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From Always-On to Always-There: Locative Media and Playful Identities

In this paper I discuss the convergence of GPS (*global positioning systems*), online publishing, and the phenomenon of "*geo-tagging*" in consumer handheld devices. This combination makes it possible not only to map places, but also people and their preferences, and publish and share these with others. Taking Dutch examples, such as www.geoskating.com and/or www.bliin.com, the paper explores the implications for experiences of movement and co-presence in relation to identity. I argue this convergence creates a *playful* mode of being.

In response to the 'old' new media paradigm of "anyplace, anytime, anywhere" - still prevalent in popular thought - recent work shows that the mobile phone helps to create 'a sense of place' (Nyíri et al. 2005). How do location-aware technologies influence our sense of place and mobility? Location and routes are *augmented* with added layers of personal experiences (tags, multimedia content, stories). Being somewhere and moving around becomes *immersive*. It demands a participatory attitude, like playing a game. Are those added layers 'playgrounds' for sharing personality?

Always-on technologies contribute to altered experiences of *co-presence* from physical to imagined nearness (Urry 2002). What happens when technologies start mediating physical proximity? *Always-there* technologies, as they may be dubbed, help to pinpoint others and trace their movements and experiences in (almost) realtime. Co-presence becomes more *pervasive*, emerging not only when potentiality turns into actual communication, but as ongoing actuality. A doubled kind of 'present presence' perhaps? Mobile phones have been noted for serving as "umbilical cords" (Townsend 2000; Geser 2004). Does the pervasiveness of co-presence lead to further erosion of (the narrative idea of) unitary, autonomous Self? Are our identities increasingly becoming distributed "playful identities"?

References

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