 C: .hhh no ku sä sanoit viikko sitte että sä et oo- lähössä, (h)e
.hhh well cause you said a week ago that you are not goin', (h)e

16 A: (mieli) muuttu- sej [jälkee,
(mind) changed after [that,

17 C: [ku ens viikolla on festarit,
[cause there's a festival next week,

appreciation and alignment with the previous action. This demonstrates the emotional attunement to the location-telling at lines 3–4, making it procedurally relevant. At line 7, the caller acknowledges the response with speech particles that are left intonationally incomplete to reserve the floor for the next action. The subsequent invitation is produced through negating the candidate answer (Pomerantz, 1988) as a kind of a tease (8). The formulation “so you are NOT . . .” displays that the caller has perceived at this point the answerer’s willingness to go out.

The invitation starts with “nii” (meaning “so”, in this context; see Sorjonen, 2001) that brings the subsequent utterance to a conclusion. Line 15 shows that the reference point had been what the person had said a week ago. It appears that the caller had heard the appreciation of the answerer’s response to her information. The favourable reception of the location and the attunement to its emotional bearing established an environment for an invitation as a tease. At line 10, the answerer po-facedly accepts the invitation before starting to laugh (Drew, 1987). The inviter joins the laughter. Post-musings that orient to the maintenance of the intersubjective understanding follow, including the detailing of background of the emotional interchange (lines 11–17; cf. Schegloff, 2007: 142–148). Here the mention of being at a beach appears to have been a pre-invitation, the favourable reception of which made the invitation proper possible. Further, the tease seems to follow the overstated reception of location information. The recipient appeared to have been so ready to go out that she became vulnerable to a tease. The subsequent joint laughter marks this as a friendship ritual, a friendly tease (Arminen and Halonen, 2007).

More formally, the sequential properties of a seductive location formulation can be presented as following the trajectory:

⁶ In Finnish, the turn-initial “voim mää” has a reversed word-order that counters the implication of the prior turn. In English, the same syntactic resource is not available; instead, the CAPITAL letters are used to display the force that the reverse word order conveys in Finnish.

- (1) The inviter informs the recipient about location.
- (2) The recipient attunes to location via a marked, affective reception.
- (3) The invitation is produced as being occasioned by the affective reception.
- (4) The recipient responds to the invitation (acceptance preferred).

Of course, the recipient might refrain from attuning to the symbolic qualities of location. Subsequently, the informant might steer clear of the next action, and the sequence would not be realized (see Schegloff, 1980). At any rate, there are a number of cases where the recipient produces a marked positive response to a location formulation, or to a description of activity, building a favourable environment for the next action, as in Extracts 3, 4 and 5.

In the next call (Extract 5), C has called A to say that she and her partner are coming to the city where A lives, and they start to talk about their plans for the weekend. From line 1 on, A is talking about plans she has with her local friends for the weekend, including a plan to go to some bar. She goes on to add as an increment the name of a likely bar, adding further the fact that she is there at the moment. Again an expressive reception of the location-telling takes place through laughter; in fact, here the recipient joins the laughter. Subsequently, the teller details the location, making it appealing, and the recipient states her interest in checking the place out.

Excerpt 5: “The queue is now already way huge here”

(I: 2002-07-13_22-16-34; A=answerer, C=caller)

- 1 A: me ollaan suunniteltu et me mennään varmaan päiväl
we've planned that we'll probably go during the day
- 2 sinne Töölöön (0.2) konserttii,
to the Töölö (0.2) concert,
- 3 (0.3)
- 4 C: joo,
yeah,
- 5 A: ja sit me mennä-än (.) illal johki baarii,
and then we'll go (.) to some bar in the evening,
- 6 (.)
- 7 →A: todennäköisesti Tavas↑tialle siä mä oon nykki, (h)(h)a
probably to Tavas↑tia that's where I'm now also, (h)(h)a
- 8 →C: >(h)a (h)a< .hhh no ni,
>(h)a (h)a< .hhh well so,
- 9 A: hhyy
- 10 (0.2)
- 11 C: ni,
yea,
- 12 A: täähän on kiva paikka me tultii niiku joskus
u know this is a nice place we got here like
- 13 varttia vaille kymmenen tänne,
about quarter to ten,

- 14 (0.3)
- 15 A: n[i tääl on nyt jo ihan törkee jono ((idiom))
s[o the queue is now already way huge here
- 16 C: [ni,
[yea,
- 17 A: ja kello on jotain vartin yli kymmenen tai tai, (.)
and it's about a quarter past ten or or, (.)
- 18 no on se jo puoli yksitoista mutta,
well it's already half ten but,
- 19 (0.3)
- 20 A: joka ↑tapauksessa jono alko kerääntyyn jo
anyway ↑the queue already started to form here
- 21 kymmenen jälkeen tänne ja tää on niinkun ihan täys,
after ten and this is like totally full,
- 22 (0.9)
- 23 →C: no ni mä en o- varmaa ees ikinä käyny siäl se vois
well I've probably never even been there it could
- 24 → olla ihan kiva paikka.
be an allright place
- 25 A: tää on ihan törkeen hyvä paikka ((idiom)) tiet sä siis
this is like a damn good place u know like
- 26 tää on niiku iha ykköne,
this is so: number one,
- 27 (0.4)
- 28 C: just,
right,
- 29 (.)
- 30 A: m(h)[e
- 31 → C: [täytyy panna testaten. ((idiom))
[must [] test it.
- 32 A: täytyy pan[na (h)e (h)e ((idiom))
must fuc[k (h)e (h)e
- 33 C: [muta,
[but,

34 C: mutta tota noin, (.) kyllä me o- meil olis suunnitelma et
but well um, (.) we do ha- we'd plan

35 me tultais lauantaina sinneppäi,
to come thereabout on Saturday,

Again the announcement of the location (being at a club), invites laughter. Here the person at the club uses her current experience to build the image of the place as alluring. Noticeably, in this call there is no straightforward invitation, as in excerpts 3 or 4. In fact, the invitation is noticeably absent. At lines 23–24, the recipient produces a ‘pre-acceptance’, i.e., she states her interest concerning the place. This pre-acceptance would make the invitation proper relevant, but the informant continues her detailing and upgrades her assessment of the place (25–26).⁷ At line 31, the recipient gives a generic response produced as a zero person verb form. It is a positive answer in a passive form to an invitation that has not yet been made. It has also an idiomatic quality that would make it closing relevant, appropriate for closing the sequence (Drew and Holt, 1995; Arminen, 2001). The informant then takes up the double meaning of the idiom (in Finnish the verb “panna” (to put) has the slang meaning “to fuck”), and produces a double entendre (32). The recipient does not join the laughter and begins closing (34–35). Through self-repair the recipient makes her commitment to the weekend conditional.

Here the recipient seems to orient to the seductive location formulation, but the teller noticeably refrains from producing the action that would have become relevant, and to which the recipient already orients. The teller allows the recipient to know about her (and her friends’) plans but does not produce an invitation proper. By revealing their plans she enables the caller to have knowledge to join them, but makes the caller herself responsible for making the decision by not making an invitation (for strategic actions, see Sacks, 1992; Arminen, 2005b). Note that the caller is also part of the collective, since she is phoning on the behalf of a couple. This may be an instance in which a seductive location formulation as a ‘pre’ to an invitation takes place, but the invitation is not realized. The answerer seems to orient to not being in a legitimate position to invite the group (that the caller is speaking on behalf of) to join the group that she is a part of (for collectives in interaction, see Schegloff, 1995).

6. Intimacy of the routine

Mobile communication may alter existing communication patterns and enable new ways to maintain networks, but it also remains embedded in the prevailing social relations and practices. Many mobile communication practices are a part of the everyday routines and may seem self-evident and trivial. Mundane routines nevertheless constitute an essential part of everyday life and changes in them amount to profound alternations in ways of life and the organizing principles of society (McNeill and McNeill, 2003). Mobile communicative practices may not seem radically new as they are solidly anchored to daily routines and errands. Further, participants themselves may purposefully design these communicative exchanges as being of secondary importance, as if they were insignificant; not claiming small things big. Still, the tie to the most trivial, tiny and inconsequential daily matters builds up the relevance of mobile communication. Sacks (1992:211) made a distinction between “actions that generate interaction” and “interactionally generated actions”, where the latter are noticeably “small” things that are not planned in advance but seem to arise out of surrounding action. Mobile contextual configuration allows the emergence of new kinds of interactionally generated actions, such as mobile real-time co-ordination, mobile accounts and mobile social presence (see Arminen, 2008). As salient as these activities as a whole may be, people treat them as small.

In this routine phone call, a young man calls his girlfriend, who is in their mutual home studying while he is on his way home. We will specifically focus on a small “mobile politeness” at line 38, where the caller offers to buy something on his way home. Both the placement and the design of the offer are critical for its meaning. It is an example of a seemingly tiny and unremarkable mobile communicative action that is far from insignificant.

⁷ An aspect of this ‘selling’ speech may be the caller is from a bigger, ‘more sophisticated’ city than the answerer. A may want to show off how cool places they have as well.

Excerpt 6: “I shouldn’t buy anything or”

(A:F2003-12-2 17.29.38; A=Answerer, C=Caller)

- 1 A: hallå?
hello?
- 2 C: halloj du
hi there
- 3 A: halloj
hiyah
- 4 C: vad gör du
what are you doing
- 5 (0.7)
- 6 A: nä jag pluggar.
well I’m studying.
- 7 C: a:: [går det bra
yeah:: [is it going well
- 8 A: [((clears throat))
- 9 A: m: ja ↑det gör la det
m: yes ↑ I guess it is
- 10 C: ja sådär.
yes so-so.
- 11 A: ja vad gör du?
yes what are you doing?
- 12 C: jag är på väg hem.
I’m on my way home.
- 13 A: jaha.
okay.
- 14 (0.6)
- 15 C: ha. (.) har nån ringt eller.
yeah. (.) so has anyone called or.
- 16 (0.5)
- 17 A: nä::,
no::,
- 18 C: hepp.
all right.

- 19 (0.8)
- 20 A: ingen °har ringt°
nobody °has called°
- 21 C: nobody (0.5) .hh (0.2)
nobody ((in English)) (0.5) .hh (0.2)
- 22 A: °m° [men vart e du då?
°m° [but where are you then?
- 23 C: [(x-)
- 24 (0.5)
- 25 C: ja e Vasa nästan vid: e:: (1.0) >va heter det< Valand
I'm in Vasa almost by: e:: (1.0) >what's it called< Valand
- 26 (0.6)
- 27 A: aha, (.) ska du gå?
okay, (.) are you walking?
- 28 C: ja:
yes:
- 29 A: m=
m=
- 30 C: =a jag får se (0.8) hh om det kommer en fyra så tar jag den
=yeah I'll see (0.8) hh if a four comes I'll catch it
- 31 A: ja
yes
- 32 (1.0)
- 33 C: [.hh men
[.hh but
- 34 A: [jaja=
[well okay=
- 35 C: =ja (0.7) men [då vet-
=yes (0.7) but [then you know
- 36 A: [då kommer du snart då=
[then you'll be here soon then=
- 37 → C: =h↑a jag ska inte köpa nånting eller
=ye↑ah I shouldn't buy anything or
- 38 (0.7)

- 39 A: nä:: inte vad jag vet
no:: not that I know of
- 40 C: nä
no
- 41 (0.3)
- 42 A: de e nog lugnt
there's probably no need
- 43 C: a
yeah
- 44 A: [m
[m
- 45 C: [all right [a men då syns vi sen då
[all right ((in English)) [yeah then I'll see you later then
- 46 A: [okay
[okay
- 47 A: m
m
- 48 C: puss hej
kiss bye
- 49 A: hej då
bye bye

This is recognizably a short, routine call; a boyfriend calling his girlfriend on their landline phone discussing everyday matters. After a summons–answer and an exchange of greetings, there is an exchange of what-are-you-doing questions (lines 4–11), and then at the anchor position, the first topic slot, there is a question about whether anybody has called him (15).

At line 22, the answerer asks for the caller's location. In order to calculate his estimated time of arrival home, she checks what sort of transportation he is using (Weilenmann and Leuchovius, 2004). The caller answers that he will walk but adds that "I'll see", and if a "four" comes by (the number of a tram) he will catch it (line 30). At line 36, she sums up her candidate understanding of what has been accomplished; that he will be coming home soon. He first confirms her understanding but then latches his offer to buy something. This small communicative gesture is interesting both because of its position and design.

First, the offer is not placed in the anchor position to be treated as the reason-for-the-call. Rather, it is located within a pre-closing sequence, initiated already at line 34 with her "well okay". Her candidate understanding at line 36, that he will be coming soon, then provides an opportunity to initiate closing as an initiation concerning their arrangement after the call (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). In this way, the caller's offer is accomplished as a move out of the closing (Button, 1987). Indeed, the pre-closing (line 45) appears almost immediately after the reception of the offer.

Further, the offer is not produced as an independent action that would have been marked as a new activity, but is a latched expansion to his confirmation of her understanding of his arrival. The offer is tied to their arrangements, and not presented as an activity to be judged independently.

Finally, the offer is designed negatively—"I shouldn't buy anything or", which is important in several ways. The negative design makes explicit what has been implicit in their conversation so far; a lacking request by A for C to stop

by the store and pick something up on his way home. In this way it is designed to display that C has already inferred that no stop at the store is necessary. Through its negative design it does not seek direct acceptance, allowing the recipient to reject it without an account. The use of ‘or’ in a turn-final position in an inquiry such as this, opens up for a ‘no’-type response as the preferred next (Lindström, 1999:78). Designing the question so that it prefers a negative response, rather than an uptake, is also sensitive to its placement after a closing has been initiated.

The design and placement of this offer make it an unremarkable, small action that may take place without immediate wider ramifications. Nevertheless, it is not entirely insignificant. By contrast, the elaborate “smallness” is an achievement that is socially significant. For one thing, it relies on mobile contextual configuration in merging together the semiotic fields of her being at home and his being on his way. He can combine his access to shops with her knowledge of their needs. The negative form of his inquiry displays that he does not orient to any expected need but he offers to fulfil her needs were they to be stated. He shows that his mind is with her and their “home business” while he is away.

Further, his questions are produced as having emerged out of their interaction. As Sacks (1992:157–174) points out, the first topics in calls are strongly accountable: they can be taken as the reason-for-the-call. Had the offer been presented in the anchor position, it would have been seen as the reason-for-the-call. The designed smallness of the offer is intricately linked to the way the couple manages their relationship by demonstrating what they take to be significant for them. It is an inferentially rich detail of the moment-to-moment management of a social relationship.

To sum up, in this excerpt we have seen the routine at play (Schegloff, 1986); a boyfriend calling his girlfriend on his way home, to exchange their do-about, letting her make an inquiry about his arrival and offering to pick something up. The mobile context of information allows them to exchange their respective semiotic resources, knowledge and needs. Furthermore, the mobile offer is relevantly coupled with the ensuing social action, allowing them to update and maintain their relationship. In this and similar ways, the mobile phone provides an opportunity to keep up to date with loved ones while away, and design actions so as to reflexively reinforce the relationship. Sharing information of activity as and when it happens and intricately designing actions to index the relationship can create a sense of intimacy.

7. Discussion

In this article, we have used Goodwin’s framework of contextual configuration to expand upon the ways in which parties to a mobile phone call share the knowledge of their contexts, to design their actions accordingly. In this way, we have seen how mobile phone calls contain information exchange about such things as location, transportation, current activity, etc. Sharing this information allows the parties to draw conclusions about their availability for engaging in a phone call or in future mutual activities. Contextual information is dynamic, the meaning of individual aspects of contexts depending on other aspects. For instance, in one call, the caller took the recipient’s answer about being at home as a display of availability for a mutual activity, an assumption which turned out to be wrong. The knowledge of ongoing activities, location and other participants does not guarantee the successful anticipation of the recipient’s availability for future activity. The mobile contextual configuration is all the more important because it allows participants to share the salient aspects of contexts and to orient recipients to the semiotic resources relevant to the action in question.

The fact that (mobile) contextual configurations are dynamic and constantly under negotiation means that it may become salient to specify the nature of the context and its situated meaning with extended sequences of inquiries. We have inspected some types of such extended sequences. Seductive place formulations, a particular form of pre-sequence (Schegloff, 1980, 2007), are a way in which a party can build up a favourable environment for a subsequently proposed action. For instance, mentioning that one is at the beach can open a discussion about what to do next, or presenting the nightclub as having a very long queue, configures that place as popular, and a potential place to go to. These seductive place formulations provide a beneficial environment for the next action, and make way for an invitation or an offer.

In this article, we have analyzed mobile phone calls from Finnish and Swedish speakers to discuss how the possibility of frequent communication and the intimate connection with ongoing activities may increase the emotional intensity of social relationships. Our discussion adds to the ongoing debate about whether mobile phones widen the divisions between people. Much research on communication technologies is concerned with the “erosion of face-to-face community” (Nie and Hillygus, 2002). The strongest form of negative utopia has been called the balkanization of

society (Ling, 2004; Geser, 2005). We have argued that this topic needs to be investigated by looking at the details of mobile communication. We have further shown that mobile contextual configuration allows an intermingling of semiotic resources and social norms from different contexts. Since the mobile parties in interaction take resources and norms both from their mutual context and parties' proximate contexts into consideration, mobile communication provides a heterotopic arena where the claims from several sources are negotiated. Mobile communication does not as such appear to be responsible for accentuating the balkanization of society were that to be true.

Mobile telephony is a ubiquitous form of communication that has both practical and symbolic aspects. It allows an efficient real-time co-ordination of social action that may smooth arrangements, saving time by allowing "dead" moments to be utilized for communication. This micro co-ordination of social action that transcends the past limits of wired networks is not empty of social and symbolic meanings. When people coordinate their actions by communicating about their whereabouts and availability for mutual activities, they also establish and maintain their social relationships. The mundane errands are embedded in symbolic qualities. Mobile communication that makes all mundane activities shareable becomes inescapably interwoven into the personalities and the relationships of those who communicate. The call made or received at the beach involves the connotations of "beach" as a part of the message. Mobile technology does not "free" us from places, spaces and practices, but makes them resources for communication, leading to a new, hybrid symbolic texture of everyday life (Arminen, 2008). Mobile communication may at times be distanced from the immediate context, but also has the potential to communicate the significance of the moment. The frequent contact in and through dead moments may allow building of knowledge about the other anywhere, anytime rather than just at selected moments of public show, enabling an extended intimacy. The significant moments can be shared with chosen non-present others allowing them to get access to experiences and emotions as and where they happen.

In mobile communication the parties' common action is connected to their immediate presence. The parties may share their own immediate space–time, not necessarily needing to orient to an external, objective time as prior to mobile arrangements. The time-frame of common activity may establish a shared space–time that also overcomes the physical distance between them. In this way, the mobile phone allows for mobile intimacy and presence, in which the participants share seemingly small and insignificant pieces of information about their activities and whereabouts. Still, these things are the small things that the world is made up of, and the ability to share them as and when they happen allows people to maintain and strengthen bonds across physical distances, rather than driving them further apart.

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