Mobile Messages

Eija-Liisa Kasesniemi

Mobile Messages

Young People and a New Communication Culture

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PREFACE

The information technology revolution has not quite proceeded as the victorious march from one stage to the next as was expected still a short while ago. Many companies have suffered serious losses from misplaced investments in third generation mobile telephony and fiber optic networks. Some firms have gone bankrupt, and several others are struggling under enormous debts. The level of investments in the worldwide telecommunications business is low, and some time will be needed before we can speak about a return to normal business conditions.

Such setbacks should not, however, prevent us from seeing the fact that the worldwide spread of mobile telephony has been a staggering success. The number of mobile subscribers has increased from 91 million in 1995 to more than 954 million in 2001, and the one billion milestone was left behind in 2002. In the last few years, the total of mobile subscribers has clearly grown faster than the numbers of Internet users.

The increase in the use of mobile telephones will undoubtedly have a strong impact on the ways in which we communicate with each other. Already many representatives of the younger generations would probably experience real difficulties in getting along without their handsets. One may get the feeling that a person doesn't really exist if he or she cannot be reached with a mobile phone.

The Finns have been among the forerunners in the development of new communication cultures. Finnish teenagers in particular have been very inventive in adapting the different features of their mobile devices – such as the possibility text messages – to their particular needs, and these inventions have also been utilized by Finnish telecommunications companies in further developing their products and services.

A team of young researchers at the University of Tampere happened to be starting qualitative field research on the emergence of new communication cultures among Finnish teenagers in autumn 1997, just as the mobile phone penetration rate jumped to an entirely new level. Since then the research team has been able to follow the different stages in the 'domestication' of these new technological devices, and recently they have extended their analysis to different age groups and intercultural comparisons.

The research has been financed by Nokia, Sonera Corporation and the National Technology Agency of Finland, Tekes. The participating companies have also helped the research team in many other ways in executing their scientific work. Numerous discussions have arisen between the researchers and the company representatives in which everybody has tried to understand the real significance of those cultural phenomena that the research team could identify. Simultaneously there has emerged a fruitful collaboration between the researchers and their young informants; some of the latter have, as a matter of fact, participated in the actual realisation of the research as additional fieldworkers.

This book is based upon the materials that have been gathered during the course of this research work. The text has been written by Eija-Liisa Kasesniemi, who also initiated the whole project. The book deals with the development of new kinds of communication cultures in the late 1990s and early 2000s among Finnish teenagers. We are convinced that these cultures have certain quite idiosyncratic features, and as such they do not provide an adequate basis for wider theoretical generalisations. Yet, the spread of mobile

communications, especially among the younger generations, has in recent times developed into a very universal phenomenon. Thus we dare to say about the basic features of the phenomenon we have analysed that *de te fabula narratur*.

One important reservation must, however, be made concerning the limitations of our analysis. The fieldwork was done before the introduction of such new features as mobile multimedia and more advanced game applications. This book represents an analysis of the breakthrough of the GSM-based technologies, and what happens next will essentially depend upon those user-driven social and cultural innovations that have not yet been made.

Antti Kasvio, Research Director
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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, considerable discussion about the Finnish information society has taken place in both the media and academic publications. Free access to the information society has been established as a national goal: libraries, schools, day-care centres and homes are connected to the network, and an increasing number of authorities are offering their services online or providing citizens with free access to the Internet. By now, the information network should reach even the remotest small village in the land.

Nokia's sudden rise to the top of the global mobile phone market in the mid-1990s switched the focus of discussion from computers to mobile communication, as a private enterprise became a national treasure. Nokia has been perceived as the ancient horn of plenty distributing wealth and prosperity to all. Many have been inclined to call Finland a mobile phone society or a mobile information society where the network moves with the mobile citizen.

The phenomenon is, no doubt, rather impressive. In the space of a few years, mobile phones have moved from practically level zero to a situation where everyone has the right – or even the responsibility – to possess a mobile phone. In certain professions, remaining outside the network, if not quite impossible, at least requires vivid explanations. It is a communication culture for the whole nation; in the 2000s, the mobile phenomenon embraces all

age groups from children to grandparents. The media brings out aspects such as mobile parenting and young adults in financial difficulties with their phone bills. Despite the occasional overdramatisation by the media, most Finns have adopted the new communication culture in a calm, sedate fashion, adopting new developments in their lives if and when they see fit. The mobile phone has become a tool for life management, an aid comparable to an organiser or a calendar. Since the mid-1990s, young people have been marching at the front line of the phenomenon: they have not simply overtaken adults on the GSM highway, but have taken to creating communication paths and shortcuts of their own. The communication of teenagers is often impenetrable forest to adults.

The swift growth of mobile communication has, at times, dazzled both market analysts and researchers. Mobile phones seem to have become a passageway to the information society. Some people have even displayed an inclination to construct a large part of Finnish national identity around the ubiquitous device. The mobile phone has gained meanings and risen above everyday life, becoming a cultural key for the nation. Young people have been burdened with the expectation of functioning as innovators regularly finding novel uses, interesting details and the seeds of the new mobile way of life. Some have rejected this role by choosing to act in opposition to it.

In media coverage and research on mobile communication, it seems at times that the structures of society have overshadowed the experiences of the individual. Extensive visible transitions, such as the spread of an innovation, may function to dismiss the voice and experiences of the individual user. Perhaps a little too often the spotlight has been on the mobile device instead of its user. In direct contrast to this, the research design for the study carried out at the Tampere University Information Society Research Centre approaches the subject from the point of view of the individual and personal user experiences. Instead of observing statistics we have listened to people who use mobile phones. We remember the teenaged participants as individuals with names, personalities and back-

grounds rather than representatives of a certain gender, age group or user profile. This type of orientation to the individual can be seen both as a strength and weakness of the study. Wide samples have, however, helped us to also locate generalisations in a mass of the individual stories. The research attitude is summed up by a statement uttered in one of the researchers' meetings: it seems that in the end, individuals are actually more alike than they are different.

The research project emerged as a reaction to the new communication culture. In summer 1997, the researchers' attention was drawn to young people fascinated with the new communication device, carrying and using their mobile phones in plain sight. At the same time, many adults were uncomfortable with public use of their mobile phones; in public discussion, the device was labelled *juppinalle*, a yuppie teddy bear or an adult toy.

As the phenomenon was only just taking shape, researchers at Information Society Research Centre, University of Tampere, hurried to launch a pilot project that would chart the early stages of the phenomenon. The study began only a few months later, in autumn 1997, employing a research group of three. At most, the research group has incorporated as many as seven people. In the beginning the research was limited to the families of mobile-owning children and teenagers under the age of 18, but later it was expanded to cover families who had not yet acquired a mobile phone for their child.

The research operated on two levels. On the one hand, the study aimed to serve its research partners by using the methods of applied cultural anthropology to produce information that could be utilised for the purposes of product development. On the other hand, the study examined the development of the mobile communication phenomenon on a more general level.

In the early stages of the study, the project received its financing from Telecom Finland, the name of which was subsequently changed to Sonera Corporation, and from Nokia Corporation. Between 1998 and 2001, the research received the majority of its funding from the Finnish National Technology Agency, Tekes, as

the project was a part of the agency's Telecommunications – Creating a Global Village (TLX) technology programme, while both Nokia and Sonera continued as research partners.

In accordance with respected academic tradition, I have done my best to filter out the personal opinions of the research group and allow room for the subject of the study: the voice of young people. At the same time, I will not attempt to deny that the research group has, at times intensely, lived in the midst of our research subject. This has introduced us to one of the basic problems of studying culture: it is difficult to look at a phenomenon from the outside once you are already inside it. Starting the study, the researchers' experiences of and attitudes to mobile communication have ranged from *tabula rasa* to long-term ownership and active personal interest in the technology. However, as the years have passed, these attitudes have been shaped by both increased personal experience and findings from the field.

This publication presents a selection of the broader themes of the research project since 1997. The text is firmly anchored in empiria, in observations from the field. Rather than thoroughly explaining or interpreting teens' mobile communication culture, the book aims to provide a description of the phenomenon. We have taken the first step, and this has led us to a crossroads with a number of directions to choose from. The well-worn metaphor of a window to a new world is probably best forgotten. In our context, a more useful metaphor might be a mobile phone menu from which we have chosen the main entries for the user to examine. The variety and content of submenus is almost endless. For those interested in further information on the topic we recommend two dissertations currently in preparation: Virpi Oksman's study on children and teenager's relationship to new media and technology (Journalism and Mass Communication) and Eija-Liisa Kasesniemi's work on written mobile communication (Folklore Studies).

In Erfurt, October 12th, 2001
Eija-Liisa Kasesniemi

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'If you're still interested I'd like to go on participating in the study,' wrote 15-year-old Taru[1] to one of the researchers in autumn 1998. Since then she has become one of the mobile teens interviewed on more than one occasion. Jaana, who had gathered a large collection of text messages and persuaded her boyfriend to join the research was similarly enthusiastic: 'I can carry on if you like! Hey, it's been fun!' Sixteen-year-old Jere systematically recorded his observations regarding the mobile phenomenon for months.

The contributions of teenagers like Taru, Jaana and Jere have been crucial for the implementation of the study. They have maintained their enthusiasm even when the researchers themselves have been ready to fall back on routine. As the research has progressed, the teens have been increasingly active in explaining the research material. In addition to actual interviews, they have also interpreted the data in cooperation with the researchers and have been the ones to keep the research group up-to-date whenever new developments have taken place in the field. Some of these teenagers have participated in the research for more than three years and a few continue their involvement today.

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[1] All names and other information that might reveal the identity of the persons involved, such as place of residence, have been altered to protect the informants' privacy.

Between 1997 and 2001 nearly 1,000 Finns interested in mobile communication took part in the study. Aside from teenagers, the participants included children, parents of children and teenagers, as well as teachers and other educators. All have shared their experiences of mobile communication with the researchers. What is just as important is that they have opened new doors for the study by discussing it with their friends and family. In addition to mobile enthusiasts, people opposed to the phenomenon have also taken part. This has provided the researchers with alternative ways of looking at their observations. Without the help of all these people, the research would never have taken place.

The main financing for the study came from National Technology Agency of Finland (Tekes). The agency showed unique courage in backing a project that was one of its kind in a research programme with a strongly technological bias. The same openness to new ideas was displayed by Antti Kasvio, Research Director of the former Information Society Research Centre,[2] who had no doubts about including the project in the centre's research programme, though, at the time, resources for the study were far from resolved. The project has also received important financial support from the Finnish telecommunications companies Nokia Mobile Phones and Sonera Mobile Operations. In addition to this, the companies have also afforded the researchers a glimpse at future technologies and the process through which they are generated. Without the support of Tekes and the financing companies, implementing the study in its current capacity would have been impossible. Moreover, we remain indebted to the companies for their encouragement in internationalising the results and in pursuing further research delving deeper into the heart of the matter. The study

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[2] In 2001 the unit changed its name to the Information Society Institute, at the same time broadening its scope as a network organisation uniting research projects operating in different departments of the University of Tampere and the Tampere University of Technology.

has already crossed national borders by expanding to Japan, the UK and Germany.

Over the years the following researchers have participated in the research: Jarna Hara (Information Studies, Finnish language), Anu Jäppinen (Social Psychology), Johanna Järveläinen (Sociology), Pirkko Järvelä (Ethnology), and Jussi Turtiainen (Social Policy). The research group in 2001 consisted of Pirjo Rautiainen (Cultural Anthropology), Sanna Malinen (Social Psychology), Virpi Oksman (Journalism and Mass Communication) and Anu Utriainen (Translation Studies, Marketing). Hanna Liikala has worked as a translator for the group and has also translated this book. Piritta Heikkinen and Marianne Partanen have participated in the study as trainees. Researcher Juha Kolari has provided much of the picture material used in the illustrations of this book. Jenni Airaksinen and Valtteri Vuorisalo have assisted in the gathering of separate consumer research data. The contributions of all of these people both in the field and in the analysis of the results have been crucial for the publication of this book.

In addition to the research group in 2001, the following people have given their comments on the manuscript in its different stages: Information Society Institute Research Director Antti Kasvio, Professor Seppo Knuuttila, Timo Hautala, Eija Kaasinen, Minna Kulju, Marjo Kumpulainen, Jussi Lintunen, Anna-Liisa Lintunen, Minna Mäkinen and Seppo Puranen. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to them. We are also grateful to Josephine Abdallah, who gave an extremely useful commentary on the language of the English version of the book. Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude to Outi Sisättö who, as a representative of the publisher, has continued to have faith in the project and has encouraged the writing process until the completion of the book.

1 ENTER PIN CODE

Introduction to mobilephonics

From anywhere to anywhere

'When they had the campaign that allowed you to send SMS for two cents a piece, we pretty much sat there all day with the mobile and probably sent a few hundred messages in all. We could be sitting on a bed next to each other typing messages to one another. For three or four hours we just sat on the bed sending messages to one another,' relates Sanna, 14. Who is she? By quoting this passage we immediately categorise her as a user of a certain medium, young, interested in novelties – perhaps even addicted to them? Maybe also a typical representative of her gender? We can certainly deduce that Sanna is a mobile teen, but this applies to the majority of Finnish teenagers. This publication constitutes an effort to combine the hundreds of mobile phone stories into a single narrative, highlighting the voice of the teenagers. The reader should, however, recall that a text always remains a product of its time. Technology and the surrounding research appear to be dependent on the logic of capitalism, whereby concepts and commodified technology possess a limited lifespan that is based on their value as 'new' objects. Researcher Tapio Mäkelä has stated that, at the moment, words such as 'virtual', 'hacker' and 'cyber' are suffering a decline in popularity, whereas the terms 'community', 'mobile' and 'portal' are far more fashionable.[1] Like any text, this one is also tied to its time. The publication will afford central stage to mobile

communication and the teen community, and we will not completely disregard the service portal either, even though our examination is focused more on the user than on the content producer.

We can assess contemporary phenomena in relation to perceptions of our time in the future visions of past decades, and by examining these visions we can perhaps reveal something of the present. In 1970, Finnish researchers published a book that anticipated developments that might take place in the next 30 years. Some of the predictions have come true with only minor differences: The emergence of digital television is transforming the medium from a one-way entertainment centre into an interactive communication channel; the Internet is disseminating news without paper like the envisioned 'copy machine' that delivered the daily papers and any other necessary information to the corner of the futuristic living room.

Visions from the 1970s also include mentions of wireless communication through 'pocket radio phones', which would allow one to make calls from anywhere to anywhere. Media researcher Kaarle Nordenstreng predicted that by the turn of the millennium, one third of adults would own this type of pocket phone, although it would have been for professional needs and not for pleasure. He found it unlikely that all Finns would be in possession of such a device. After all, who would be naive enough to believe that such technological developments would actually benefit ordinary people. First, many people would not be able to afford every available technological gadget, and second, not everyone would probably even be interested in a pocketable radiophone, Nordenstreng contended.[2]

The 70s visions stress the distribution of information and the management of affairs. Since then, other fields of life such as entertainment, experiences and social networking have, to a large degree, supplanted information as the most relevant mobile content. Furthermore, the concept of information is likely to have broadened and lost much of the highbrow prestige afforded to it in pre-

vious years, so that the distribution of everyday information equals more than database searches. Nonetheless, one of the guiding principles behind the pocket radiophone was liberation from location. The same idea – anytime, anyplace – appears again and again, both in the speech of the users and the slogans of the advertisers. It seems that society has turned mobile. Fourteen-year-old Kati considers the advantages and downsides of different forms of communication:

> *Researcher:* If you had to give up either SMS or email, which one would you drop?
> *Kati:* Probably email since the computer is so, I mean you can't carry it with you and things like that.
> Researcher: Do you visit any IRC[3] or chat channels on the Net?
> *Kati:* I do quite a lot sometimes, but at the moment not that much.
> *Researcher:* Do you like to IRC?
> *Kati:* Yeah, it's exciting, you can have a person at the other end of the world, and you can talk to them just like that.
> *Researcher:* Is IRC more fun than sending SMS?
> *Kati:* Mm, there's the thing that you can only do it in one place, sitting in front of your monitor. You can send SMS pretty much anywhere.

As researchers, our task is to examine the relationship between the mobile phone, the individual and society. Experts have aired opposing views concerning the transitions that have actually taken place and the direction of current change. Louis Leung and Ran Wei, who have conducted a wide telephone survey on mobile users in Hong Kong (1998), conclude that new technology which offers an unprecedented freedom of movement and immediate access anywhere may serve as a catalyst for social change. But what does technology bring us? What does it maintain? What does it take away from us? At the moment, the main motivation for mobile phone use is largely similar to that of the fixed-line phone – conversations with other human beings through means of voice call.

The mobile devices termed 3rd Generation (3G) are expected to offer a type of hybrid between a phone and a portable computer, or a convergence device that offers broad multimedia contents independent of place and time.[4] Will this device affect people's behaviour by introducing new aspects to the culture, or will the new technology simply serve to enforce the existing structures?

For decades, the Finns have been labelled as a nation who rather keep quiet and get things done than talk. Can text messaging be seen as yet another way for us to keep quiet? In this respect, it is interesting to note that text messaging has also achieved wide popularity in Italy, a nation commonly considered to be one of the most talkative in the world. Perhaps the Italians see in text messaging an additional means to express themselves? Claude S. Fisher, who has examined the Americans' adoption of the fixed-line phone, maintains that the influence of the telephone on the American way of life may not have been as revolutionary as was thought. Rather than transforming their lives, the telephone provided people with a means to pursue their chosen lifestyle with even more zeal than before.[5]

Juha Nurmela, who has conducted large-sample studies on the Finnish information society, contends that the mobile phone has succeeded in shaping the Finns' behaviour in a way that has strengthened its own position in their lives. Nurmela reminds us, however, that the mobile phone is but a willess device that, in itself, is incapable of directing anyone's actions. What we are dealing with here is a comprehensive phenomenon that serves as a site for designers, service providers, users and many others to execute their own wishes. When enough of these wishes have converged, this has generated mobile phone friendly environments.[6]

Mobile Eldorado

It seems indisputable that in their current form, the pocket radio-phones have exceeded all expectations. In the mid-1990s, the soundscape in the public spaces of Finnish society gained a whole new dimension; the chart-hit-imitating mobile phone ringing tones and the beeping of SMS alerts invaded the consciousness of the Finns. The endless chatter of remote communicators with no visible partner seemed to be everywhere. In the beginning of the decade, the ringing of a mobile phone still constituted a focal point that automatically structured space. The attention of everyone present was directed to the sound: whose phone was that? Little by little, the sounds integrated into the unnoticed background noise of shopping centres and train stations. Today, the sound of a mobile phone has the sole effect of people reaching for their pockets: Was it my phone ringing?

In the 2000s, the mobile phone or, as the Finns like to call it, *känny* or *kännykkä* (diminutive of 'hand' and its derivative), seems to have pervaded every inch of Finnish territory. Many Finns are openly indulging in the luxury of perpetual connectedness. This is not a question of a misconception either: the number of mobile phones is high and the number of mobile phone users is even higher. Mobile phones are currently owned by all age groups starting from children of less than seven years of age to senior citizens. In early 2001, more than 88% of Finnish households possessed at least one mobile phone, and the average monthly mobile bill had risen to EUR 40. These figures presuppose for each communicator a daily expenditure equalling the price of a tabloid.

Mobile telecommunication networks cover almost the entire country, and it is now possible to send a text message from the most secluded wildernesses. The mobile rings – and continues to cause irritation – in the ski huts of Lapland as well as in the rush hour buses of southern Finland. To answer a mobile call, 'Where are you?' has become an opening phrase comparable to a greeting.

The question is, however, necessary in most cases. The communication partner can be almost anywhere: getting a tan on a beach holiday, attending somebody's funeral, at a gym or perhaps queuing at the cashier in a corner shop.

Speaking on a mobile phone in public spaces has created a conflicting situation in which the communicator is simultaneously both there and elsewhere. Mobile phone use thus enables a type of telepresence: when remote presence is substituted for actual presence, the physical loses its significance.[7] On occasion, the physical environment is forgotten and the conversationalists end up revealing some of their most intimate thoughts to outsiders. This kind of behaviour transforms the fellow travellers or passers-by into voyeurs, whether they like it or not. It is this visible side of mobile phone use that that has gained the most attention in the media. The defects of Finnish mobile phone etiquette have received wide criticism in 'Letters to the Editor' pages of newspapers and magazines, and the introduction of mobile manners and even direct mobile bans have been suggested to rectify the situation. In extreme cases, it seems as if the old proverb of silence being golden has been given a new sounding board. Even though the behavioural norms of young people differ greatly from those of adults, the young have also commented on what they perceive as acceptable mobile behaviour. Usage culture constitutes negotiation on what type of behaviour is tolerated in a given situation. In her diary, 17-year-old Satu gathered observations about manners in mobile culture:

> The Swedes are better at using mobiles than the Finns. When we went out for dinner with a cousin of mine and some Swedish friends, they all turned off their phones!!! Very polite. Apparently they always do this. We've got a lot to learn about manners!

> I took a trip to central Finland with a friend of mine. I observed a few people speaking on the mobile. It was great how people answered their phones with their names, unlike where I come from.

In some countries, city centres have been turned into Alcohol-Free Zones. Many Finns have called for similarly strict bans on mobile use for certain areas. Sociologist Timo Kopomaa terms the existing mobile-free areas as 'sound-off zones' or simply 'off zones'. In these locations, the use of the mobile phone is negatively labelled. Often, the prohibition is indicated by a distinct sign. Kopomaa supplements his idea with the notion of 'on zones', where the use is, if not always advisable, at least allowed. The reasons behind these location-specific mobile bans are related to protection of private space, general atmosphere and possible negative effects on other people's health. These sound-off zones include certain focused interaction situations shared with other people (concerts, theatre performances, church events), 'sanctified locations' (libraries, certain restaurants) and locations and situations involving potential safety risks (aeroplanes, hospitals).[8]

In international reports, Finland has gained numerous epithets resulting from the wide diffusion of mobile usage. The country has been called a mobile communication laboratory, mobile Eldorado, the Japan of the North, a field of experiments where anything is possible and has been said to walk one step ahead of other countries. Sometimes, unrealistic expectations have ensued from these images. The research group received almost weekly queries for confirmation of rumours such as 'every 7-year-old in Finland has a mobile phone' or that there are 'mobile detectors in schools'. The dozens of mobile studies allegedly carried out on Finnish mobile users are a frequent subject of these queries. Most of these studies have, however, yet to be conducted. Finland's reputation as the mobile nation feeds on itself. The success of the Finnish mobile phone manufacturer Nokia supports this image – in a period of few years, the company surpassed previous market leaders, including giants such as the Swedish Ericsson, the American Motorola and the German Siemens.

From car phone to vibrating alert

In the beginning of the 1990s, the mobile phone was still labelled a luxury item and functioned as an indication of status. Only business people pressed for time and lorry-drivers busy with their deliveries could have real use for a mobile: they worked every day with heavy and sizeable car phones[9] permanently installed into their vehicles. At the same time, using a small portable phone was labelled as negative and speaking on a pocket phone was easily interpreted as showing-off.

Similar status-oriented thinking has prevailed elsewhere, too. Australian researchers have argued that the mobile phone's image as a business tool or a toy may serve to prevent its wider use for purposes such as support for and monitoring of older people and small children.[10] The old yuppie label still persists in some respects: the newest and the most expensive mobile phones are often reminiscent of expensive jewellery or carefully picked fashion accessories that provide the finishing touch to the owner's image. In Finnish slang, the larger phone models from a few years ago have become unfashionable 'logs' or 'sticks'. To an extent, mobile communication continues to be associated with energetic, successful, and glamorous people, an image created and maintained by advertising.

In the beginning, the speech of mobile users was directed visibly to the device as, during calls, the hand phone was held close to the mouth and the ear. Today, the roller-blader or mountain biker whirling by, apparently not handling any device and talking to air, perplexes others by appearing to be conversing only with himself. The earpiece is hidden in the ear, and the minuscule microphone is attached to the collar. Mobile telephony is simultaneously more ubiquitous and better concealed than ever. Technological accessories and additional functions such as vibrating alert and hands free equipment enable inconspicuous use of the device. This also applies to the 'profile' feature that enables the user to pre-program

the device to react to incoming calls in a manner that is, for example, suitable for the office environment, outdoor use or in situations where any mobile-originated sound would be inappropriate. The mobile phone no longer attracts the attention of everyone present but, safely tucked away in a breast pocket or a handbag, notifies the owner of a received call or a new text message through quiet vibration. The relationship between the mobile and its owner has literally turned physical: it is possible to feel an incoming call. The concealment of mobile telephony has been enhanced by the fact that today, much of mobile communication consists of written communication: text messages that travel silently through the GSM network or announce their arrival with a soft, almost inaudible beep.

Users and mobile content

The immediately visible and audible mobile culture reveals only the tip of the iceberg. Although the fact that the mobile phone frees the modern communicator from the constraints of time and space and cord and wire is significant in itself, the content of communication – what is communicated, why and to whom – is even more important. Without meaningful content, mobile communication would never have become an established phenomenon. It may be useful here to compare mobile communication devices to other media. In the 1950s, people watched television because the device still had the charm of novelty. In the early 1980s, any recording was sufficient as content for video. In the early 1990s, the Internet in itself was deemed exciting as simple home pages were visited by thousands of curious Net surfers.

As supply broadens, consumers become more knowledgeable and their demands become more refined, placing more significance on the content of the media. Increased supply forces one to opt for whichever TV channel seems the most appealing, to pick

either a thriller or a romantic comedy from the video shop, and to look for the most interesting entertainment or information on the Internet. This selective development, which highlights the differences between various user groups, can be generalised to mobile communication. The increase in the number of mobile users forces people to consciously direct their communication. With so many users, it is impossible to communicate with everyone, even though the rise in the population of GSM users seems to have enhanced the motivation to carry the communication device at all times.

WAP (Wireless Application Protocol), also called mobile Internet, was launched in Europe in early 2000 and introduced a number of new services to the mobile phone. WAP services are related to SMS-based mobile services providing information in areas such as the weather, sports scores and stock quotes. The range of WAP services, however, is notably wider than this. WAP environments allow for phenomena such as email, mobile tribes, mobile communities and games. The one-door principle of Internet portals has also been transported to mobile communication: one address will provide the user with all the necessary information, as the content can be customised to match the individual's needs.

The proportion of the use of value-added services has continued to increase in mobile communication. The real explosion, however, has occurred in person-to-person communication, which can also be termed the personal content production of each mobile communicator. Instead of using readymade content, the communicators prefer to create their own content for each new situation. So far, the storytelling of mobile communicators is conveyed in calls and text messages, the volume of which is significant in Finland. In 2002, 1.4 billion short messages were sent in a country of five million inhabitants, and the growth in usage does not seem about to halt.[11] In Japan, the envelope icon appearing on the screen no longer signifies the reception of a brief 160-character SMS message. In the i-mode mobile phone network, which is one step ahead of GSM technology, the envelope announces the arrival of an email

message. The messages are not transmitted simply from one phone to another but from one user environment to another, from the Internet to a mobile phone network.

New spatiality and the third place

The mobile phone's integration into the lives of teens has been so thorough that finding a situation or an environment that would exclude the use of the device altogether seems to pose some difficulty. The use of mobile telephony intertwines with school, leisure and family life. For this reason we have chosen not to observe mobile communication as a culture that is firmly connected to a specific location or situation, for example by limiting our investigation to school or partying communication. This is, however, not to say that this type of approach would be impossible: it might well serve to open up different aspects of the culture.

Ownership of a certain mobile phone model can function as a means of both belonging to a group and differentiating oneself from others.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

Based on his examination of the everyday mobile phone culture of the Finns, sociologist Pasi Mäenpää has established how, in the use of the mobile phone, the location of the speakers becomes loaded with significance, even though the abolishment of place or its meaning has been hailed as one of the major themes of digital society. Mäenpää illustrates his point through the concept of new spatiality: as the actual place of communication may be anywhere, location becomes the object of consideration in a new way, and the caller has to consciously choose a place in which to carry out the communication act. Location thus begins to carry meaning in connection with either the relationship between the caller and the recipient of the call, or the relationship of the caller to his or her physical environment – or in some cases both. In short, the opportunity to communicate anywhere at any time does not imply arbitrariness of time and space but the opportunity to choose when and where to communicate.[12]

Timo Kopomaa has developed the notion of the mobile phone as a virtual space or a virtual place. The idea is based on a definition of the third place conceived by Ray Oldenburg, who applies it to cafés, shops and other meeting places.[13] According to Kopomaa, in its own everyday manner, the mobile phone also constitutes a meeting place or a popular hangout. Third places are often taken for granted, and most of them have a low profile. In the case of the mobile phone, this means a low threshold for contact, as mobile phone users are reachable outside of official schedules.[14]

The idea of the mobile phone as a place is further illuminated when examined in conjunction with geographer Pauli Tapani Karjalainen's idea of a humanistic interpretation of physical place. He explores the issue of understanding places as lived locations, as inherent belonging to a certain place or, as may sometimes be the case, an uncontrollable desire or obligation to be elsewhere. In Karjalainen's considerations, place becomes the outcome of human interpretation and attribution of meaning. Place itself has no general content, but is allocated meaning through the current life situ-

ation of the person. By constantly humanising our environment, we are in a way attributing a set of meanings to an environment that in itself is neutral. In this way, we draw the environment nearer to us and turn it into a place. In Karjalainen's view, instead of simply measuring our surroundings, we begin to 'live' places that have become familiar to us and that we have made our own.[15] In line with this way of thinking, we might perhaps conclude that through a process appropriation, by making the technology part of our lives, we gradually transform the mobile phone into a mental 'place' for the user to live in and control.

It is our research hypothesis that the young use the same contents in largely different places – or use decidedly different contents in very similar places. Mobile encounters unite people in temporally and spatially different situations. Communication taking place in school does not simply focus on school-related topics. Parents may intrude on the teens' party through the mobile phone. The many levels of private life coexist in the mobile phone; time, place and the situation of use change. The notions of new spatiality and the third place by no means exclude one another but rather complement each other. Although in our study the attention does not focus primarily on space or spatially differentiated use situations, we will now present some issues connected with the context of use that facilitate an understanding of the new youth culture.

Places and situations of use

International researchers have often been struck by the positive attitude of the Finnish school system toward the new communication, noting that the children are allowed to bring their mobile phones to school. In part, this constitutes genuine adaptation. Teachers are not willing to continue a losing battle; teens have been using their mobile phones in schools for as long as they have had the devices, regardless of the bans and regulations some schools

have occasionally resorted to. Parents have often taken the side of their children by expressing the concern that the teens might feel frustrated not being allowed to take the mobile phone to school when they are used to carrying the devices at all other times.

The total mobile phone bans issued in schools some years ago have been revoked almost without exception, replaced by more specific restrictions. Some schools have included a section on the use of mobile phones in their disciplinary regulations, while others have chosen to draw up an entire mobile phone etiquette. Restrictions have been discussed at morning assembly, in school papers edited by pupils, and presentations held by pupils. In general, use during breaks has been determined as acceptable and use during lessons has been forbidden. In class, the sound must be turned off but the phones may remain switched on, which enables partial use of the devices. The following extract is from 17-year-old Turo's diary:

> As I knew I was going to have to miss Finnish class, I sent a message to a girl in our class (her because I was sure the message would reach its target as she's always fiddling with her 5110 in class), and asked her to inform the teacher about my absence. I then received a message from mum saying, 'I'LL FETCH THE PARCEL FROM POST OFFICE.' The goods I had ordered the day before had arrived. Just to pass the time I replied to her something like, 'That's nice, I've got a physics exam today by the way.' So as not to be too bored by the lecture, I received another message from a friend describing the essence of Finnish foreplay. Nothing cheers you up quite like a good old-fashioned obscenity. It was also beneficial for others as they could snigger at me grinning by myself.

Use in school is frequently hidden, as it is not always evident to outsiders, or even to the teacher who is present in the situation. Examples of sending text messages and making *pilaris* – short signal calls intended not to be answered – in the middle of a lesson are numerous. Use during lessons is, according to most teenagers in-

terviewed, a normal pastime at school. It has rarely been labelled as disruptive behaviour.

> *Researcher:* Why do you need to send text messages during class in school?
> *Leena (14):* Dunno, it's just so boring there. It's too mind numbing just sitting there.
> *Researcher:* You're not afraid of gaining a bad reputation for it?
> *Leena:* No, 'cause usually the people [teachers] may not even notice. They don't really care, they just rant on about whatever.

A number of interesting studies have been conducted on Finnish school culture by analysing phenomena such as pupils' time-space paths and the soundscape in schools. Sound is an efficient form of opposition but also a delicate tool for social control.[16] One of the most important functions of consciously produced sound is to mark the person's territory, domestic milieu and spheres of power.[17] For instance, the use of a personal stereo enables a person to privatise time and space, to create a personal soundscape. A pupil may become immersed in this private world in the middle of a lesson.[18] The time-space paths of schools are important sites for controlling time, space, movement and sound. They contain information on what is obligatory at a certain moment and what kind of movement or sound is forbidden in a certain place at a certain time. One more level may be added to the list: the state of mind. When distressed by lack of personal space, the pupils take refuge in the boundless non-space of daydreams.[19] Mobile phones have become a part of this state of mind. When the use of sound is impossible, silent mobile communication acquires a quality that borders on telepathy.

From school classes, the mobile phone has continued its diffusion to other places that, according to the mobile phone etiquette of adults, are not necessarily suitable for mobile communication. Almost without exception, the teens have their phones on in librar-

ies, public transport vehicles and even in church, as exemplified in the following observation by one of the researchers.

A small town congregation has gathered for Sunday evening mass. The church is half full of people, mostly adults. In the front row, a teenaged boy is seated next to a woman who is presumably his mother. He has, perhaps, come because attendance is required for confirmation. The boy appears to be absorbed in the sermon, his head bowed and his hands in his lap. The mass ends with Communion. People are queuing in the aisle waiting for their turn. The boy in the front row still sits with his eyes respectfully to the ground, smiling peacefully. Occasionally he even lets out a quiet laugh. What has got the young man in such a good mood? The boy is sitting about three feet away from the clergyman distributing the Communion. The researcher manages a better look at the boy just before she reaches the altar. The reason for the smile now becomes evident. Between his clasped hands, shielded by the back of the bench, there is a small mobile phone and on its screen an open text message which the boy is scrolling through.

The boy's reply might have resembled one sent to 15-year-old Saija by her boyfriend:

> THANKSiWASsupposedTOfixITaTaBITmoreBUTiWASinAhurry...
> YOURpartnerWASbetterTHANmostPEOPLEhad!I´mINchurchAT
> theMOMENT,weehay...BRIGHTandEARLYatSCHOOLtomorrow
> RIGHThon?
> (SMS)

Levels of mobility

It is commonly presumed that the main use of the mobile takes place while the user is 'elsewhere' or 'away'. Typically, mobile communicators are described as being in transit from one place to another, coming or going, making do with a constantly shifting envi-

ronment. In his work, Timo Kopomaa associates the mobile phone with the lifestyle of modern nomads, these groups and individuals constantly on the move. As an extreme example he mentions a roller-blader who, dressed in Spandex and wearing a hands-free kit, attends to mobile communication while physically in motion.[20] The mobile communicator portrayed in advertising is away from the location or social context conceived of as 'standard' – the home, family, workplace and friends – just as the boy in the church was socially isolated from his friends spending their Sunday evening in a less formal setting.

It is important to realise, however, that mobility is not an unambiguous concept. It can be divided into two separate categories of semimobility and full mobility. The roller-blader whirling by or a person driving a truck is an example of the fully mobile communicator who is engaged in physical movement and by consequence cannot give their undivided attention to communication. A mobile communicator located in a train, hotel room or in someone else's office functions in a state of semimobility. The environment may be entirely stable, with the use of wireless communication motivated solely by the fact of being away from familiar surroundings; other communication channels dependent on equipment accessible at home or in the office may not be available. Use is thus not induced by mobility but by the lack of other communication channels.[21]

Mobility remains, beyond doubt, one explaining factor for teenage mobile communication. When evaluating the importance of the mobile phone or the computer, or more specifically of text messaging and email in their lives, teens almost invariably choose mobile communication over the Internet, citing the mobility enabled by the device as the most important reason. In the teens' accounts, the computer is viewed as a stationary object, whereas the mobile phone has pervaded all of the space-time paths of everyday life. Like adults, the teens stress how they carry the mobile phone with them at all times. The observation is hardly surprising. What

is perhaps more unexpected is the actual reality of usage. In the light of an examination of actual practices, the emphasis on full mobility turns out to be partly erroneous. The role of use while on the move becomes decidedly less significant. Only part of the usage occurs 'elsewhere' or in transit. Where does much of *mobile* communication take place then? The answer may seem surprising: at home, in the teen's bedroom, in bed, often late at night.

It has thus become evident that what we have termed stationary use is often more characteristic of mobile communication than actual mobility. The mobile phone can be seen as a stand-in for the fixed-line phone, functioning as its substitute and supplement. One explanation for this may be the traditional location of the fixed-line phone. A study on the changing media culture of children and teenagers concluded that only 17 percent of the participants interviewed in 1997 had a landline phone installed in their own room.[22] The position of the fixed-line phone has not strengthened since then; on the contrary, many Finnish families have given up their land-line phones altogether. Furthermore, the fixed-line phone often constitutes a communication device common to the family and is thus placed in a space where each family member has equal access, such as the hallway, the kitchen or the living room. In fact, the computer common to the family is often located in a space of limited access to the teen, such as the parents' bedroom or study. In this situation, the only means of communication constantly available to the teens is the mobile phone.

Generation *Homo Mobilis*?

As became clear from the example at the opening of this chapter, research has a tendency to label and categorise its subjects. Categorisation functions as a tool to help the researcher to structure data, and description of any phenomenon becomes easier when it is placed under a certain nametag. In past years, we have described

the research through terms such as children and teenagers' 'mobile phone culture', 'mobile communication culture' and, most recently, 'mobile culture'. All of these have in common the concept of culture, which we have been unwilling to replace with a more concise term. A culture is something more than the mobile phone use of families or the communication patterns of teenagers.

The first term, 'mobile phone culture', places an emphasis on the terminal device or the mobile phone. Current mobile phones are but one version of mobile devices which, in the narrowest sense of the term, include various paging devices and, in the broadest sense, also contain personal digital assistants (PDAs) and communicators, smart phones which come closer to laptop computers. In the future, the range of devices is likely to increase further. Device-related terms were descriptive especially in the early stages of the phenomenon, when the simple fact of owning a mobile phone was still considered to be valuable in itself. Actual communication through the device could be left in the shadow of ownership and the social status afforded by it. Still today, the culture continues to be influenced by the on-going negotiation concerning the new and the old or the trendy and the old-fashioned. Sixteen-year-old Terhi writes in her diary (1999):

> I'm going to have to get a new mobile! Jari got a 6110 and I have to say it looks great! . . . Got an SMS from Katri today. Apparently she has her phone back now, I wonder why that is . . . ? Her parents took the mobile away from her when her bills were nearing EUR 350. Katri and her parents are proof that the model of your mobile phone really has nothing to do with how wealthy your parents are. Her parents are, you could almost say, rich, and yet she has to make do with an ancient 1631. Poor thing . . . I mean the mobile. Not many of its species left.

Whereas the third term 'mobile communication culture' focuses attention on the activity of communication, the term 'mobile culture' covers both sides of the phenomenon – purchase and owner-

ship of the terminal device and its all-round use. In Finnish, the terminology is at times less descriptive: the word for mobile phone, *matkapuhelin* translates directly as 'travel phone' and does not include the word 'mobile' as such but instead refers to going away or being elsewhere.

With the use of the word 'culture' we wish to emphasise the fact that we are referring to a larger entity. A culture is built upon the habits and beliefs of a certain community and the underlying ideology that directs the actions, decisions and choices of the individual. The behaviour of individuals is thus always, though to a varying degree, affected by the community. The notion of culture is not just an abstraction but also involves material elements and aspects connected with human relationships; social networks and

Text messages often serve to enforce girls' friendships and can sometimes be looked upon as successors to the exchange of notes popular in the girl culture of previous decades.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

people's relationships to objects constitute an important part of culture. The culture described here evolves rapidly and is subject to constant change. On a more general note, a culture is never a static entity but constitutes a process where a certain culture is recreated over and over again by creatively combining elements adopted from different sources. [23]

We do not claim to offer a near complete picture of teen mobile culture. Rather, our treatment of the topic seeks to open up some cultural traits in a certain temporal context. Often, the observations may function more to reveal aspects of the life of an individual than to map collectively shared behaviour. Cultural traits should also be explored regionally, in relation to the user's living environment. Speaking about a uniform mobile communication culture of Finnish teenagers would thus be erroneous. Observations in rural areas cannot be applied to cities, and the communication cultures between different parts of the country may vary considerably.

Generation and language

In the footsteps of Don Tapscott, media researcher Sam Inkinen has analysed youth in the 1990s. Both Inkinen and Tapscott speak of recent youth cultures in terms of generations, such as Generation G (Generation Global) and the Net Generation. The central idea behind these terms is that, for the first time in history, children and teenagers master the key technology affecting the development of culture and society better than their parents. This key technology equals information technology and the digital media, the mastering of which has become 'cultural technique' central for life in contemporary society.[24]

During the the study, we have at times been rather carefree in our use of various generation-related concepts. We have termed the target of the study the mobile phone generation, mobile teens, the mobile generation, or even *Homo Mobilis*, the moving and com-

municating human. Researchers analysing phenomena connected with mobile communication have looked for reasons for the popularity of the device in its everyday nature, in the facilitation it provides in managing affairs, as well as in a certain inherent sense of a special something and detachment from routines which it provides for the user.[25] With teens of the mobile phone generation, these aspects are equally important and serve to complement each other: the mobile phone is a part of everyday life but also a factor in special occasions. The use of the mobile phone is integrated into the teens' life management in the here and now as well as playing an important part in those moments of detachment from the real world when they choose to switch to a 'mobile world' perceived as more fun than the present reality.

With these generation definitions we refer to children and teenagers for whom mobile communication has become almost a matter of course, something that has been a part of their lives for a long time. Finnish teenagers have been compared to schools of fish that, while in constant movement, are perfectly synchronised in switching direction, never losing contact with the others. For today's children, the mobile phone has existed all their lives. An easy comparison can be made to TV or the format of buying music. Finns born after the 1960s are not likely to recall the time before television. For young people in the 1990s, the word 'record' no longer evokes an image of a large black plastic circle, but is synonymous with a shiny metallic CD. More recent discussions on the topic, however, are less concerned with the idea of generation; instead, researchers have begun to develop ideas related to mobile tribes or mobile virtual communities.[26] The words themselves may sound suspiciously fashionable, but the notion of tribes is in certain ways a useful substitute for generational thinking, as dissecting the generation into tribes leaves more room for differences between the various user groups.

A feature typical of any culture is that bearers transmitting the culture develop their own distinct way of expressing things, so that other people belonging to the same culture generally have no trou-

ble understanding this lingo. As 15-year-old Hanna wrote in her diary:

> The two last periods were geography and I was so bored I took my mobile out of my jacket pocket and began to *key in messages*. When I finished school, the bus was packed and I was really uptight and then people kept making *pilaris* (no-calls). That makes me all the more nervous.

> We were sitting on the stairway of the shopping centre and I was playing the worm game on Jenni's *mobile* and just when I was getting a really good score Ville rang me! ARGGH! When we came here we were sitting in the living room and Jenni and Ville were *swapping mobiles*. They were *checking each other's in-boxes*, and maybe something else. It looked so sweet.

Depending on how crystallised the expression is, it can be called slang, vocabulary (the worm game), or even specialised terminology (*pilari*), that does not necessarily open up to outsiders who are not part of the culture.

In and out of the network

The mobile generation is not focused exclusively on the mobile phone. Out of the teenagers studied, 95 percent used the Internet often or at least occasionally, while only five percent did not use it at all. More than three out of four had their own email account. Email and mobile chat were the most frequently stated functions when asked what new features the teens would like to have in their phones. At the time of the study, certain mobile email services were already available, but their usage costs remained too high for teenagers. What is more, the use of these services requires a WAP-enabled phone. In teens' usage, the different communication channels tend to overlap and the switches between them are fluent and fre-

quent. A conversation originated in an online chat continues in SMS messages, and a message sent from a mobile phone is broadcast in an SMS chat show on television. The weakest species in this jungle of communications would seem to be the traditional letter. The interviewed girls still occasionally sent cards and letters, but boys no longer seemed interested in traditional written communication.

In the study, we have distinguished between two forms of teen mobile culture. Use of real-time (online) communication takes place in the GSM network. Other (offline) use of the mobile terminal does not require a connection to the network. For us, mobile culture outside the network also incorporates aspects that do not necessarily constitute use of the device as such. The notebooks for SMS-collecting, popular among girls in particular, are one example of mobile culture that does not immediately involve use of the wireless handset. The most essential difference between the two ways of using the device is the costs generated by them, as use of the network is subject to charge whereas offline use is free.

> *Researcher:* Do you ever use the phone in the mornings or is it just in the evenings?
> *Aaro (16):* Most of it is in the evening, I'd say. Do you mean calling or any use?
> *Researcher:* Anything really. Do you do anything with it or just have it on your belt?
> *Aaro:* I use it at school quite a lot, toy with it to make time go a little faster, play the games or whatever.
> *Researcher:* Do you change the settings?
> *Aaro:* Browse it mainly in case I'd come across a new function.
> *Researcher:* Do you still find those at this stage?
> *Aaro:* Not really. It would have to be pretty novel. I suppose if I'd open it with a different code or something I might be able to find something.
> *Researcher:* So you just sort of fiddle with it.
> *Aaro:* That's right, I just play with the thing.

In addition to mobile calls, online use incorporates facilities such as sending and receiving text and picture messages, use of delivery reports,[27] email, telefax, ordering ringing tones and icons, and the use of WAP services. Naturally, all of the services are not used by all teens, and information on the novelties is often best transmitted through word-of-mouth, as in the case of 15-year-old Raisa, who writes: 'Sometimes it takes a while for the messages to get there, why is that? Sometimes they're not delivered at all . . . ! I didn't learn how to use the delivery reports until last week. You learn a lot more easily from friends than you do by reading the manual!'

In reality, all online services are not real time: a text message can take hours to reach the receiving handset and the message is both composed and read outside of the network; the loading of WAP services occurs with a delay; email sent to a mobile phone does not reach the recipient until the person logs on to the email service. Yet the aim of the real time services is constant availability to the user. The optimal mobile communicator would be the omnipotent user who is in complete control of the communication environment instantly and constantly, irrespective of their location or the time of day.

If the research on the mobile culture of teenagers would be limited to analysing the communication taking place in the GSM network, the overall view of the culture would remain feeble and incomplete. Observing the use taking place outside the network reveals an equally significant side of the culture. The offline use of the devices incorporates use of the mobile as an entertainment centre (games), a memo (calendar, name and number information), a clock (notifications, alarm), a teacher (use of foreign language menus) or learning material (dictionary). Similar use is, however, to be detected increasingly in online communication:

> Today at lunch hour a girlfriend of mine was preparing an English essay that she was supposed to hand in the next lesson. She asked me what the word 'sample' was in English. I was irritated to realise that I could not remember such an easy word and decided to look it up

from a Web dictionary with my Nokia Communicator. My impressive attempt to come to the rescue failed owing to the error message 'Internet connection failure'. A moment later it dawned on me that I had changed my password for the Internet and had forgotten to change it for the Communicator. Damn!

Adapting the mobile phone to suit the owner's personality is an integral part of offline culture. This can be achieved by means of colour covers, special antennas and carrying cases. Sometimes the personalisation of the phone expands to personification: the teens occasionally treat their mobile phones as if they were living, feeling creatures or 'Telegotchis' resembling the virtual pets of children. Teenagers may describe their mobiles as non-machines, their alternate personality or their babies. The users 'dress' their devices in new costumes (colour covers) or 'play' with them (games). The owners also wish to guarantee the well-being of their technological friend by providing the device with devoted care through 'feeding' (charging the battery) and cleaning it. During winter, the mobile handset is carried close to the heart – 'I carry it in my breast pocket so it don't freeze up,' related the 16-year old Jussi. Henna, also sixteen, designed an entire winter wardrobe for her mobile.

> *Interviewer:* You have a nice pouch for it.
> *Henna:* Yeah, I change them depending on what I'm wearing.
> *Interviewer:* You have many of them?
> *Henna:* Yes. I make them whenever I feel like it.
> *Interviewer:* Ah. When did you start making them?
> *Henna:* In the summer I guess. First I realised that when it gets cold, keeping it warm spares the battery. So I knitted them, and when the winter got colder I made some out of fake fur.

All of these activities entail spending time with the mobile phone. The wireless handset entertains the owner while simultaneously providing company and companionship. The teens describe the joy of tinkering with their mobile phones: the devices they thought they knew inside and out manage to surprise them over and over

again. Nonetheless, an even more essential part of the mobile culture is the social dimension, the status value of the handset. At its simplest, the status value can be measured in price and quality, in how fashionable the phone is and how highly rated its brand. The following rule can be applied here: the more expensive the handset, the higher its status. In practice, knowing the price of the model is not enough to pin down the phone's social value. On the contrary, the value would seem to be increasingly defined by the content of the mobile – its mind and soul, so to speak. A large selection of interesting text messages, hundreds of names and numbers stored in the memory and a unique text displayed on the screen add to the value of the handset. The rule to be applied in this case is: the more social content the phone has, the higher the status. Friends 'packed' in the mobile phone – numbers in the phone book, messages, small GSM animations sent as gifts – all reflect the popularity of the owner. The phone thus becomes the young person's letter of recommendation in the circle of friends.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

1   Mäkelä 2001: 151.
2   Nordenstreng 1970: 135-136.
3   IRC: Internet Relay Chat. A way of conversing with people through the Internet that, like online chat, allows real-time contact between people in all parts of the world. Generally, the topics discussed in IRC are considered to be somewhat more specific than in regular online chat.
4   Leung and Wei 2000: 18.
5   Fisher 1992: 5.
6   Nurmela 2001: 28.
7   Kopomaa 2000: 112.
8   Ibid.: 100-101.

9   For a more detailed account of mobile phone terminology, see *Matkaviestinsanasto* p. 81-84.

10   Cox and Leonard 1993: 10.

11   www.mintc.fi (website of Ministry of Transport and Communications).

12   Mäenpää 2000b: 137.

13   Oldenburg 1989.

14   Kopomaa 2000: 103.

15   Karjalainen 1997: 230.

16   Tolonen 2000: 135.

17   Järviluoma 1996: 205.

18   Laine 1997: 45.

19   Gordon, Lahelma and Tolonen 1995: 5.

20   Kopomaa 2000: 15.

21   Väänänen-Vainio-Mattila and Ruuska 2000: 179.

22   Saanilahti 1999: 7.

23   Cf., for instance, *Jargon* 1994, *culture*.

24   Inkinen 1998: 165-185.

25   Cf., for instance, J.P. Roos 1999 and 1994; Kopomaa 2000, Mäenpää 2000b.

26   Cf., for instance, Rheingold 2001.

27   Delivery reports are a function of the network that enables a mobile owner to keep track of when messages have been delivered.

2 CODE ACCEPTED

In the field with mobiles

Aims of the study

As the research progressed, the challenges posed by the fieldwork multiplied, and the research group began to question things that, in the early days, were perhaps taken for granted. A 15-year-old girl once rendered her interviewer speechless by asking how the research group had come to study the subject of teenagers' mobile phone use. In this chapter, we aim to provide an answer to this question and to shed some light on the variety of methods used in the implementation of the research along the years.

> *Miia:* What is it exactly that you're doing with this study . . . ?
> *Researcher:* Mmm.
> *Miia:* Is this something you do a lot, or why mobile teens?
> *Researcher:* Right. We've been doing this for quite a while now . . . . Let me shut this off . . . (turns off the recorder) (pause in the recording).

The needs of the financing companies with regard to the research have been easily understood by young people and their families. Many have made it a point to inform the researchers of certain themes they would want conveyed to the 'Nokia engineers'. Sometimes, the interviewees spoke directly at the engineer or representative of the service provider personified in the tape recorder. Sixteen-year-old Tuomas had this to say about a TV commercial by

Sonera, Finland's largest mobile operator and one of the partners in the implementation of the study: 'OK, right, here's one thing for the people at Sonera, whoever is going to be *listening* to this. [. . .] I don't want to be looking at these fat chicks with loads of makeup. Get some babes in the commercials' (emphasis ours).

Many couples describe rereading the messages they have sent to each other in the course of their relationship as returning to the good and bad moments of their time together. This serves to build and maintain the relationship.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

At no stage has the research group tried to obscure the presence of the financing companies in the study. If fact, it has sometimes been problematic to get the interviewees to believe that the researcher might actually be interested in things that are not directly related to technology. There have been occasions where the discussion turning to topics such as relationship problems and SMS quarrels for half an hour has prompted the interviewee to ask whether the researcher would like them to get 'back on track' and continue with the questions on the list. The meaning of the academic side of the study, the part of research that is not directly linked to technology, has not been understood quite so clearly. What is it the researcher wants to know?

The aims set for the research by the financing companies can be summed up as exploring the everyday life of their current and future customers and the related communication needs. These needs can be connected with areas such as communication, life management and participation in different communities. The focus of the academic research is not far from this with the consequence that reconciling the two interests has occurred without greater difficulty. From an academic perspective, the main aims of the research have consisted of exploring and describing the emergence and development of the mobile communication phenomenon as well as its manifestations and effects on the lives of individuals. The main focus of the research can be stripped down to two basic themes: how do people come to acquire a mobile phone and how do they use it? The themes have been approached from the viewpoint of both personal and collective beliefs, hopes and fears. What are the factors that motivate a person to acquire a mobile phone? What factors hinder or promote the diffusion of the culture? The themes have led us to a path exploring the transitions that take place in society as communication and everyday life are digitalised.

In the first years of the study, a humanistic/social scientific research partly financed by companies perplexed the academic world to the extent that the researchers were occasionally almost left feeling like the black sheep of the academic community. The question of objectivity and impartiality was raised every now and again, a critique directed to the researchers' alleged desire to 'purify' the entire research field. The researchers were occasionally portrayed as missionaries destined to spread the message of mobile communication. At times, the media or the world of business has wanted to position the researchers in the role of a mediator, an agent operating between producers and consumers. Sometimes, a description intended as neutral presented by the researchers in the media has been interpreted as a value-charged statement. The researchers have also been expected to side with the teenagers (which prompts the question: against whom?) or even to ignore, in the name of Public Relations, observations that might reflect negatively on the

industry. However, in the 2000s, similar studies are being carried out elsewhere, and the notion of university/corporate cooperation no longer remains quite so foreign to the academic world.

Researchers' backgrounds

Researchers share with other human beings the quality of seeing in their subject characteristics which they themselves are interested in. Inversely, it is both natural and beneficial for science that researchers choose subjects that are of interest to them. Nonetheless, being too fond of one's research subject may lead to, perhaps unconsciously, turning a blind eye to certain things when it comes to interpretation. Every feature of the phenomenon studied becomes loaded with meaning and appears to bear great significance. In instances like these, research comes close to hype, the unfounded praise for a product or a phenomenon with the aim of promoting sales. Will a researcher oriented towards SMS in her private life go out of her way to interpret text messaging as a culture (with all the positive connotations of the word intact) rather than observing it more critically as rapidly increasing consumption?

It has been assumed that the researchers have become fascinated with mediated communication as private individuals. In reality, the attitudes have been very moderate. At the start of the project, none of the researchers aside from the project leader had their own mobile phone. One researcher borrowed a mobile phone from her parents, and another bought her first mobile when starting the job. A third group member insisted on using a mobile phone with a broken keypad for months by keying in the necessary numbers and characters with a small stick 'since it still works'. Yet another amused the teens by attending to her calls with a model that had long since fallen out of fashion. In fact, the group have taken their steps in mobile phone use along with the participants of the study.

The researchers in the project come from backgrounds in both the humanities and social sciences, represented by the fields of cultural anthropology, ethnology, folklore studies, information studies, media studies, linguistics, marketing, sociology and social psychology. This multidisciplinary approach has been opted for to offer fresh viewpoints into the subject, and indeed, each researcher has brought something to the project. As a whole, the project – like the traditional wedding dress – has comprised something old, something new and something borrowed. The research has evolved from an inquiry concentrating on a certain form of folklore and stresing individual culture traits toward a study of the use and reception of various media. One thing that all of the researchers have, however, held in common is a qualitative approach to research and the value they place on the encounters that take place in the field.

As criticism from the outside has lessened, the group has felt an increasing need to reflect on the possibility of over-interpreting the results. Some time ago, a sign announcing entry to the 'Hype-Free Zone' was posted outside the office door. Still, the situation remains the same as in all qualitative research; the personality of the analysts is a factor in the analysis, and by now, the researchers have themselves become insiders in the culture of mobile communication, so that disengaging themselves entirely is no longer possible, if even desirable.

The influence of the study on the field

During its existence, the project has received its fair share of publicity, and hundreds of media contacts have served to familiarise the public with the idea behind the study. As can be expected, the research field has not remained unaffected by the project's visibility in the media. The researchers had, admittedly, lost any illusions they might have had concerning the 'pure' or 'genuine' field long before that. We are all aware that in the 2000s, the media, the In-

ternet and other comparable entertainment have an important presence in the lives of teenagers. Yet the constant dialogue between the research and the field has continued to amaze the research group. Assessing whether we are, in fact, observing a culture generated by young people or a phenomenon we ourselves have participated in creating has on numerous occasions proved beyond our capabilities.

Qualitative research always exerts a certain influence on the field and on the network of informants. The simple fact of an interview has the effect that the interviewee, at least to some extent, gives consideration to the topic in question. In extreme cases, the research can actually alter the life of the person studied if the discussion leads them to conceive of certain issues in a new way. When this happens, the researcher has, willingly or unwillingly, set in motion a reaction, the strength and duration of which are difficult to anticipate. In our case, we have come across two types of phenomena connected with implications of the research on the field. First, we have come to suspect that we have in fact participated in generating, promoting and directing the development of a teen mobile communication culture. Second, statements by the researchers have been used to accelerate the phenomenon, and in the more extreme cases, the researchers have been able to record the interviewees repeating versions of views they themselves have expressed in the media. We appreciate how these claims might seem less than plausible, which is why we now proceed to illustrate them through two examples.

Some years ago Finland's largest newspaper published a rather extensive article on the phenomenon of SMS notebooks developed by girls.[1] The article was based on the study conducted at the University of Tampere and unleashed a chain reaction – other media instantly became interested in the subject. The effects of the media coverage could be detected in the field within a few days as more and more girls talked about collecting their messages in special notebooks. They explained that they had got the idea from a story in a newspaper: some had heard about the article from a friend,

others had read it themselves. In a short space of time, the SMS notebook phenomenon spread throughout the country. In a few weeks, a culture previously categorised as marginal had developed into a solid part of girl culture; despite its new popularity, systematic collection of SMS still failed to cross the gender line. Not long after this, a mobile operator launched a small booklet that had been designed especially for the purpose of collecting text messages. The shop-bought booklet surpassed the trusted notebooks in popularity. Today, it is also possible to save the messages in digital message banks maintained by various service providers and available for browsing on the Web.

> *Researchers:* What's your take on the collecting? What do you think about the SMS booklet, the one that's been printed?
> *Iiris (16):* It was expensive, but really nice. It's not one you'd want to carry around with you, though. I have it on my shelf at home. It being so thick and all. I especially like the thick pink covers. At the end, it has all that stuff you can order from Sonera, a list of their services, so that's a little boring. They could make one at Radiolinja,[2] too. They could come in different colours, and it should have space for numbers, so you could number the messages.
> *Researcher:* Right. So are you going to go on writing them down?
> *Iiris:* Yeah. I've just been thinking, the first [notebook] is almost finished, but I can't write in that anymore since I've already started a second one. I would need to get a third one now, but I haven't got round to buying it yet.

The regular media coverage of the project – at the rate of almost an interview per week – is often reflected in the informants' perceptions of the culture. In his work, Janne Kivivuori has explored the concept of psychoculture. With the notion of psychologisation of everyday life he refers to how regular people (i.e., laymen) start talking about their life and interpreting the events taking place around them using concepts developed by the tradition of psychological thought. He points out that one might even talk about a culture of 'scientific life management', where a life that has been

thoroughly reflected upon and pinned down by concepts becomes the ideal. Values that have been validated and defined as ideal by intellectual authorities in the field serve as the cornerstones of this life worth pursuing.[3]

A way of speaking comparable to the one described by Kivivuori can be detected especially in the interviews of adults. We have termed this the everyday information society discourse. In their speech, people have a tendency to echo statements repeated in the media on how the mobile phone is a key to the information society, how young people have become the new mobile generation skilled in the utilisation of the various media, how parents have transferred their responsibility to the media, how people are struggling to deal with information overload and how, in addition to enhancing security, the new mobile positioning services are also providing a mental Big Brother to look over our shoulders. The discourse feeds on itself. Whether these claims are valid or not, they are frequently repeated as heard without considering their actual significance. Sometimes the personal opinion of the interviewee will actually turn out to contradict these claims. The details of the study as presented in the media have already began to circulate as comparable (psycho)folklore: every teenager already has a mobile phone; rather than calling, young people send text messages; young people are reforming mobile communication through innovations; children in their first year at school carry a mobile phone in their school bags; and the culture of dating is shifting towards virtual relationships enacted on the Internet.

In one family, a 20-year-old big brother participated in the conversation concerning the mobile communication habits of his younger siblings. He expressed a number of well-founded views on children and teenagers' use of mobile telephony, described the limits of the culture, illustrated his point with examples and criticised the direction of the development. As the conversation wore on, the ideas expressed by the young man began to sound a little too familiar to the researcher. A little later, the brother revealed having a few days earlier heard a radio interview where 'some expert' had illumi-

nated the use of mobile telephony among teenagers. He then said that he agreed with the person although he did not have personal experience about all the themes mentioned in the programme. In fact, he knew very little about his 10- and 14-year-old siblings' use of the mobile phone. The interviewer easily identified herself as the expert on the radio. Later, similar incidents have occurred with increasing frequency. The researcher interviewed on TV or in a newspaper became a factor in the opinions stated by parents in their interviews. Moreover, some of the teenagers have talked about appealing to their parents by referring to these newspaper articles or television shows in order to persuade them to purchase a mobile phone or a newer phone model for the teen.

Applied cultural anthropology

According to folklorist Leea Virtanen, the general significance of the humanities lies in making life understandable and enhancing the understanding of humans as cultural beings.[4] Cultural anthropologist Olli Alho suggests that if in today's society one wanted to afford the cultural sciences a mission apart from knowledge production, it could be to diminish ethnocentric attitudes stressing the superiority of one's own culture over others. It can, perhaps, be argued that these attitudes constitute a necessary element of community life, but their destructive effects also remain painfully evident in modern society.[5] Weakening ethnocentric attitudes is an important consideration especially today, as ethnic conflicts are being played out in various parts of the world.

The Achilles' heel of our research has been that the situation has often appeared to contradict the aim presented by Alho. In the minds of many people, mobile telephony seems to have established itself as a national project where a single technological phenomenon positions a nation as superior to all others. Similar attitudes have surfaced at the individual level, although the young have also taken a healthy pride in themselves as a result of their special skills.

The teenage members of the 'Nokia tribe' often related stories about the primitive stage of mobile communications in countries they had visited. Conversely, some of the teens expressed uncertainty over their suitability as research subjects, as they did not use the mobile phone as much as other people they knew. Here, the amount of consumption has become a measure for a person's level of skills and knowledge.

We have defined our field of study as applied cultural anthropology. The idea is by no means a new one. Cultural anthropologist Ilmari Vesterinen contends that results from anthropological studies have always been applied with or without the knowledge of the researcher.[6] Knowledge generated in this way can be used, for example, in the solving of technological problems and questions related to economic growth. The responsibility of the anthropologist and the ethics of research thus increase in significance, as the results can also be used to manipulate people.[7]

In the context of our study, application has mainly constituted cooperation with the financing companies. The purpose of gathering information has not been simply to map or explain a certain phenomenon. In addition to basic research, the objective has been to apply the findings, whether directly or indirectly, to product development. It should be understood that the concept 'product development' is used here in the broader meaning of the term. A product can thus constitute an artefact, a system of services or an advertising concept, in other words any individual element that serves to promote the functions of an enterprise. All products are not tangible, and sometimes even a weak signal from the field may inspire a fresh idea. As dictated by the laws of market economy, the interest of the companies is not merely theoretical, but aims at economic growth. Applied interpretation of the data has, however, not been up to the research group. Yet the mere knowledge that the results were being applied to cater for the needs of the companies evoked conflicting passions among the researchers, who engaged in recurring conversations on the justification and ethics of research work. The group members have had to come to terms with the

notion that, through his or her work, an individual researcher may have promoted things that are not in line with his or her identity as a researcher.

Reassessing focus and the researcher's intuition

The first period of fieldwork was begun in autumn 1997. Two researchers interviewed some thirty families with children in various parts of Finland. All families had at least one child under 18 years of age who owned a mobile phone. In all, 121 people participated in the study: 78 adults and 43 children and teenagers. The number of adults includes 32 teachers from six different towns. The study constituted a quick and effective cross-section of the mobile communication culture of the era.

The backgrounds of the families interviewed in the pilot study were in some way connected with mobile telephony as the families were recruited through handouts distributed to the employees of a mobile operator. The sample thus included families where the father, mother or a close relative was employed by one of the companies financing the study.

For this reason, nearly all of the participants can be said to have been pioneers of mobile telephony, even to the extent of belonging to what we have called the 'inner circle' of mobile communication. In consequence, the knowledge concerning mobile telephony that had accumulated in the family through the mother, father, grandparents or other relatives was likely to be more comprehensive than what was known about the issue in the average Finnish family at that time. Still, the families constituted real-life mobile communicators who had consciously chosen to purchase a mobile phone for a child. Each family member was interviewed separately and individual interviews were supplemented by group interviews. The researchers were, however, still rather insecure about how to approach the teenagers. In the pilot study, the voice of adults is somewhat more prominent than that of the teenagers. At the time, the

teen interviews were conducted on the researcher's terms, in the family homes, even in the presence of parents.

The research during the pilot study was about exploring the terrain, so that everyone got asked nearly everything. The researchers were still unsure about whether the mobile phone phenomenon was really a new form of culture or simply an incoherent bundle of unrelated experiences of individual users. These concerns were not foreign to the financing companies, either. People looking at Finland from another country through the lens of market research found it hard to believe that the phenomenon amounted to anything more than the cult of Nokia boosted by nationalistic enthusiasm, as suspected by the critics. The researchers were asked whether there really were families in Finland where children already had mobile phones, and if so, were these families exceptionally wealthy? Another commonly repeated statement was that the use of the mobile phone by young people seemed like an interesting topic, but the phenomenon would surely remain in the margins of society for decades to come and as such would not benefit the design and marketing of handsets. Furthermore, there was uncertainty about whether the observations would repeat themselves and thus prove generalisable. The researchers set as their aim the

The shared SMS culture of girls: the messages become common property when they are composed or written together.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

collection of at least some pieces of information that would be generalisable on a larger scale. The results of the pilot study were enough to convince the researchers – and the funders of the study – that this phenomenon was going to endure longer than the Tamagotchi fad, that it was not likely to remain inside the boundaries of a single nation and so would definitely be worth exploring in more detail.

In 1998, the topics were reorganised into sub-themes and the sample was grouped more specifically according to factors such as age, gender and type of family. The themes dealt with have included text messaging, children's use of the mobile phone, communication between romantic couples and differences of use between the genders. The length of one research period increased from two to three months, and the sample for each period contained a minimum of 30 children, teenagers or families. As the project employed three researchers and one research assistant, we managed to double the sample for some of the periods. Furthermore, the research has benefited from being able to function without significant breaks, which has enabled a degree of continuity. In consequence, the study has been based on a constant flow of information from the field to the researcher group rather than being forced to rely on a random collection of occasional samples.

Between 1998 and 1999 a total of 540 Finns participated in the study. Less than two hundred of them were adults – parents of the teens interviewed as well as teachers and youth workers. Roughly a third of the interviews were conducted in families with children while two thirds of them constituted individual, pair or group interviews with teenagers. The teen interviews did not involve parents or siblings – the attention focused solely on the teenager and his or her friendship circle: the girl or boyfriend, the best friend and other members of their immediate social network. Since 1999, the number of interviews has continued to rise so that by 2001 almost 1,000 Finns had participated in the study. Some have been interviewed several times over the past years, and some still maintain contact with the researchers.

In the pilot phase, the families were recruited mainly through the financing companies. Later, new recruits have been sought through 'Letters to the Editor' pages in newspapers, Internet discussion boards and advertisements in day-care centres, schools and on shop notice boards. No less significantly, the researchers have also discovered the benefits of the snowball technique, where information about the study has spread from teens to their friends, from parents to other families in their social network and from teachers to pupils. Some of the teens, like the girl in the following example, have recruited their friends each time the researchers have asked for help.

> HI!FOUND A BOY FOR THE INTERVIEW AND GIRL TOO!WOULD THEIR INTERVIEW BE 6 MAY AS WELL?(THAT WOULD BE OK FOR ME)-TARU-
> (SMS)

These teens can be regarded as gatekeepers of tradition, who crack the door open just enough to allow the researcher to enter into the field.[8] One must, however, keep in mind that in reality there is no uniform teen mobile community or teen mobile communication culture that the researcher could or should break into. Mobile phone users are not united by a common secret language or a certain code of conduct. What we are dealing with, rather, are forms of youth culture that are closely intertwined with the use of the mobile phone. The horse poems by stable girls and the altered training schedule of an ice-hockey team hardly have anything in common apart from the medium of communication: the text message.

The number of people expressing their willingness to participate in the research has sometimes been tenfold the number of people that can actually be incorporated into the sample, which means that, in a sense, new recruitment campaigns would no longer be necessary. Nonetheless, the research group continued their search for new interviewees. By decentralising the recruitment

process, the group aimed for a sample as heterogeneous as possible. The more extrovert teens enrolled themselves; girls were quicker to contact the research group than boys; children under ten years of age were usually signed in by their parents; and quiet or shy children and teenagers or those who had for some other reason been marginalised were best reached through indirect contacts, such as friends or teachers. After the pilot study, we tried to exclude from the sample families with direct ties to the mobile telecommunications industry. This, however, no longer seems purposeful. By now, nearly every Finn has friends or relatives whose job is in some way connected with mobile communication. The inner circle has broadened to cover the entire nation.

As the research progressed, researchers became more confident in reassessing its focus based on weak signals arising from the field. We have come to interpret as signals even very faint indications of a change taking place in the field, be it a transition in an old usage or a new innovation. These weak signals can strengthen and anticipate further developments. It is, naturally, also possible that they constitute passing observations from the margins of the phenomenon, which means that they will die down quickly and can thus not be generalised. A history of almost five years of conducting research has sensitised the researchers to new variations of the culture emerging in the field. Yet in a sense it has also desensitised them; the old proverb about not seeing the forest for the trees occasionally strikes a familiar chord.

It was mentioned earlier that the cooperation between the research group and financing companies has been rather frictionless. What has, however, occasionally proved problematic is how to convince companies of points of interest based almost entirely on the intuition of an individual researcher. Partly, these differences of opinion are based on the different time perspective of the corporate and academic worlds. Where researchers experience the need to observe slower wave-like developments in the field, the companies feel they require information on clear-cut transitions and rapid movements inside the culture.

A researcher who is in regular interaction with the research field knows when an important change is about to take place. In the eyes of an outsider, the observation, a small isolated sign of change, seems to be afforded too much emphasis. When in a short space of time the phenomenon of text messaging opened up to its full glory, it was not difficult for the researchers to become convinced of its significance. However, people outside the research group sometimes found it hard to see the sense in dedicating an entire three-month research period to investigating the use of an individual service. However, the group has returned to the theme in each subsequent research period. The instinct of the researchers proved correct as, at least for the moment, text messaging appears to occupy a strong position in the mobile communication culture of Finnish teens.

Qualitative research

The material gathered by the research group has been essentially qualitative, and representatives of financing companies have often questioned the researchers about the nature of qualitative inquiry. The methodology has been confused with market research; people have presumed that the researchers utilise multiple choice forms and ask for the informants' opinions over the phone. In reality, the scenario is quite different. Qualitative research stresses the relationship between the researcher and the researched, a relationship that is never exhausted in a single communication. Sometimes, the contacts have continued even after the research is over. The relationship, which is based on mutual trust, has an existence outside of actual encounters.

Our study is easily located under the epithet of most forms of qualitative inquiry. These forms include ethnography, case studies, fieldwork, the data-oriented grounded theory, document studies, observational studies, interview studies, descriptive studies and

naturalistic inquiry.[9] We have described and interpreted the culture, and we have observed and conducted interviews in the field; we have approached the phenomenon through individual cases. Sometimes, the research themes have emerged directly from the data, while other times we have recorded reality by capturing fragments of everyday life in the form of pictures and text samples.

Some of the contacts with the teenagers have expanded into relationships that involve regular communication and occasionally have even developed into friendships, with the researcher and the informant exchanging SMS and email on a weekly basis. Those who have been with the study the longest have grown from 15-year-old teenagers into students in their twenties. On occasions, it has been almost too easy for the researchers to blend in with the researched as the teenagers have not always been capable or willing to make the distinction between the researcher and the private person. They have, for instance, called the researchers at night or during weekends wanting to share a difficult experience concerning bullying or a broken heart, in this way nudging the role of the researcher towards that of a therapist or a 'help line'.

The researcher has entered the daily life of the researched at home, school, work and leisure. In its most reduced form, the fieldwork conducted by the group has constituted thematic interviews. Perhaps at its best, it has been based on participant observation, where the researcher for a moment actually lives the life of the researched. Observation has enabled the researchers to simultaneously examine the individual, the small group and the community of teens. We have spent numerous summer weekends at rock festivals, many winter nights in youth discos, and we have observed the long-standing local youth tradition of celebrating the beginning of summer holidays on a nearby beach. The researchers have followed worm game[10] competitions, visited summer camps where confirmation classes are held, witnessed the action on school yards during breaks and, most importantly, spent endless hours sitting in coffee houses and fastfood restaurants with the interviewees. Youth

researcher Vesa Puuronen has stated that, methodologically, there are special considerations to be taken into account when researching young people. Methods based on direct communication between the researcher and the researched seem to be the most suitable for youth research. Studying young people also poses the particular methodological challenge that teenagers may not be willing to cooperate with the researcher if they perceive him or her as representing the world of adults and its institutions.[11]

An interpretative, understanding approach to research makes it easier for the researcher to be admitted inside the culture being explored. In cultural anthropology, this is called the emic approach: the phenomenon is examined through the informants' own analysis and classifications, based on their set of values, without the researcher's presuppositions. The approach highlights the meanings generated by the culture bearers themselves and strives to observe the culture from the inside, stressing the viewpoint of the culture bearer.[12] Emic knowledge is particularly significant to achieve an intuitive and emphatic understanding of the culture. Writers in the field also seem rather unanimous about the importance of emic knowledge for successful fieldwork.[13] The understanding attitude of the ethnographer may, however, become the researcher's stumbling block, leading to a situation where the researcher, thoroughly absorbed in the research, begins to defend the subject in good and evil, to forward its cause and to speak on its behalf.[14] The expression 'going native' describes an anthropologist's excessive identification with the target of the research. In cases like these, the researcher is lost inside the field, so that a researcher studying animal rights activists begins to function as a member of the group and unbolt the cages of animals bred for their fur.[15] We admit that group members have occasionally been tempted by the empathy trap, and opening the cage door has not always been that far from their minds.

The child-adult or teenager-adult research relationship always contains the juxtaposition of 'us' against 'them', the outsiders. An

adult cannot, and indeed should not, attempt to be a teenager. The role of the researcher is the role of an adult. This said, qualitative research also presumes a capacity for empathy. The interviews have dealt with all aspects of the teens' lives, not just their use of the mobile phone. The teens have seized the opportunity to relate their problems when provided with a listening adult. The researchers have heard about mental violence in the homes, bullying in schools, pressures created by being different and how it feels to be ostracised. Furthermore, the teens have talked about things deemed unacceptable by society: purchasing alcohol and cigarettes for the underaged, selling stolen goods and shoplifting.

> I noticed again tonight how useful text messages can be. I was talking to Joni [boyfriend] on the mobile about my birthday that's coming up. The subject of alcohol came up and of course my little sister Nella happened to be sitting next to me. I couldn't say anything in front of her, since she would go directly to my parents. We agreed that I would text him about my needs . . . Works like a charm, and my little sister won't be peeking at the messages!
> (Katja, 16, extract from diary)

Some of the issues discussed have been problematic for other reasons. How should the researcher react when the teen relates 'saving' in mobile costs by secretly calling friends on their mobiles from the household phone? In instances like these, the researchers have been forced to assess their loyalties. Should they maintain a neutral attitude and listen to the stories without reacting or, in their role as adults, advise the teen to follow the norms and regulations of society?

As the amount of data collected is rather substantial, we have received regular queries about making it available to other researchers. The financing companies have also expressed their interest in perusing the entire material instead of settling for summaries compiled by the research team. We have, however, decided not to agree to this. Maintaining the confidence of the young informants

is possible only through protecting the information they have trusted us with. In consequence, the research data, stored at the University of Tampere, remains closed and available for use by the research group alone.

To claim that the research data is packed with delicate details of the teens' personal lives or that all of the research contacts were deep and profound in nature would obviously be overstating the facts. In the middle of one interview, the 15-year-old male inform-ant answered his mobile phone by saying: 'I'm still at the *investiga-tion*. Yeah, we'll be through in a minute' (emphasis ours). Though up until the call, the boy had been well focused on the situation and openly interacted with the researcher, the choice of words re-veals his attitude. The boy had been contacted through his teacher and the interview was carried out in an empty classroom, which made the whole situation reminiscent of interaction between teacher and pupil. In a context like this, the teen is likely to per-ceive the interviewer as an authority similar to a schoolteacher. The setting does, indeed, conjure up images of a formal investigation rather than those of an equal conversation.

One night's worth of participant observation on a beach filled with teens celebrating the start of their summer holiday seemed to puzzle some of the research subjects; for the researchers, the night was a real borderline experience. The researchers (all women) with their black jeans, leather jackets and pierced nostrils looked neither adult nor young enough for the teenagers. A girl commented by shouting: 'What the hell are people that old doing here?'

It is important to recall here that the process of data gathering is only the initial stage of a study. Since the 1980s, special emphasis has been placed on writing the ethnography, or producing a study based on fieldwork. The objective of making the study more dia-logic or discursive means diminishing the authority of the ethnog-rapher: the interpretation emerges from the interaction between the ethnographer and his or her target. This process also positions the researcher as an object of interpretation and reflection.[16]

The ambivalent position of the researcher has its drawbacks. It is no doubt beneficial for science that the researcher live inside the subject of the study. Scientific fascination and profound interest, occasionally even bordering on the obsessive, is often likely to lead to solid results. Conversely, armchair anthropology that settles for observing things from a distance, or office-hour research carried out exclusively between the hours of nine and five may fail to capture the essence of a living and breathing culture. What is more, sciences observing individuals and communities are currently rejecting the idea of the researcher as an outside observer or objective onlooker. Although objective research methods have been developed, the notion that any researcher would be able to completely detach their person from their work and to function as a machine-like recorder of a situation is clearly quite illusory. The anthropologist is as much a combination of biological and psychological characteristics as the person being researched. Moreover, it should be remembered that the personality of the researcher is formed outside of the field and reflects the person's entire life history. Personal background is a factor in the choice of research problem, target of the study and research methods, even in the reasons for choosing to study anthropology in the first place.[17]

The notion of the objective researcher or outside observer disengaged from the target of the study has been replaced by that of the researcher-subject, who remains conscious of his or her role as an individual with a certain personal background and of the effect this personality has on his or her portrayal of the field. A researcher's description of the reality taking place in the field constitutes a reproduction as a picture reflected even from the best of mirrors still remains an image of reality, not reality itself. A researcher can thus be seen as another instrument in the implementation of a study[18] and inevitably has an influence on the final shape of the study. In addition to having a range of research methods to choose from, the researcher with his or her personal experiences and observations forms the most important link between the target of the re-

search and the data.[19] Through his or her personality, personal background, education, age, gender and research interests, the researcher affects the quality of the knowledge gained from the study. This is why any study conducted should include analysis of the researcher's person, and researchers should always remember to critique themselves as the internal source of the fieldwork.[20]

It is, however, also true that introducing the research subject into one's everyday life makes analytical assessment of the data more difficult. The researcher should be able to differentiate between his or her personal feelings and the experiences of the researched. Although self-reflection by the researcher, a critical analysis of one's personal experiences about the matter, may yield useful interpretations, one should be careful not to transfer the thoughts of the researcher onto the researched. The primary task of a researcher is to construct a picture of the research subject, not to explore his or her own personal experiences. Researchers may not automatically perceive the situation as problematic in this sense

'Mobile buddies' or animal-shaped carrying pouches offer a variety of characters to choose from. Picture: Sanna Malinen, 2001.

and may assume that as a result of their education they are able to draw the line between personal opinions and those of the people studied, between perceptions that arise from their own personal background and observations that arise from the field. To the outsider this line may appear artificial and any claimed precision may seem quite illusory.

According to sociologist Pertti Alasuutari, a typology created on the basis of a qualitative inquiry should not be regarded as a result in itself, but a mere starting point for analysis and interpretation. Creating a typology may, however, prove problematic in itself. Too rough of a categorisation forces the researcher to label very different cases as belonging to the same type. Conversely, getting caught up in minor differences leads to the establishment of a typology with categories that can only accommodate a few individual cases.[21] When examining cultural categorisations, the objective is not simply to divide the data into groups based on certain criteria, but rather to examine the various constructions of meaning. The aim is to study the oppositions contained in the texts and to consider the manner in which people – or texts – make sense of things.[22] The researcher attempts to look for explanations behind the actions and to determine some of the meanings, fears, hopes and needs hidden behind visible motivations and needs.

The informants of the study

It has been our aim to at least narrow the gulf between the roles of the researcher and the researched every time the opportunity has presented itself. The teens have expressed a genuine interest in the study, and we have shared with them the information we have gathered when they have asked for it. Some of the teens have also held presentations on mobile culture in school and some have simply been interested in finding out how other teens make use of their mobile phones. In her letter to the research group, 16-year-

old Henna writes: 'One more thing: What about your results? Is it possible to find out about them or could we have a copy to ourselves? It would be really interesting to find out how much text messaging other teens do in Finland.'

We prefer to refer to the teenagers as 'informants', experts on their own lives and living environments, rather than as 'subjects' or 'respondents', which evoke more passive images. In some situations, the young have acted as co-researchers or research partners, who have interpreted the data in cooperation with the researcher. The informants have not, however, functioned as research assistants at any point of the study, even though we have sometimes, perhaps misleadingly, talked about the teenagers helping us in our research. We insist on establishing a clear difference between an informant and a research assistant.[23] As is visible in the following citation from a cover letter by 17-year-old SMS collector Taru, some of the informants have documented their actions in a manner profound enough to be expected of professional researchers:

> When I got the forms, I sent a few messages right away and wrote them down as if for practice. I was very excited about the research. If I sent messages at home, I would fill in the forms right away. And if I was, say, out with my friends and sent/received a message, I would store it in the memory, and after I got home I would write down the message and the date it was received.

The research group have been helped tremendously by a network of informants who often contacted the researchers of their own initiative. These teenagers have talked about changes in the mobile phenomena, or sent the researcher the latest chain message going around their circle of friends. This has enabled the researchers to keep up with current trends, particularly with regard to social innovations and new phenomena, which have come to their attention quite rapidly, surpassing the official research plan. These social networks have guaranteed that the research remained up-to-date and flexible. Furthermore, the continuity in research relationships

minimises the number of misinterpretations as the researchers have had the opportunity to reintroduce the same themes or, if necessary, verify their interpretations of the teens' lives.

The pilot study already examined different areas of Finland, both urban and rural. Throughout its duration, the study has covered the entire area of Finland, from the capital of Helsinki in the south coast to northern Lapland, and from the west coast to the Russian border. The number of interviews in each area was proportional to the population of the area.

Interviews were carried out in cities and towns of different sizes, as well as in built-up areas and rural areas on the outskirts of municipalities. During 1998 and 1999, 43 percent of the teens interviewed lived in towns or cities, 39 percent in villages or built-up areas and 17 percent in rural areas. As can be expected, different living environments have implications on the teens' lives, for example with regard to ease of transport from one place to another. In a built-up area, the teens are able to walk or bike to school or the library, whereas in rural areas, due to the long distances, travelling generally requires the use of a car.

Our original idea was to reassess the urban label that had been attached to the use of mobile telephony. The hypothesis was that different environments breed different usage culture. If a teenager living in a small village can't call up a group of friends every night to go skateboarding, what does he use his mobile phone for? As the research progressed, rural areas proved indispensable to the researchers. The first mobile-using children were not found in the capital area but in small villages where it is not uncommon for children as young as seven to travel to school unaccompanied. More than regional inequality, the research has been affected by the language barrier. Although 6 percent of Finns speak Swedish as their native tongue and several dialects of Sami are spoken by the Sami people residing in Finnish Lapland, nearly all of the participants were Finnish-speaking and only a couple of bilingual (with Swedish or Sami as the other language) teenagers took part.

There is great variation in the social backgrounds and types of family of the informants: some are from large families, others from homes consisting of just two people; some come from nuclear families, others live with single parents. In 1997 and 1998, 78 percent of the teens lived in nuclear families and 22 percent lived with a lone parent. Both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum are represented in the sample: some of the families were very wealthy while others had to rely on welfare to get by. Thirty-three percent of the teens came from families where only one of the parents worked, and in 4 percent of the families both parents were unemployed. Similar discussions concerning mobile usage costs are enacted in families irrespective of their social background. Teachers in particular often voice their disbelief concerning how *all* families can afford to pay for their children's use of mobile telephony. Sixteen-year-old Sonja writes:

> I was at a hamburger restaurant with my boyfriend today. We'd been sitting at the table for some time when I noticed someone I knew at the next table. It was Marja, the twelve-year-old daughter of a friend of my mother's. I had understood that the financial situation in their family was a little difficult, single mother and all, but the girl was chatting away on the mobile just to pass the time . . . It's possible of course that she's got the mobile as a present from her godmother or someone like that, but someone's got to pay the bills as well, right?

When the research began, its focus group was defined as Finns under 18 years of age. Later, based on observations that emerged from the data, the group decided to divide the subject into five subgroups that displayed distinct mobile communication cultures: small children (3- to 6-year-olds), children (7- to 10-year-olds), pre-teenagers (11- to 12-year-olds), teenagers (13- to 15-year-olds) and late teenagers (16- to 18-year-olds). The decision to set the age limit at 18 was taken because in Finland that is the age of majority that transforms teens into legally competent adults. In practice, the limit occasionally stretched to allow for some interviewees who

had already turned 19. Until the end of 1999, the research placed a special focus on 10- to 12-year-olds and 13- to 16-year-olds.

The age limits are by no means rigid and were intended to be indicative more than anything else. To generalise, the mobile communication of each group can be described as follows: small children almost without exception use the mobile phone in the presence and under the guidance of adults; slightly older children's mobile communication is directed to the family and close relatives; pre-teens' use of mobile telephony exhibits a clear turn away from the family and towards friendship circles; the mobile communication of 13- to 15-year-olds is abundant and innovative; and late teens use mobile phones in a manner that is, in many ways, similar to adult usage.

The minimum age limit has also varied in the course of the study. In the early stages of the research, it was expected that the limit would 'naturally' become fixed at about seven years, which is when Finnish children generally begin school. In fact, for quite some time, the age of 6 or 7 years seemed to constitute a certain 'magic limit', and it was thought that the phenomenon could not reach younger children. Not too many years ago, studying mobile communication even in school-age children seemed like a truly marginal subject. However, the situation has changed rapidly as the age limit continued to drop, with the effect that the youngest interviewees have been 4- to 5-year-old mobile owners. It should be said that these children have so far remained special, isolated cases and no further generalisations can be drawn about their young age.

The use of mobile telephony by young children is, however, on the increase. Mobile communicators of 7 to 10 years of age are no longer individual cases but part of a larger trend. The constantly lowering age of the informants poses new challenges for researchers in the field. For one, it is likely to increase the role of participant observation in research methodology, as in-depth interviews proceeding question by question and based on verbal expression are

not the most functional tools when studying the communication culture of small children. Although this publication's main focus is on teenagers, a brief overview on children's mobile communication culture and the initial stages of its study is provided in Chapter 7.

Interviews and observation

Parallel and interlacing use of different types of data is generally understood to be beneficial for the outcome of a study, so that different observations obtained through different channels complement each other. This type of methodology is called triangulation.[24] In accordance with this approach we have sought to collect our data from a multitude of sources. The subject has been observed from a variety of angles: statistics measure the amount of use, and the interviews assess the quality of use, while the documents produced and collected by the teens describe the phenomenon in the words of the researched.

The data is divided into six different types: interviews, SMS messages (collected either on forms or as copies of SMS notebooks), notes by researchers and teenagers, statistical data, form enquiries, and picture material.[25] Interviews have been archived both as tapes and written transcripts: At the end of 1999, the tapes already amounted to 550 hours of recorded interviews and their transcripts extended to more than 10,000 pages. The researchers have written field notes where they have described interview situations and observations. Some of the teens kept mobile or media diaries. The researchers received feedback through SMS, email or regular mail. The picture material includes photographs of families' and teenagers' use of the mobile phone taken by the researchers, and drawings where children have depicted their visions of future mobile devices.

Statistical information has been gathered with background forms that cover issues such as the family situation of the inform-

ant in addition to getting the most basic information on their use of mobile telephony and the Internet. The data also includes two more extensive surveys. The first survey was carried out in September 1998, with 122 respondents between the ages of 13 and 16. The second survey data was gathered in April 1999 in upper secondary schools and vocational schools in the Province of Lapland. This time, the number of respondents was 94.

As the research has continued, the interviews have expanded in both length and depth. At the pilot stage, some of the basic interviews lasted no more than 30 minutes. The researchers visited schools in all parts of Finland, met teachers during breaks and explored the roots of teens' mobile history through a straight-to-the-point question-and-answer technique. We have come to term these early forms of information collecting as basic interviews. The thematic interviews that later became a central part of the research have generally lasted from one to three hours and focused on themes central for the research: Why was the mobile phone acquired? What is it used for, and what is the usage culture like? The duration of the more free-form in-depth interviews has ranged from six to eight hours. The longer interviews have been conducted with teens whom the researchers have met on more than one occasion. As the researcher and the researched have established a more familiar and trusting relationship, the interviews can cover the entire life situation of the interviewee. Furthermore, defining what constitutes an interview is not always immediately obvious. The duration of an interview on tape is in most cases much shorter than the time we have actually spent with the teens and the families.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish. The quotations in this book are translations of actual research material. All potentially identifiable information such as proper names, nicknames and references to localities have been altered in order to ensure the protection of the informants' personal data.

Text messages

In spring 1998, a change took place in the research field. Suddenly, the teens were bursting with stories about SMS communication enabled by GSM networks (NMT[26] models had grown rare among teenagers by this time). Statistically, the number of SMS messages sent attained the number of mobile calls and even surpassed it in a period of just a few months (for a broader account on the development of text messaging, please refer to Chapter 5).

Today, a significant proportion of teens' mobile phone use consists of SMS use. Seventeen-year-old Piia writes: 'Sometimes it seems people have a real urge for text messaging, when people everywhere are fiddling with their mobiles.' Jere, also 17, brings up one of the reasons for the popularity of SMS in his diary. Combining child-like amusement to grown-up talk, the culture becomes a part of the process of becoming an adult: 'In the evening I got a sudden attack of childishness and got some obscene text messages from the Internet and sent them to three of my friends. This morning I did something out of the ordinary: shocked my mom with a rude text message! I also sent them to a few of my friends while I was at it. Chain-message sending has gotten pretty easy, having got some off the Internet yesterday and storing the best ones in a file under "Standard Messages". The name of the file is particularly fitting: it's my opinion that most messages sent by teens are these types of profanities. People do also send regular messages, but the obscenities surpass the other messages in quantity, because whenever you get a "good" one you tend to pass it on to quite a few people.'

The messages can and should be discussed in the interviews, but it is studying the actual messages themselves that best opens up the phenomenon. In summer 1998, the research was expanded by beginning an organised collection of text messages. Since whenever it is discussed, our SMS archive still evokes numerous questions, we will continue by presenting the methods used in the collection.

A more detailed account on the actual content of the messages and usage culture can be found further on in the book.

Between summer 1998 and winter 1999, messages were collected over a period 18 months. In that time, the teenagers wrote down and sent in more than four thousand messages, and in the following year, a further two thousand messages were added to the collection. The collection continued in 2001. Today, the SMS bank comprises nearly eight thousand messages. Instead of the individual messages, the gathering later focused increasingly on the text message collections teens have compiled for their own purposes. Fifteen-year-old Marianne has gathered several notebooks' worth of the messages.

> I started collecting the messages almost as soon as I got my mobile and my friends started bombing me with them. First I wrote them on whatever pieces of paper I could lay my hands on, but then I needed to get a notebook and write them all in there. My friends have been a big help in collecting the messages, they often call me just to give me a few. You can also find them on the Internet.

Teenagers collect messages by copying both sent and received messages word for word, character by character on special forms. The collecting methods have varied individually; some have written down the messages as soon as they have sent or received them, others have made it a nightly habit. Some have written the messages first on paper or on a computer and then copied them onto the forms.

The collectors have been both girls and boys, but on average, girls have been more eager to participate to the extent that they constitute some 80 percent of the collectors. The lower proportion of boys as collectors is not very prominent in the contents of the messages, though, as an important share of the messages collected by girls have been sent by boys. In this way, boys are strongly present in the SMS material. It should be noted, however, that in this situation, most of the boys' messages represent inter-gender

communication, as opposed to messaging among boys. Thus at the moment, as a whole, the collected SMS material highlights the communication of girls.

Many teens have experienced the collection of SMS messages as the part of the research that has been the most fun, which has meant that the recruiting has not been too problematic, even though the collection itself is rather laborious. The following comments are extracts from cover letters sent in with message forms:

> I can collect more, if you send me more forms. I've collected them all! You can laugh now!

> I want to continue, send in fresh forms!

> I've written down every message, I'm pretty conscientious! I can continue doing it if you like! Hey, it's been fun!

> In case you need more SMS, I'm willing to collect them!

> I'd like to carry on collecting them if that's OK with you.

Understanding the messages simply as texts, detached from the environment in which they were produced, might on many occasions prove difficult, as they can be filled with expressions and abbreviations bordering on code language. To facilitate the interpretation of message contents, all collectors have been interviewed. Often, the teens have become SMS collectors after the initial interview, and a second interview has been conducted once the collection was completed. During these interviews, the researchers and the teens have discussed and interpreted the contents of the messages.

The age of the collectors has ranged from 13 to 19, with average ages of the collectors between 1998 and 2000 being 15.6 for girls and 16.8 for boys. With girls, the ages have ranged from 13 to 18, and the boys' ages have been between 15 and 19. The majority of the messages have been sent between teens as only a fraction

consists of messaging with adults. Typically, adult contacts are directed to parents and older siblings and cousins.

Like the interviewees, the SMS collectors almost invariably consist of teenagers speaking Finnish as their native language, with the result that the collected messages are mostly written in Finnish. However, certain collectors have also exchanged individual messages in Swedish or Sami. A number of messages written by deaf teenagers are also included. The mother tongue of these teens is sign language, and the language used in the messages, Finnish, is only their second language. The messages have been collected by teenagers living in all parts of Finland, which has meant that nearly every dialect area is represented in the study and indeed number of dialectal features as well as instances of urban slang can be detected in the material. There are also many expressions borrowed from foreign languages, mostly English, German, Spanish and French, with some of the messages written entirely in a foreign language.

Generally, the teens filled up the stack of forms (fitting one hundred messages) in one month's time. In 2000, many were ex-

Management of future time is perhaps the most central aspect of boys' calls to each other: the mobile phone is commonly used to plan what will happen next.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

changing the required hundred messages in less than two weeks, like 15-year-old Maaret:

> It took me exactly two weeks to collect these hundred messages. I didn't really censor them. There are arguments and clearing up misunderstandings, stuff like that. But a lot of it is just 'pointless' messaging, when the person you're sending messages to may be near by or you've just been writing about something totally unnecessary just for fun . . . On the other hand, there is a lot of agreeing on when and where to meet and stuff like that. What can I say about them?! Your basic everyday messaging. Boring really. This month I sent 283 messages and received about the same number. The most important reason for messaging is us getting to know the boys next door and texting with them. Most of the messages are pretty unnecessary, but fun – I've really enjoyed reading them!!

Even this relatively significant number of messages represents only a minuscule portion of the actual flow of SMS through the teens' mobile phones. Many have filled up more than one batch of forms. Some have collected messages in consecutive years, which has allowed the researchers to observe the possible changes in the communication style of an individual communicator as the person gets older and his or her mobile communication skills develop. For example, the transformation of a 15-year-old girl living with her parents into a student and an independent woman of 17 naturally also has an effect on the type of messages she sends.

The collection was implemented by means of gathering the messages on forms. After enrolling as an SMS collector, the person received one hundred forms with a request to copy off his or her phone messages sent or received during the research period. The forms consist of two parts. First, they include a chart for copying the message sent or received by the teen. The teenagers were advised to exercise particular care in the copying of the messages, including the difference between capitals and lower-case lettering. Despite this, the messages collected may include copying errors of

some characters or words; some collectors are more careful than others, and the human factor is likely to introduce mistakes no matter how scrupulous the informant is. In case the teens chose to leave something out intentionally or realised they omitted something by accident, they were instructed to consider this in the cover letter.

Second, the form includes multiple-choice questions about the sender and the recipient (age, gender) as well as the situation of the communication (day of the week, time of day). The forms are also used to gather information related to the communication channel: which service provider or other channel had the sender and the recipient of a particular message used? Messages collected in 1998 and 1999 contained a vast number of text messages that had been sent from free SMS services available in the Internet. The use of these services does not incur costs to either the sender or the recipient. In 2000, a question on whether the writer had used predictive text input (T9[TM])[27] to compose the message was added to the form.

At first, the teens were asked to collect all the messages they received. In 1999, the number of various service messages increased so much that the collectors were instructed to leave them out, as it was possible for one person to receive dozens of service messages in the course of one week. In practice, the teens have had the opportunity to themselves discard and censor some of their messages. No doubt some have been left out by accident. The forms may also have run out, or the person may not have taken enough of them along when leaving town for a few days. Part of the messages are also very difficult to reproduce on paper, such as animation-like picture messages or messages that consist of repetition of a single character (for example a message with 160 dots that functioned to disable a certain phone model).

The SMS forms have been archived as they were received from the collectors. The messages have also been written in electronic form and printed out. Statistical software is used in the analysis of the SMS material, for instance, to acquire data on the length of the

messages (number of characters), the number of words, the type of lettering (capitals or small case), use of punctuation and loan words. Analysis of the content is carried out with software designed for qualitative analysis (N Vivo). The programme is used, among other things, to categorise the messages according to their thematic fields. They are also classified according to the age and gender of the sender or recipient. Some of the collected messages are used as examples in this book. Names and other elements that might lead to the identification of the persons involved have been changed to protect the privacy of the collectors and their friends. A dissertation based on the SMS material is currently being prepared.

The textual material of the research is wide, rich – and indirect. Observed from the point of view of source criticism, we are examining paper copies, non-digital variants of digital text messages. The possibility of error is always present when messages are collected in this manner; a message can be left out by accident, the form can go missing, the teenager can leave a message out intentionally, the collector can make a mistake in copying the message, etc. As text messages cannot be saved like emails, the current method is almost the only conceivable one. The methods of videoing the messages directly off the screen of the mobile, forwarding the messages to the researcher and dictating them on tape have been considered but, at least for the moment, these methods remain too laborious and too inexact. The proliferation of the SMS phenomenon among increasingly younger age groups is forcing the researchers to consider renewing the methods: a seven-year-old who has only recently learned to write in capitals cannot be obligated to copy their messages on forms every night.

The limits of interpretation

The SIM card of a mobile has no mercy for the user. It allows three and only three attempts at the PIN code, and the four digits must be reproduced exactly – no mistakes are tolerated. The breaking of cultural codes is more flexible as there are many possible readings. This chapter's title derives from the comparison: Code Accepted. The various possible readings also entail the possibility of misinterpreting the code. Anthropology speaks of cultural distortions, when the personal background of the researcher strongly influences the way he or she conducts research and the picture he or she forms of the research subject.[28]

A distortion like this may occur when a researcher, on the basis of his or her gender, as a woman or a man, makes interpretations of the opposite sex without considering his or her own gender background as a factor in both the gathering and interpretation of the material. The person's gender can thus limit the results gained from a study. It should not, however, be deducted from this that women alone should be allowed to study the culture of women and girls and that men only should explore boy and man culture. In fact, the situation may even be the opposite. Crossing the gender line may have the effect of opening the researcher's eyes to a number of cultural traits a person inside the culture would perhaps take as given. Furthermore, informants may occasionally find it easier to open up to a person of the opposite sex. Out of the nine people who at different times have constituted the research group, only one has been male, which is likely to have narrowed the point of view of the research group.

Similar problems may arise if a researcher investigating the culture of their own membership group strives to understand the cultural traits and modes of explanation for phenomena that do not actually emerge from the data gathered but from the personal experiences of the researcher. It is possible that these observations apply to the community being studied, but it is just as possible that they

remain true only to the researcher. Occasionally, however, research, for one reason or another, fails to attain all the necessary information, and in situations like these, the experiential knowledge acquired by the researcher may serve to patch the gaps in the data. The researcher may, relying on the situational experiences and the connection to the studied community acquired in the field begin acting as an informant in the study.[29]

In our context, one might perhaps be easily misled to transfer one's own adult perspective to the world of children and teenagers. Though the observations may appear similar on the surface, their foundations are quite different as teens create their culture without the knowledge and experience afforded by age. One can consider here the example of consumption and related costs. Young people may appear very rational about where their money (whether earned or received from parents) would be best invested, but they usually lack the financial responsibility of adults. For teens, consumption constitutes satisfying personal needs with no need to worry about necessities; they have jobs in order to be able to buy themselves something nice, not to pay for the electricity or to manage their rent. Thus, teens' views on what is economical and necessary in a given situation are based on a completely different set of principles than the consumption patterns of adults. We will illustrate this difference through an example concerning the purchase of the mobile phone.

Although the oversized mobile bills widely covered by the media are not part of the daily reality of most young people, the researchers have been repeatedly struck by the wealth and prosperity that surrounds the teens. Often, an instance of educational bargaining can be detected in the background. The teens often talk about the mobile phone as a prize or a promise. Confiscating the device is employed as a means of punishment, though this is notably less common. By behaving in accordance with the parents' wishes, the teen secures his or her 'standard of living', like 15-year-old Ville, who at the time of the interview was using the most ex-

pensive handset on the market, with a retail price of several hundred euros:

> *Researcher:* Did your mother not think it was expensive?
> *Ville:* She did kind of ask me why does it have to be that expensive, but then she said if that's what our baby wants, we'll have to get it then.
> *Researcher:* It sounds to me like you get pretty much anything you ask for, or do they sometimes tell you they won't buy something?
> *Ville:* They do sometimes, but they do tend to give in pretty much.
> *Researcher:* What do you think they would refuse to buy you?
> *Ville:* I don't know really. Cigarettes I suppose. I don't smoke and I don't drink so I don't need them, but I can't think of anything else.
> *Researcher:* So is it your dad sometimes that says maybe they shouldn't...?
> *Ville:* Yeah, my dad's a little more firm about these things. Then my mum keeps telling him that it's OK to get something.

There is another possibility for distortion that should perhaps be taken into account. Some of the teens and the families have received a financial remuneration for participating, while others have not.[30] Some have known about the fee when enrolling for the study, while others have found out after they have made their contribution. It is possible that some of the interviewees had no other motivation to participate but the prospect of financial gain. Sixteen-year-old Janne asks the researchers in his letter: 'I collected the messages on paper whenever I have had the opportunity (whenever I've been able to write things down). I would now be interested in your grounds for paying the fee, for example, how do you receive the EUR 34 worth of free calls, or in other words what are your grounds for giving out EUR 8 to 34 worth of call time?'

The vast majority of those taking part for the first time, however, were unaware of the size of the fee or even the possibility of receiving one, so their will to participate was based on their personal interest in the study. At times, the situation has even been

reversed: the teens' willingness to keep in touch with the researchers through calling and SMS actually incurs costs to the teens.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1   More on SMS culture in Chapter 5.
2   At the time of the interviews, Radiolinja was Finland's second largest mobile operator.
3   Kivivuori 1992: 8.
4   Virtanen 1999: 376.
5   Alho 1989: 35.
6   Vesterinen 1999: 88.
7   *Jargon, applied anthropology.*
8   Geddes 1998: 95.
9   Newman and Benz 1998: 9.
10   The worm game (called the *Snake* or *Snake* II in Nokia models) is one of the first games included in mobile handsets. The simple game has since attained the status of a classic.
11   Puuronen 1997: 9.
12   *Jargon* 1994, *emic*.
13   Vesterinen 1999: 123.
14   Ahponen 2001: 58.
15   Vesterinen 1999: 101.
16   *Jargon, ethnography.*
17   Powdermaker 1966: 19.
18   See for example Ganguly-Scrace 1998: 44; Kelles 1984: 18-24.
19   Junkala 1999: 190; Suojanen 1997: 154.
20   Suojanen 1982: 150; see also Fetterman 1989: 12.
21   Alasuutari 1995: 83.
22   Ibid.: 100-101.
23   Cf. Geddes 1998: 94.
24   Newman and Benz 1998: 83.
25   Apart from the photographs by Juha Kolari, the illustrations in the book consist of the project's picture material.

26   The NMT (Nordic Mobile Telephone) system was operational in the Nordic countries before the launch of GSM. NMT models lacked many of the features included in the GSM standard and thus quickly became unfashionable after the roll-out of the new technology.

27   Predictive Text Input (T9) systems have been developed by mobile device manufacturers to facilitate message writing. The application is based on a built-in dictionary that enables the device to 'guess' the word the user is typing thus diminishing the time spent completing a text message.

28   *Jargon, cultural bias.*

29   Geddes 1998: 94.

30   The size of the fee has ranged from EUR 8 to EUR 80. Some have received their fee in cash while others have taken it in free call time. The size of the fee has depended on the time contributed to the research and the amount of material collected.

3 3G, 4G ...

Young mobile generations

> *Researcher:* Can you still remember the time when you didn't have a mobile phone?
> *Teemu (16):* Not really, I'm beginning to get used to always having it.

Mobile devices are grouped into different generations. The analogue ARP and NMT phones represent the first generation, developed primarily for transmitting speech; the digital GSM equipped with data features constitutes the second generation. The third generation, known as 3G, was rolled out in Japan in October 2001, and the launch of UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System) networks and services is expected in Europe in the next few years.[1]

The 3G, which enables the rapid transfer of data, enhances the transformation of mobile phones into media centres, even as its 4G follow-up is already being envisaged. The new generations broaden the range of mobile telephony by introducing features such as photography, moving image, and a more efficient way to receive material by downloading it directly from the Internet, thereby blurring the boundary between the mobile phone and the portable computer. According to the visionaries, the future mobile phone should reach, or even exceed the capabilities of today's computers.

When, in the late 1980s, a father who had received a new GSM phone from his firm gave his old NMT model to his daughter, the teenaged girl became a mobile communicator. Many in the family's immediate circle could not understand what use the teenager might have for a mobile phone. At the time, few people realised that the girl was one of the founders of a new culture. She was probably seen as an exceptionally young mobile phone owner, but not yet a representative of a new way of communicating. In the 2000s, people often refer to teenagers as the mobile phone, communications or media generation. This chapter presents a view on when and how this generation emerged, dividing the development of teen mobile communication culture into four waves, each spawning cultural change. First, however, a brief account of the technology that permitted the culture to take form.

Technological framework for the culture

The functional and cultural frame for the phenomenon consists of rapidly evolving telecommunications technology. So far, the development appears as a continuum without end. A mobile terminal and a network that supports it are crucial for the actualisation of mobile communication. For the communicator, concrete manifestations of the network include antenna towers rising above an open field, the SIM card concealed inside a mobile phone, the graphic bars on the handset screen indicating the strength of the network signal as well as the various services offered by mobile operators.

Although consumers have become familiar with the use of the mobile phone, few people can explain the SIM chip card, which is essential for the phone's operation. The SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) or GSM card is a small card inserted in a mobile communication device and containing information necessary for the identification of the subscriber and the encryption of radio traffic.[2] Use of the four-digit PIN code serves to protect the contents of the card

and prevent its illegitimate use. In practice, many users do not grasp the significance of the network or the mobile operator. For them, the invisible mobile communication culminates in the tangible mobile device. The immaterial side of mobile communication is meaningless, irrelevant information to the user, for whom it is enough that the phone remains 'alive' and 'operational'. To ensure this, the only thing to do is to keep the mobile telephone within coverage area.

Throughout the course of the research, the number of service providers or operators offering mobile services continued to increase. Until 1999, two large network operators ruled the Finnish market: Sonera (former Telecom Finland) and Radiolinja. Of the teens interviewed between 1998 and 1999, 42 percent were Radiolinja subscribers and 58 percent Sonera customers.

Sometimes, the users may be quite familiar with the issues discussed, but official sounding terminology often seems to distance them from the topic. For the teenagers, the value-added services offered by service providers are 'all that stuff you can have on your phone'. They may talk about how it's 'neat to get a picture (i.e. logo) from there'. In the interviews, we have tried to evaluate the extent of the teens' knowledge concerning mobile telecommunications. This line of questioning has sometimes put the researchers in an awkward situation, as they have been too quick to assume the teens to be familiar with the terminology and concepts they themselves have grown so accustomed to using.

> *Researcher:* How many mobile phone operators do you know to exist?
> *Milla:* No, well, no, [laughs] I don't really know anything about them.
> *Researcher:* Of the ones that you do know, which one would you say is the best?
> *Milla:* I don't really know what the 'operator' is.
> *Researcher:* Oh, right.

The functional frame of the communication is in a constant state of evolution. The launch of each new mobile device destroys the earlier culture and helps to generate a new one. The close connection between mobile communication and technology is probably the most evident in the case of SMS messaging as only the spread of GSM technology enabled the birth of the text messaging culture, which could not have emerged without the technological innovation of the Short Message Service that was originally devised for an entirely different purpose. It should be remembered, however, that the era of GSM had its predecessors in the VHF, the ARP and the NMT.

The national car radiophone network (ARP[3]) was launched in 1971, and by 1978 it covered the whole of Finland. Originally, the network was manually operated, but in 1992 it was automatised. A call placed in the ARP network could only be maintained within the area of one base station. If the phone was carried to the area of another base station, the connection was cut off. The number of ARP subscribers reached its peak in 1986 with a total of over 35,500 customers. Later, the number of users decreased gradually, having diminished to a few thousand by the termination of the network at the end of 2000.[4] ARP was not the first Finnish wireless telecommunications network, however, as it was preceded by VHF (Very High Frequency) phones developed for use by authorities. In the mid-1960s a few thousand VHF phones existed in Finland.[5]

The NMT (Nordic Mobile Telephone) 450 network was launched in Finland in 1982. By 1990, the network covered the entire country, but capacity failed to meet the unexpectedly large demand, and in 1987 the NMT 900 network was rolled out to ameliorate the quality of service. The NMT 900 network was closed down at the end of 2000, accompanied by advertising slogans announcing the 'final silencing of NMT phones'. The number of NMT users was at its highpoint in 1996 with nearly 440,000 subscribers. Since then, the number continued to fall so that by autumn 2000, the total of subscribers had sunk to 70 000. The NMT 450 network was terminated at the end of 2002.[6]

Finland was one of the first countries to introduce the GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) system in 1991,[7] although wider use of the network for commercial purposes did not begin until the following year.[8] ARP in the 70s and NMT in the 80s liberated the communicator from the cord of the fixed-line phone as well as the binds of a certain location. Despite this, the communication sprang from a continuum of telephone usage based on speech, and, even today, the value of talking appears unshaken with the transmission of human speech remaining the killer application that ultimately makes users carry the phones with them.

Like shop-bought

It is clearly unwise to completely detach a culture strongly linked to technology from its origins. Mobile communication culture is built around the technology of the mobile phone, which, like any other product, is an artefact (lat. *ars* = skill, *factum* = produce), a produce of human skill, an artificial object.[9] People's close relationship to objects is not simply physical, it is also a cultural phenomenon. It is possible to read culture from objects; shapes, manufacturing techniques, and signs of use speak of the lives, skills and dreams of the their makers, users, consumers and owners. Even issues related to people's social standing, relationships with others and the settings of their lives, as well as the surrounding structures of society, can be deducted from the objects that intertwine with their existence.[10] People's relationship to the mobile phone

The mobile phone – a window to the information society? Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

also remains very multifaceted, incorporating the actual reshaping of the device, manual skills and social imitation.

In 1997 a group of 16-year-old boys discovered that colourful exchangeable covers had become available for the most expensive mobile phone models. However, at the time, colour covers sold in the shops were scarcely available and, most importantly, rather costly. Also, they were not manufactured for all phone models. The mobile phone manufacturer Ericsson had introduced small colourful phones that the users perceived as advanced, thus colour and small size came to symbolise quality, a status element that at the time seemed to overrule functional features. Next to these novelties, the more sizeable models in the traditional black began to seem old-fashioned.

Instead of buying manufactured colour covers, the boys painted their mobiles light green, silver, or sky blue with the same paints they had used earlier to paint their mopeds and helmets. According to one of the painters: 'You look at your phone so much, it's nice to have it look a little different from time to time.'

> *Researcher:* Why did you pick this colour, green, is that your favourite colour?
> *Jami:* Well, not really, but it's kind of radical.
> *Researcher:* I suppose it was pretty cheap painting them yourself?
> *Jami:* Yeah, the paint was EUR 3 or something.
> *Researcher:* Did you paint the old covers?
> *Jami:* Yeah, the old ones.
> *Researcher:* How about now, do you change the covers according to your mood?
> *Jami:* Yeah. I changed them the day before yesterday and don't know when I'll do it again.
> *Researcher:* What do you suppose it is that makes you want to change them?
> *Jami:* I don't know, I suppose if you get bored with one, you switch to a different one.
> *Researcher:* You've got two sets now. Is that enough or are you going to get more?

Jami: One that you could paint over every week if you wanted to might be nice. Those came out so good I wouldn't like to paint over them again.
Researcher: What would be the next colour if you decided to paint another set?
Jami: Purple, I suppose, or something like that.

At the time, the boys' aim was to imitate the appearance of the existing product as closely as possible. In the end, they were happy about doing such a good job that friends were unable to tell the difference between self-painted and shop-bought covers.

Researcher: This looks real nice. Have you got any comments about it?
Jami: Everyone's said that the ones I've painted myself are real neat, and nobody would believe I've done them myself, but when they've looked at them a little closer they've said that ok, maybe you have.

Covers painted with bright colours give the boys' mobile phones a quality that makes them stand out from the standard models owned by their friends. The use value of goods is a manifestation of cultural meanings. When cultural meanings become part of an object's use value, these meanings begin to shape use of the objects, producing their use value. Because of the meanings at work in artefacts, their use value is never socially neutral, and various social groups incorporate it as part of their practical interests. Through objects, groups communicate their cultural coherence and demarcate themselves as a separate group, at the same time differentiating themselves from other groups, such as children and older people.[11] This is why the 'painter boys' were seen as forerunners and gained the respect of their immediate circle. In this sense, the colour covers were not just an aesthetic extra, but promoted the owner's status in a community.

The boundaries of mobilehood

Seen from a scientific viewpoint, the concept of the mobile phone is an abstraction that unites a variety of mobile devices through the single common feature of enabling calls. The mobile phone can be viewed as an amoeba or a chameleon the appearance of which changes with every season and with the current level of technology – the boundaries of mobilehood are constantly shifting. Informants have thus sometimes ended up pondering what type of telephone actually constitutes a mobile handset. Are all portable phones mobile phones?

> *Researcher:* Next, I would ask you to consider the situation when you first saw a mobile phone. What was the situation like, who had it and . . .
>
> *Mother:* The first time I ever saw a mobile phone would have been one of those, do you count ARPs as well?
>
> *Researcher:* Sure.
>
> *Mother:* It was this huge appliance this guy was carrying. It was probably an absolutely ancient ARP, the ones that came in a huge box. At the time . . . it was quite some time ago, sometime in the 70s. An actual mobile phone that would be on the level of the devices we have today, let me think . . . with them being everywhere these days, I haven't really thought about when they started to appear . . . sometime in the mid-80s I suppose, someone had one and everyone else stared at the thing more or less flabbergasted.
>
> *Mika (15):* The first time I remember seeing a mobile phone was in primary school, when my friend's dad had one. I remember that it was this absolutely huge Ericsson.

In 1987, the term *matkapuhelin* – the word currently used for the mobile phone, roughly translates as 'travel phone' – replaced the previously used *autoradiopuhelin* ('car radiophone')[12] in Finnish usage. Naming an innovation is an important part of the taming of a technology.[13] With the mobile phone, the renaming was also strongly linked to a profound shift in the appearance of the device.

The difference to the previous was marked: the component technology of the new NMT system had enabled manufacture of the first handheld terminals.[14] Now the mobile phone could fit into a pocket or a handbag, whereas the popular NMT model Mobira Talkman launched in 1984 still weighed some ten kilos![15]

Changes in technology have naturally affected people's perceptions of what constitutes a mobile phone. In the 2000s, young people expect phones to have the additional features of games, a clock and calendar. The phone's appearance can be altered daily and changing the colour of the handset no longer requires a visit to a retailer as the users themselves can snap the covers on and off in seconds. Retailers stock dozens of different brands of mobile phones, and hundreds of different models are on offer at any given time. Despite the wide range of supply, Nokia still remains the absolute market leader. According to a common estimate, some 75% of mobile phones sold in Finland are manufactured by Nokia, and as the retail value of Nokia phones remains high even when sold second-hand, they tend to remain in circulation after abandonment by the initial user.

The Finns interviewed commonly used the term *nokialainen* to denote a mobile phone manufactured by Nokia. In fact, the word seemed to be more or less synonymous with the whole concept of the mobile phone. Talk about other brands was sometimes muffled by the plethora of Nokia references, as if the interviews were taking place in a 'Nokialand' where there was no need for any other devices. Between 1998 and 1999, 86 percent of the teens interviewed owned a mobile phone manufactured by Nokia. One tenth of the teens had a model by Ericsson while the rest were split between other brands such as Panasonic, Philips and Sony. The representation of Nokia owners thus far outstrips that of other brands, but the difference is likely to be proportional to the popularity of the different manufacturers in Finland.

Unlike in many other countries, Finnish mobile operators do not provide users with mobile phones for a nominal charge in ex-

change for their commitment as subscribers. Despite regulations against subsidised handsets, the enormous increase in supply has dropped the prices; a new phone can be acquired for less than EUR 170 when not long ago the price would have been at least three-fold. In the mid-90s, the purchase of a mobile phone easily swallowed one half of the average worker's monthly income. The purchase of mobile phones has long constituted status-related consumption: buying a handset equals display and expression of social status through consumption of artefacts.[16] The fashionable choice is based on the spirit of the times and not, for instance, on an opportunity to make an economical purchase. On the contrary, a certain product may be opted for precisely because of its elevated price, to indicate that money is not an obstacle.[17]

When the term 'mobile phone' is mentioned in the data from 1997, what is being referred to is a device largely different from those of more recent years. In the first interviews, the clock and calculator features were considered a luxury or even an unnecessary extra, and the opportunity to access the Internet via the mobile phone appeared as a distant future vision. The informants emphasised the communicative aspect of the mobile phone and stressed the importance of features that today are standard equipment in all models. The simple fact of carrying the device was still problematic a few years ago as the handsets were large, heavy, and required frequent charging.

> *Researcher:* What were the features that you absolutely wanted in the phone?
> *Mother:* GSM was the only option for me because you get the caller's number, which you can't see in NMT. That's very important. And also the fact that it would keep a record of all calls made, received and unanswered. These are really important points.

It makes sense to divide mobile phones into two categories according to their size and functions: actual mobile phones used primarily with one hand, and somewhat larger multimedia-enabled

Communicators resembling laptop computers and generally operated with both hands.[18] Regardless of the differences in size, today even the largest models can fit into a decent-sized pocket. In the early 2000s, the smallest mobile phones weigh less than 100 grams. Small size continues to be a desired property in mobile phones, although the question of how small the devices can get without interfering with usability has raised a certain amount of discussion.

Fifteen-year-old Iiro owned the most expensive mobile phone on the market at the time (the price of the phone could have bought three of the same manufacturer's least expensive model). The handset was small and inconspicuous and could be compared to jewellery or a pocket mirror:

> *Iiro:* And it looks so good. Fits in the palm of your hand. If the teacher comes to you and asks for it you can just say: 'I've got nothing here.'
> *Researcher:* So you're happy with the way it looks [chrome covers]?
> *Iiro:* Yeah, I think it looks good because you can check your hair in it, see if it's all over the place.
> *Researcher:* Do you polish it, or how do you keep it clean?
> *Iiro:* I wipe it with my sleeve sometimes if it's real smudged.
> *Researcher:* Where do you usually keep it?
> *Iiro:* In my jacket pocket, and it fits inside the palm of my hand, so there, or sometimes inside a glove, in the winter, when you've got big gloves and you can fit it in there.

The handmade look

The teens were asked to bring their mobile phones to the interviews and, almost without fail, it would be sitting on the edge of the table while the owner was talking to the researcher. The occasions where the mobile emerged from the pocket or the backpack in the original state it once left the factory were few and far between. Most of the teens had altered the menus and ringing tones

to suit their individual tastes. The standard grey, black or navy blue covers were rarely encountered. In addition to the colour covers, the devices were decorated with stickers, special antennas and batteries or mobile jewellery, such as a ring around the antenna. Some of the decorations were little more than fashion fads: for example, flashing antennas seem to have disappeared almost completely.

In its simplest form, varying the mobile phone's appearance involves changing the colour covers, and the most industrious paint their covers themselves. Yet today, the painting culture is completely different to what it was three years ago. The painted colour covers are no longer expected to be replicas of products already on the market. These days, the painters aim at distinction. Many schools and friendship groups have their own 'mobile painters', who create unique covers. The ideal phone has changed from looking the same as everyone else's to one that stands out from the crowd, and the handmade or the self-made look has become trendy.

> *Kalle:* I bought one 'cause a friend from school paints them, or someone I know, not a friend exactly, but I know him.
> *Researcher:* Could you show me again. Did you get to decide on the colour [red] beforehand or did they have different paints you could choose from?
> *Kalle:* There were different kinds. He had ready-made samples there. He can paint real well.
> Researcher: This looks great. Is this your favourite colour?
> *Kalle:* No, this is just because, this electric blue type of colour is the most common in our school, and there weren't many reds, two people I think have red, me and this other guy.

The year 1998 can be described as a turning point in Finnish mobile communication, where the number of mobile phones exceeded that of fixed-line telephones. The development has continued in the same direction. Internationally, the situation in Finland is rare, as in most countries the number of fixed-line connections

still exceeds that of mobile subscribers.[19] A relatively recent phenomenon is that mobile phones have turned into ordinary commodities that are either discarded or recycled when they are no longer wanted. As consumers' demands have increased, second-hand phones no longer find buyers as easily as before. Moreover, the termination of the NMT 900 network rendered a significant number of handsets useless. These developments have also evoked public discussion on the disposal of mobile phone batteries and plastic parts, with the users wanting mobile telephony to become ecological consumption.

The birth of mobile culture

While the first interviews for the study were conducted in autumn 1997, we have here chosen to trace the roots of the phenomenon to 1995. This is, of course, a matter of interpretation. By young users we refer to those teenagers who at the time of the research were in possession of their own mobile device. Before receiving a personal mobile phone, many teens had been able to use or borrow a mobile phone common to the family. The five waves of development presented here are based on the perceptions related to the researchers by teens and their parents and teachers living amidst the phenomenon. In this sense, the statements are based on highly subjective experiences and observations.

'I'd say they started to appear a couple of years ago,' was the response of a female teacher from the capital area when asked about the first appearance mobile phones in school (interview held in 1997). The teacher's personal interest in technology may have had a bearing on her observations. The same year, another female teacher from a different school reported that she had only seen a single mobile phone in her school so far. A moment later, a male teacher working in the same school gave a detailed account of his wide-ranging observations on teens' use of mobile telephony: for

instance, that very morning two boys had been calling each other in class just to 'try it out and see what it's like'. In the early stages of the culture, regional differences were probably more prominent: the pioneers were perhaps more easily found in towns and cities than in the country.

First-wave pioneers

> *Father:* In the summer, when he went to do the car job, they had no phone there of course, so it made it easier for him [being able to call on his mobile].
> *Researcher:* Which car job was that?
> *Father:* The go-karting track, he was in charge of the track on his own. He did that for two summers. So the mobile was a big help in that. So it came with the job. And boys figure out how to make it fun, too, don't they?

Teen mobile phone culture in Finland goes back to 1995. The culture is thus relatively young. The first wave can be situated in the school year 1995–1996. At the time, mobile-owning teenagers remained a rare occurrence and were noticeable in their environment. In this context, the first encounters with the device had stuck in the informants' memory, as they in some way reversed the standard order of things. One female teacher commented on a mobile phone owned by one of her pupils: 'I thought it was nicer than the one I had.'

Typically, first-wave mobile teens were young people from very wealthy families or teenagers who were already working and thus earning some of their spending money. Another group of early adopters constituted children of low-income families who had purchased a mobile phone to support their earning, because they worked in a hamburger restaurant or ran a babysitting circle, and having a personal mobile phone enabled them to stay on top of things, be available for shifts, etc. One female teacher recalled a

former student of hers: 'He was a businessman, he had his own firm at the time, or he was setting one up, an aspiring young businessman. And naturally he would underline his situation with his use of the mobile phone. But people were a little amused by it.'

Another female teacher remembers why one of her students needed a mobile phone:

> *Teacher:* I remember, in the middle of one French class, the 'princess's' phone rang and she went out into the hallway.
> *Researcher:* How old was she?
> *Teacher:* Sixteen.
> *Researcher:* Can you say what type of students have them?
> *Teacher:* This particular princess, with her it was because she had to be on call constantly, because she models. She has to be available all the time – in case she gets a gig.

These first-wave mobile owners were almost without exception over 16 years of age; there is hardly any mention of users younger than this in the material. It should be remembered in this context that, during the first wave, even an 18-year-old was looked upon as a young mobile phone owner. At the time, teens' use of the mobile phone was often regarded with the same social disapproval that has later been linked to use of mobile telephony by children. As a teacher who had come across a mobile teen of less than 16 years of age related: 'It really made me laugh to think what kind of parents would give a mobile phone to children that age to take to school, or would even get one for them. And the other kids seemed very excited about it, they seemed to admire the lucky owner.'

In the early stages of the phenomenon, mobiles seem to have been more numerous in large towns and especially in the capital area. The device itself continued to be associated with 1980s yuppie culture, and the teens' views were no exception. Fifteen-year-old Reija, who lived in a well-to-do residential area, had this to say about conspicuous use of the mobile phone: 'We were just talking about how [our school] is thought of as pretty posh. So whenever

someone passes by they'll see everyone standing outside trying out their ringing tones. That's a little creepy!'

Thus the teenage pioneers of mobile telephony were mainly children of wealthy families, and for them the mobile phone was but one more item in an array of possessions used to construct one's image. Still too expensive for the masses, the mobile phone had not yet become a street fashion accessory or a trend product. In the words of a female teacher: 'A mobile was a sign of an active young man or woman.' New handsets were expensive, some up to EUR 500 or even EUR 800, and the devices were large; because of their considerable price and size, mobile phones could not be acquired on impulse or carried inconspicuously.

A feature that was characteristic of the initial stage and did not recur in subsequent waves was that of the borrowed mobile, usually from parents, to be used on a certain occasion. A male teacher reminisces: 'Even a borrowed phone was a precious object among students. The kids would show them off to each other. I would say it was clearly a status symbol.' Owning a mobile was associated with the adult world and often seen as a symbol of independence.

Second-wave culture

Fifteen-year-old Jenni had the following thoughts in November 1997:

> I'd say they [mobile phones] began to be around more last spring [1997]. My sister who had been abroad as an exchange student, when after one year she came to Helsinki, she was pretty terrified when she noticed that suddenly everyone had a mobile. On the other side of the Atlantic they don't that much. I'd say it happened last summer, for a lot of people.

The second wave, when the devices became more common, took place during the school year 1996–1997. Mobile phones spread

from town schools to the country and from older to younger students, from general upper secondary schools to the final year of comprehensive school.

> They became common in the last year, they've appeared in the course of one year and more or less exploded in the spring [of 1997], when the final-year students were beginning to turn eighteen, last spring, that's when they started to be about, everyone seemed to be getting one. (Male teacher, autumn 1997)

By this time, most school classes with pupils aged 13 to 15 had at least one mobile owner. As the mobile phone became a common topic of conversation and an object of interest, the teachers described the sudden epidemic of mobile fever:

> *Teacher:* I myself, I mean, I'm completely . . . I got this mobile phone for myself, it's been a year now, it's my virtual pet. I've showed it to all of my students. It's completely ancient now, of course, when I compare it to the ones they have. I'm really curious about their phones, we measure them and everything.
> *Researcher:* What did they say when you showed it to them?
> *Teacher:* They smirked a bit and thought I was terribly childish. But they did examine it thoroughly and nodded to say that it was ok. They did sort of hint that it wasn't exactly the hottest one on the market. Sort of saying, ok, if that's the one you've got.

The youngest mobile owners were already below 16 years of age, though not yet below 15, as the age of confirmation, 15, seemed to constitute a rigid limit for mobile ownership. The mobile phone soon became a popular confirmation present, and a common gift in other contexts, too, thus facilitating parents' decisions on what to get teens for Christmas or their birthday.

> There's been a lot of them this autumn in particular, I think the most popular confirmation present [in summer 1997] has probably been a mobile, because they've become a lot more common with people that age. (Female teacher, autumn 1997)

Families still felt that rational grounds were necessary to explain the purchase. The most commonly cited reasons for acquiring a mobile phone were the need for more communication within the family, and parents' desire to increase security in the teen's life in situations perceived as potentially dangerous, such as when travelling or spending time with friends on the streets at night.

It became increasingly common for teens to buy their own mobiles, the most inexpensive GSM models, and they were often saving up 'to get a better phone'. The mobile handset no longer symbolised just wealth and status or the transition to the adult world. Entertainment and amusement emerged as the new central meanings. A 13-year-old girl explained how, for her, the significance of the mobile phone came close to that of a toy, something that is nice to have as an object – a telegotchi.

The prices of mobiles fell to the same price range as quality Walkmen, bicycles or portable TVs, with the consequence that an increasing portion of parents were able to purchase them for their children.

> *Sari (16):* Out of my friends, I'd say the rich ones had them. Others didn't really. So it was pretty much a sign of a rich kid. Allowed them to show off a bit. But now everyone has them. Since they've gotten so cheap and all. You can get a mobile pretty cheap these days.
> *Researcher:* Were these the sort of people that were the first in other things too?
> *Sari:* I guess you could say so. You can tell by just looking at them that they are into brands and things, you can see that they wear designer clothes.

At the same time, the handsets became smaller and easier to carry around, as they could fit in pockets, and their appearance became more attractive, with user-changeable colour covers as an alternative to the basic black. The mobile acquired a personal touch and was transformed into a fashion accessory; the appearance of the phone became an expression of the owner's personality.

Third-wave explosion

During the school year 1997–1998, in the third wave of the phenomenon, the mobile culture of teenagers spread at an explosive rate. Suddenly, everyone seemed to have a mobile phone, with the youngest mobile users already 13- to 14-year-olds. The penetration rate was far from 100 percent, but as mobile owners used and carried their devices conspicuously, the image of a large number of devices was enhanced.

The wide diffusion of mobile telephony had the consequence that the device began to function as a symbol of belonging. Sixteen-year-old Pasi concluded that without a mobile phone 'you would miss all the good stuff that you get with having one. A friend could be trying to reach you and would get no answer even though they'd have something really funny to tell you.' Parents, too, related that the pressure for purchasing a phone no longer originated in the families but in the teens' friendship circles. In the following excerpt from an interview, the eldest daughter had been using the mobile phone for three years already. Her 14-year-old sister and 12-year-old brother were both aspiring to get their own handsets.

> *Researcher:* So did the smaller kids take the example of their big sister with the mobile phone thing?
> *Mother:* I suppose there's been some of that as well, but mostly it's been their friends at school. When someone else has one they start to think wouldn't it be nice if they could be part of that crowd by having one too. The girl was happy when she went to school after Christmas, since she was one of the kids who had got one, so that was real nice for her.

The constant lowering of mobile phone prices brought the devices within the reach of almost everyone. One female teacher described the situation like this: 'And then it's become, with girls for example, a general safety measure for worried mothers, so they can get a hold of the girl. It doesn't have a social [background] to it anymore, in

my opinion, anyone can have them these days, mobiles.' Children of single, unemployed or student parents also began to get mobiles. Thus, mobile phone ownership no longer differentiated between socioeconomic groups or revealed the user's financial position. Teachers seemed surprised at how common the devices had grown.

> *Researcher:* Does it say something about the student's background, personality or things like that, can you say that a certain type of student might have one?
> *Teacher:* No, not really. The first case was a son of a pretty wealthy family, but it seems to me children of all social groups are beginning to have them now.

The newest mobile phones, however, still retained their value as an indication of social status. Furthermore, teens began to have more sophisticated and more expensive phone models. It was no longer sufficient simply to own a handset; the phone had to represent a certain make or model. The NMT models that represented earlier mobile technology quickly became dated and socially unserviceable so that in a short space of time, perfectly functional models became 'antiques' that no longer met the teens' requirements.

> *Mother:* She [daughter, 16] seemed quite ok with it, as long as she had a mobile phone. It wasn't until afterwards that she began the terrible whining. It's ancient and so heavy and I'd need to get such and such a model. Her friends only began to get them after she had got hers. Nobody in her sister's [14] class had them either, except for one boy, I think.
> *Researcher:* So this [the NMT model 'Ringo'] was OK at the time?
> Mother: Yeah. As long as it was a mobile. It was a toy more than anything else.

The third-wave observations reveal yet another interesting phenomenon in the habit of transferring the used mobile phone to the mother, since 'it's still ok for mum'. The newest and the most expensive mobile phone in the family had, with increasing frequency,

been acquired for the teenager. Special reasons were no longer necessary for the purchase and the phone was acquired simply because everyone else had one. At the beginning of the third wave, mobile phones were strongly visible both in schools and in the teens' leisure activities as teens' mobile communication began to be increasingly centred on their friendship circles, shifting away from the family. For this reason, teens wanted to carry their phones with them where they knew other teens were going to be present.

Everyday devices of the fourth wave

Since the latter part of 1999, the phenomenon has entered its fourth wave, where the mobile has become a right – or responsibility – of everyone. The cheapest mobiles can be acquired for less than EUR 15, so it is no longer the price of purchase that is an obstacle but rather the usage costs that may prove problematic. The age structure of the users has also shifted so that the youngest mobile communicators are less than seven years of age. In fact, many young people can't recall what life was like before the mobile

You, me and my mobile: The mobile phone became the third party of teen relationships. Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

phone. The use of the phone is often perceived as natural, necessary and unavoidable. In the words of a female teacher:

> *Teacher:* It seems somehow that [the mobile phone] might represent status for older people but with young people it's something very ordinary, they don't really make that much out of it.
> *Researcher:* So they've adopted it as part of their everyday lives?
> *Teacher:* Yes, they've been using it almost their whole lives, or their youth at least, so it's nothing that extraordinary, it's just like anything else.

A male teacher had this to say about the present stage of the phenomenon: 'It seems to me that [the teens] have a pretty relaxed attitude towards it, that it's just an instrument through which you can reach people. They may be more at ease with it than the older generation, who are not as accustomed to using it.' Today, it seems a matter of course that 13- to 14-year-olds have mobile phones, and in this respect, the talk about teenage mobile users being 'too young' sounds quite out of date.

In the fourth wave, two opposing forces are in action: the use is becoming increasingly versatile, but at the same time the device is reinforcing its status as a simple tool in everyday life. Depending on the point of view, one can talk about an enrichment in usage culture or a penetration of mobile culture into every area of life. Questions have been raised as to whether the mobile phone creates a powerful dependency and turns teens into adults who are unable to manage their everyday lives without a technological aid. Parents and educators have worried about whether today's youth would experience their lives as 'odd' or 'uncontrollable' if deprived of the soothing presence of their mobile phone. For 16-year-old Jarno, the mobile phone also functions as a watch:

> *Researcher:* What would your school day be like if you forgot to take the mobile phone with you one morning?
> *Jarno:* I have sometimes.

Researcher: Is that a catastrophe?

Jarno: It's a little odd [laughs]. You start to pick up the phone to see what time it is. The clock function is what I use the most, my friends are always asking me the time. Not many people wear a watch anymore. The clock in the mobile is the only one I've got.

Researcher: Have you got a watch at all?

Jarno: I do at home but I can't be bothered to wear it.

Researcher: Is it too difficult?

Jarno: I don't know. I used to carry a wristwatch, but then I stopped and just began using the clock on my mobile.

The teens' use of the mobile phone has formed routines that are no longer questioned: the phone is carried and remains switched on nearly everywhere. Distinct forms of mobile culture have emerged for girls, boys, groups of friends and romantic couples. One difference from the mobile culture of the early stages of the phenomenon is clear. In the beginning, teens acquired mobiles so they could be available to anyone at any time. The situation has reversed since then and, at present, teens use their GSM phones for active social selection. If the caller is unwanted, the teenager can reject the call with one push of a button. The mobile phone has become a tool for personal life management and the social selection of friends. As such, the mobile is an instrument of personal power.

Fifth-wave dimensions

It seems likely that we are already experiencing some aspects of the fifth wave of the phenomenon. What are its central characteristics? There are five dimensions that are manifest throughout the data and seem to be getting stronger by the day: (1) a need for personalisation, (2) a rise in written communication, (3) the emergence of (sub)cultural traits in small groups, (4) the collective nature of usage and (5) the endless demand for new content. Other central concerns are the safety and protection of the individual. While

teens shudder at the thought of constant, unwavering control, some of the parents are interested in the opportunity to monitor their children's actions through mobile technology.

It has been widely marketed that the mobile device is an extension of the self. Based on the data, we can conclude that current developments are leading us toward a situation where what is fashionable is no longer determined by what others have but what they don't have. Personalisation covers both modification of the device and individual usage. Taken to extremes, personalisation may include signs of wear or dispelling the image of technology in favour of a more 'handmade' appearance. The device is expected to adapt to the user's moods, to live and evolve together with its owner. Young people want technology to show a human touch or display signs of past usage.

> *Researcher:* If you had your own computer, would you still write in the notebook?
> *Kirsi (16):* Yeah, in my notebooks. I like them. With notebooks it's . .. if you've got a computer, you can't see if you've written a lot in it. You can see it in a notebook, you can see if you've written a lot, you can see that it's been used.
> *Researcher:* Is that why it means so much to you, because you notice how many pages have been used?
> *Kirsi:* Yeah, maybe that's it. You can't see it with a computer, if you, like, use a disc or something, if there's stuff written on it or not, or if you've written on it many times or not. Yeah, maybe that's why.

The material also yields some evidence of ecological thinking, as although the teens seem reluctant to entirely reject the flow of new mobile models, some would like the stream to slow down. The phenomenon of personalisation represents a tendency toward everyday technology, toward toppling technology from its pedestal or breaking earlier conventions regarding technology. Young people do not necessarily want high technology to look like high technology; Finnish girls, for instance, chose to decorate their mobiles with nail polish.

Juhani (17): Then there's this new thing, girls with 5110s painting them with nail polish. Some of them turn out pretty neat.
Researcher: What kinds have you seen?
Juhani: Well, pearl colours for instance, blue and that kind of stuff.

Researcher: What paint did you use?
Sanni (15): Nail polish.
Researcher: Pretty neat.
Sanni: It would go well with your outfit.
Researcher: Yeah. We're both having a blue period. When did you paint the covers?
Sanni: I painted them about a month or two ago. Then last night I gave it a new coat when I was varnishing my nails.

The mobile device is perceived as a tool for person-to-person communication. It appears, however, that shared use is emerging alongside private use, as the mobile device does not merely support and promote the self of the owner but also serves to enhance group solidarity. The aspect of selfhood is accompanied by the reinforcement of 'ushood'. Couples and groups create their own mobile practices and 'secret cultures' that may be impenetrable to outsiders. It seems clear that the notion of youth continues to entail an element of rebellion against previous generations. This inherent element of youth culture can be detected in the way that, rather than imitating adult culture, teen mobile phone usage prefers to tread its own paths. This is a tendency that is likely to continue into the future.

In Finland, the number of text messages sent has attained the number of mobile calls and, in part, surpassed it. The use of SMS constitutes content production by the users themselves. At the same time, the range of ready-made content continues to broaden, as WAP and the mobile Internet are further diversifying mobile communication based on text and image. Crossing the boundaries between different media seems to be highlighted in this development, with the mobile phone emerging as the ultimate medium. It may not be much of an exaggeration to say that, while the upcoming

UMTS technology is still being developed, users are already well prepared for the use of third generation mobile services. The young fluently mix content from the Internet, print media, the television and music. For the moment, it would seem that the young mobile generation have a lead on technology.

It is worth keeping in mind, however, that the apparent progressiveness of teens may be illusory. As 12-year-old Timo stated in January 1998: 'It would be pretty complicated, but I suppose I'd take the Communicator.' Already in the pilot stage of the study, the interviews were packed with teens' dreams about this 'Web phone'. In reality, it is cost that hinders usage. So far, the costs of a wireless venture onto the Internet have proven too expensive for teens, even though the established mobile discourse keeps declaring how 'it would be nice to surf the Net'.

> *Researcher:* If you could have any phone you wanted right now, what would that be?
> *Rami (15):* It would probably be the Communicator.
> *Researcher:* Why's that?
> *Rami:* It would be like, you could do a lot of stuff with it, it wouldn't just be a phone. It's the Internet that's interesting, since I don't have a computer.

> *Researcher:* If you could have any phone you wanted, which one would you pick?
> *Salla (13):* I'm pretty happy with the one I have. I don't think I could even use a phone with too many functions. Maybe the new one by Nokia with fax, the Internet and the keyboard. That would be pretty neat. It would be nice to surf the Internet with that.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

1   See for instance Penttinen 1999 and Walke 1998.
2   *Matkaviestinsanasto* 1993, *SIM card*.
3   The acronym derives from the word *'autoradiopuhelin'*, which is
         Finnish for 'car radio phone'.
4   On the development of ARP technology see for instance Häikiö
         1998: 29; Penttinen 1999: 10; *Televiestintätilasto* 2000: 56; and
         Volotinen 1999: 172.
5   Häikiö 1998: 25-27.
6   On the development of the NMT network, see for instance *Case
         Mobile Finland,* 2000: 50; Häikiö 1998, 34-39; *Televiestintätilasto*
         2000: 56; and http://www.sonera.fi/pressinfo/tiedotteet/
         FinSonera2001/2001/68.
7   Häikiö 1998: 130-131.
8   Penttinen 1999: 15.
9   See *Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, *artefact*.
10   Kiuru 1999: 219.
11   Ilmonen 1993: 204.
12   Häikiö 1998: 39.
13   Pantzar 1996: 51; cf. also Bausinger.
14   Volotinen 1999: 173.
15   Bruun and Wállen 1999: 68(69.
16   *Jargon, conspicuous consumption.*
17   Toivonen 1999: 165.
18   Väänänen-Vainio-Mattila and Ruuska 2000: 171.
19   *Tiedolla tietoyhteiskuntaan II* 1999: 26-27.

4 INNOVATING CULTURE

New uses for new objects

Everyday gadgets

'Can we manage without technology?' asks Information researcher Kai Ekholm. Our answer is that the question needs rephrasing, as it is technology that can't manage without us.[1] This crystallises the whole idea of user-oriented and human-centred technology. Even the best of services could not become established without a user. The most sophisticated electronic device will disappear from the market if there is no demand for it. Technology follows the simplest natural law: find your niche or become extinct. Coming into contact with the new and the unfamiliar raises the subject of fears and prejudices. Certainly, the development of technology cannot be discussed without evaluating the various effects of that technology. What kinds risks are involved? Views on technological development range from a belief in progress to imagining of various horror scenarios in which humans are overpowered by technology.[2]

Sociologist Mika Pantzar has described the fears, prejudices and elements of resistance associated with the novelties of different periods. Inventions such as the radio, bicycle, television, car and the telephone have all gone through a process of cultural assimilation. The landline telephone, for example, was considered a scientific toy or a status symbol of little use for the general population with the possible exception of serving as a form of mass media.

With each new innovation, the taming and establishment of the technology has been preceded by the stages of enthusiasm, resistance, and stabilisation. In the end the novelties are transformed into invisible parts of everyday life, both enabling activities and limiting them.[3] This cycle of technology also applies to the mobile phone; its label as a yuppie status symbol has gradually worn off, leaving us with a useful object for everyday use.

The mobile phone is one of those things that make life easier, that seem to find their place automatically and that, after a while, one no longer thinks about, write sociologist J.P. Roos, who in 1993 produced a groundbreaking article on the use of mobile communication in Finland, and sociologist Tommi Hoikkala. According to these scholars, the mobile phone is a gadget that is deeply rooted in everyday life but has not yet evolved to its full potential. The mobile phone is like the wheel: some of its many uses are probably yet to be invented.[4] Timo Kopomaa, who has studied the emergence the of Finnish mobile phone society, illustrated the passage of the mobile phone into an everyday device by pointing out that the question 'Who has a portable phone?' has been replaced by the question 'Why doesn't everyone have a mobile phone yet?'[5] In line with this way of thinking, 17-year-old Marja compares the mobile phone to a washing machine: 'It's become pretty common, a bit like the fixed-line phone or the TV or the video. People don't go on about it saying: "Hey, you know we got this really neat washing machine yesterday." It's just "OK, you've got a mobile too, can I get your number?"'

In his thesis on cultural anthropology, Tommi Sulkala has studied the Finns' belief in technology through the myth of progress connected with the mobile phone. Mobile phone users expressed strong ethnocentric feelings of how their current way of life, which is greatly affected by technology, remains the best possible alternative, and how people in Western societies today are living a life that is more meaningful than that of people living in more 'primitive' conditions. According to Sulkala, some of the interviews also yielded evidence of a dichotomist approach to technol-

ogy as the informants' relationships to technology seemed to incorporate two antagonistic forces, one emphasising progress and the other doubting whether technological development really is taking us in the right direction.[6]

Novelties in everyday life

Cultural researchers have long been interested in people's daily lives, but the scientific definition of everyday life remains frail or at least arguable. What do we mean when we say we study the everyday lives of people? For instance, how frequently can special occasions take place in everyday life? If day-to-day life is made up of routines, do the variations in these routines also constitute everyday life? In order to become a target of scientific examination, a phenomenon has to be distinct in some way. Themes that appear the most 'trivial' may never be examined from a scientific viewpoint, as research tends to focus on certain peaks that emerge from the sea of everyday life and are only actualised in a certain context. In view of the practicalities of research, it is often clearer to limit data collection to areas such as documenting children's new day-care lore or the fast-food culture of teenagers rather than mapping the daily practices or silent treatment strategies in the quarrelling culture of relationships. An event that is firmly connected with mate-
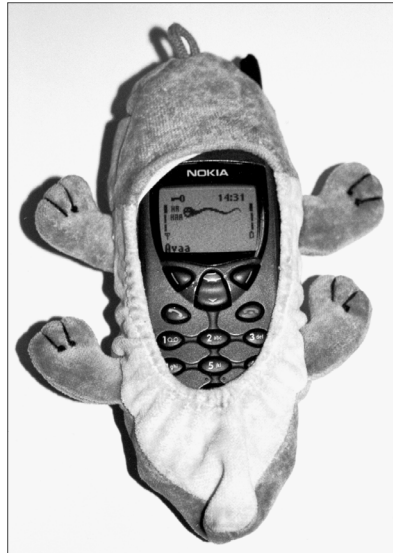
Accessories designed to carry and protect the mobile also provide a 'human touch' by personalising the device.
Picture: Marianne Partanen, 2001.

rial culture or a certain time or place, often containing a strong ritualistic element, is more easily documented with pictures, words and objects than a phenomenon that is located in the undefined daily lives of people. Furthermore, waves of great change, such as the permeation of society by mobile phones, which is clearly visible in the streets, or the emergence of the mobile information society, are easier to perceive than an individual tradition of a single person or usage culture, which, admittedly, usually builds upon wider currents in society.

Leea Virtanen, who in her research has explored Finnish folklore, asks the question 'What type of material tends to be easily left out if the aim of the research is to depict the reality of society?' Her answer is that data related to issues that are very common and obvious for all may be difficult to see as worth collecting. In the British TV show *Men Behaving Badly*, the main characters Gary and Tony discuss how people spending hours in front of the television, like they themselves do, is never shown on TV. Everyday life harbours many habits that attract no attention precisely because of their ordinary nature and regularity of occurrence.[7] Despite the wide attention it has gained, research on the use of mobile telephony appears, in part, to have fallen into one of these triviality traps. We will substantiate this claim in the following paragraphs.

Despite the fact that, almost without exception, inquiries and studies on published during recent years pay attention to how the communication device turns into a useful object of everyday life, cultural traits such as the content of calls, sometimes seen as trivial, have gained very little attention. The everyday nature of the device is frequently understood to mean the same as wide proliferation. Researcher Pasi Mäenpää, who has examined the Finns' use of mobile communication in their everyday lives, claims that the announcement 'Hi, I'll be there soon' is the most common type of mobile call.[8] This may well be true, but so far there has been little wider empirical research on the structure and content of mobile calls. Social psychologist Derek R. Rutter, who has conducted re-

search on the use of the fixed-line phone, concludes that research on telephone behaviour has been limited by the fact that studies on both private and professional use of the telephone have focused on the attitudes people have toward the use of the phone and that in fact, relatively little information has been gathered on the actual event of the call or the result of the process.[9] The question thus remains, what really happens when people actually use their mobiles instead of talking about using them?

Fragmentary pieces of everyday life and micro-level events, such as voice calls, taking place throughout the day are difficult to capture. The number of mobile terminals or the fashionable colour covers are not hidden from the researcher in the way that phone conversations, perceived as intimate, are. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that the apparently obvious and 'natural' character of the subject – the mobile phone being used for talking – has kept researchers from exploring the issue more broadly, even though contemporary technology allows us to record of the speech of people on the move. This research field extends all the way from the length of calls, their main theme, and mobile etiquette to such untouched areas as conventions for answering and ending a call, voice control and phone-related sayings and vocabulary, to mention but a few.

For many years, Finland was the number one country in statistics assessing the use of mobile devices in relation to population size and still remains one of the top five countries in the prevalence of mobile communications. In 2000 Hong Kong and Taiwan both surpassed Finland with 80% of inhabitants possessing a mobile phone. The other two countries above Finland are Austria and Italy. In Finland, the corresponding figure was 72.6 percent. The figures for Iceland, Norway and Sweden are very similar to those in Finland.[10] A survey conducted in the Helsinki area in spring 2000 showed that 68% of 10- to 18-year-olds and as many as a third of 10-year-olds had a personal mobile phone.[11] Finnish teenagers and their mobiles, as well as mobile owning children, have been the

subject of frequent reports to the international audience. In general, instead of focusing on what it is Finns actually do with their mobile phones in their daily lives, the news has concentrated on the ownership of the mobile communication device, which in the case of Finland can be said to constitute a cultural grand narrative. In addition to ownership, certain curiosities or individual stories, such as the use of mobile chat services, which has so far remained in the margins of the phenomenon, have been considered newsworthy by the international media. This is comparable to the media's continued interest in Japanese i-mode girls fascinated with the possibilities of email through the mobile Internet.

This is why we claim that research on the use of mobile telephony is regrettably often limited to an analysis of prevalence and volume of usage. The structure of the Finnish mobile information society can, naturally, be detected in figures like these, but its contents are to be found elsewhere. The ever-evolving content is created by the users. Communication researcher Marja-Leena Viherä, who has envisioned the future of civil society, states that culturally, the most essential question from the citizen's point of view is whether the citizen is a mere consumer of products or whether he or she also acts as their producer.[12] Of most importance, in this case, are the materials produced by users themselves, not the products offered to them. It is the minute details of everyday life that afford sense to the usage.

The viewpoint stressing the prevalence of terminal devices as the measure of an information society is rarely the most useful. In theory, every Finn has access to the Internet and email through the public library system. In practice, the obstacles are to be found elsewhere: the library is far away, the user's ICT skills are insufficient, or the library is not open when the user would have the opportunity to use the services. The situation can be compared to the media culture generated by television. In 1997, 38% of Finnish children had their own television set. In the age group of 15-year-olds, 60% had a TV in their room and 22% even had their own

VCR.[13] The number of televisions in children's bedrooms no doubt says something of the standard of living in Finnish families. Nevertheless, a more interesting approach from the point of view of media culture, might be to focus on the interaction between the television and the viewer, or the negotiation of boundaries between reality and fiction. Instead of the device used for transmission, this type of consideration focuses on the content of the medium, such as the direct or indirect reflections of the emotional world of soap operas and the brutal violence of late-night television, in the lives of children and teenagers.

Everyday innovations

The study of innovations and novelties is an essential part of ethnological research. Old vs new, or traditional vs modern is a setting that no cultural researcher can overlook. The basic concepts of innovation research are the innovation process (the adoption of an artefact or a habit by a population), innovators (who are the first to adopt a new artefact or a habit) and innovation obstacles (the factors that hinder the adoption of a new artefact or a habit). The diffusion process consists of the spread of cultural loans and cultural traits from one culture to another through geographical and historical contacts.[14]

Media researcher Sonja Kangas and social anthropologist Kaisa Coogan, who have explored young people's use of the Internet and mobile telephony, criticise the way in which all young people have been labelled as innovators. According to Kangas and Coogan, teenagers do not constitute trend-setting virtuosos, even though recent years have yielded numerous accounts of how the young act as unprejudiced innovators, inventing and adopting new uses for both the mobile phone and the Internet. In reality, many young people experience anxiety as a result of the expectations directed toward them, not every young person is interested in information

technologies, and few of those that are keep themselves up-to-date of the prospects for the mobile phone or the Internet.[15]

The claim is probably justified if the concept of innovation is approached from the vantage point of a new service or device. However, the picture is likely to change if the concept is detached from the chain of actions aimed solely at enhancing technological product development. Some years ago, teenagers came up with a useful innovation to facilitate everyday life. They realised that it was possible to check the time by sending a message to the service provider's free bill status query: with the SMS message concerning the current state of their mobile bill, the user also received information as to the time at which the message was sent. As the first GSM phones did not have a built-in clock feature, the users needed other means to check the time. From the teens' point of view, the innovation was functional, useful and economical. For the service provider, the situation was almost the opposite as some of the teens made dozens of queries a week for this purpose alone and, as could be expected, each time check placed a strain on the actual bill information service.

The possible interpretations are broadened when, instead of the technological viewpoint, the phenomenon is observed with an eye on the concept of social innovation. It is particularly important to understand the types of social innovations people produce when they are incorporating various new technological solutions as part of their everyday lives. This approach enables interaction between technological and social innovations so that they support each other, and the new solutions gain actual commercial significance.[16]

A simple example of a social innovation would be the use of the phone book feature as a letter of reference to one's social network. This personal note pad is quickly transformed into a measure of the owner's social network. Frequently, the 'phone book' of a teen's mobile phone is filled to the last memory slot. An empty memory can be interpreted as symbolic of an empty life. For 17-year-old Jaana, it is important to have an array of numbers stored in her mobile phone: 'I've got numbers of people I've never called or sent

a message to, I just have to have the number there, just so people can see I have a bunch of numbers stored there.' This social innovation has become so widely accepted that the young are also able to use it inversely. Talking to the researcher about her feelings loneliness, 16-year-old Elisa illustrates her situation by saying: 'Even in my mobile, I've only got the numbers of my mum, dad and little sister. And just a few people from my class, but they're in there just for the sake of having some numbers stored. They never call or text me, and I don't call them.'

Admittedly, the issue of social innovations comes down to a question of interpretation. This is visible for example in the case of SMS notebooks. When the phone's memory filled up with text messages, the teens began to copy them out into notebooks. A little later, ready-made booklets and digital message banks intended for SMS collecting were launched. Which was it that created the innovation: was it the teenagers who began to use the messages in a way that contradicted their disposable character, or the world of business that responded to the need expressed by teenagers? Similar fragments of usage culture need not necessarily be placed under the category of innovations. We can simply talk about ways of using the device. Moreover, it is worth keeping in mind that not all innovations are sensible or even desirable.

Leea Virtanen points out that observers of the various forms of contemporary culture should not hesitate to tackle those issues pertaining to people's daily lives that may seem entertaining, coarse, trivial or obvious.[17] Furthermore, the definition of obvious is in no way unambiguous, as it is highly dependent on the individual's level of knowledge. We proceed by exploring a few small phenomena which have, at least so far, remained exclusive to teen mobile communication culture and which are easily overlooked as being 'obvious' or 'trivial'. Some of these phenomena involve individual features of usage culture often seen as routine behaviour (answering the phone, storing of names and numbers), and some are clearly innovative, at least on some level (the *pilari* or signal call culture).

These phenomena will be approached through ethnography, and the description will provide an opportunity for broader interpretations of the direction of general mobile culture. We will, however, maintain our distance from the trivial assumption that all elements of youth culture will sooner or later be incorporated into adult culture. The description contains some references to GSM technology; many of the features of usage culture dealt with here are built on this technology, which provides its users with new opportunities to add a personal touch to their communications through means such as unique ringing tones or symbols associated with a certain caller or caller group.

GSM unveils the caller

In a GSM network, a series of numbers such as +358 40 1234567 flashing on the screen of a mobile phone announces the number of the person calling. Thus, the user is represented as a series of numbers consisting of three elements: the country code, the national destination code, and the subscriber number or individual phone number.[18] The phone number functions in the manner of a social security number; as the subscriber enters into contract with a mobile operator, each SIM card receives its own series of numbers that identify the subscriber and are independent of the terminal device the card is placed in. The series of numbers symbolises and also identifies the caller, constituting a way to re-establish contact when necessary. A missed call also leaves a trace in the phone's memory, and these digital footprints deliver information on who has paid a visit to your mobile screen, when, and how many times.

Conscious concealing of one's phone number reverses the situation. By temporarily (caller identification restriction) or permanently (unlisted number) preventing the sending of one's number, the caller may conceal his or her identity from the recipient. A number of researchers have concluded that in communication

through the mobile phone, the identity of the communicator should be disclosed, whereas part of the appeal of an online chat conversation lies in the opportunity to play with different identities.[19] Although mobile communication by young people is largely based on keeping in touch with the various people in their social network and identifying people in that network, the opportunity for anonymity provided by the technology enables benevolent teasing (such as expressing a crush on someone) and even more aggressive assaults best defined as bullying. An 18-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl from opposite ends of the country describe a game of mobile hide and seek:

> *Researcher:* Do these guys have an unlisted number or do they just switch on caller ID restriction for the weekend?
> *Jaska:* They switch it on for the weekend, or if they want to annoy someone in the middle of class, they switch it on.
> *Researcher:* Who do they make *hälys* [alarm calls] to? Friends or enemies?
> *Tutta:* Well, friends and so-called enemies, so that they can't see your number. To tease them.

Caller identification anticipated the more recently launched positioning services, where information on the location of the ever-present terminal device is used to identify people and to keep track of their whereabouts. Information on the location of the user is transmitted to others in the form of either a text or an image of a map. The analogy with anonymously playing with identities using caller ID restriction is clear: the positioning service affords the user the opportunity to either 'hide' or 'come out'. It is possible for the user to determine either permanently or in a particular situation who is or isn't allowed to locate them and thus 'see' them on their mobile screen. At best, or worst, the positioning service can deliver specific information on who the user is with.

Future mobile communicators will be able to group their friends and acquaintances more accurately than ever, as position-

ing technology enables the inclusion of the categories of physical proximity and physical access. Users will be able to differentiate between those are allowed to enter their private lives and those who are left outside. The whole idea of positioning appears as an interesting mind game, though one question remains unanswered: Who decides who is allowed to locate whom? Do parents have the right to monitor their children on the basis of safety concerns?

Too easy NMT

The difference between GSM culture and the communication of the NMT era is significant. In NMT technology, calls remained anonymous and missed calls constituted nothing more than a uniform mass. In November 1998, one mother conjectured: 'It'll take no more than a couple of years for GSM to become so common that you won't even think about writing down numbers, since the number is already there, in the phone.' The prediction became reality: after the launch of GSM, communication became automatised even quicker than the mother had anticipated, and the days of guessing the identity of callers or writing down numbers were in the past. It is our view that without communication technology unveiling the identity of the communicators, the current multi-leveled teen mobile communication culture would never have emerged. This is, admittedly, a bold claim. However, similar views have surfaced in another study on the communication of young people in Finland, the Nufix study carried out by Elisa Communications and Youth Research Network. According to the researchers, some young people refuse to think NMT era as actual mobile communication because, for them, only the GSM phones supporting SMS constitute 'real' mobile phones.[20]

Caller identification was experimented with for a while in some NMT 900 devices in Finland. The service was available at least in a model called 'Ringo' where, unlike in other mobile phones in Finland, the subscription or the SIM card did not constitute a

separate entity that could be moved from one mobile phone to another but was particular to the mobile device it was acquired with. Despite some advanced features, the Ringos only enabled the display of numbers, not the storing of names. Furthermore, their memory capacity for numbers was limited. As a result, the model was quickly overshadowed by inexpensive GSM phones and the device, marketed mainly as a youth phone, never became popular among teenagers. The main idea behind the model had probably been to produce a device that was cheap, easy and simple enough to be used by children and teenagers. As it turned out, this was a less than successful sales strategy. The teens nicknamed the model 'blonde phone' or 'bimbo phone'. In their view, the model would have been suitable for adults whose skills in mobile communication they perceived as lesser than their own.

> *Juuso (14):* I got the mobile for Christmas. I saw my mum slip something inside a sock and then put the sock back in the sock drawer. After that, she went off so I went to see what she had put in there, and a mobile it was . . .
> *Researcher:* So you were happy?
> *Juuso:* Yep. I thought at first that if they've got me a Ringo, then I don't want it, but it wasn't a Ringo.
> *Researcher:* Why would it have shocked you to find a Ringo? That would have been a mobile too, right?
> *Juuso:* All my friends who have had them are nervous wrecks, they really hate the phone. Apparently it's no good.
> *Researcher:* Do people just think it's bad as a phone or is it stupid in some other way too?
> *Juuso:* It's bad. It doesn't have SMS. The memory is absolutely outrageous, you have to remember people's numbers. Probably something like 20 or 30 memory slots.
> *Researcher:* If your mum or dad would have been silly enough to get a Ringo, would you have agreed to use it?
> *Juuso:* I would have used it anyway, it would have been smaller than my first phone. It's just that my friends kept going on about it so I thought if I don't want them on my case about it, I have to get a different one.

Best of numbers

In the following, we will explore the sociocultural phenomena generated by the caller ID services of GSM technology. We are not talking exclusively about a youth culture, as the same elements can be detected increasingly in adults' use of mobile telephony. The mobile culture of adults seems to travel one step behind that of teenagers, at times also choosing different paths.

First, such cultural elements are connected with the storing of names in the memory of the phone or on the SIM card. Furthermore, the caller identification feature of GSM technology regulates how the phone is answered. Third, caller identification and, in part, the possibility to avoid it has generated a new teasing culture in the form of *pilari* culture, communication through no-calls made by dialling and hanging up before the call is answered.

The main function of the phone number is crucial for the communication to be successful. The caller must remember the numbers 'correctly'; a single mistake in keying in the number prevents the connection from being formed and in most cases connects the call to a wrong number. One of the most typical mobile phone-related jokes in Finland plays on the scenarios enabled by this possibility: Why did the orphan faint after receiving a text message? The message read: 'Dinner is ready and in the fridge, dear. Heat it up in the microwave. I'll be home at five! Love, Mum.'

The requirement for precision is the same for all digital communications. A single missing character, dot or underscore in an email address means that the message comes back to the sender undelivered or is directed to the wrong person. The establishment of a digital connection lacks the fuzzy logic of direct social contact, where any missing information is deduced from the data given or supplanted with the nearest equivalent depending on the situation of the communicator. In real life, one misheard line in a conversation does not break up the discussion as the listener can supplement the communication through non-verbal messages or ask the

person to repeat what they have said. Digital mail centres, on the other hand, have no postmen who would be capable of delivering the erroneously addressed messages to their intended recipients. Machine language does not adapt to the user's needs, but requires unerring compliance to its own rules. The mobile telecommunications industry has yet to develop a digital nod or bit-based eye contact that would re-direct the message to the right person. It is of course true that calls themselves contain a lot of non-verbal information. Background noises create a situation-specific soundscape that delivers information about the speaker's location. Likewise, the human voice reveals the moods of both the caller and the recipient, as well as their attitudes toward the person they are speaking with and the matter discussed.[21]

Safety devices for the elderly and, in particular, mobile communication devices targeted at small children come close to this model of natural or direct communication: the pressing of any key establishes a connection to the right person, whether a doctor on duty or a parent waiting at home. Attaching a photograph or other visual identifier to the establishment of contact, to the pressing of a certain key, is likely to further increase the sense of familiarity. Through the visual symbol, the impersonal command may be transformed into the recognisable figure of a doctor or mother who can be reached through touch, even if it is merely the press of a button.

To return to the subscriber's personal phone number, the operating principle behind the phone number is familiar from the fixed telephone network. The only difference lies in the fact that in mobile communication, the phone numbers are more closely associated with their owners, or at least their position is more central than in traditional telephone communication. Sixteen-year-old Kaisa describes the personal aspect of the mobile phone:

> I think it's a really great feeling each time someone calls, you know, calls you. People wanting to reach you personally is great since I don't have a private line here [at home]. So it's been great, the fact that it's

just for me. That someone wants to speak to me and no one else. That it's not just, hi, it's me here, could I speak to your little sister?

With the home phone, the number can be looked at as the hallway of communication: the phone is answered by the person nearest to it and the caller asks for the person he or she wants to contact. The number of the home phone is a collective and shared identifier of the user group or the family. Frequently, the home number will remain the same for decades and the combination of the phone number, personal data and address information is relatively easy to find in a telephone directory. Though the number is often listed under the name of one person alone, it is perceived as belonging to the community sharing the same address. The home phone number is the number of such-and-such family, not the personal number of the person registered as the subscriber. Typically, the fixed-line phone is a location-specific communication device for joint use by a group of people.[22]

The proliferation of mobile telephony revolutionised the idea of the phone number as mobile phone numbers became an uncontrollable mishmash of numbers that refused to comply with the logic familiar from the fixed-line phone. For instance, the user's place of residence could no longer be deduced from the first two digits of the number as was previously possible with fixed-line phone numbers. The only thing a mobile number reveals of its owner is the service provider used. The number of the mobile phone is in most cases not to be found in a telephone directory, as such a listing is generally liable to a fee. In addition, the phenomenon of switching between service providers to benefit from free call time offered to new subscribers is common. Teens in particular try out different types of service offered by different mobile operators and it is not uncommon for one person to have more than one mobile contract active at one time. At times when these offers have been the most widely available, around Christmas and at the beginning of holiday seasons, the teenagers interviewed have sometimes had three or four different contracts active at one time. It is

thus not surprising that most find it difficult to remember the range of arbitrary ten-digit series belonging to people in their social network.

As the user has the opportunity of choosing their mobile phone number off a list of numbers still available, the sequence of numbers often carries some significance for its user, and their year of birth, lucky numbers, street address or wedding day may be hidden behind the digits. A personal code like this is, however, in most cases incomprehensible to anyone but the user, although the numbers of friends or family sometimes follow a similar logic. A certain series of digits may be common to a group of people and can thus serve to further unite them. A mother of an extended family speaks about the importance phone numbers have in her family:

> One thing that's probably the most important of all, it's really silly, but a good phone number is important to all of us. My husband got three fives, so I also wanted one with fives. I have a three before the
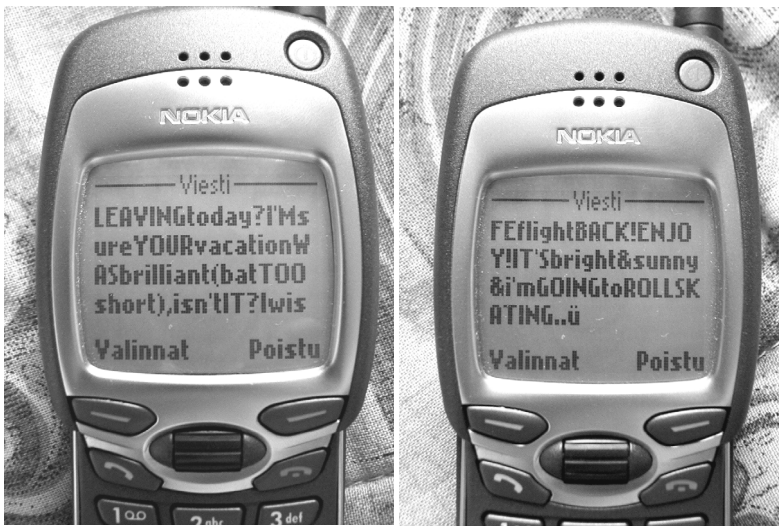
Not all of the messages gathered are written in Finnish: foreign languages are commonly utilised in SMS, with the writers sometimes mixing two or more to produce the desired result. Pictures: Juha Kolari, 2000.

three fives, that's how I wanted it. And my sister has a nine and three fives. So we've chosen them on the basis of the number. My mum has one beginning 547, and my oldest son's begins with 547, and then he has 2345, this is what he had asked for. And then my younger son has 007, for James Bond, see. So this number business is really important for us.

Control by numbers

Perhaps the most central aspect of mobile numbers is that they are associated with a certain individual mobile phone user. Throughout the research, the use of mobile communication has shown an increasing tendency towards one-to-one communication. When calling from a mobile phone, one does not expect to have to pass a common 'communications hallway' because the call is automatically directed to the intended person. The following excerpt from an interview with two 17-year-old girls sheds light on this aspect of the phenomenon:

> *Jonna:* I called Sari on her mobile today when she was at work. Then at a certain hour when I know they'll be having dinner at her house, and her parents don't like the phone to ring when they're eating, so I can call Sari on the mobile just in case she may not be having dinner, or I might leave a message on her voicemail.
> *Sari:* Or if you don't know someone's home number, or if it's someone you don't know that well.
> *Jonna:* So you don't really want to call their house.
> *Sari:* They may answer with their last name or something.
> *Jonna:* Or first name, you may not know who it is, yeah.
> *Sari:* Yeah. So you kind of want the easy way out.

It is increasingly rare that a mobile phone number constitutes a shared 'family mobile number'. As the number of wireless devices in the family increases, the mobile phone becomes differentiated as 'mum's mobile' or 'dad's mobile'. The first numbers not to be asso-

ciated with the whole family, aside from the numbers to parent's work phones, would seem to be the numbers of teenagers. In certain situations, the teen will answer the mobile phone common to the family, but generally, parents do not answer the phone of the young person, at least not unless specifically asked to do so. For teenagers, the mobile phone has turned into an area that they are in complete control over, with the consequence that parents' contact to the world of teenagers is increasingly fragmentary. This development may lead to a situation where even the teens' closest friends remain distant to the parents.[23] The home phone number has been allocated a new intimacy and is given only to the closest of friends. Even a new boyfriend might only be given the mobile number.

> I got mad at my boyfriend when he was 2 hrs late from when we were supposed to meet!!! I called a few of my best mates to tell them I wouldn't be answering my mobile for four days and turned off the phone. WHICH WAS ALSO VERY GOOD FOR MY PHONE BILL!!! PS. My boyfriend only has the mobile number and not the numbers to where we live or to our summer cabin!!
> (Extract from a mobile dairy by 16-year-old Taru)

Comparable to a favorite place, the mobile phone is a personal and protected space that people want to shield from outsiders. Kalevi Korpela, who has conducted a study on the favourite places of young Finns, has observed that they have various nicknames. In addition to naming them, some teens also attribute human qualities to these places and they may speak of a place as being an understanding listener as well as a comforter. For teenagers, changing the appearance of one's bedroom is important – pictures and personal objects are used to reinforce the identity of the owner and to inform others about who is living in the room. A sense of control deriving from the ability to regulate the appearance of the place, the organisation of objects and furniture in it and other people's access to the space is an essential element in young people's enjoyment of their favourite places. Naming, humanising, personalising

and general controlling of the place speak of the person's endeavours to assume psychological and emotional control over their physical environment. These mechanisms are used to guarantee that the favourite place continues to generate pleasure when the person is going through experiences that evoke feelings ranging from great joy to disappointment and threat.[24] The same mechanisms are at play in the ways in which teens assume control of their mobile phone. Nicknames are given to the device, and it is decorated from the inside (e.g. through the ordering of logos to personalise the phone's display) and/or outside (through painting or changing the covers on the phone). We will return to the topic of mobile telephony as a place and to the mobile communication as part of the owner's personality in Chapter 5.

'Mum' calling

Because, in general, one phone number accounts for one user, the number comes to symbolise the caller. The question 'What number did this call come from?' thus loses its significance as the caller behind the number becomes more important: 'Who was it that called?' The number assumes particular significance in text messaging, where the immediate human element, the voice of the communicator, is missing from the equation. In addition to the number, the only clue to the writer's identity is their style of communication. The number or the name becomes the representative of the person.

The possibilities contained in current mobile phone models regarding the (de)coding of the mobile number into the caller are already quite good. When communication takes place with a person whose information has been stored in the phone, the series of numbers is replaced by the name or nickname chosen by the user: 'Tommi calling'. Storing of information has been taken to an extreme in mobile Communicators, where each person or entry is

afforded an entire contact file, with enough room for street address, email address and notes. What is ironic about this is that teenagers, who would perhaps have the capacity to remember the numbers even better than adults, have best adopted the means to avoid memorising. For young people, the decoding of the series of numbers into names is of almost vital importance. Phone numbers are no longer memorised, and it is extremely rare to see a person key in an entire phone number. Teens' routines in mobile phone use are based on utilising the stored data and the speed dial.

In the interviews, teens often make jokes about how their parents and grandparents still key in the entire number every time they call someone. Young people are amused by adults' lack of communicative competence. Why do things the 'old fashioned way'? At the same time, they admit to having themselves become dependent on the mobile phone, as they can no longer remember anyone's phone number. When the mobile phone freed the users from the obligation to memorise numbers, it also created a dependency on the device. Today, teens carry 'all necessary information' in their mobile phones. When a mobile phone is lost or broken, the entire social network of the user vanishes momentarily. Similar faith in the device's capabilities can be detected with children. Twelve-year-old Julius had this to say:

> *Researcher:* What kind of calls do you make on the mobile?
> *Julius:* To numbers I can remember, mum for instance, but if I can't remember it I just phone with the mobile.
> *Researcher:* So you don't learn them by heart anymore, the ones you have stored in your mobile?
> *Julius:* Yeah.

The relatively small number of memory locations on SIM cards and mobile devices has generated a situation of *numerus clausus*. Though it has multiplied from the early days of mobile communications, the number of names and numbers that can fit in the memory of a mobile phone remains limited. Many mobile models

limit the maximum length of names to 15 or 20 characters. This has generated a practice of inventing mobile nicknames that differentiate by one or two characters alone. Sometimes the naming is facilitated by the symbolic use of special characters: The exclamation mark substituting for letter I in *N!na* symbolises the antenna of a mobile phone, while the character # in *Nina#*, the name under which the person's home number is stored, serves to represent the four walls of a house.

When the phone rings, the name of the caller is displayed on the screen and can be seen by other people in the company of the mobile phone's owner. For this reason, the name should be humorous or otherwise socially acceptable. The connection between names and numbers provides an opportunity to mislead others in social situations. Jari, for instance, was somewhat embarrassed by the fact that his mother would call him or send him SMS on Friday nights. He resolved the situation by storing his mother's number in his phone under the name 'Mallu'. He then proceeded to explain to his friends that Mallu was a female acquaintance he had met on the Internet who, having had a few beers on weekends, had a habit of bombing him with calls and SMS. The constant calls and messages, which before had been a source of embarrassment to the boy, were thus magically transformed into acceptable communication and perhaps even served to promote the owner's status as a man of the world.

When storing the numbers of their boyfriend or girlfriend, teens rarely use the actual name of the person but an adjective or a term of endearment descriptive of the nature of the relationship: *Honey, Sweetheart, Darling, Hubby, Love*. Fourteen-year-old Katja varied the name under which she had stored her boyfriend's number on her SIM card depending on the current state of the relationship: 'When I first put him in there, he was under "Hubby", and I was in his under "My Wife Kati". Then I changed it to "Fucking Bastard" when I thought, well, that it would make me feel a little better, but now I just have him there as "Kari", so that's OK now.'

Mobile etiquette and SIM card culture

Every now and again one can see claims denouncing mobile etiquette as a very loose and even unknown concept. Researchers have even concluded that young people's use of the mobile phone no longer seems to be regulated by any specific etiquette and that it has come to be acceptable to use the phone nearly anywhere and in any way you please.[25] This is probably true if we understand etiquette to mean usage that is clearly visible to the outside observer, constituting factors such as places where the mobile phone can be switched on or in whose company it can be answered. For the young, the mobile phone is such a natural means of communication that its utilisation knows almost no limits. By this we mean that teenagers rarely need to consider when it is appropriate to have the phone switched on or in whose company it is suitable to take a call. They use their mobiles on the street, in shops and in school corridors. They are not uncomfortable with using the mobile phone in public and see no reason to avoid communications where no specific reasons or limitations exist. Only places such as hospitals, aeroplanes and libraries are seen as requiring particular consideration in this respect.

We would suggest, however, that the mobile communication culture of teenagers, or rather, its more implicit structure, contains a vast array of etiquette rules each one more binding than the next. The person breaking the rules may not be criticised by adults; instead norm breakers are disapproved of by peers acting in the same social network. These unwritten rules are connected with the answering of mobile calls and storing of names and numbers, which we have come to call SIM culture. The name derives from the SIM card, where most of this information is stored in an ordinary mobile phone. SMS use is regulated by a corresponding etiquette, but these rules will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

While a mobile phone can only accommodate a certain number of names and phone numbers, the social use of the device calls

for storing as vast an amount of information as possible in the phone. In this case, the phone book feature can contain numbers of people that the phone's owner in reality never contacts. The number is only stored and kept in the memory because that person's high position in the social ranking system. This can be the school's most 'eligible bachelor', a talented football player or a child of a local celebrity. A comparison can be drawn here to adult practices, where a visiting card received from an important person is usually kept as at least as a memory, even when it is clear that no further contact will take place between the people. To return to the teens, the purpose of social status enhancement makes it worthwhile to store as many of these numbers as possible on the phone, irrespective of how irrational the grounds for keeping them. Fifteen-year-old Pilvi is reluctant to erase unnecessary numbers – you never know.

> *Researcher:* Are all of the hundred numbers people you actually call, or are there just-in-case numbers as well?
> *Pilvi:* No way, probably half of them I don't even call, they're just there, seen them a few times and taken their number, you just don't erase it in case you end up needing it at some point . . .

Number storing is based on reciprocity and exchange. It is extremely rude not to ask for a person's number if they have first offered you theirs. Because of these politeness concerns the phones fill up with numbers the users are very unlikely to actually need. A commonly heard complaint among teenagers is that 'the numbers just keep piling up'. Pre-teens in particular seem to actually collect new numbers. Another reason for extensive number collecting is the teens' perception that all of the names of the ever-evolving social network should be stored in the mobile phone. The presence of a name in a mobile phone's memory equals a place for the person in the life of the owner of the phone. In the words of 17-year-old Taija, removing someone from your SIM card is analogous to 'out of my life and good riddance':

Researcher: Do you have numbers in there that you never call?

Taija: Well, I've called all of them at some point. But some of them are there pretty much unused.

Researcher: Is that common, would you say, keeping people's numbers like that?

Taija: Yeah, it's pretty common. You may get someone asking you 'Hey, have you got my number?' and you'd be all 'Oh no, I just erased it last week.'

Researcher: Have you ever got so mad at anyone that you would erase their number from your mobile phone?

Taija: I have, in fact. I just thought: 'Out of my life and good riddance to that person.'

Researcher: Have you made up since?

Taija: Well, yeah, we have. I put the number back in there.

The data on the SIM card also provides aids for remembering and reminiscing:

Kati: He [new boyfriend] browsed the names and since there's quite a few of them in there, guys I've phoned about once in my life, he kept asking: 'Who's this Janne? Who's this Jarmo? Who's this? Who's this? How are you in contact with him?'

Researcher: Do you still have all your old boyfriends in there? You don't erase their numbers?

Kati: Not really, you remember a lot of things when you see the names in there. There's some people under 'only wish I knew your name', things like that, people I don't know at all.

Erasing the number whether on purpose or by accident may lead to difficult conflicts. It is hard to admit to someone that you have not stored their number. Teenagers are avid users of different mobile services that enable them to find out who a certain number belongs to, even in cases where it would be easier to simply call the number stored in the phone's memory. It is, however, more convenient socially to get the information on the caller through other means. A 16-year-old girl relates how she identifies unknown callers: 'When someone's calling and you don't know who's number it is, you

pretty much tend to use the [directory enquiries] service. You don't want to start asking them who they are in case it's someone you know well and you just don't happen to have their new phone number.'

In a number of instances, Taija's 'good riddance' attitude is emblematic of the whole SIM card culture; the emotions directed to the owners are passed onto the nicknames in the phones. If the owner of the phone wishes to actively eliminate a person from their life, it's out of phone, out of life. The network of names present in the phone mirrors relationships in real life, as in the case of these 17-year-old girls:

> *Researcher:* Does it ever happen that you get so annoyed with someone that you simply have to erase their number?
> *Jonna:* Yes. I've done that, yes.
> *Sari:* It's only happened to me a couple of times, I've thought, I don't need that, I'll never see them again. Like this one girl at this rock festival. Hey, she lives somewhere else, I don't need that. And then I got a little upset with this one boy, so I erased him. But he was one of those people that I never wanted to see again either.
> *Researcher:* But you have . . .?
> *Jonna:* Not that much anymore, but there are people that I know, and I think, OK, I'm never going to be phoning that person or I'll never be in a situation where I would instantly need their number, I can check it from the phone directory. And then there's a few people that I don't necessarily want to have anything to do with, so I don't need them in my life through my mobile either.
> *Researcher:* So the people in your phone are in your life, somehow?
> *Jonna:* Yeah.

How to answer

The mobile phone answering etiquette is a relatively common topic of 'Letters to the Editor' pages in newspapers and magazines. In Finland, it has been customary to answer the family (fixed-line)

phone with one's last name or, at least in the case of children, by stating the full name. Consequently, adults tend to criticise the habit of young people to answer their mobiles by their first name only. Many parents feel that the first name is not enough to identify the person. For 16-year-old Hanna, the mobile phone is a private communication channel that does not require stating one's last name:

> *Researcher:* How do you generally answer if you get a call, say, from your boyfriend?
> *Hanna:* Well, if I see who's calling I just say hi or whatever, whatever I feel like saying.
> *Researcher:* What about if it's a number you don't recognise? Do you use your first or last name?
> *Hanna:* First name.
> *Researcher:* Just your first name. Is that how you answer the fixed-line phone at home as well?
> *Hanna:* Last name.
> *Researcher:* Oh, what's the difference between the two then?
> *Hanna:* I don't know, it's never occurred to me to answer the mobile with my last name. The home phone is, you know, common to many people. But since that [the mobile] is just mine, when someone calls you expect them to want to talk to me and no one else.

The first name is sufficient for teenagers as for them the mobile phone is a private matter and a personal communication device that no one else is expected to answer. Answering a call 'like adults do', by stating their whole name, may even go against etiquette. Use of one's whole name is easily interpreted as undue self-assertion and an attempt to be something the others are not. Words and sayings perceived as belonging to the adult lexicon are also labelled as undesirable usage. Jonna and Sari, both 17, criticise the manner in which boys their age try to sound like businessmen while speaking on the mobile phone. The boys formulate their thoughts in the manner of adults.

Jonna: There are a few in our school that I know of: yuppie, yuppie, there goes that mobile phone guy again.

Researcher: What have they done to get a reputation like that?

Jonna: Speaking with flashy gestures every chance they get.

Researcher: What does it mean to speak with flashy gestures?

Jonna: The sort of thing, you know, 'Oh, that must be my mobile phone ringing!'

Sari: Taking the phone in your hand and looking at it, with the thing ringing all the time, checking the name of the caller and then answering with your last name: 'Virtanen.'

Jonna: Precisely.

Sari: 'Mäkinen.'

Researcher: What would you say is more yuppie behaviour, answering with your last name or first?

Jonna: Saying your last name when answering the phone is a little off, in my opinion.

Sari: Yep. The mobile phone being a personal thing, it's my number and I can say what I want when I answer it, when everyone knows who they're calling in any case. You know, it's a personal thing.

Jonna: They try to give a picture of themselves that says hey, I'm doing something real important here. Sure you are. . . . So they talk really loudly. . . . I'm at school right now, this may take a while, but I'll get back to you. And the tone of voice sounds like, this is me selling cars here.

Sari: And some words they use, like, 'I'll get back to you.' There's no way I could say to Jonna, hey, I'll get back to you. I would say something like, ok, I'll call you when I know something about it, or whatever. But, no, never 'I'll get back to you.' It just sounds so official.

According to the young, the difference from fixed-line etiquette is clear. Most answer the home phone with their whole name because their parents require them to, either for the sake of good manners or in order to avoid mix-ups. The aspect of control is less prominent in calls to the home phone as the caller can be 'anyone'. 'You've got no idea who's going to call,' states 16-year-old Vesa. This logic does not apply to teens' use of their mobiles. The same boy answers calls by unidentified callers to his mobile with his first name only.

There is a difference in degree here: the caller may be unrecognised but the underlying assumption is that whoever calls you on your mobile is trying to reach you personally, even if you don't know who they are yet.

> *Researcher:* When you don't recognise the number?
> *Vesa:* I say 'Vesa'.
> *Researcher:* So just the first name then.

With the fixed-line phone, the caller's initial anonymity has been the norm for several decades; devices displaying the caller's number have been relatively rare until the last few years. With the mobile phone, the expectation is that the number should be displayed to the person receiving the call. Calling 'unidentified' is a breach of norm, and it is interpreted as an attempt to provoke the receiver. Unrecognised callers may thus get an answer that is more abrupt than normally. An extract from 17-year-old Jari's mobile phone diary states: 'In the afternoon my mobile rang, someone was phoning without caller identification. I answered with a pretty rude "WHAT!" It wasn't a prankster, as I first suspected but granddad calling from his mobile with an unlisted number [i.e. is not displayed to the recipient].' It is not uncommon for calls like these to be left entirely unanswered. This is the case particularly when the calls are interpreted as teasing calls, part of *pilari* culture, our next topic of discussion.

Pilari culture

'We call it a häläri'

It is night. The mother is reading the paper in the kitchen and hears her daughter's mobile phone ring in her room. A moment later, the mobile starts again with the first strokes of the familiar ringing tone. A moment's pause and same again. The mother con-

cludes that her daughter must be taking a shower and is thus unable to answer the phone. After the fifth attempt, the mother goes and finds the handset, but answering it is not worth the trouble. The ringing dies down the moment she reaches out for the phone. The screen delivers the message: '5 missed calls'. The caller probably has lousy reception and can't maintain the connection, the mother conjectures and reckons it must be something very important for the person to try so many times. A short pause and another calls informs, with a message on the screen, that it is 'Jenna calling'. Elsewhere, Jenna continues to dial her friend's number over and over again puzzled by the fact that she does not respond to the calls, though an American TV show interesting to both girls is about to start on TV. The mother listens to the phone go off one more time and ends the sixth call by pressing the button with the image of the red receiver to terminate the call.

'Don't answer it!' exclaims the daughter as she sees the mobile in her mother's hand. The daughter has received a bundle of calls that are not meant to be answered in the traditional manner. 'It's a *häläri* [an alarm call], Jenna's only *bombing me*, she's reminding me to watch Ally McBeal (I'll reply in a minute to let her know I've seen them.' The girl responds to the calls with a short reply call, the meaning of which is interpreted correctly at the other end as: 'I'm now ready to watch TV "with you".' Conveniently, this communication does not add to the mobile bill of either of the girls. The bombing can continue later on, for example if the episode features an inside joke and one of the girls wants to draw the other one's attention to it.

The girl in the example could be 14-year-old Sanna, who amuses herself by teasing her parents with *pilaris*:

Researcher: Have your parents noticed that you make calls like that?
Sanna: They have. They always ask, was it your friend calling again. I just say, she did a *häläri*. I always do one back.
Researcher: So your mum and dad don't do it then.
Sanna: No.

Researcher: Do you ever do *häläris* to your mum and dad?
Sanna: I do. I call them on purpose to wind them up. I can be in my bedroom and their mobile may be on the table just a few feet from my room, but if I do a *häläri*, they always call me back.

Sometimes the calling is about testing the social atmosphere, anticipating or preparing for subsequent communication. *Pilaris* can be used to find out if the other person is at that moment willing (what kind of mood the person is in) or able (what kind of situation the person is in) to engage in a more exacting form of communication. Sixteen-year-old Virpi talks about her conventions of *pilari* use:

> *Virpi:* A friend of mine always makes a *pilari*, then I call her back, I know that she wants to talk to me. Then after a while she phones and we talk for half an hour or an hour. So it's kind of knowing to expect a call.
> *Researcher:* So she kind of warns you beforehand that she's going to call you?
> *Virpi:* Yeah, to find out if I'm alone someplace, if it's ok for her to call and things like that.

Pilaris are also used to deliver information on the present company of the person making the call. A *pilari* thus serves as a visiting card or a name tag, functioning as the teens' own positioning service that notifies them of the movements of their circle of friends, as reported by 15-year-old Anu:

> *Researcher:* Do you do *hälys* together with a bunch of people – sitting here for instance [service station bar]?
> *Anu:* Someone may write a message to ask where I am and who with. . . And then we can call that person, say, I call them first, and then my friend who's there calls them, so that person gets the idea that we're together somewhere, the two of us.
> *Researcher:* Kind of announcing who's there.
> *Anu:* Yeah.

Like many Finnish teens, the girls in the excerpts have made a social innovation connected with mobile communication by coming up with a way of using existing technology in a manner other than it was intended for. Mobile calls were originally meant for voice conversations, but young people now also use them for non-conversations, for no-calls of a kind, for non-verbal messaging that is close to a code language. The discovery is made over and over again in different times and places. Most commonly, however, *pilari* knowledge spreads through experience: sometimes young mobile phone users come up with *pilaris* as if by accident when the person they are trying to reach is not there to answer the call immediately. The phenomenon spreads as a person who has been a target of a *pilari* commonly decides to try it out on their other friends.

Terminology differentiates between calls

> *Valtteri:* It came about around that time [after Christmas], the name for it, *häly*, people started calling it that.
> *Researcher:* So before that they had no name for it.
> *Valtteri:* No. I suppose you called them *pilaris* too.

The phenomenon would be easy to describe and explain if its development had ceased at the signal call culture stage, where its purpose was simply to cut down usage costs. This was, however, not the case. Different uses have generated different terminology that varies regionally and according to the purpose of the no-call. In all, we have come across some 20 different names for the call. The most common ones are presented in the following.

> SEND ME A MESSAGE OR MAKE A PILARI WHEN HE RINGS! (SMS)

One of the most widespread names for the phenomenon is *pilari* or 'prank' as in prank call. The calls and calling have different names

in different parts of Finland, their meanings ranging from bluffing to sexual references and harassment calls. The calls are also commonly referred to as *häläris* or *hälys*, derivatives of words denoting alarm calls or alarms, with *häläri* as perhaps the most widely recognised term for the phenomenon. A *häläri* is often made to remind someone of something that has previously been agreed upon, though it may also be intended simply to gain the other person's attention. Eighteen-year-old Petra describes the phenomenon in her diary:

> One thing that's pretty common is a student discount call, or a *häläri*, that's letting the phone ring once or twice to leave the information on who's called and still not have to spend your money.

Teens from the Helsinki area refer to their calls as *ykkönens* ('one-offs'). The name is descriptive of the usage: the callers only let the phone ring once. Another name for these calls is *piikki,* a word denoting 'expense', as in calling at someone else's expense. People from southern Finland are familiar with *killeris*, dead or killed calls. The English language also provided the inspiration for the word *misse*, as short for 'missed calls'. The terminology also contains numerous verbs derived from the nouns.

The terminology is not unambiguous and the meaning of the words varies from one region to another. Some teens refer to all of the calls as either *pilaris* or *häläris*. Others differentiate between types of calls according to whether the caller manages to answer the call or whether the number is displayed on the screen or not. The number of times the phone is allowed to ring is also a factor in the differentiation: a *killeri* may be a call that is cut off after only one ring, whereas a *pilari* may 'last a bit longer, three or four rings, before you hang it up'. The following is 11-year-old Jussi's definition of *pilari* terminology:

> A *pilari* is a call where you can't see the number. You cut it off the second someone answers. Then if you see the number, and it's a fast

one, that's a *killeri*. And if you make a *killeri* back to the person then maybe he'll call you back, if he has something he needs to say to you or he'll send a text message. It's kind of asking the person if they can talk to you.

Some of the words are specific to certain regions and can be said to be characteristic of one or more dialects, whereas the words 'bomb' and 'bombing' are used in all areas of Finland. In keeping with the military terminology, the equivalents for 'firing' and 'sustained fire' are sometimes used to refer to dozens of no-calls made back to back. Acknowledging the calls by making *pilaris* of your own also has its own term for it: *kuitti*, which is an informal word for acknowledgement.

> For fuck's sake!i'llbomb you if ican make it!You have to be there to meet me right away!
> (SMS)

> You in for a game of badminton...We could walk there.I'll bomb you when I leave home...RLEAASE
> (SMS)

Like teasing in general, bombing is not an unambiguous phenomenon. In most cases, the teenagers interpret making *pilaris* as a reciprocal pastime and amusement. Receiving a 'bomb' is perceived as a pleasant thing, an indication of the caller's friendship or interest in beginning a new relationship. In a sense, *pilari* culture constitutes pigtail-pulling for the 2000s – you tease the person you like. Still, being the object of teasing is not necessarily a desirable position and *pilaris* can also be used for actual bullying. In cases like this, the teasing is systematic: offensive behaviour is directed repeatedly to one and the same individual. Occasional teasing to which any one of a group of children can and probably will be subjected to does not meet the characteristics of bullying.[26] It should be noted, however, that the subjective experience of the target can

never be overlooked when considering this type of behaviour. In school for instance, students and teachers have different conceptions of when shoving or name-calling constitutes just a game and when it can be classified as bullying.[27] Sometimes, however, the attention may be unwanted and the person may be forced to turn off their mobile phone in order to escape the situation. In cases like this, GSM bombing comes close to Internet SPAM, except that this 'mobile SPAM' is more difficult, if not impossible, to get rid of. Creating a revocation list for unwanted numbers is not possible in GSM networks as it is in the case of the Internet mailing lists. The opportunity to conceal the caller's number enables anonymous harassment. Sixteen-year-old Tarja writes in her diary:

> I was at home, and these guys were bombing me all day! I didn't like it so I turned off the phone. I don't like people who bomb me for no reason.

Inside interpretations

The basic quality of a pilari can be summed up by saying that a *pilari* is always a call missed or cut off on purpose, but not every missed call constitutes a *pilari*. There is a fine line between a *pilari* and a regular call. In the example related earlier, the mother is unable to tell the difference between a *pilari* and an actual call, whereas the daughter recognises the function of the call because of the precise moment at which it is made (the airing time of a certain television programme).

Teenagers often relate misinterpretations that occurred when they or their friends had not yet become familiar with the use of *pilaris*. They had tried to answer the calls or had replied by making an actual call, being under the impression that the caller had something urgent they wanted to discuss. Many stated that the unexpected answering of their *pilaris* had added to their phone bill. Fourteen-year-old Sanna relates her experiences: 'Some people

make *pilaris*, so I called them back to ask, "What is it?" and the person just said, "Nothing, I was just making a *pilari*." So I was just, "Oh, right." And then we would start talking about whatever and the bill would justa add up.' A young person who has moved from the novice stage to being an experienced mobile user, recognising the different communication styles and situations and making correct cultural interpretations of the different contacts, becomes one of the 'insiders' acquainted with the practices of mobile communication.

In extreme cases, the users have agreed on a specific code dependent on the number of calls. For example, one call means 'Good night', two calls means 'OK', and three calls means 'Call me, I can't 'cause my bill is too big'. In our data, these agreed-upon codes are slightly more common with girls than with boys. Relationships between best friends and girl groups may include regular *pilari* communications, as reported by a mother of 13- and 15-year-old girls:

> The young people in our house, they have this thing that they reply to each other . . . do you know about this? You key in the number and let it ring once and then cut it off. It's some kind of an announcement thing, you don't try to hide the number, you just let it show on the screen. It's like saying hi, even when the other person may be far away. Our girls do this quite a lot in the evenings, they do it to each of their friends at least once a night. . . . With the girls it starts when they come home from school, they start rcalling them with just one ring and then they reply with one ring as well. It's just something they do.

Outside of established *pilari* usage, situation-specific codes are agreed on in text messages. The number of signal calls made indicates whether the answer is yes or no.

> Are you coming or not(to practice)?Make 2 häläris if you're coming.1 if not.
> (SMS)

> Has Jere called you? Make two hälys if he has and one if he
> hasn't kirsi
> (SMS)

An essential feature in the culture is its close link to GSM technology. The calling would not be fun or at least it would be of no use without the recipient getting the information on who the caller is. Nevertheless, the exception proves the rule as sometimes it is precisely the conscious concealing of the caller's number that creates the tension that makes the calling exciting. Eighteen-year-old Asko writes in his diary:

> Then we made a few harassing phone calls to a couple of 'friends'. The speaker on the Communicator was perfect for this, as both of us were able to hear our victim holler.

A GSM mobile phone automatically keeps track of the times and the numbers of calls received. Especially boys strive to make and break what they call *pilari* records. The purpose is to make as many calls as possible in as short a space of time as possible. Most phone models are able to announce only a limited number of missed calls, and this limit is in the ultimate aim of these aspiring record-breakers. Fourteen-year-old Hannu was impressed by his friend's perseverance:

> One time last year a friend of mine had called me 73 times. Sometime ago all my friends were calling this one number. When he'd checked it, he'd had 143 calls and about ten new numbers. But mine was the best with just one new number. They had all come from the same person. You have to work hard for that.

In this context, girls would seem to be more reluctant record-breakers than boys, even though they too occasionally hold *pilari* sessions just to pass the time. A few girls mentioned occasionally calling through the entire selection of numbers on their SIM card.

Jenna (15): If there's nothing to do, I make a bunch of *hälys* to everyone, and then they get all irritated, what were you doing calling me again and this sort of thing.

Researcher: How many is the most you've ever made to one person – or do you get a lot of them yourself sometimes?

Jenna: Once I got 65 from a cousin of mine. I was pretty amazed when I looked at the phone.

Researcher: In what space of time? Back to back?

Jenna: Yea. About two hours I think, I hadn't looked at the phone in school. Then when I checked it: 65 missed calls and one new number – yikes.

Researcher: How about you, have you ever made that many of them to anyone?

Jenna: No. I would say 20 is the maximum I could make to any one person. It seems a bit frustrating to me, so no.

The most significant difference compared to regular calls is that this type of calling incurs no charge to either the caller or the recipient, or at least the expenses are very small resulting only from a few seconds of call time. It is, therefore, common to use this type of communication to regulate usage costs: 'Then if they reply back to you, you know that they've got it, they just don't want to write to you or their bill is too big to send another message.'

One aspect of *pilari* culture can be described as an interactive game of speed: the recipient tries to answer the call before the caller cuts off the connection. An answered call does not continue into a conversation, and the game is usually resumed in a few minutes' time.

Researcher: What do you mean by *pilari*? What are they like?

Tuija (16): You call and then try to cut it off as fast as possible so the other person doesn't have time to answer. Now there's this thing that whenever you try to make a *pilari* people are always trying to answer it. . . .

Researcher: What do they do if you do manage to answer it?

Tuija: Usually they just slam it shut and wait a while and then start again. Or then I wait for five minutes or so and do a *pilari* on them.

The *pilari* culture thus allocates various meanings to pilaris made at different times and in different ways. Not all Finnish teenagers use *pilaris* and many grow tired of them quickly. In a case like this, the *pilari* stage can be regarded as part of the person's novice period in mobile communication and a transient phase in the development of the young person's mobile communication profile. What is characteristic of the whole phenomenon, however, is that, almost without exception, teens all over Finland are able to describe the culture, even in the case of teens that do not actively make or receive *pilaris*.

Pilaris can also be a source of confusion in relationships between young people of different ages. When 15-year-old Marika gets numerous pilaris from boys she knows, her boyfriend, who is over 20, can't understand why other boys would try to reach his girlfriend at the strangest hours. *Pilaris* seem to be characteristic of the mobile communication of under 18-year-olds.

Until recently, parents have been more or less unaware of the phenomenon. The earlier the data examined, the more likely it is for parents to be uninformed about the culture. The parents of under 12-year-old children may have come across the phenomenon more often; children's *pilari* calling is more easily detected and parents are more likely to interfere, often interpreting the calling as bullying. What is interesting, however, is that the culture seems to be spreading to the mobile use of adults, as situations where adults wonder at the several 'ghost calls' that have appeared on their phone in the course of an evening emerge every once in while.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

1   Ekholm 2001: 44.
2   Vornanen 2000: 330.
3   Pantzar 1996: 20-25, 50.
4   Hoikkala & Roos 2000: 13.
5   Kopomaa 2000: 28.
6   Sulkala 1999: 17.
7   Virtanen 1999: 378.
8   Mäenpää 2000b: 133.
9   Rutter 1987: 14.
10   Information on the prevalence of mobile phones quickly becomes
     dated. The information provided here is from the statistics of the
     International Telecommunication Union.
11   Keskinen 2000.
12   Viherä 1999: 59.
13   Saanilahti 1999: 7.
14   *Jargon* 1994, *innovation* and *diffusion*.
15   Coogan and Kangas 2001b.
16   Suomi tietoyhteiskuntana 2000: 52.
17   Virtanen 1999: 381.
18   *Matkaviestinsanasto* 1993: 56-57.
19   Coogan and Kangas 2001a.
20   Coogan and Kangas 2001a.
21   *Etikettikirja* 1992: 22.
22   Viherä 1999: 175.
23   Coogan and Kangas 2001a.
24   Korpela 1995: 8-9.
25   Coogan and Kangas 2001a.
26   Salmivalli 1998: 29-30.
27   Lahelma 2000: 92.

5 MESSAGE SENT

Short messages, long stories

The birth of SMS

Text messaging culture as a part of mobile culture is a relatively young phenomenon. Technologically, the history of messaging goes back no more than a decade, and the actual culture based on person-to-person messaging did not emerge until the mid-1990s. Throughout this brief history, Finland has been at the front line of its development. However, in 2000, Norway surpassed Finland in the number of text messages sent; the monthly average of outgoing messages per subscriber was 30 for the Norwegians and 22 for the Finns.[1]

The text messaging culture encompasses two clearly different areas: person-to-person messaging and the use of value-added services. For our purposes, we have decided to categorise all SMS material composed by users themselves under personal communication. In addition to the success of person-to-person messaging, the popularity of SMS-based value-added services has increased notably since 1997; there are hundreds of content services currently available including ringing tones, weather, and information on the current status of the user's mobile bill. The cost of these kind of messages is significantly higher than in person-to-person messaging, with the exception of SMS advertising that naturally generates no costs for the user. In addition to actual service and network opera-

tors, numerous small private service providers and large media consortiums also offer SMS-based services. In this chapter, however, the focus is on youth culture generated by person-to-person messaging. Before embarking on an analysis of cultural traits, it may be useful to offer a brief account of the technological aspect of the phenomenon.

The sending of text messages became possible in Finland in late 1991 with the introduction of GSM network technology. This did not mean, however, that mobile users were instantly able to send each other text messages, as at this early stage, GSM phones only supported the reception of SMS messages. Initially, the messages were used exclusively as signals in the voicemail service, with notification of a new message in a person's voicemail account being sent to the user as a text message. Mobile phone manufacturers could not see a need for regular mobile phone users to send text messages, which had the consequence of SMS not becoming available to the average mobile subscriber until the mid-1990s, when SMS sending was added as a feature to most GSM phone models.[2] A similar gradual development took place in the operators' short message service. In the beginning, SMS was an additional function that had to be ordered separately. Today, SMS sending is possible from all mobile phones.

Text messaging has not been actively marketed at any stage of its development, and yet the growth in the volume of messages has exceeded all expectations. Since the technology has become available, users have been very independent in its adoption. An important step for text messaging was the signing of an interconnect agreement in 1995 between two major mobile operators, which enabled users to send SMS messages between networks. Before this, text messaging was only possible between subscribers of the same operator.[3] Since the mid-1990s, the number of companies providing SMS services has increased significantly, and today messages travel fluently between all operators.

As was evident in the meagre interest exhibited by mobile phone manufacturers in the early stages of the phenomenon, it was

expected that text messaging would remain overshadowed by voice calls or become a specialised service for a small user group. This, however, was not to be. Instead of delivering certain predetermined types of information, the messages became communication for all and their contents came to deal with everyday life: 'Your basic, everyday messaging. Boring actually,' said 15-year-old Maaret of her messages.

The actual SMS trend emerged in 1998.[4] The following year, the five million Finns sent some 702 million SMS messages and in 2000, the number of messages sent amounted to nearly one billion.[5] The volume of message sending has since increased further; in 2002 Finns sent a total of 1.4 billion text messages.[6] Looking at the number of messages sent by the average individual user may provide a somewhat clearer view of the rise in the annual rate of message sending. In 1996, Sonera customers sent an average of 1.1 messages a month. Three years later in 1999, the corresponding figure was 21 messages, and in 2000 this had grown to 25 messages per subscriber. At the same time, the increase in the duration of calls in a month was notably less significant, going from 34 minutes to 40.4 minutes.[7]

It seems clear that teenagers have been the pioneers of text messaging in Finland. The communication of girls and boys has been both significant in quantity and broad and versatile in content. As the messaging culture of teenagers is not based on purely rational communication for useful purposes, such as managing affairs, normative statements are sometimes made in connection with the phenomenon and researchers conclude, presumably with turns of phrase adopted from young people, that while text messaging is used to manage affairs, people also send a number of 'pointless messages'.[8] Some teens also express concern over whether text messaging culture has come to play too large a role in their communication. Eighteen-year-old Saara writes:

> Actually, when I think about my messages and the messages that I get, it's pretty horrible to realise how much people actually 'talk through

the messages'! When I think about my own phone bills, and I know that most of my bill comes from message sending, I begin to wonder: 'Have I lost my capacity for speech?' 'Am I only able to express myself in writing anymore?' SPOOKY!

Features of text messages

A text message is an SMS-based (SMS = Short Message Service) message sent in a GSM network. To be specific, the term 'short message' comprises any message sent through the service (including, for example, picture messages and ringing tones), whereas a 'text message' only contains alphanumeric and special characters. The terms are, however, often used interchangeably. Messages mainly travel from one mobile phone to another or from an operator to a mobile phone and can also be sent from the Web. Earlier, a number of websites provided the opportunity to send free messages to any mobile phone. Since then, service providers have placed limitations on message sending by barring the reception of messages from numerous free-of-charge message services, although some currently allow SMS sending from their own pages on the Internet.

The length of the message is perhaps the feature that is the most characteristic of short messages, hence the name. At its longest, a message can extend to 160 characters, with the shortest messages only comprising a couple of letters, as in 'OK'. Generally, a text message is defined as a message consisting of 1 to 160 characters. One character equals one letter, number, special character, space or punctuation mark. It is, however, also possible to send a message that is entirely empty, without a single character. A message like this may be used to imply 'I'm speechless,' or to say 'I don't want to talk to you.' Sometimes 'bombing with empties' is used for teasing. SMS sending is supplemented by a free service that lets the user know whether the message has been delivered, stating the time at which it has reached the phone of the recipient.

Newer phone models save these delivery reports in a different directory from regular SMS while older models still receive these messages in the same way as person-to-person SMS.

While service messages may include a logo or a ringing tone, in general a text message composed by a mobile phone user contains only text – letters, numbers and special characters. The messages may contain small pictures, but they too are made up of characters available in the mobile phone, as in the following examples depicting a Christmas tree and a lucky fish.

```
    ,*,     merry
   ,*@*,    christmas
  ,*@*@*,
 „„„„„„„„„„„
     tj
```
(SMS)

Here's a lucky fish for you)-((((0).Send it to at least 5 people who deserve love and happiness, if you don't,you'll get bad luck! Happy holidays, Tiina
(SMS)

Messages sent are charged according to a price per message, but receiving the messages is free of charge. SMS pricing has remained surprisingly similar throughout the existence of the messages. At its cheapest, the price per message is as low as 5 cents whereas the most expensive text messages cost some 17 cents. With the smaller operators, the price is determined based on the network the message is sent to, so that sending messages within a certain network is cheaper than communication between networks.[9] It is interesting to note that the price of the most expensive person-to-person text message could pay for a mobile call lasting thirty seconds to three minutes, depending on the operator.

The popularity of text messaging among both adults and young people is frequently explained through the relatively inexpensive prices of the messages in comparison with the price of call minutes. Yet in practice, the messages are in many situations more expensive than short calls. Also, text messaging is frequently not limited to the sending of an individual message, but expands into extensive question-answer-question chains. Furthermore, it would appear that the use of the most recent mobile phone models increases the number of messages sent as they no longer limit the length of the text to 160 characters. The text itself can be significantly longer, and the phone automatically cuts it down into the necessary number of 160-character messages, each with the standard fee for a text message. Another aspect evident in our material from the point of view of message length and pricing is the wealth of messages with no other purpose than expression of agreement: 'OK', 'Fine', or 'Agreed'. The price of a message remains the same whether the message is empty or utilises all of the 160 characters. An SMS dialogue, particularly if it consists of messages this short, adds to the mobile phone bill of both participants significantly more than it would cost to go through the same conversation in a voice call. We thus maintain that, more than pricing, the source of the messages' popularity is to be found in the contents circulated in them. It is these contents that the users see as being worth the cost.

Text messages may be hailed as more economical than they actually are, but one clear benefit to the pricing policy remains. According to teenagers, it is much easier to decide on an SMS quota of three, five or ten per day than it is to keep track of calling costs. When the subscriber's phone bill threatens to get too high, some of the messages are substituted by signal calls (cf. Chapter 4). In the words of 14-year-old Taija: 'As the credit limit drew nearer, the message sending got less and you would begin making more and more *killeris* to friends who had just begun a new billing period.'

Reasons for the popularity of 160 characters

Text messaging is a far-reaching phenomenon, but can we talk about a uniform messaging culture among Finnish teenagers? The answer is both yes and no. The phenomenon incorporates special terminology, usage patterns and social norms. The members of SMS culture develop their own terminology: instead of using the standard term *tekstiviesti*, the young refer to their messages as *tekstaris*, using a shortened form of the word. Verbs commonly used in this context include *textata, texmailla, viestailla or faxata* (derivatives from nouns 'text', 'message' and 'fax'), to mention but a few.

The contents of the messages cover a wide area; in the space of 160 characters, the young users manage to discuss all aspects of teen existence. In addition, the messages reveal something of young people's relations with adults. The messages can be roughly divided into three main categories according to their content: complying with everyday information needs, initiating and maintaining social relationships and pure pastime and entertainment. The extreme ends of each category appear very distant from each other. Messages are used to ask for advice with homework but also to purchase alcohol on the weekends. They are used to strengthen friendships and to quarrel with enemies. Humorous messages are filled with verbal acrobatics and nonsense poetry. Sometimes the messages are seen as a communication channel that is almost too easy to use as the low threshold for sending a message via SMS makes the communication less controllable. Messages are passed on that are not well thought-out, as 17-year-old Sirpa relates:

> This brings me to the subject of weekend communication . . . I don't even know how many declarations of love I've received, but . . . When there's a phone in one hand and a beer bottle in the other it's easy for boys to say things they might not mean . . . With SMS, it is easy to write about your feelings, even if it's on the spur of the moment . . . The message leaves your mobile quickly, causing no embarrassment,

oops? If I don't read a message like this until the next morning, I don't reply to it . . .

It's unlikely the person will even remember all the people he confessed his love to the previous night . . . But this tendency to send soppy messages on Friday/Saturday night at 9 pm is <u>REALLY</u> common with boys!!! Maybe it'll reduce with age. It's possible that girls also do this, but not the people I know . . . You don't begin sending messages like that until you're absolutely certain you're feelings will be responded to (And certainly not when you've been drinking!).

Our results are somewhat contradictory to those by other Finnish researchers working in the field. Timo Kopomaa refers to text messaging as a playful communication channel. His data (22 interviewees in the age group 15-22) indicates that young people don't see text messaging as being suitable for personal contacts or communication requiring more profound discussion.[10] In a paper presented at a seminar on mobile media, Sonja Kangas and Kaisa Coogan voice the clearly provocative claim that SMS communication has long since lost its glamour. According to them, the messages have become such an obvious part of teens' communication that 'it's not that thrilling for anyone anymore'.[11] Kangas and Coogan base their claim on data gathered among upper secondary school students in the Uusimaa region in the South of Finland and in the Helsinki area (30 16- to 18-year-old interviewees in 1999).[12]

There are a number of aspects in these claims that are not supported by our findings. The most recent interviews of teenagers as well as the SMS data collected in 2001 show that the text message remains a highly versatile means of self-expression and interest toward it has not diminished in any significant way. On the contrary, new user groups seem to be emerging. The following observation by Juha Nurmela on development in the use of mobile telephony is in line with this interpretation. Over the years, numerous devices have been launched that, after the initial excitement, have failed to find their niche in people's everyday lives. According to Nurmela,

however, mobile phone users have not shown signs of growing tired of the device; rather, usage is constantly becoming more varied.[13] What is more, claims about the playfulness and lightness of the messages appear to constitute a misperception. Teens' messages quite frequently deal with the more fundamental aspects of life such as grief, the illness of a family member, or death.

> Don't talk about this to anyone, only Minna knows, but 6 Oct my mom found out that she has tumours, and you don't find out until after the operation if they're malignant or not? Mirja
> (SMS)

> Don't come rejoicing tomorrow,come in silence.Marko is dead,if you didn't know already.Watch news at ten.
> (SMS)

> It was Jorma.The guy that died. I knew him.Vesa, Elina's boyfriend,Jorma was his best friend. Why? Jorma shouldn't have died. So wrong.
> (SMS)

In their messages, girls articulate fears of pregnancy, discuss contraception and consider who would be the right person to have their first time with. The messages are often sent at night when teens feel they need support going through things they perceive as difficult; many state that they would not dare to bring up some of the topics they discuss in the messages in regular conversation.

> Got the results from the pregnancy test today: I'm not pregnant,yyyes! Say hi to everyone! Love, Ninni88
> (SMS)

In the following SMS dialogue, two 17-year-old girls discuss their sexuality and related human relationships.

I've begun to think that Pekka might be 'the first' for me, but I'm still pretty unsure. Anyway, unsure is good, right?
(SMS)

Yeah.. I suppose it is.. but if you have enough feelings for him, it might be ok.. do you have enough feelings for him? ...Ville is pretty sweet... *hih*
(SMS)

I suppose I have feelings, but they're partly hidden inside me. What I'm afraid of most is he'll leave again, and I'll hit rock bottom again. I don't want that.
(SMS)

Don't think he'll be leaving you anytime soon, going to all that trouble getting your number and all..:)oh,erase the message I just sent.. the ending, you know..:)
(SMS)

The messages reflect feelings of disappointment and abandonment, dealing with matters such as bullying, loneliness, fear of failure, problems in the family and with girl/boyfriends. Nightly discussions between couples often continue about relationship problems that have emerged earlier in the day. In the following quotation, 17-year-old Pirjo and her boyfriend discuss their relationship:

I'M NOT angry but I'd just like to say that I don't like people talking to me like that. I love you and care about you even though you are a bit annoying at times. Quit being s6 sulky! :)
(girl's message)

I'M SO FUCKING DEPRESSED I REALLY AM. SITTING HOME ALONE IN THE DARK AGAIN. I'M REALLY REALLY SORRY!
(boy's message)

You had a badday but that doesn't entitle you to accuse me of cheating on you when it was nothing like that or being shitty in any other way. Had a real nice time... Sleep tight!
(girl's message)

Is that right! Whatever! It's just so fucking... Goodnight!!
(boy's message)

Text messaging is often used to seek support when the writer is feeling low or insecure. It does not appear to be simply a communication medium for lighthearted playfulness. It should be noted, however, that the more serious themes are perhaps highlighted in text messaging between girls. In general, text messaging culture would appear to be a strong point of girls in particular. According to Finnish sociologists Sari Näre and Jaana Lähteenmaa, girls' communities successfully and creatively incorporate modern individualism. In their lives, girls are more inclined to choose both options than to take one and reject the other, so their lifestyle is characterised by the balancing of various alternatives of modern life: adapting their own motives to the interests of others, self-expression and social responsibility. This type of mentality is commonly acknowledged as characteristic of a (post)modern way of thinking. In their culture, girls are trained to avoid extreme alternatives that affect their lives in a comprehensive way. They develop social and communicative skills necessary in late-modern society, such as capacity for empathy, interaction and self-reflection.[14] Girls' text messaging affords the means for all of these: it combines empathy, interpretation of one's own life and interaction on many different levels. The following is an SMS conversation between two 17-year-old girls:

HI,HARI WAS ABOUT TO GO HOME IN THE MORNING, I TURNED OFF THE ALARM WHEN HE FELL ASLEEP..ha-haDON'T

KNOW IF WE'RE TOGETHER OR NOT,BUT DRUGS ARE A DEFI-
NITE PROBLEM..shh! nice...
(SMS)

You're a crooked person! hah-ha. You were right to do it
though, no use helping his drug world. Talk about it when
you're sober if you can. dON'T LET HIM GO HOME!
(SMS)

In relationship communication, messages by boys also tend to be
very emotionally laden. The use of SMS would seem to play a sig-
nificant part in the initiation of relationships, as is evident in the
following direct enquiry concerning the possibility of a romantic
relationship. Note especially the rate of moves made, which is al-
most one per minute:

(At 1:03 am the boy asks:)
DO YOU THINK YOU COULD BE MY GIRLFRIEND?I REALLY
CARE ABOUT YOU...IF I'VE ASKED YOU BEFORE I DON'T RE-
MEMBER WHAT YOU SAID.PS.(I'M SOBER:)

(At 1:05 am the girl, 14, replies:)
It might not work out with you out there every week and me
here..

(At 1:08 am the boys asks:)
HOW CAN YOU KNOW THAT..YOU DON'T EVEN WANT TO TRY
THEN..? I WANT TO TRY!:)

(At 1:09 am the girl replies:)
OKAY..we'll give it a shot...

(At 1:10 am the girl adds the question:)
How come you're up at this hour by the way?

(At 1:12 the boy replies:)
WE WERE WATCHING TV AT ALEKSI'S..ARE YOU GOING TO THE PARTY?

(At 1:15 am the girl replies:)
Yeah..that's Tuesday night right?I have to get out of town for our training at Virtasalmi,but I think I can make it afterwards..

(At 1:16 am, the boy:)
COME BY AND SEE ME IF YOU'VE GOT THE TIME NEXT WEEK.BUT I'LL BE GOING TO SLEEP NOW SORRY IF I WOKE YOU EARLIER.SWEET DREAMS DARLING.

One undeniable strength of text messaging is the constant availability of the device and the immediacy of communication enabled by this. It appears that, at least to an extent, the messages combine the best aspects of landline telephones and email. The telephone is said to have benefited from the social satisfaction it affords the user as it is well suited for the maintenance of personal relationships. The telephone is an efficient tool for emotional expression, giving advice and exchanging information as its capacity for human voice transmission enables real-time expression of emotions. Easy communication between people living on different schedules and the opportunity to keep in contact with geographically distant people, or with people one does not have the time to meet in person, are frequently stated as the benefits of email.[15] Occasionally, email and SMS are grouped in the same category. For instance, the report by German communication researchers Joachim Höflich and Patrick Rössler presenting the findings of their *Jugendliche und SMS* survey inquiry is entitled *E-Mail für das Handy* (2000): Email for the Mobile Phone. It should be noted, however, that in this report they describe the rapid exchange of a sequence of text messages as resembling conversations that take place in online chat (*die SMS-Gespräche*) rather than referring to it as a type of correspondence.[16]

It has been suggested that text messaging has slowed down the uptake of Internet connections in Finnish households.[17] We believe, however, that the position of text messaging is not quite this influential in Finnish society as a whole. The large-scale consumers of messaging have so far been teenagers, who do not make the decisions about acquiring a family Internet connection. More than text messaging, a key factor in this may be the high level of mobile phone penetration in Finnish society. The growth in mobile ownership has resulted in many Finns giving up fixed-line telephones, which they perceive as expensive but without which it is impossible to log on to the Internet. At times, the close relationship between email and SMS has been evident in the interviews. Both children and senior citizens occasionally confuse the two and refer to text messages as *sähköviesti*, a term that is halfway between text message and email, and is perhaps best translated as 'e-message'.

It is our view that text messaging does not constitute mobile email. Numerous services have been developed to notify users of email with messages received on the user's mobile phone, sometimes including the subject field or part of the text. Despite this, text messaging constitutes communication that is, in quality, fundamentally different from communication via email as the text message is often closer to written speech than email or the traditional letter. In principle, email constitutes a real-time communication channel but in practice the sender and the recipient of an email message are rarely online simultaneously. With SMS the sender may receive an answer in less than a minute. More so than email or letters, text messaging resembles the use of computer-mediated instant messaging, with the communication parties using the device simultaneously. Another point of comparison is the wireless Internet services in Japan, having enabled the reception of actual email on mobile phones and allowing the mobile phone number to function as an email address. This service allows for messages significantly longer than the 160 characters of SMS.[18] The messages can be sent from one mobile phone to another, from the Internet to the mobile phone and vice versa.

Text messaging is capable of expressing the entire spectrum of human emotions. The messages can hate, love, gossip, mediate quarrels and express longing even when the writer lacks the courage to call, or in situations where other communication channels are not available. As we mentioned earlier, nightly messages are a significant aspect of adolescent text messaging. A quiet and inconspicuous message serves as an interactive substitute for a diary when the need arises to share thoughts with others. 'I'm glad SMS was invented. It gives you a chance to tell a friend something when calling is impossible or in situations where you have to be quiet,' writes 16-year-old Milla. Another interesting aspect of the culture is that teenagers view some people as strictly virtual or mobile acquaintances, which means that writing is the only means of communication available in that particular relationship. Fifteen-year-old Sonja talks about her 'wireless pen pals':

> Quite a lot of the messages are from SMS marathons between me and someone else. We have talked to each other at some point. Perhaps it would be easier with a call, but the thing with messages is that you can keep them, whereas with a phone call [you can't] :) and then there's the fact that I don't really know this person all that well. I don't really have the nerve to call someone I know just from the Internet. . . Text messages are like a discussion board sometimes. For me at least.

Teenagers rely on the power of the text message; if they have fallen out with a friend or girl/boyfriend and the person will not answer their calls, they are certain the messages won't be left unread. The following is an extract from 16-year-old Piia's letter to one of the researchers:

> I have to say that SMS is absolutely Super! → It saved one of my friendships. A friend got mad at me → wouldn't answer the phone anymore (saw the number) and wouldn't answer the door. I sent them a message (and you always read your messages . . .) So we're still friends.

In cases like this, text messaging functions as the backdoor of communication. As well as facilitating communication, SMS also provides the means for the creation of pseudopersonalities, as in the following example related in a diary by 17-year-old Tomi, where a 'forged' text message rescues a boy whose reputation has been compromised through no fault of his own.

> Before the competition I got a call from a friend of mine who was not too pleased with the fact that he had got the blame for a few impudent remarks uttered by me, which is to say I had let out a few obscenities and this one guy had been telling people about it, saying this friend of mine had said them. After the game I checked my mobile: 11 missed calls. The same caller as before the competition. I called him back and he told me he had played a bit of a trick on someone. He had saved his own mobile number on his mobile under my name. Then he had sent himself a text message with my 'confession' in it about saying the things. And the people bought it completely! He was very sorry for having done it without my permission and this was the main reason for his calls.

Encounters in SMS

The teenagers do not speak of text messaging as an actual place as such, but they do often utilise an expression indicating that something has happened *in* the text messages. They may have begun their current relationship through SMS, settled an argument with messages, or sometimes escaped into the messages on a boring school day. Teachers describe how teens often send the outside world of school into oblivion and become absorbed in the world of SMS. The messages are thus perceived as something between a device and a place. In the field of youth research, there has been much discussion about whether, apart from the streets, young people really have any space of their own that they can regulate and control

without strict supervision by adults.[19] In a way, the messages constitute an autonomous space teenagers can feel in control of.

In her observations concerning virtual space and virtual communities, Annette N. Markham states that members of Internet communities speak of cyberspace as a tool, a place and a way of being. The tool aspect signifies that the Internet is seen as an instrument of communication enabling encounters between geographically distant people and also liberating people from the obligation of having to meet face to face. The notion of cyberspace as place implies viewing it as a common space that people enter to converse with others. Those for whom the network constitutes a way of existing do not emphasise the technological aspect as such but see the Internet as a means for self-expression through text. They speak of their lives in/as text. Some see themselves as a type of cyborg: the mind and body of the user become one with the computer, or the mind is detached from the body and transferred onto the computer where it continues to create and sustain itself through language.[20] Perceiving communication as a way of being is

Alone or together? The promoter of self is also the key to the mobile community.
Picture: Pirjo Rautiainen, 1999.

probably fitting for many young SMS users. For them, text messaging has become more than just a tool or a place for meeting people – the messages have expanded into expressions of their personality.

SMS chat on television

The most recent phenomenon relating to mobile communities is that of mobile chats, aired outside of actual programme time, on different television channels. They have become popular especially among the young population. The principle of these written chat shows is very simple: Viewers send their comments to the show in the form of a text message, and a few minutes later, the message is displayed on TV and can be read by everyone tuned into that channel. The activities of these discussion channels are directed by a host who works under a pseudonym, such as 'Danae' or 'Mimi'. The messages are received and, when necessary, edited by a supervisor who is generally not shown on TV. The supervisor eliminates messages that go against the ideology of the show, such as racist comments or explicit sex talk. Messages containing identifiable information on people are also censored as the shows do not publicise telephone numbers or full names, and the conversationalists generally use a pseudonym, such as 'Olli from Helsinki', 'Mama Suburbia' or 'Wolfman'.

When the conversation is at its quietest, SMS chat operates on a near real-time basis. At other times, hundreds of messages may be lined up for publication. The host´s tasks is to keep up the viewers´ interest despite the long delay in displaying their messages. In addition, the host answers questions asked by the participants, gives advice and comments on the messages received. Reviving a dying conversation is also up to the host. A message that is provocative enough almost without exception receives a flood of responses. Regular topics of conversation involve homosexuality, cheating on one's partner and being cheated on, and bullying in schools.

Originally, SMS chats only operated in the early hours of the morning after other programmes had ended. Later they got airtime in the break between morning and afternoon programming. Most of the commentary on weekday mornings is sent in by teenagers who have stayed home from school because they are ill, but messages from full-time mothers, shift workers and the unemployed also appear on screen. What is common to the all of the messages is a feeling of solitude and loneliness – the television is, at that particular moment, the only company available. The popularity of TV chats has not been hindered by the fact that getting a message displayed is significantly more expensive than sending a regular SMS message, at least fivefold. Moreover, when the service is at its busiest, a message may stay on screen for less than 30 seconds, which means that it is possible for messages to slip by unnoticed.

Conversation in GSM chat shows meanders from one subject to another. The occasional chain message can be detected among the more personal messaging. At night, the messages become more daring, discussing topics such as alcohol and sex. People rerturning from a night out continue their evening in chat shows or turn to it for consolation when the night has been less than successful. Late morning chat discusses areas such as the importance of military and alternative civil service and problems with child care – one winter morning a worried parent asked for advice on how to treat frostbites on children's cheeks. Later that morning the conversation moved on to contemplation of death; one of the chat regulars had died the previous day. The boy's girlfriend gave a relatively detailed description of the event of death, others consoled those close to the deceased and sent in sayings and poems suited to the occasion. The conversation revolved around remembering the old friend from chat with both tears: 'Rami was a good person, he helped others in chat, I going to miss him a lot . . .', 'You just have to think that it's good up there in heaven' and a more humorous approach – 'Rami laid down his knife and fork and joined the great majority. My condolences.'

Occasional visitors expressed their doubts about whether Rami had ever existed. It is plausible that what was buried in the conversation was only an alternate personality of one of the chat regulars. What is essential, however, is not whether the death had actually taken place or not, but the willingness of the interlocutors to share what had happened. The death theme expanded to the sharing of the grief at losing loved ones as participants spoke about their own experiences: one had lost a small child and someone else's grandmother had died. One person related the loss of a beloved hamster. The host participated in the handling of the common grief by commenting on the messages with words expressing comfort and empathy, such as *massive hug*, *squeeze* and *tender hug*. One of the conversationalists suggested one minute's silence for the memory of Rami and the host halted the discussion for a while. Teenaged mothers gradually took over the conversation and the subject matter moved from death to babies. A bride-to-be asked for advice on wedding arrangements and wondered whether a red wedding dress would be appropriate. Another person aspiring to become a nurse asked for the experiences of those in the profession. The participants were inquisitive about the host's age and favourite breed of dog, and boys sent flirtatious messages to the 28-year-old supervisor.

The content of these public chats is very similar to that of person-to-person text messaging by teenagers. It has been concluded that publication on the Internet blurs the line between conversation and the one-sided presentation of material. Chris Abbot points out that publishing on the Internet is closer to speaking 'directly with an audience rather than to the audience'.[21] The same applies for SMS conversations on television, which successfully combine broad distribution and genuine interactivity. The fascination of the medium is based on the expectancy of a response: the host may comment on the message, or the entire conversation may take a different turn if the other participants start commenting on the new theme raised by the sender.

From perishable to permanent

The properties of mobile communication perhaps most frequently mentioned in advertising are its private, personal nature and the opportunity for real-time communication, with the concomitant notion of 'living in the moment'. With a mobile terminal, one can be reached by others whenever it is convenient. Mobile operators want to personalise their services for different user groups and even for individual users. Therefore, the focus has been on the needs of the individual rather than those of the community. The mobile phone has been seen more as a tool more for the planning the future than recording the past.

Perhaps the most surprising features in the text messaging of Finnish teenagers are its high degree of collectivity and pursuit of permanence. SMS material is shared both in a concrete and in a symbolic way as text messages are circulated among friends, are composed and read together, and fitting expressions or entire messages are borrowed from others and assimilated into one's own SMS repertoire. Next, we provide an overview of how text messages are shared and retained by Finnish teenagers.

A text message is a digital group of characters that exists in a mobile phone or on the SIM card for a short time, ranging from a couple of minutes to a few weeks. Nonetheless, the number of text messages sent and received by teenagers has increased so much that there is not enough memory on the SIM card or in the memory of the terminal device to store all messages. One day's worth of messaging may be enough to fill the memory, and teens are forced to erase old messages in order to be able to receive new ones. Still, many find enough room in their phones to keep the messages they hold the most valuable. Fourteen-year-old Siru writes:

> I never write down my text messages on paper. There are a few that are particularly dear to me that have occupied memory slots for almost a year now. Messages that I like, I keep in my phone a little

longer, and when they don't seem that special anymore I erase them. This is why my message memory is often pretty full up . . .

The messages preserved are often connected with the beginning of a romantic relationship, with anniversaries, a very significant friendship or, more commonly, with their status as a first: this is the first message I ever sent to him/her or received from him/her. A message categorised as important may remain in the phone for years. Hanne, 17, speaks of her most treasured message: 'The oldest message I saved is I think two years old, and it's still there in my outbox.' The same quality of being the first is emphasised in message collecting, which will be explored later in more detail. Seventeen-year-old Laura writes about the messages she thinks are worth keeping:

> I do sometimes write down messages in my diary, if they are in some way significant, for example when I got the first love messages from my boyfriend. Sometimes when I get nice poems I keep them in my phone or write them down somewhere.

Visual expression in mobile phones is also connected with new beginnings. For example, the text A+H5500 can be used to signify Aaro and Hanna having found each other on May 5, 2000. The text may be decorated with an appropriate image representing engagement rings, hearts or the even more popular 'love teddy bears'. 'You know how you can get the text to show up on the screen, along the bottom. I've had T H H on there, meaning Taina, heart, Hannu,' explains a 16-year-old boy. Images are usually ordered as a chargeable service and the text can be produced by editing the names of the phones' customisable profile settings, which were intended for facilitating the switch between different usage situations. This characteristic is, however, limited to owners of phone models that enable the renaming of the profiles that show up on the screen.

These mobile screen texts are the successors of messages announcing who is going out with who traditionally carved on park benches or written on walls. Instead of the bark of trees, the teenagers of the 2000s opt for a digital platform to announce their love for each other. Cultural researchers have mourned over the perishable quality of modern communication as the written notes of a private individual have been reduced to vanishing text messages.[22] Like oral tradition, text messages are difficult to capture; today's message is not likely to exist tomorrow. The contradiction is bewildering. Because of their nature as written communication, one would expect the messages to endure longer than oral expression.

For a long time, the study of folklore stressed oral transmission as a distinctive characteristic. More recently, it has become widely accepted that written material transmitted through non-institu-

For boys, the mobile often functions as a symbol of general mobility and doing things together.
Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

tional means also constitutes folklore.[23] In earlier folklore, tradition bearers such as singers, storytellers and people acquainted with the practice of rites could also be reading and writing individuals. Today, cultural researchers working on Western culture almost exclusively encounter people with the ability and the willingness to express themselves in writing. Contemporary anthropology emphasises written narration and general writing culture.[24] Today *Homo tradens*, bearer of oral tradition, is also and perhaps more than anything a *homo scribens & narrans*, a writing and storytelling human being,[25] like 15-year-old Ronja in the following example:

> Before your research I had written down some (three notebooks' worth!) of messages that were important for me. Their contents varied a lot: some of them were just regular text messages that I had just happened to write down along with the rest, and some were amazingly cute and valuable bursts of emotion. Messages by my then-boyfriends have been written down particularly carefully . . .

The term 'popular writings' is used to signify written cultural products that have emerged without the effect of the researcher or that have been written specifically for the purposes of the research.[26] One example of materials that have emerged independently are the SMS notebooks of teenagers. 'Collecting messages is something I already know. I've filled up one notebook, and I'm on my second one now,' relates 15-year-old Malla. Teens' letters to researchers quoted in this chapter are examples of texts written for the purposes of the research. Thematic writing, written notes, diaries and other documents by the writing human being form a central part of data gathering in folklore studies, too.[27]

SMS notebook culture

The young SMS users who record this perishable culture ease the labour of cultural researchers documenting the phenomenon. As

mentioned earlier, the non-digital backlash of recording the messages manually and storing them forms an important part of SMS culture. Not all of the messages are disposable. Some teens have begun to copy the messages in calendars, in diaries, on slips of paper, in the margins of schoolbooks, on computer, or more systematically, in SMS notebooks. The notebooks bear resemblance to autograph albums, where teens have traditionally written down poems, rhymes and other texts with the recurring themes of love and friendship. 'I write the best messages down in the notebook, or if I get one that's really personal, in my dairy,' states 15-year-old Karita, and 17-year-old Vilma wholeheartedly agrees: 'I collect all my messages in the SMS notebook.' The copying thus ranges from recording the occasional 'good one' to a more organised documentation of an area of life.

> I don't write them down in notebooks, but I may scribble down a few cute lines in the margins my calendar. (Merja, 20)

> I still write down the occasional funny message that I want to remember. I always carry this notepad in my bag. That's where I write the most important of my messages. (Susanna, 17)

Teenagers have developed certain personal routines for message collecting. They only collect certain types of messages and almost always copy the messages in a certain way or at a certain time of day, for example when going to bed at night. In the following, 16-year-old Saara defines her field of message collecting:

> I've collected messages for a few months now in this small notebook. I'm pretty selective with what I put in and what I leave out. I always write down any fun inside stuff I get from my friends, you get a good laugh out of them afterwards. I also write down messages from my boyfriend, though not all of them, just the 'sweet and sensitive' ones.

In the 1960s, girls collected song lyrics; in the 1980s and 1990s girls compiled autograph albums, some with a specific love theme;[28] and SMS notebooks can be seen as the contemporary manifestation of this tradition. The cultural continuum is also present in another way, with the texts in autograph albums now modified to the length of a text message. We mentioned the collecting culture in Chapter 2 when discussing the extent to which we, as researchers, had participated in the creation of this culture through analysing its practices in various media. This is not the only way research on the phenomenon has influenced teens' message collecting; gathering messages for the study has lead many of the teenaged informants to consider collecting SMS messages for their own purposes. Fifteen-year-old Miia writes:

> Most of the messages I've copied directly off the phone. And then again from the forms (which I'll be sending to you) for myself. I want to keep them as memories :) So far I haven't been too keen on keeping the messages, but after this I've thought about beginning some sort of a notebook for them.

Collecting practices vary individually. Some collect every message they send or receive, one copies the messages sent by her boyfriend, another the messages from best friends. Sixteen-year-old Hanne collects messages from her boyfriend and her best friends, giving the following reason for beginning to collect the messages: 'When my phone couldn't fit anymore, I liked to keep them to read later.' Here, it is personal communication that is collected, as a message that is copied must be personally significant in some way. The messages signify a return to the past, helping the person to remember and reminisce. Seventeen-year-old Laura writes:

> Some of the messages were really heart-warming or fun or witty in some other way. These are the types of messages I tend to write down. Usually I jot them down in my diary. It's good fun reading later what type of messages you've been sending and who with.

There is one factor that text message collectors have in common: as they are almost without exception girls. At any rate, the text message-collecting culture of girls is much more visible and more organised than that of boys, for whom the collecting has not developed into a hobby, even though they may decide to keep the occasional individual message because of its important content.

> *Researcher:* Have you ever written them down, if you've had to erase them for some reason?
> *Janne (17)*: Well, at some point Leea sent me these poems. If I've had to erase them, I think I've had to erase one or two of them, I've written them down on paper then, the poems.
> *Researcher:* What kind of poems were they?
> *Janne:* What were they now . . . There was one that went: 'When you look at me you seem distant, when you look at the clouds you seem close.' Stuff like that.
> *Researcher:* Why were they so important you felt you had to write them down?
> *Janne:* They just sounded so good somehow, so I thought I'd keep them.
> *Researcher:* Where do you have them now?
> *Janne:* They're on a piece of paper in a drawer.

Chain messages as contemporary folklore

When we say that the messages constitute *contemporary folklore or modern folklore*, what do we mean? What does it mean for folklore to be modern or, more generally, for any phenomenon to be modern? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines modern as 'being at this time, now existing or pertaining to present or recent times'. In art, the word 'modern' is frequently used as the opposite of classical and conformist.[29] According to folklorist Jyrki Pöysä, the division between old and new folklore represents two different approaches to folklore studies. He goes onto state that this dichotomy is based on

common-sense reasoning and contains value judgements that may pass from the research subject to the researchers, so that what is past is serious and elevated in itself while anything contemporary is seen as trivial and amusing.[30] Pöysä refuses to associate contemporary folklore with urban culture while a significant number of people continue to live in rural areas. Moreover, a folklore genre may be labelled as modern if it has been only recently recognised, even though its roots may extend back for centuries, as in the case of graffiti and comic books. Sometimes the young age of those researched may also become a distinguishing feature of modern folklore.[31]

The study of folklore has raised the following three criteria as the defining features of modern folklore – in addition to folklore existing in this moment. The folklore examined is entirely new or *modern*; the old theme has been *modernised* or adapted to contemporary culture; the birth, lifespan and transmission of an item of folklore is connected with mass communication or *modern* written and electronic *media*.[32] The constant naming of new research areas and new forms of folklore is thus an on-going activity in research on contemporary folklore. Considering its means of transmission, text message folklore remains a relatively new form of folklore, used in a relatively new medium, the mobile phone. The themes have been transferred to SMS from other, previously recognised forms of folklore such as jokes, toilet wall writings and xeroxlore or photocopier folklore. Some of the messages have clearly emerged for the purposes of mobile phone use alone, with the content relating directly to the mobile phone or its use. The culture also includes teasing folklore, which mocks a service provider or device manufacturer not used by the sender. The following example is probably one of the first messages to have been passed around Finland:

> I-am-GSM-virus-"sweden"-if-you-do-not-pass-me-on-within-an-hour-then-your-phone-will-turn-into-a-pitiful-eerikson (SMS)

At regular intervals, a wave of messages pretending to be from mobile operators passes through the country. Composed in official style, the messages 'inform' the user that their mobile service will be terminated and advise them to contact the operator's customer service.

> Your mobile service will be terminated due to unpaid bills and its detected misuse. For further information please call 98009491 Yours NMT GSM invoicing
> (SMS)

> Your mobile service will be terminated due to sending GSM short messages that insult good taste. Sender: Sonera/Feedback 18 Oct 1999 07:69:96 pm
> (SMS)

Some teenagers only collect circulatory messages, also copying them from the Internet, and from various books and magazines. Dozens of websites dedicated to these circulatory messages have sprung up on the Internet and collections of messages have even been published as books. The message collecting bears resemblance to the tradition of autograph albums, with the messages collected in the same way as rhymes and poems. 'I collect chain messages, so whenever I get one I write it down or store it on my SIM card,' explains 15-year-old Anne. The messages are actively sought after and traded and compared with friends. The same, fixed messages circulate from one mobile phone to another.

Chain messages are the successors to chain letters circulating on paper or via email and are the most crystallised form of the collective text messaging culture. The chain messages often contain wishes for something, accompanied by a playful threat: if you don't comply, bad luck will follow. A typical chain message is the 'Lucky Fish' message at the beginning of this chapter. The following three examples also serve to illustrate this type rather well:

Send this message to six of your friends by Christmas and you'll get the one you've always dreamt about. If you don't send this on it may take you years!
(SMS)

Sex drugs rock & roll,speed weed & birth control,lifes a bitch & then u die,so fuck the world & lets get high!Send this to 5people or have 7yrs bad sex!!
(SMS, in original English)

When love loves love, love's love doesn't know how much love's love is loved by love. Send this message to 5 others and you'll be lucky in love!
(SMS)

Some of the messages are direct loans from other folklore genres. Rhymes, song lyrics, jokes and wishes are circulated in what we have termed circulatory messages. Most mobile phone users have received only one chain or circulatory message in the time they have been using mobile phones. Some have saved in their phones a selection of messages suitable for a variety of different situations so they can reply to the circulatory messages they receive with an equivalent from their store of messages. On the arrival of a chain message, mobile etiquette demands a reply with a message that is equally funny or otherwise interesting. A text message is like a small gift that requires something in return.

Chain message enthusiasm varies according to age groups and regions. A chain message can be the fad of the week, something that people get bored with quickly. The most active chain message enthusiasts would seem to be the 13- to 15-year-olds. Some always send a good message forward. What, then, constitutes a 'good message'? To put it pointedly, this is a message with 'adults-only' content: something to do with alcohol, sex, or cigarettes. Occasionally, alarmed parents have expressed their horror at texts they have seen

in the mobile phones of their teenagers. Having checked her son's messages without his knowledge, a mother of a 14-year-old boy contacted one of the researchers in a state of alarm: 'There's nothing in there but the one thing!' What did the mother see in the boy's phone? Mobile phones are places where childhood heroes, such as comic book characters, appear dressed in the role of adults. Parodies involving Santa Claus or fairy tale characters exist in the dozens. Cigarettes, alcohol and sex are important elements in the contents of the messages.

> YOU CAME TO MY HOUSE.I HAD A TREAT FOR YOU.AT FIRST YOU DIDN'T WANT IT, BUT THEN YOU PUT IT IN YOUR MOUTH.YOU COULD FEEL THE FOAM RUNNING DOWN FROM THE CORNERS OF YOUR MOUTH.AH,THE TASTE OF BEER.
> (SMS)

> You let me have it between my lips,I felt I could have all of it.I gagged and blushed and almost choked.How strange yet sweet was my first smoke
> (SMS)

> Ain't got the muscles of Arnold Schwarzenegger Nor the body hair of Mel Gibson nor the looks of Brad Pitt...but I lick like Lassie!
> (SMS)

There is no significant difference between girls and boys in the reading of chain messages, forwarding them, or storing them. Apparently, the messages that may sound nasty or crude to adults are part of the process of growing up, and the same stories are also told in schoolyards face to face, without the intermediary mobile. The messages are used to test one's limits and step out of the role of a child. The situation is characteristic of researching culture. Often we only see the official side of life, disregarding the unofficial, oral

and hidden side. Imagine a class in school: we see the teacher asking questions and the pupils answering, and it is this performance that is interpreted as what 'school' is all about. Yet the moment the teacher's back is turned, the social situation is altered completely: children perform elaborate rope tricks for each other (if they are what is currently in fashion), make gestures and write notes. The official interpretation does not recognise this world of secrets. When people speak the 'truth', it is not gathered as folklore because the stories contained in the narration often pass unrecognised.[33]

No matter what view we take on the moral or educational significance of these messages, their creation and use cannot be attributed to a few individual teenagers alone. The messages are part of a collective written culture made up of contemporary folklore and common stories. The phenomenon, with its daring messages, is part of the teens' peer group culture, which is invisible to adults. This testing one's limits can also be seen in the popular logos ordered to personalise the screen of the mobile. The logo on the screen of 14-year-old Tapani was the lower half of a naked woman's body with the legs spread apart. 'It's neat show to friends,' he argued. The material also contains some instances of openly racist text messages, which prompts the question of whether the texts, in these cases, can be seen simply as texts.

Shared messages, common contents

Kaisa Coogan and Sonja Kangas, in the research report on their project Nufix: Young People and Communication Acrobatics, state that text messages are seen as private communication and thus are not shown to others, with exceptions being made only for messages that are neutral in content. According to the researchers, the messages are protected by secrecy of correspondence.[34] The claim appears in a curious light when compared to observations made con-

cerning Finnish girl culture, where sharing experiences is an important part of the 'best friend' institution. Our data, too, contradicts this claim. We do not maintain that all text messages passing through and stored in the mobiles of young people are shared and public, but rather that the messages' degree of collectivity ranges from fully public to strictly personal.

We can proceed by examining forms of collective reading and writing present in the data. The reader of the message does not simply equal the mobile owner, as messages are also read by the owner's friends. Teens read the messages in cafés, at parties and during classes in school. Sometimes the users invite their friends to inspect their phones; sometimes friends read each other's messages without permission. The messages are read as a sign of confidence, out of curiosity, and simply to pass the time. Before elaborating further on the subject of collective reading, we will briefly discuss the matter of composing and answering text messages.
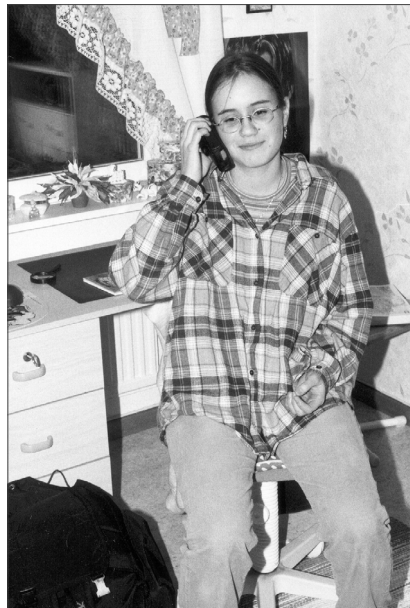
After the launch of GSM, NMT models representing earlier mobile technology quickly became dated and socially unserviceable and no longer met the teens' requirements. Picture: Johanna Järveläinen, 1998.

As the mobile phone is used on the move, one might expect the messages generally to be written in haste. On average, teenagers are very quick and secure message writers. Many relate being able to write a message blindfolded, for example with the mobile phone hidden under their desk at school. Despite this, message writing is not always done in a rush: teenagers frequently spend a substantial amount of time in planning a single message. The interviewed boys reveal that, as their girlfriends value messages for the purpose of maintaining the relationship, or 'love messages' as the teens prefer to call them, the content of these messages has to be carefully considered. Because of this, it is not uncommon for boys to spend up to thirty minutes composing a single message.

All the couples that participated in the research were, as far as we know, heterosexual teenagers, but it is perhaps reasonable to assume that a similarly powerful emotional bond is just as evident in relationships between teens from sexual minorities.

The boyfriend of 14-year-old Siru knows how to make his girlfriend happy at night: 'Well, Pekka keeps sending me these poems: "Our love is beautiful like the sunset or the starry sky, which are forever, just like our love. Love, Your darling boy, who loves you."' Sometimes, for economic reasons, *pilari* bombing occurs instead of this nightly communication. 'When you get bombed, you know that the other person is thinking of you, so it's good. In the beginning there was a lot of this, the phone beeping, send one back and so on. It's become less now, the bombing. But it did feel good.'

> TRY TO BEAR WITH IT LOVE REMEMBER THAT I LOVE YOU AND I NEVER WANT TO LET YOU GO YOU ARE THE LOVE OF MY LIFE AND I WANT TO LIVE WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!!!! (SMS)

As the boys see it, these romantic messages constitute communication intended to remain between the two people in the relationship, and even the people closest to them remain unaware that this

type of communication ever takes place. Many wonder about what their friends would say if they ever found out. The boys are often ignorant of the fact that that the messages are rarely read solely by the girl they are targeted to: these deeply emotional messages usually get shown at least to the girl's best friend. In girl culture, 'being together' is not an intimate relationship concerning only two people but a collective phenomenon, a social activity that involves the entire community and its opinions.[35] An important variable in girls' use of the mobile phone is the best friend institution mentioned earlier. The best friend culture is typical of girls in particular, and it is an important part of the social relationships that girls act in and that have a profound effect in their becoming women. The best friend is always one of the most central people in girls' social relations; girls invariably describe the relationship with their best friend as one of their most important relationships.[36]

The following SMS dialogue between 13-year-old Tuula and her best friend illustrates the friendship culture of girls. The bag mentioned in the messages serves to reinforce the relationship as by sharing their belongings the girls also share their lives with each other. Text messages often become part of this exchange to strengthen the friendships, seeming to function as a successor to the exchange of notes popular in the girl culture of previous decades. Valerie Hay, who has studied girls' friendships, observed how girls circulated these notes between them in class. Some of the notes ended up lying on the classroom floor or inside the desks, whereas others were stored for years to come. In the notes, girls enacted lengthy question-and-answer dialogues. Other girls delivered the notes from the sender to the recipient.[37]

> I LOVE YOUR BAG!I CAN FIT ALL MY THINGS IN THERE!WHERE DID YOU GET IT?I WANT ONE JUST LIKE IT …!
> (SMS)

> CAN TRADE BAGS WITH YOU IF YOU WANT.
> (SMS)

Hi!can i come round?are you allowed to trade bags?*tutu*
(SMS)

YEAH THAT'S OK YOU CAN COME ROUND.I'M ALLOWED TO
TRADE
(SMS)

Girls' close friendships penetrate almost all their activities, so it makes sense that an examination of these areas of life will afford a better understanding of their entire life situation. Girls are constantly balancing a network of social relationships where one can detect inside spaces (friendships) and outside spaces (termination of friendships, quarrels). It is important for girls to anchor themselves to these friendships, to form alliances with other girls, to try to live up to ideals of reciprocal friendship and, most importantly, to avoid being left outside relationships. In the friendship culture of girls, detachment does not equal freedom but unhappiness and loneliness. For girls, freedom is the opportunity to choose between many friendships.[38] The division between inside space and outside space or inclusion and exclusion is evident throughout the interviews. Fifteen-year-old Tuomas contemplates the differences between girls' and boys' friendships:

> *Tuomas:* I think it's more of a girl thing, but what's also a girl thing is dressing up in the same clothes, you know, with your best friends. But that's just it, girls have their cliques. It's all about saying she's not with us: 'You can't wear your blue hat to school cause we're wearing ours!' That sort of thing is not right, I don't think.
> *Researcher:* Do boys ever have cliques like that?
> *Tuomas:* Sometimes I suppose, but . . .
> *Researcher:* Are they in some way different to girls' cliques?
> *Tuomas:* Yeah, 'cause other people can get in, I suppose. It's more a thing of everyone having their turn. (Laughs.) But with girls, there's no way you can get in, or then it's like there's all this intrigue against others. (Laughs.) I've seen this type of stuff, but no, not with boys . . .

And then with boys things also tend to get settled then and there, when with girls it may be: 'I really hate her!' for the rest of their lives.

In addition to friends reading each other's messages, text messages are also read between lovers. Allowing your boy/girlfriend to read your messages is seen as an indication of trust. The content of an individual message often raises discussion: Why does it read like this in here? Cross-reading is also a sign of silent control; the messages speak about what has happened in your life and who you have been in contact with. Many couples describe rereading the messages they have sent to each other in the course of their relationship as returning to the good and bad moments of their time together. Rereading the messages serves to build and maintain the relationship.

> *Researcher:* Do you think your boyfriend and other people also keep the messages?
> *Saila (16):* Yeah, Kai's kept all of my messages. It's fun to read them, when you read your own messages first and then Kai's.

We shall now go back to the moment the messages are composed. Most boys appreciate the extra time afforded by the written communication channel to think things through. In SMS, communication does not require exposing oneself to direct criticism, as the means of communication allows one to formulate the message in peace. The boys we have interviewed talk about spending up to thirty minutes in composing a message they consider significant; a message like this is not born without forethought. Boys look for suitable words, crystallise expression, and reflect on whether the recipient will interpret the message correctly. This far exceeds mere mechanical, device-oriented writing. The text messages are part of teens' personal content production. It is the content of the messages, the message in the text message that gives sense to mobile communication and motivates its use. The meanings of the messages, however short, expand into long stories. According to media

researcher Veijo Hietala, the basic human emotions such as joy, sadness, love and hate are born as stories or narratives – or, to be more precise, they are stories. The archetypal stories of human kind have, since ancient times, developed around these emotions. Like narratives, emotions are generally directed to some aim or goal and emerge from success or failure to achieve this goal.[39] It is these great emotions and the narratives they generate that form the core of teen communication, as well. The better the content, the more satisfactory the user experience.

Shaping and reshaping the text brings the user a sense of control. With reference to writing on the Internet, it has been concluded that careful planning of one's own text – written speech – before sending gives the communicators a sense that they are controlling both themselves and other people's perceptions of them.[40] On the Internet, real-time speech is afforded a written form, and in the cyber universe writing almost assumes the function of oral communication.[41]

> *Researcher:* Don't you think it would be nice to hear the voice of the person?
> *Jarno (16):* I suppose it would, but I don't know how I would act, you know, someone asking something and expecting an answer right away. So it's different with the phone. With a text message you get time to think up some good answers.

> *Mika (15):* Yeah, 'cause you can't think, when you're on the phone, just that it's pretty difficult when you need to react so much more quickly than with the messages. It's the time you get to think things over that's the most important benefit for me.

Resorting to text messaging is clearly not just a 'boy-thing'. Especially girls who view themselves as shy or quiet often emphasise that text messaging is the best means of communication for them. As 17-year-old Senja puts it: 'I myself mostly use messages, I'm not a big caller. I rarely say stuff on the phone that I write in my mes-

sages. The messages are a good form of communication for me, as I'm a little shy. I prefer to say things in messages to my boyfriend, too, rather than calling him. And sometimes you say a bit more in them, too.' Insecurities in self-expression are not the only reason teens opt for text messaging. The messages are also a good way of considering the feelings of the other person. Teens often state that a text message affords both sides the opportunity to exit an embarrassing situation without losing face.

> *Researcher:* So you couldn't imagine calling someone and saying, 'Hey, I really like you'?
> *Aleksi (15):* It's a lot easier to do in a text message. When you hear the voice, you get the first reaction and it may be, like, crucial in a bad way. But with a message the other person has the time to think, if they don't want to make you feel bad. For instance, if I sent a message to someone. Then that person would have the time to think whether she'd send back something that would be out of line or if she'd rather send something posit–, you know, saying that she likes me, too. Or then one saying: 'Sorry, I'm not free right now' or whatever.

An etiquette of sometimes surprising precision has developed around the answering of the messages. The first basic rule is that the message should be replied to using the same medium, with a text message. The second rule is that the message should be responded to as quickly as possible. Anxiety caused by replies too long overdue can be detected in SMS communication between friends: the messages are used to provide consolation for the lack of reply:

> I'M REALLY STRESSED OUTAFTER SENDING JAMI THE MESSAGE.I REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE!HE HASN'T SENT ANYTHING BACK.MAYBEIT'S OVER NOW.ARE YOU ANXIOUSABOUT TOMORROW?
> (SMS)

PatiencePatienceMyFriend! Maybe he's getting back from the fair and hasn't had time to answer yet. But should I be stressed if you are?:)I'm not.
(SMS)

The most frequently stated time limit or acceptable delay for a reply is some 30 minutes. Failing to reply in time is almost without exception interpreted as rudeness. If the reply is delayed, the mobile etiquette of teenagers requires an explanation to be given in order to avoid misunderstandings. The messages often begin with an explanation for the delay: 'I'm sorry for not answering right away, but . . .' Sometimes the sender expects a reply so quickly that conflicts are inevitable. One of the boys interviewed had received a message from a girl telling him that she had a crush on him. The next message, with a somewhat tearful tone – 'Why don't you answer, do you hate me?' – came only a few minutes later. In fact, Jami had spent the whole time composing his answer: 'I got a little poetic, she sent me two messages while I was writing the one. I kept amending it and then when I got it right, said what I wanted to say, then I sent it.'

Advice from the message consultant

The messages are not only read, but also written together. Despite its seemingly intimate tone, the communication of girls in particular is not always one-on-one. An invisible but significant 'SMS consultant' may operate between the sender and the recipient of the message. The consultant is either a close friend of the sender, or a verbally talented and socially sensitive member of the group of friends, a veritable SMS virtuoso, who advises others on how to correctly formulate text messages. These teens are consulted most commonly when the relationship is just beginning or in a crisis. The skilful writer helps the sender to compress the expression of his

or her most significant emotions into 160 characters, which constitutes editing the text and suggesting suitable words. Some girls report that using these consultants is common even during a quiet phase in a relationship with no current problems or high points: 'I've shown them [message drafts] and asked if they're right,' states 15-year-old Maria.

Consulting improves the quality of the message, and working together also enhances girls' group solidarity – text messaging is a way to share relationships. The message is, however, nearly always sent under the sender's name only, and the recipient of the message is generally unaware of the number of people involved in composing the message and the time spent in formulating it. A distinction should be made here between conscious cheating and simply doing things together. Writing messages under someone else's name or, perhaps more accurately, under someone else's phone number, would enable the writer(s) to distort reality. Collective composing of SMS messages, however, is not about consciously misleading people. It is a way to do things together and share emotions and is almost without exception seen as a positive phenomenon. Despite this, comparable 'consultation' is sometimes connected with behaviour that is experienced as negative by others concerned. In the following excerpt, 14-year-old Marita relates how she used a technical feature in her phone, the voice memo recorder, to knowingly breach her friend's confidence and violate the secrecy of telephone conversation. However, it should be noted that the example is an extreme one and in no way describes the activities of any larger group of teenagers.

> *Marita:* I kept asking my granddad for months to get me a new mobile, telling him that I couldn't take the old one anymore. I would have wanted a Nokia 6110, but then my granddad told me about the new Siemens and asked if I wanted to have that instead. And I did. It was smaller and it had this one real nice thing that you could record bits of conversations. Fifteen seconds or something like that.
> *Researcher:* Did you use the recording function?

Marita: I did. It was a lot of fun taping my friends' calls and then later when I was at their house or something asking them, 'Would you like to hear what you said to me on the phone yesterday?'
Researcher: So you would tape something of each call, or how did you choose what to tape?
Marita: It was mostly when my friends would begin telling me some huge secrets, I liked to tape them.
Researcher: Did you ever play them to other people?
Marita: Yeah.
Researcher: What sort of things were the secrets usually about then?
Marita: Boys.
Researcher: Did you play any practical jokes with it?
Marita: What I did once was play it to this guy. My friend nearly killed me, but it was OK. She just got a little cross with me. And the guy was having the time of his life. They're together now.

Similar well-meaning deception is also evident in the teens' – girls'? – habit of purposefully sending a message to a 'wrong number': to an ex-boyfriend or a new object of affection. The senders use the sensitivity of technology and the erring of humans to explain the 'mistake' and to support their own interests. The aim of the messages may be to irritate the recipient by letting them know that the writer is doing all right despite the ending of the relationship. This can also be seen as a type of social subliminal advertising or indirect marketing of one's own personality. Seventeen-year-old Sirpa illustrates this 'wrong target' messaging culture in her letter:

I have to say something about the absolutely RIDICULOUS habits connected with the use of mobiles with my friends . . . They have to do with a situation where you'd really love to send a message to someone (a boy), but there is NO WAY you could stoop to actually sending one!!!

One way (which is utterly ridiculous!): You write a message that suggests whatever you want him to know about yourself ('I'm doing real well', 'I'm fabulous') and perhaps makes him jealous, etc, . . . depending on what your purpose is, and then send the message to that per-

son, and then immediately follow it with a 'Sorry, wrong number' message (the 2nd message is not obligatory). And then just wait for him to answer. . . HA-HA!!! VERY IMMATURE! This is especially popular for harassing old boyfriends . . . But also when you have a terrible itch to contact someone, but you don't know what to say to them . . .

SMS personas

As we mentioned, sometimes there are several writers to a message. Sometimes it may seem that the one writer has two different personalities: a brave SMS self and a more reserved real-life self. As was evident in the above examples, some of the teens consider text messaging an easier communication channel compared to calling, which obviously entails speaking to people. In extreme cases this can lead to overuse of one communication channel. We refer to this type of excessive usage, which is markedly different from other communication by the same person, as the expression of the user's SMS persona. Sometimes the difference between the SMS persona and the actual personality of the person is very marked – if we accept the assumption that the physical self of an individual is in some way more 'real' than the self constructed through text messages. The possible differences between the person's actions in real life and the SMS persona become clear in the following case of a 15-year-old girl. The girl kept sending text messages to the researchers prompting them to come and interview her as she had so much to say. The messages were clear and reflected self-confidence. At the moment of the interview, the researcher discovered a very quiet girl who only glanced at the person interviewing her and was unwilling to answer most of the questions. The SMS persona was notably braver than the real life self.

The same courage through writing applies to some boys only willing to express their love through written speech. For them, an important function of SMS is to serve as a channel through which

they can express their emotions to their girlfriend. In extreme cases, the boy will never say to the girl face to face that he loves her. The following story of a couple will illustrate the point. The boy initiates the relationship through SMS on a Sunday night. After thinking about it for a moment, the girl responds with an affirmative message. The relationship begins. Next morning, the couple meets on the school bus. The girl takes the front seat, and the boy seats himself at the back. Neither acknowledges the other person's existence. The couple see each other on breaks but continue to act as if they don't know each other. In the evening, the boy writes the girl a romantic message filled to the brim with tenderness. The school bus episode repeats itself the following morning. This carries on until the weekend; it is not until Friday night that the two finally find the courage to talk to each other, yet both consider the relationship to have begun the previous Sunday with the first exchange of messages.

The story is not one of its kind. Seventeen-year-old Matti speaks of his mobile phone romance built on nocturnal love messages:

> *Matti:* But like every time we'd see each other, once we got the thing going again, we'd never talk about them [the messages] in school. In fact everything happened by SMS.
> *Researcher:* Why would you not talk about the messages in school?
> *Matti:* Well, they were so, you know. I tried to avoid it too, especially face to face, I didn't want to say it to her straight out in school or anywhere like that.

Relationships are thus often initiated by a text message. Fourteen-year-old Saimi remembers how a relationship of hers began with playful teasing through SMS: 'We were at the youth centre and then Kari sent me an SMS that said: "Saimi is nutty." We started teasing each other, and then it became all about "hey love" and things like this, and we started calling. And that's how it started really. Then Kari sent me an SMS asking if I wanted to be with

him.' Relationships are also maintained and sometimes ended through text messages. For most teens, leaving one's girl/boyfriend through SMS constitutes escaping the responsibility involved in a relationship. Nonetheless, SMS break-ups are relatively common occurrences. It should be noted, however, that this kind of behaviour mostly belongs to the culture of under 16-year-olds. In a somewhat sardonic tone, one of our message collectors, 16-year-old Satu, delivers an account of what took place during her message collecting period: 'There was one thing that happened that was pretty sad. My boyfriend left me and did it by SMS, which I found pretty outrageous, but, you know, that's pretty much up your alley, right?' There is, however, one mitigating factor in breaking up through SMS. Relatively many are of the opinion that even though the medium is not appropriate for terminating a longer relationship, it can be used to break off a relationship that has only lasted for a few days.

Finnish teenagers are not taken aback by technology permeating their relationships, and the mobile phone is frequently acknowledged as 'the third member' in between. Some of the girls accept the whole emotional situation because it is commendable that the boy has found at least some way to express himself. Some of the relationships end due to a lack of actual encounters or the disappointment brought on by reality. As some of the girls put it, in reality the passionate and smooth talking prince of SMS may turn out to be the quiet frog of the fairytale; the difference between the expectations and their fulfilment is too great and the relationship ends.

The language of the messages

The wider the phenomenon has spread, the more discussion it has aroused in the Finnish media concerning its influence on the language and, most notably, the written expression of teenagers. Similar questions have been raised about the language of comics and the

influence of email. Teachers of Finnish have been particularly worried about the negative effects that the free-form, often quickly written text messages may have on teenagers' capacity for the standard language expression so crucial for educational purposes. In part, the fear is probably justified. For boys in particular writing anything more than short text messages seems to continue to pose problems. Whereas girls wrote the researchers accounts of several pages in length, boys' cover letters frequently occupied only one third of a sheet of paper. The situation can, however, be seen as a matter of a viewpoint: isn't it a good thing that boys at least produce texts of 160 characters as opposed to not writing anything at all? The following is a cover letter by 18-year-old Hannes, one of the SMS collectors (use of capital letters from the original text):

> IT TOOK ME SOME TIME TO GET THIS LETTER READY, BUT I HOPE I CAN STILL MAKE IT IN TIME. THE COLLECTING WENT OK, BUT WRITING THIS LETTER WAS A LITTLE PROBLEMATIC AS I DIDN'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO FIND THE TIME FOR IT. I MANAGED TO COLLECT THE HUNDRED MESSAGES IN LESS THAN A MONTH'S TIME BUT WRITING THIS LETTER OR RATHER STARTING IT TOOK ME A LITTLE OVER A MONTH.

The letter does well to illustrate the difference between text types in the writing culture of boys: they can easily exchange a hundred text messages in a relatively short space of time, but producing a single more formal cover letter is considered distasteful enough to be put off for weeks.

SMS communication does not rely on traditional grammar or punctuation. On the Internet, the use of upper case lettering is interpreted as shouting;[42] the same goes with increasing frequency for GSM text messaging. It should be mentioned, however, that compared to computer-mediated communication, more SMS messages are written in capitals or small letters only, which is partly due to the fact that the older phone models only supported the use

of capitals. In addition, words are shortened, and inflectional endings characteristic of the Finnish language are left out. Also, it is common to substitute concise expressions from other languages for long Finnish words and to leave out verbs denoting 'being', which are considered redundant with regard to the message's content.

Sometimes punctuation and wordspacing is omitted completely. WithTheSpacesOmittedEachWordMayBeCapitalizedForClarity. It is worth noting here that this style of writing does not seem attributable to the influence of English language conventions in the capitalisation of headings, as has sometimes been suggested. The reason for the use of capitals is purely economical: each wordspace wastes precious characters that would be best used for communication. With the spaces omitted, the text becomes difficult to read. Capitalising the initial letters in words is teens' device-centred way of improving readability and thus be no means diminishes the quality of the text. As 16-year-old Maarit writes:

> It's not always enough to shorten words: you always seem to run out of space and then you have to leave out wordspacing, 'cause that too uses up space. So that makes the reading even more difficult. What I do is start each new word with a capital letter so the reader would know when a new word begins and wouldn't think of it as just one nonstop sentence. That makes it at least a little clearer. I know writers who write everything together either in small letters or capitals: 'icantgowithyoutodaycauseineedtolookafterourkidsthewholeday', and that's something you really can't make out, at least not in small letters. This is how I would write the sentence: 'Ican'tGoWithYou TodayCauseIHaveToLookAfterOurKidsTheWholeDay'.

The expression is connected to the device in other ways, too. A mistake in one letter, a typing error, may produce a new term of endearment that may remain in the language of text messages either briefly or permanently. Johanna, 19, relates: 'Sometimes when you use the predictive text input, you get some pretty funny typing errors . . .' With the rise in the popularity of SMS and the fact that

the mobile phone's keypad is not really designed for typing, most phone models now enable facilitated text input that is based on a built-in dictionary and reduces the number of presses required to complete a word. The feature is known as predictive text input or T9™. The dictionary 'guesses' what the user wants to say by offering the most common alternative. Because of the 'automatic' character of the dictionary, mistakes are easily introduced in the text if the writer does not pay attention.

The dictionary is an exception in the mobile culture of teenagers in that it is the only feature in mobile phones that has failed to break through. In fact, teens have been slower than adults in adopting the predictive text input. Teenagers are not willing to write dictionary language. As the application is based on standard language, the use of teenagers' 'own' words (not included in the default dictionary) requires extra effort; the user has to teach the application his/her personal vocabulary. Despite this, it is worth remembering that on the keypad of a regular mobile phone, all the available characters have been divided behind twelve keys and, as a result, use may require dozens of presses of the same key – a special character may be placed far behind alphabets and numbers. Teaching the application may require effort, but is not without benefits.

Some of the teens' messages bear more resemblance to a code language than standard language. A text filled with code language expressions may remain incomprehensible to an outsider unless explained. The use of abbreviations is very common and may be particularly tricky to comprehend: the lengthy acronym MRSNAJI signifies 'I love you now and forever' in Finnish, while the somewhat more concise ILY is used to express the same in English. Sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, abbreviations common on the Internet gain new meanings when transported to the mobile phone. The case of the acronym LOL (Laughing Out Loud) is a good example of this: Finnish teens adopted it into their mobile phone lexicon, in the process transforming an indication of laughter possibly containing a hint of sarcasm into a symbol for love and friendship (Lots Of Love).

> I saw the letters LOL on the Internet. I then began to use it with the mobile, no one knew what it meant, I had to explain to everyone, and now it's quite common. At first you'd always blush if you got a message saying LOL from someone. Now it just means 'friend'. (Heli, 15)

Smileys or emoticons familiar from the Internet also add emotion to the messages, so that they can smile and wink ;-) or sulk :-(. Emoticons like these are read by tilting the head 90 degrees anti-clockwise (to the left), until, for instance, the combination :-) looks like a smiling face (two eyes, a nose and a mouth). The smiling face is the most commonly used smiley and expresses a happy grin on the face of the writer.[43] Shorter versions are sometimes substituted for smileys borrowed from the Internet: the 'mobile mini smiley', the letter ü, is a convenient and economical substitute for the three-character :-).

> *Researcher:* Have you developed some kind of special language for your messages? If an outsider reads them, will he understand what you mean?
> *Petri (17):* Ever since the beginning we've always had this thing that we don't put any spaces between words and write the words alternately in capitals and in lower case, so you notice where a word ends and another one begins. That way you save the spaces and punctuation marks. Now there's also this German ü, that's become a kind of a *mini smiley*. It's only one character, so you don't always need to use two. And we abbreviate words quite a lot.
> *Researcher*: What words are they?
> *Petri:* One that's really common is gn for good night and things like that.

In their messages, teens commonly mix Finnish with foreign language words and expressions; the messages are often written in a medley of languages where a suitable expression is picked out from any language system mastered by the writer. 'Kirsi, do we start textailu? Anna' asks a 15-year-old girl blending English and Finnish in her query. The English expressions are adopted in the text to

condense the messages or to facilitate the expression of emotions. According to the informants, it is easier to profess one's love in a foreign language.

> 'ELLOUmaiLAAV!LEAVINGtoday?MsureYOURvacationWASbrilliant (batTOOshort),isn´tIT?IwishYOUHAVEaVICE&SAFEflightBACK!IT´S bright&sunny&i´mGOINGtoROLLSKATING..ü
> (SMS, in original English)

In addition to foreign languages, local dialects are also strongly present in the messages. In fact, most of the messages contain at least some characteristics of local speech. The observation is not in line with what could be expected. Language scientists have assumed that dialects do not find their way into the messages, and public discussion has done its share to create a picture of a uniform SMS language containing mobile phone-related vocabulary that remains the same in all areas of Finland. The messages in the data are presently undergoing a more profound analysis concerning the features of various Finnish language dialects. Yet with many of the messages, even a quick read-through enables us to relatively easily determine the part of the country the writer comes from.

Text message repertoires

Perhaps the biggest fallacy concerning the SMS communication of teenagers is the presumption that it follows a certain fixed formula. Our text message collection substantiates the notion of various repertoires in SMS expression, with most teenagers in possession of several different repertoires. The messages sent by a certain young person thus do not constitute a uniform mass, but are divided into a variety of styles of expression according to their content, form and language.[44] The teen may, for instance, compose a formal standard language message for the violin teacher in order to re-

schedule the lesson. Parents may receive an excuse imitating spoken language but punctuated according to the rules of grammar on why the teen will be late coming home. SMS exchanged with the best friend may include wordplays in slang and local dialect, and messages that go around the group of friends are often full of puns and insider vocabulary. Girls and boys with romantic interests exchange messages filled with vocabulary and expressions best compared with romantic short stories published in magazines or daytime soaps on TV.

It would seem, however, that more repertoires can be discerned in the mobile communication of girls than that of boys. Furthermore, girls stress that opting for a certain style of communication constitutes a conscious choice. Nineteen-year-old Johanna writes:

> How I see it, all of my friends write pretty decent Finnish, apart from the sometimes incomprehensible abbreviations etc. When you run out of space, you skip all the spaces between words and begin each word with a capital letter so you can tell the words apart. I only use this 'technique' when I'm absolutely sure that the recipient will understand, for instance, there'd be no use trying it with my dad, since he wouldn't get it.

In addition to situation-specific repertoires, adolescent text messaging continues to evolve temporally. The difference can be detected when we compare a teenager's messages from a few years ago with their recent messages. The first messages are often similar in style to letters and postcards or telegraphic language, whereas the most recent messages imitate spoken language resembling lines in a conversation. Much of SMS communication can be seen to constitute written speech. In its purest form, the 'postcard message' is a congratulatory message, a greeting that replaces the traditional birthday card, or a reminder that in its brevity resembles text jotted down on a slip of paper. The early messages begin with a greeting and end with a signature identifying the sender; later this superfluous text is omitted. For instance, there is no need to mention the

name of the recipient at the end of a message intended for someone you know, as teenaged message senders generally know who has their number stored on the SIM cards.

> IWISHYOUGOODFORTUNEINLIFE,ANDCONGRATULATIONSON YOUR SPECIALDAY!LOVE,PETE
> (SMS)

> CONGRATULATIONS! THE CARD IS ON THE WAY BUT STUPID AS I AM I FORGOT TO SEND IT YESTERDAY SO IT'LL PROBABLY BE THERE TOMORROW! SORRY.
> (SMS)

Boys, girls and messages

Making gendered generalisations about text messaging is daring as some boys will always break the limits of the alleged boys' text messaging profile and some girls will go to great lengths to avoid text messaging, even though, in general, girls are heavy users of SMS. With this in mind we will, however, now attempt to present some preliminary generalisations on differences in boys' and girls' text messaging.

The words brief, informative and pragmatic can be used to sum up the main characteristics of boys' text messaging. Boys have a tendency to state the essential in a near laconic tone: 'we're drinking Friday, the bottle's fine' or 'that's ok'. Boys have no inclination to utilise the entire space of 160 characters if they can fit the essentials in a shorter space. A message of 40-50 characters is frequently sufficient. The SMS material by boys contains numerous short question-answer texts, where the point of the message fits in one sentence: What time's practice? / You coming to the gym? / I can't make it to practice today! / Let's go out! / I can't, I'm at our summer cabin. It would also appear that punctuation and the use of capitals to begin sentences are omitted in boys' messages more often than

girls'. This may, however, constitute a misinterpretation owing to a limited sample size with boys.

It has become clear that text messaging in the 2000s often expands into lengthy question-answer dialogues bearing resemblance to actual conversation. Messages like these contain the expectation of a speedy reply – a question requires an answer. Some of the messages imitate conversation in Internet chats: reaction speed is emphasised and the message can comprise only one or two words. A line in a conversation like this is like a reply to a speedy exchange in the corridor: 'OK! It's a date! See you then!' The following SMS dialogue is a typical example of a text message conversation between 15-year-old boys:

Question:
How's your summer been so far? we had confirmation this morning. Great time in the church uh-huh!!
(SMS)
Answer:
It's been ok. the bands getting a shitload of gigs this summer.check [www address removed]
(SMS)
Question
Where do you have the gigs?
(SMS)
Answer:
Parties, Outdoors everywhere and in this club.
(SMS)
Question:
Do you play your own songs
(SMS)
Answer:
Yeah.that's all we play.
(SMS)
Concluding message
Well, don't break any legs or anything
(SMS)

Girls frequently bring up two points when discussing the gender differences in text messaging. On the one hand, they talk about the 160-characters running out a little too quickly, and on the other hand, they speak of 'padding' or filling up the message after the main point has been made. Padding can consist of chatting, gossip, or telling your friends how much you love them. Some girls also criticise boys' competence in interpreting SMS messages. They say that, in most cases, text messages to boys should be written in 'plain language' without too many compressed expressions, references or hints. Girls maintain that boys are unable to get the hints hidden between the lines.

> *Heidi (15):* Well, me at least, when I write to boys . . . they always need an entire sentence (laughs) . . . 'cause they're like 'What does this mean?'
> *Researcher:* Is that really the only way they'll get them?
> *Heidi:* Yeah, they don't get them otherwise and then it's like . . . you have to write really properly, for them to get it.
> *Researcher:* What about when boys send you messages, are they different from what girls send? Are they as long or the same . . .?
> *Heidi:* No, they're short, really short. They're like 'I was at home, didn't do anything.' Period. They're like stupid, something that you might as well not send at all.
> *Researcher:* Why don't boys use all 160 characters to get their money's worth?
> *Heidi:* I don't know. Maybe . . . maybe they can't be bothered or . . .
> *Researcher:* Do you ever get really long ones from boys?
> *Heidi:* No.
> *Researcher:* Never?
> *Heidi:* Well, maybe sometimes . . . but they don't use any padding, like we do.

Some girls also relate mix-ups caused by the different communication styles of the genders. When a girl fills up a message to a boy with friendly padding talk, the boy interprets the message too literally and may perceive it, for instance, as an indication of romantic

interest. It should be said, however, that girls themselves are sometimes at a loss when trying to interpret whether suggestive messages by boys are meant to be taken seriously or whether they have been sent as a joke to pass the time with friends. Fifteen-year-old Heini has identified the problem:

> I can't send messages with boys 'cause it always ends up flirtatious. You can't talk to boys through SMS without including stuff that an outsider might interpret the wrong way. Well, nothing racy but always something personal. Then every once in a while you end up thinking was he serious or was it just a joke.

Girls' conversational text messaging is also imitative of natural conversation, though in a different way than that of boys. While boys stress the speed of communication, girls emphasise the wealth of content. The communication of girls is contemplative, impulsive, meandering and nuanced. When a 17-year-old girl asks her friend for a favour, the request is meticulous and descriptive, even contemplative:

> COULD YOU DO ME A FAVOR THAT'S LARGER THAN LIFE: BRING ME ONE OF THEM BEADED HEADBANDS? IF NOT, THAT'S OK, JUST SAY SO. DON'T FRET OVER IT?
> (09:52 PM) (SMS)

> IF IT'S EXPENSIVE, SMS ME, OK? YOU'LL GET THE MONEY RIGHT AWAY, OR IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY, BEFORE YOU GO. PLEASE GET ONE WITH WHITE BEADS NOT YELLOW. THAAANKS!!!
> (09:55 PM) (SMS)

> I DON'T KNOW, DO YOU THINK THE YELLOW ONE WOULD LOOK MORE LIKE REAL PEARLS?
> (22:02 PM) (SMS)

Messages between girls are full of social softening, extra words and emotional sharing of experiences. Boys frequently only write about what has happened, and where and how it has happened, whereas girls contemplate the reasons behind the incidents and include description about how the matter has affected them. The styles represent different forms of written speech and can also be seen to constitute its extreme forms. It will be interesting to follow the development and intertwining of the two styles with an eye on the likelihood that, in the future, SMS messages will probably be replaced by emails far exceeding the length of 160 characters and mobile chat channels enabling conversation bordering on spoken language.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

1   *Suomen tekstiviestimarkkinat* 1998-2000 2001: 37-39.
2   Ibid.: 13.
3   Ibid.: 13.
4   Case Mobile Finland 2000: 26.
5   *Suomen tekstiviestimarkkinat 1998-2000* 2001: 29-32.
6   http://www.mintc.fi
7   http://www.sonera.fi/investor_fi/taloudellinen/index.html.
8   Coogan and Kangas 2001a.
9   *Suomen tekstiviestimarkkinat 1998-2000* 2001: 21.
10   Kopomaa 2000: 68-75.
11   Coogan and Kangas 2001b.
12   Coogan and Kangas 2001b.
13   Nurmela 2001: 49.
14   Näre and Lähteenmaa 1992: 329.
15   Dimmick, Kline and Stafford 2000, 9.
16   Höflich and Rössler 2000 and 2001.
17   Cf. for instance *Suomen tekstiviestimarkkinat* 1998-2000 2001: 16.
18   For mobile services in Japan, see for example
         http://www.nttdo como.com.

19   See for example *Cool Places* 1998.
20   Markham 1998: 86.
21   Abbot 1998: 86.
22   Virtanen 1999: 378.
23   Virtanen 1988: 281.
24   Apo 1995: 177-178.
25   Suojanen 1999: 49.
26   Apo 1995: 184.
27   Suojanen 1999: 49.
28   See for instance Lipponen 1992 and 1998.
29   *Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, *modern*.
30   Pöysä 1996: 242.
31   Ibid.: 226.
32   Virtanen 1988: 194-195.
33   Virtanen 1999: 379.
34   Coogan and Kangas 2001b.
35   Anttila 1998: 40.
36   Puuronen 1996: 269.
37   Hey 1997: 50-51, 80-83.
38   Aapola 1992: 84-86.
39   Hietala 1999: 249-250.
40   Markham 1998: 124.
41   Abbot 1998: 86.
42   Järvinen 2000: 65.
43   Ibid.: 65.
44   Similar observations have been made concerning the language of email. Cf. Luukka 2000.

6 NICE COVERS

Culture of an object

Booze phones and kitsch mobiles

'It's just a part of life nowadays. A phenomenon of our time,' proclaims a mother on her attitude to mobile phones in her family and continues, 'It's made things so much easier. I wouldn't give it up without a struggle.' We encounter here a perception that runs through the whole research material: mobile communication is a part of everyday life, and the device makes it easier to manage everyday affairs. The relationship to the object is not questioned. If the mobile phone is by definition a phenomenon of our time, can we still recall what life was like before the mobile phone? The earliest research material contains mentions of young people who wanted to position themselves against the mobile-using mainstream. This type of opposition typically occurred when a young person returned to Finland after having spent a year abroad as an exchange student. Many felt that during their absence a change they did not want to be part of had taken place in their home country.

> [My daughter] was of the opinion that, during the time she had been away from Finland, mobile phones had become a lot more common in the streets of Helsinki. She was really amazed at how common. And she couldn't understand why so many people suddenly needed

mobiles. And then at some point I suppose she reacted against it somehow and decided that she was not going to get a mobile phone herself. (Mother in 1997)

In autumn 1997, 14-year-old Sanni told a researcher: 'A friend of mine was offered a mobile phone, but she'd rather have turtle. (Laughter) So that's how interested [my friends] are.' In the 2000s, people who are opposed to mobile culture or who, like Sanni's friend, remain utterly indifferent to it are hard to come by. Deciding against mobile phone use after having purchased the first phone is even more rare.[1] In the entire time of the research, we have come across only one child who had given up the use of the mobile phone. In the more recent material, the critical views are not so much directed to the purchase of a mobile phone as such but to its usage or mobile-related consumption, including the elevated prices of the devices and costs of use.

Almost a third of teenagers (30%) interviewed between 1998 and 1999 reported paying their own phone bill. Forty-six percent

The use of SMS constitutes content production by the users themselves. Picture: Juha Kolari, 2000.

had their bills paid by their parents, and 23% had agreed to pay the sum that exceeded the limit they had agreed on with their parents. The sudden rise in popularity of various technological restrictions can be seen as a manifestation of the new critical attitude mentioned earlier. There are at least two types of technical limitations designed to control the costs of mobile phone use: some do no more than remind the user of the costs that have been incurred so far, while others go as far as establishing a credit limit that prevents the making of calls and the sending of messages when the user exceeds this agreed-upon monthly sum. The use of services for regulating and/or monitoring the subscriber's mobile-related expenditure saw a significant increase in 2000. The limits also became a frequent topic of conversation and featured commonly in the content of text messages collected by teens, as in the following examples:

> WHAT'S UP?HAVEN'T HEARD FROM YOU IN A WHILE?WHERE'D YOU DISAPPEAR TO?CALL ME IF YOU CAN, I'M ABOUT TO HIT THE CREDIT LIMIT!LET ME KNOW HOW YOU'RE DOING!MERVI
> (SMS)

> NOT MUCH,JUST COLD AND SNOWY!I'M 16.WHO ARE YOU,HOW OLD,WHERE DO YOU LIVE ETC..! CAN YOU CALL ME, MY CREDIT LIMIT'S ALMOST UP SO I SHOULDN'T WRITE TOO MANY!?
> (SMS)

> MANAGED TO FINALLY SEND EMAIL TO YOU. HAD A TERRIFIC WEEKEND. MORE ABOUT THAT IN THE MAIL. I'M TEXTING FROM MUM'S PHONE CAUSE MY CREDIT LIMIT'S UP AGAIN. SARI
> (SMS)

Another way to express criticism towards current trends related to mobile telephony is to consciously choose an 'old-fashioned' mo-

bile phone model. Teens might opt for an unfashionable make or model in opposition to mainstream fashion or because of ecological thinking, wanting to slow the ever-accelerating consumption. It should be remembered, however, that this is not a large group of young people who both think and act to oppose consumption. A type of pseudocriticism is encountered much more commonly: users state that acquiring a new phone model would not have been necessary because the old one was still perfectly functional, yet are not willing to stop replacing the phones whenever a new model is rolled out by the manufacturer. It seems that the launch of a new model automatically creates a pressure to acquire it. Certain groups that perceive a certain model as part of their image emerge as an exception to this. For example, a model by Nokia that is thought of by many as 'the basic phone' and often afforded a certain nostalgic value is sometimes associated with the rock 'n' roll ideology of the 1950s:

> *Researcher:* What makes the 2110 a rock 'n' roll phone?
> *Veera (16):* Well, here the rockers have them as well.
> *Researcher:* What does it mean to be a rocker? How do you dress and what kind of ideas do you have?
> *Veera:* Everybody wears dark blue jeans with turn-ups, cowboy boots, white T-shirt, flannel shirt, a leather jacket and hair like Elvis'. The ideology is basically that everyone loves rock 'n' roll music, and it's a bit like what Elvis was, you want to be like him, and you take it easy and have fun and don't bitch about small things and that kind of thing.

Between 1998 and 1999, almost a third of the teenagers interviewed (28 percent) had replaced their old mobile phone at least once. The sample included young people who were already on their third, fourth, fifth or sixth phone. The discrepancy between seemingly critical attitudes and the constant purchasing of new devices appears even more flagrant with the teens' stressing rational decision-making and economic reasons for acquiring newer models. They argued that it was wiser to replace the old device while it

was still worth something in exchange. This constitutes a clear case of circular reasoning: it is necessary to buy a new phone before the previous one gets too old. Another typical explanation emphasises family communication: the family would be acquiring a new mobile phone in any case. Why buy mother a new phone, when 'My old phone is still ok to give to mum'. Seven percent of the teenagers interviewed came from families where the only mobile phone was used by the teenager; the parents did not own mobile phones. This is likely to be a predominantly Finnish phenomenon.

Sometimes the use of an unfashionable phone is connected to a certain type of situation. The teens speak of 'booze phones', which they take along to parties or rock festivals in the summer. The point is obviously to prevent the more expensive phone from getting lost or breaking; it doesn't matter if the old 'brick-sized' model gets a few dents along the way. This makes the booze phone (or, as the teens so eloquently put it in Finnish, *kännikänny*) a part of partying culture. The oldest GSM models have also emerged as collectible items that reflect a certain era. Sometimes a large and handsome kitsch mobile may complement the owner's outfit and thus serve to enhance his or her street credibility. The display may be cracked, the cover scratched, the antenna crooked and the battery may only stay on with the help of a plaster. The following example related by two teachers will illustrate the point.

> *Male teacher:* What happened to me earlier this week was that I saw a real old-school mobile, which means that it was a few mobile phone generations . . .
> *Female teacher:* Teemu's, right?
> *Male teacher:* I think so.
> *Female teacher:* Yes, well. That was horrible.
> *Male teacher:* An absolutely ancient model . . .
> *Female teacher:* He had got it for EUR 6 from somewhere.
> *Male teacher:* He was really showing it off. So this is the next thing, the mobiles start to have a kitsch value.
> *Researcher:* Yeah. Street credibility.
> *Female teacher:* That's it.

Similarly comical aspects are sometimes associated with using the mobile phone in 'the old-fashioned' way, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

> I saw a friend of mine downtown today (drunk). She was calling someone on her mobile, which is pretty huge. Everyone's always laughing at the way she holds her phone in front of her mouth (neither end by the ear) like a walkie-talkie. It looks really odd!!! I've seen a young man do the same (also drunk).
> (Extract from a diary by 16-year-old Taru)

Life in the old days

It is interesting to note how fast the mobile phone has secured its place in the lives of its users. The young are perhaps even quicker than adults to get accustomed to having a mobile phone than adults, to the extent that within a few weeks of purchase, they speak of the phone as if it had been a part of their lives forever. Ethnologist Elina Kiuru has made some very apt observations concerning the nature of the relationship between objects and time. She points out that in the world of objects or artefacts, the passing of time is not quite as linear as is often thought. The lifespan of a single artefact is easy to perceive in terms of its birth, life and death (or eternal life), but the moment we start to consider the object in relation to people and other objects we suddenly find ourselves in an elaborate web of material, time, space, emotions, information, experiences and meaning. Kiuru asks: In the end, is it possible to determine with any precision when an object actually exists? Can an artefact be said to exist only when it fulfils a certain role within the limits of its physical existence or, in other words, constitutes material that can be measured, weighed and observed with the senses? What about memories of objects lost or objects that have been broken, fixed or altered, or that have lost all connection to their origin – what time and space do they belong to? Is the object

more about its form or content, and does the real essence of the artefact consist of material or a mental image?[2]

It seems that human beings are relatively quick to form affective relationships to various devices, and the adoption of the mobile phone also occurs on this emotional level. Laura Ermi and Petri Lankoski, who have studied emotions in digital environments, remind us that people do not become less human when utilising a computer or other digital devices, which means that human emotions are also present in usage.[3] According to Kaj Ilmonen, powerful emotions are associated with things that occupy a central place in the history of physical existence and thought. The television and the motorcar are examples of these emotionally charged objects.[4] The mobile phone can now be added to this list. One form of this emotional-charge can be seen in the phenomenon of personification, a topic that we shall return to in a few moments.

It is worth noting how, when talking about matters related to the mobile phone, teenagers and even children relatively quickly adopt an almost uniform way of speaking that reflects a juxtaposition between ways of life conceived of as 'traditional' and 'modern'. Time before the mobile phone is remembered with nostalgia, becoming the uncontrolled opposite of the strictly regulated mobile time. A typical beginning to a nostalgic narrative calls up the 'once upon a time' opening of fairy tales: 'The time before I got my mobile phone . . .' Another statement frequently uttered by young mobile users in this context is: 'I can't even remember the time when I didn't have a mobile phone.'

We have sometimes referred to young people as mobile cyborgs for whom the mobile phone has become an almost organic part of their person. The concept of cyborg sets the traditional notions of the limits between humans and machines into motion, placing them under discussion.[5] The idea of mobile cyborgs is of course strongly exaggerated, but it reflects the idea of a generation who are forced to consciously disengage themselves from the control of the device if they want to experience things differently, as in the case of the girls in the next excerpt. The new generation, whether de-

scribed by the letter X or G, inhabits an environment offering a never-ending surplus of stimuli; we are constantly surrounded by sound, movement, image and electronic signals.[6] Nostalgic speech frequently contains the notion of free, uncontrolled living where anything could happen. In the minds of the informants, the frugality of life 'before' thus also features an element of surprise and positive connotations embedded in the word. Sixteen-year-old Jenna occasionally spends mobile-free Friday nights out with friends:

> Or then, if I'm going out with a friend of mine, she may have a mobile phone. Or it may be that neither of us has a phone. It's just the two of us. It's like, we know whereabouts they tend to hang out anyway. We always run into someone. You tend to be pretty well aware of where to find people. Helsinki is a pretty small town when you think about it. You know where the others are. So you get a little traditional, you know, the same feeling as before mobiles.

According to ethnologist Teppo Korhonen, research has been in danger of becoming somewhat misguided when it ignored the significance of the artefact as part of people's everyday lives. As consumers, people place a strong emphasis on minor differences, while at the same time ethnologists are less interested in studying the variations in the shape of artefacts. Another central aspect is the meaning and value different people afford different objects, for example by elevating them to the status of a work of art, a status symbol, collectible item or souvenir. In another sense, we feel that objects have an effect on our everyday lives. Technological devices make their mark on our routines both at home and at work. Technological innovations provide us with both planned and unplanned, positive and negative experiences. In Korhonen's view, in order to get beyond technology determinism we need to focus on the meanings everyday objects hold for each of us, exploring what it is people do with them and how the activities of work and free time are organised around them. Objects, routine functions and rituals are closely intertwined. Objects regulate both our daily lives

and special occasions and also affect our perceptions of space and time.[7]

In their speech, young people sometimes associate the mobile phone with routines and meanings that in reality are not essential in this respect. This probably constitutes another instance of established mobile talk that young people have adopted along with the rest of the population. The influence of the artefact on the construction of a culture is strong. The adults interviewed by Kopomaa and Mäenpää talk about the mobile phone as a device, the meaning of which is crystallised in expressions such as 'useful object', 'tool for work', 'mental reassurance', 'just a phone', 'tool for survival' or 'safety device'. The role of the mobile phone as a useful and instrumental device is highlighted in these utterances. Conversely, the mobile phone is frequently perceived as an entertaining and social device that provides the user with experiences: 'pastime', a 'thing to show off', a 'get-away', a 'toy', 'convenience object', 'company', 'nice technological device' and a 'way to keep in touch'.[8] This discourse of usefulness versus fun also features prominently in the speech of teenagers, and from the point of view of interpretation, takes on interesting aspects. In their speech, young people make sense of their lives in relation to the mobile phone using concepts that originate in the lives of adults. Studying becomes work and schoolbooks and the mobile phone become tools for work. Because the mobile phone was, especially in the early days of the culture, commonly conceived of as a sign of a busy – and successful? – individual, teenagers aspiring to the lifestyle of adults fully adopted this tool discourse. In the following example, 16-year-old Henna describes the management of her everyday life in which the mobile phone plays an important part:

> *Researcher:* Would you say the mobile phone is a sign of a busy day for you?
> *Henna:* Yeah. It would be like a tool for work or something like that. When you come home from work, you put aside all your work things and concentrate on something else entirely.

Researcher: You work too, then?
Henna: No I don't. But, you know, study.

A certain established discourse concerning the use of the mobile telephone is visible in the material in other contexts, too. Fifteen-year-old Tiia, stating that nearly everyone in her class has a mobile phone, adopts an attitude familiar from the media: 'It's shocking really. I really mean it. Makes you think what this world is coming to.' The ideology behind the statement derives from science fiction literature: the notion of a world ruled by machines. Researcher Raine Koskimaa has concluded that science fiction literature has a tendency to put forward a pessimistic view with regard to the possible effects of virtual reality. Despite the seemingly endless technology optimism, technology and computers in particular have always engendered a certain amount of fear, which culminates in an image of life ruled by machines, a scenario that reduces the human being to a meaningless part of machinery.[9] Tiia continues the account of her relationship to technology by comparing her life to a teen movie, claiming that her current lifestyle contains practices which, before, would have seemed quite unrealistic and amusing. The fiction has become reality.

Tiia: You get really lazy about things. You may call people, when you're at school and can't find someone in the building, you just call them and ask: 'Where are you?' And they tell you: 'I'm in front of the physics room.' 'I'm in the maths room.' 'Can I see you? Let's wave.' Like that. Twenty meters apart. That's a little too much I'd say.
Researcher: But you still do it?
Tiia: It does happen. (Laughs.) Hmm. I think about two years back there was this film called *Clueless* where that happened. It was supposed to be really funny, everyone laughed. Like, that can't be real and now it's like normal, real life.
Researcher: So you tend to use it during breaks. Or during lunch hour or after school?
Tiia: Yeah. Especially after school. 'Where did you disappear to just

now?' 'We're just here 20 meters from you.' 'OK. Will you hold on a minute then.'

According to Ilmonen, an object becomes special through a process of singularisation where, generally, the four dimensions of an artefact are reduced into one, the symbolic. The crucial element is that the object is stripped of its economic dimension and thus becomes meaningful to its user in a new way. The transformation is carried out by affording the object the status of holiness. This helps the owner to get the object to serve the purposes he or she perceives as essential, which in most cases involves constructing their own social identity.[10] According to Pasi Mäenpää, the principal function of mobile phone use is connected with life management rather than communication.[11] 'I never thought of the mobile phone simply as a means to keep contact, like my dad says,' reports 15-year-old Kirsi, thus crystallising the meaning of the mobile phone for her.

Rich Ling and Per Helmersen, who have studied Norwegian teenagers' use of the mobile phone, conclude that young people attach various symbolic meanings to the mobile phone as a device. The mere existence of the mobile handset communicates to others the dichotomous message that while the owner of the device is indeed available to be reached, he or she is also popular enough to need a mobile phone. Ownership of a mobile phone also implies that the person has attained a certain technological competence and economic level. The purchase of the right model demonstrates to others that the user is up to date with current trends in consumption. Thus mobile device may serve to not only support and construct the identity of the owner but also communicate it to others.[12]

'I like to personalise everything else, too, and I like to dress in a way that no one else dresses. And my mobile phone is no Nokia 5110 with standard black covers like everyone else has. For me it's really important to have it look like it belongs to me and no one else,' stresses 15-year-old Outi. Ownership of a certain device can function as a means of both belonging to a group and differentiat-

ing oneself from others in it, as becomes clear in the following extract from a diary by 16-year-old Katariina:

FRI 28 May '99
I was downtown with a friend and a man walked by who was talking on the same mobile I have (Nokia 8110 i). I felt kind of flattered and it made me feel a certain affinity. That evening, when I was on the bus going home some old lady's mobile started ringing. The ringing tone was the basic one from Mäkitorppa [a mobile phone retailer that at the time used one of the most commonly recognised Nokia ringing tones in its advertisements] and I was red with fury!!! It was awful. The ringing tone of a beginner and an insecure person.

MON 31 May '99
I'm working for 4 days [to do practical training] and of course everyone's got a mobile there. Most of them have the same phone as me . . . I feel like I really belong! I recognise my phone from the ringing tone.

WED 2 June '99
Today I began to get really annoyed . . . The affinity vanished and disgust appeared in its place. Someone who used to be a friend of mine had bought the same phone as I have and was showing it off on purpose! Made me physically sick . . . (We're not speaking to each other) (This happened in front of our house)

Mobile buddies

In Finland, most mobile phone retailers stock a product that has the appearance of a fluffy toy, but on closer inspection turns out to be a small pouch for carrying a mobile phone. The pouch might come in the shape of a piglet, a kitten or a cartoon character and in a way becomes a 'face' or a 'body' for the mobile phone. The product name translates as 'mobile buddy'. It functions to carry and protect the mobile phone as well as to personalise it. Teens also

speak of the mobile phone as their friend in another, more abstract sense, raising it from the category of a technological device to something like actual human contact: the phone becomes a 'friend' or an 'alternate personality' that reflects the owner's identity. In the life of teenagers, the mobile phone is becoming a very central device that appears almost to be transcending its status as an object to become an instrument for something more important or even a 'companion'.[13] The above-mentioned commercial products may be doing their share to promote this development, which is more often enhanced through the practices of naming and personifying the device and the concomitant nurturing attitude directed towards it. When teenagers talk about their mobiles, they rarely use the standard term for 'mobile phone'; the general term is replaced by various terms of endearment and other nicknames. At times, the names have occupied a more visible position in mobile culture, as they have been repeated in the logos or texts on mobile phone screens. This phenomenon was examined more closely in the previous chapter.

Ville (15): He always has this pouch right here. He takes it out on breaks and kind of strokes it and (mimics breathing on the handset) always just (laughs). It's unbelievable really.

Researcher: So he keeps polishing it.

Ville: Yeah, it's like a tamagotchi, I'd say.

Researcher: Yeah.

Ville: It's his friend (laughs).

Researcher: Yeah. Would you say he's popular otherwise?

Ville: Not especially. He's a little, girls sometimes smirk at him. He tries to be a little tough sometimes (laughs), but he's not really.

Researcher: So he might really need his mobile to be a friend?

Ville: Yeah.

Researcher: So you could actually say it's . . .

Ville: Yeah. And then because he keeps trying to be something he's not, he doesn't really know how to be with the rest of us.

Researcher: Mm.

Ville: He keeps calling us childish and things like that.

Researcher: So he doesn't really fit in himself.
Ville: Yeah.

Sometimes the teens speak of their phones as if they were animate creatures that had their own will and mind and did things independently of their owners' wishes. They describe how the mobile phone 'calls people' from inside their bags or sends empty messages to people it has singled out from its memory. In scientific terms, this is known as humanising a technological feature. In reality, of course, a mobile phone makes a call only when the key that creates the connection is pressed, and in a case like this the call is generally directed to the last dialled number. The 'independent calling' happens when the owner forgets to lock the keypad, and some pressure on the 'green receiver' button is enough to initiate a call.

Personification and naming of objects are features typical of all cultures. Throughout the times, people have thought of objects as 'living' helpers, even if no actual spirit had been attributed to them, as is the case in animistic cultures. The custom of giving proper names to objects such as dolls and ships is closely related to this.[14] Finns have given their mobile phones an impressive range of pet names, some examples of which translate as banana, chat-o-matic, yuppie teddy bear, fetter, shoe (phone), stick, hand phone, slide phone, nokia, beeper, pocket and zippo.[15] The names derive from a variety of sources. Often, the nickname contains a direct reference to the phone's appearance or other distinctive features, some of which are particular to a certain model. One Nokia model is commonly called 'the banana', while another one is often referred to as 'zippo' after a brand of cigarette lighters that the phone resembles in both colour and size.

Psychologist Jan Blom, who has studied the personalisation of digital environments, has made similar observations concerning Finnish teenagers' use of mobile telephony. According to him, the young speak of the mobile phone as if it were a living thing. One of the teenagers in his sample described the mobile phone as a 'personal friend'. Another had given the mobile a name, while yet an-

other had afforded the mobile the status of a pet. In all, teenagers appeared to have become very attached to their devices.[16]

The degree of intensiveness in the nurturing of the mobile phone varies individually. In some cases, the mobile phone has a life that is comparable to that of its owner, who wakes it up in the morning (turns on the sound) and puts it to bed at night (by turning the sound off). The phone is dressed in colour covers, the design of which can be varied according to the owner's present mood (bright or gloomy colours) or outfit for the day (accessorizing). Some girls have themselves prepared an entire wardrobe of different mobile pouches for the purposes of carrying and protecting the device. Blom also mentions seasonal and media-influenced personalisation, with the *Star Wars* craze, foe example, introducing the theme of Darth Vader into mobile phones.[17] Around Christmas, the covers are red and there is a picture or an animation of a reindeer running across the screen. When ringing, the Yuletide mobile bursts into the familiar melody of *Jingle Bells*. As regards nurturing, the most basic activity involves charging the battery so that the phone does not 'die', 'pass out' or 'get tired'. Instances of nurturing activity bordering on compulsive behaviour only appear with the youngest teens. The father of a 14-year-old girl describes how his daughter's attentiveness to the state of her phone's colour covers reached proportions where it became a source of amusement and a target for benevolent teasing among family members:

> *Father:* She used to have this habit of wiping the thing clean every time she would take it in her hand. To get rid of fingerprints. Gave me the opportunity to have a go at her, asking if she'd remembered to dust her phone. Once I even sent a text message from the PC to remind her to dust it. The joke got a bit old after a while though. In the beginning I suppose she got some comments from her friends, too, for always wiping it like this (demonstrates wiping).
> *Researcher:* To keep it looking good.
> *Father:* Yes. I suppose it goes to show she liked it, when she got it as a present.

Girls go for mobile technology

The previous chapter looked into the different ways in which girls and boys use SMS. In the following, we will present some observations concerning gender differences in the more general mobile phone culture. In 1998 and 1999, there was an overrepresentation of girls in the sample: 58 percent of the informants were girls and 42 percent were boys. The difference has been evened out in subsequent data. The most important reason for the surplus of girls is their strong friendship ties. Girls often wanted to be interviewed together with their friends, so that a researcher who had agreed on an interview with one girl actually ended up surrounded by an entire network of girls.

In January 1998, two 14-year-old boys from Espoo presented a researcher with the following provocative claims concerning girls' use of mobile telephony:

> *Researcher:* Would you say girls use the mobile phone differently than boys?
> *Miika & Juuso:* Yeah.
> *Miika:* They do.
> *Juuso:* They write really slow.
> *Miika:* That's right. So they won't break it . . .
> *Juuso:* Yep.
> *Researcher:* Are their mobiles the same as yours or are they different?
> *Juuso:* Well, they're a lot simpler.
> *Miika:* Yeah. Plus they never have them on.
> *Juuso:* That's right. And they don't do anything with them. They just have them.
> *Miika:* Exactly, yeah.

Computers and the playing of computer games are more often associated with boys than girls. Researchers have expressed well-founded concern over why the use of ICTs is less interesting to girls than it is to boys. Media researcher Annikka Suoninen points out that the problem is perhaps not simply the masculine aura of tech-

nology or the common association of masculinity with all things technological, although these factors are commonly used to explain the phenomenon. What she sees as more important in this respect is what the devices can actually be used for. It should not be too difficult to get girls interested in computers if computers could be used to do things that are genuinely interesting to girls and women.[18]

The mobile phone emerges as a technology that is potentially more egalitarian than the computer. Gender differences in mobile ownership appear to be minimal and, in fact, the small difference seems to be to the advantage of girls. Marja Saanilahti concludes that the telephone may, to some extent, be seen as girls' communication device, especially considering that the fixed-line phone has already occupied a central position in the girls' 'world of communication devices'.[19] We maintain that the popularity of the telephone among girls can be ascribed to the genuine interest mentioned by Suoninen and the value of the device as a social instrument. The mobile phone enables the production and transmission of materials girls perceive as important. In fact, the claims articulated by the two boys in the 1990s can be reversed so that they are actually referring to boys. In most age groups girls have more mobile phones than boys, use the devices more than boys do and are more adept at communication through the mobile phone than boys are. Since the beginning, the main difference has resided in the fact that while boys have talked about mobile phones, girls have talked into theirs.

> *Researcher:* Do you talk about mobiles a lot? Compare makes?
> *Niina (16):* Yeah. Sometimes. It's usually something friendly, commenting on a new pair of colour covers someone's got on their phone. Or then about numbers, since they tend to change a lot because people are constantly getting new phones. So they have to change their numbers too. So we talk about that sometimes. And if there's a new model out from Nokia, people ask to see it and get all impressed. But that's not what it's about, really. It's about talking into the phone.

The boys' views probably did not quite coincide with reality even at the time they made their comments. Nonetheless, at the time, girls also tended to voice similar comments. The following statement is by 14-year-old Tuuli: 'Boys have a lot more mobile phones. 'Cause they ask to have them. They want all sorts of technological gadgets.' The perception concerning girls' more reserved relationship to their mobile phones can be detected in the interviews of a number of other boys, too. One explanation for this is that, at least in the early stages of the phenomenon, girls were more inconspicuous in their use of the mobiles, which led boys to believe that girls had no need to use them. In school, boys' mobile phone use during lessons was more aggressive than that of girls. 'Some inconsiderate louts have even had the nerve to answer,' reports a female teacher concerning boys' mobile use. Boys both talked about mobile phones and openly compared them. 'At the moment, I'd say the most talked-about subject in school is the mobile phone,' reported 15-year-old Sakari at the end of 1997. A male teacher had this to say:

> They may have it on the desk to play with or something, they tend to have it there in the open more. The phone is physically present, even if it's turned off it's there. But with girls it's more, they take it out of their bag after class and then call someone. This is the type of difference I've noticed.

The same boundary between the visible and the invisible has affected discussion on whether certain types of people are more prone to get a mobile phone than others: is the mobile phone a communication device for the extroverts alone? With teenagers, it seems impossible to establish a connection between their character and degree of mobile orientation. Teachers often find it curious how all types of students, even the quietest in the class, have a mobile phone. This can probably be explained by the egalitarian nature of the device. As we noted in the previous chapter, text messaging also affords a useful communication channel for those who prefer not to call.

As the years have passed, girls have become more active in the more conspicuous use of the phone, too. In 1999, many informants defined mobile communication as a strong point of girls in particular – a feminine technology. School corridors were filled with girl groups reading and composing messages together. Mobile gaming, the playing of games included in the handset, which was previously seen as boys' territory was in some schools labelled as girl culture. This resulted from the fact that it was the girls who were using the most recent mobile models that featured the games. Sixteen-year-old Essi writes: 'Of the games in my mobile I first finished *Space Impact*. It's a shame that at the moment I can't really be bothered with any of the games since I can't beat my records for *Snake*, *Pairs 2* and *Space Impact*, and I came up with such a good strategy for *Bantumi* that can beat the machine on any level.'

> *Researcher:* Have you noticed them reading each other's messages together?
> *Teacher:* Yes. That's what happens. There are, for instance, situations where a girl gives the phone to her friend and says: 'Look. Read it. This is the message I got.'
> *Researcher:* To pass the breaks.
> *Teacher:* Exactly. And another thing that I've noticed with girls is the worm game craze that lasted for some weeks, I think, a month maybe.

As we saw before, with teenagers the use of mobile telephony does not necessarily entail mobility. Seen from the vantage point of gender, mobility as such appears more pronounced in the communication of boys. Teenagers describe how in a typical telephone conversation between girls, the focus is in the past, on things that have already taken place. Girls go through events to reminisce or to relate them to a friend who did not herself witness the situation. In an analysis of teenagers' use of the fixed-line phone, Marja Saanilahti describes boys' calls as distinctly shorter than those of girls. In her view, boys calls usually consist mainly of agreeing on meetings, whereas girls' calls may last for hours. In their telephone conversa-

tions, girls go through anything potentially interesting that has happened to the caller, the person at the other end, friends from school or other common acquaintances. It is not uncommon for the television to be on in the background enabling real-time commentary on the subject of TV programmes. These discussions are commonly held between best friends who may have just spent most of the school day together.[20] On a similar note, an American study concludes that most phone calls lasting for more than twenty minutes are made by teenagers.[21]

Management of future time is perhaps the most central aspect of boys' calls to each other; calls are used to plan what will happen next. Speech thus functions more to anticipate the future than to go through or share the past. This orientation to the future, combined with the significance of physical mobility, can be detected in the reasons boys give for the importance of mobile communication. Boys' descriptions of life with the mobile phone involve driving mopeds and snowmobiles, wandering in the woods and going fishing.

Sami (15): I've had situations where my moped has conked out by the side of the road somewhere and I've called a friend to bring some spare parts. That's one situation where I would have had to walk quite a distance. . . . You can be out at some cabin with your mates, fishing, so it's nice that you can call the people at home to tell them we just got a 20-pound pike, to tell them to bring a camera. Things like that.

Kari (16): One time, I think I was out hunting with my big brother, and I got a little lost. So I called my brother and said, 'It looks like such and such around here, in what direction do you suppose I should be heading to get back?' To get a little advice.

Ville (17): It's been about a year now that I've been using [the mobile phone] myself, or since it really became important to me. About the time I got my license for driving a light motorcycle. When I started to move about on my own.

At this point, however, it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of one of the basic truths of qualitative interviews: what people say is not necessarily what they do. In the same way that the general mobile phone discourse has found its way into the speech of teenagers, we have reason to expect that, in the interviews, teens relate situations generally perceived as being typical of mobile phone use; situations that include moving between locations and being elsewhere. A third feature characteristic of boys' mobile-related stories is doing things together. A good example of this is boys gathering in the same space to participate in a quiz show on the radio. Each controls the situation with their personal communication device. In this way, the phone enables the boys both to do things together and to compete against each other.

> *Aatu:* There's a quiz show on the radio, so we call in with my friends, everyone has a mobile, so everyone can call.
> *Researcher:* What type of a quiz show is that?
> *Aatu:* It's the kind that lets you call in. And they give away all sorts of prizes.
> *Researcher:* So you call in together on your mobiles?
> *Aatu:* Yep.
> *Researcher:* Could you be a little more specific about the situation, when you and your friends have taken part in the show, what's the situation like? Are you all in the same room, and you all have mobiles?
> *Aatu:* All of us try to get through, and whenever someone does, the others help with the questions.
> *Researcher:* So it's easier with everyone having their own mobile phone?
> *Aatu:* Yeah, so everyone can call.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 6

1   Nurmela 2001: 20.
2   Kiuru 2000: 275.
3   Ermi and Lankoski 2000: 50.
4   Ilmonen 1993: 211.
5   Siivonen 1996: 15.
6   Bagby 1998: 241.
7   Korhonen 1999: 33-34.
8   Kopomaa 2000: 36-37.
9   Koskimaa 1994: 114, 122.
10   Ilmonen 1993: 208.
11   Mäenpää 2000a: 15.
12   Ling and Helmersen 2000: 23.
13   Coogan and Kangas 2001b.
14   Korhonen 1999: 33.
15   Kopomaa 2000: 36-37.
16   Blom 2001: 18.
17   Ibid.: 18.
18   Suoninen 1994: 129-130.
19   Saanilahti 1999: 93.
20   Ibid.: 94.
21   Keller 1977: 281-298.

7 THE TEDDY AND THE MOBILE

Children, families and mobile phones

Researching children

In this book, we have focused mainly on mobile communication taking place between teenagers. We have chosen this approach because it is the phenomenon most highlighted in the data. Although communication needs inside the family are the most commonly stated reason for purchasing a mobile phone, quantitatively, and perhaps also qualitatively, communication between friendship groups emerges as the most important among teenagers. Nevertheless, mobile communication between family members and children's use of the mobile phone in particular are on the increase. In the interviews, teenagers often underplay family communication, as it rarely actualises in accordance with their wishes. In this chapter, we will provide a glimpse into some features of children's use of the mobile phone as well as presenting certain obstacles in communication within families.[1]

By children, we mean here people of less than 12 years of age. As the researchers have discovered, conducting research with children presents an altogether different scenario compared to studying adults. Children's way of verbalising their experiences is decidedly different from that of adults. We have observed that children's answers vary depending on who is present in the situation, and sometimes, an interview with the whole family and a private chat

between the researcher and the child yield two completely different pictures of the situation. Children often keep their opinions to themselves if they suspect they may go against the adults' expectations. Surrounded by the family, the child may be influenced by the parents' views, whereas when talking to the researcher, the child may attempt to adapt his or her answers to the researchers' expectations. For example, after his interview, 7-year-old Iivari asked: 'Did I get it right?' Some of the children had been concerned about whether they would know how to answer the questions at all. As the concept of doing research is not familiar to children, they structure the situation according to a model adopted from student-teacher interaction in school. 'Hmph, you just wanted me to talk to you and show you my mobile. I thought you were going to inspect something,' concluded 6-year-old Teemu after his interview. Observation and doing things together is often a much more effective way of gathering information on child culture.[2] It is clear, however, that this type of research presupposes a certain degree of involvement in the families' everyday lives.

People's conceptions of who are perceived as children or young people with regard to the use of the mobile phone have altered significantly in the course of the last five years. Before 1997, people who in today's terms would be 'young mobile communicators' were still considered to be children in the sense that they were too young to own a mobile. The parents of a 15-year-old boy had recently separated when, in summer 1997, his father wanted to buy him a mobile phone as a confirmation present. At the time, the notion seemed quite foreign to the mother:

> At first I thought, oh dear, what's the world coming to, us getting phones like that for *kids* that age. Then I thought, well, if he wants to get it then ok, that's fine, I don't mind. And I've realised how useful it is now. You can reach him whenever. But at first it seemed to me like, ok, he's trying to be a little, you know how it is.

Purchasing a mobile phone for a child was long seen as elitist consumption, and this label still hasn't quite worn off. Mobile phones owned by the age group perceived as children have been deemed toys or luxury items, and their users are seen as not having a real need for mobile communication. According to Annikka Suoninen, moral panics are not a new phenomenon, but have ensued in the breakthrough of each new media – the cinema and the radio no less than the television, the video recorder and computer games. Suoninen presumes that the enthusiasm and lack of prejudice with which children and teenagers have adopted the use of each new media has got adults fearing a 'conspiracy' devised specifically to overrule their authority and adopting a suspicious attitude to their 'technological rivals'.[3] In Christmas 1997, a mother of two girls who had got mobile phones at the respective ages of 12 and 14 talks about her experiences:

> I thought about it as a toy more than anything else. In our neighbourhood, none of the *kids* have them, out of the people we talk to. People easily say that everyone's got one, but when you start to think about it, not a single child actually has one. Of course it was great for them to get them, really excellent.

The change in culture has been markedly rapid. Earlier, we mentioned the nostalgic feelings teens entertain with regard to the time before the mobile phone. We experience similar nostalgia when going through the old material: the interviews from 1997 seem to represent an era completely different from the one we are living now. The researchers, too, have been struck by the rapid development of the technology as well as its explosive proliferation. In the pilot period, the current mobile positioning technology (GPS) and mobile Internet services (WAP) were, indeed, discussed, but the talk was more the rhetorical construing of futuristic scenarios in response to specific questions asked by the researcher.

The age of the youngest users is another phenomenon that has undergone a major shift during the years of the research. Although

in the pilot period the discussions touched on the possibility of children under 10 years of age using the mobile phone, neither the researchers nor the parents expected the age of the users to fall quite as quickly as it did. If anything, the parents were amused by the thought that 7-year-olds would be sent to school with mobile phones in their backpacks. A cartoon published in a newspaper parodied children's use of mobile telephony: a nappy-wearing baby calling her parents on a mobile phone to say: 'I think my nappy needs changing.' The interview of a mother in the pilot period negotiates a suitable age limit:

> *Researcher:* How old do you think they have to be before you can start thinking about getting them a mobile phone?
> *Mother:* In my opinion after they're fifteen. There's individual differences of course, but I'd say that's the general limit. Whether it's fourteen or fifteen exactly, that's for every family to decide. But that's about the age they start to get interested in that kind of thing. They will have developed enough sense of responsibility and understanding by then.

'Mobile parenting'

The young age of mobile communicators in the 2000s has not ceased to surprise the research group as dozens of 7- to 10-year-olds have participated in the study. In contrast to conventional wisdom, the phenomenon is not predominantly urban. A mobile-owning 8-year-old is just as (if not more) likely to live in the country than in a city or a town. Why is it that families decide to get mobile phones for their children? One possible explanation is the model provided by older siblings or, in some families, the desire to lead a life that meets the characteristics of modernity: the families want their children to become members of the information society at an early age and, in order to promote this end, provide them with the opportunity to surf the Internet or to connect to the mo-

bile phone network. Many speak of the mobile phone as the first key to the information society. The purchase of a mobile phone for a child under ten years of age is almost without exception initiated by parents. Unlike teenagers, children rarely ask to have the device. The opposite attitudes reflected in a more general example given by 12-year-old Tuulia also appear in relation to the acquisition of the mobile phone: one of the parents objects to all new things on principle, while the other is enthusiastic about new leisure activities and appliances even when the child does not display an interest:

> *Researcher:* How have your mum and dad arranged to drive you to your hobbies?
> *Tuulia (12):* Dad is a little reluctant about things like that, he may say things like 'We're not going today and we're not going ever.' But mum is always taking me, even when I don't want to go riding she'll take me.

Some parents associate clearly pragmatic wishes to children's use of mobile telephony. They expect the mobile phone to make children more social or 'more lively and talkative', and the use of SMS is expected to inspire the child to write.

> I thought the mobile phone might be good for him, it might make him learn, like they say in the commercial, to get the Finns speaking.[4] To make him learn to use speech to settle different things. 'Cause he's not very good in situations where other children would chatter away to get their point across, he's not like that at all. He says what he meant to say, and then he's quiet. First I thought the phone would make that easier for him, but he hasn't really called that much. Basically he just says whatever it is he called to say. (Mother of an 11-year-old boy)

Children tend to prefer oral communication to SMS. They have a sense that a voice call is more easily controlled through the press of a button. Text messaging is a form of communication that requires

too much time and concentration at a stage when the child is not yet fluent at reading.

> *Ari (11):* When someone calls, you can just tell them 'Hey, don't call now.' See, if you get a message, you can't say anything like, 'Hey, don't come right now.' If you're running outside someplace, you don't have time to read it, and if you get a call you just answer it and say 'I'm busy' and hang up and put it in your pocket or something.

Some parents wish that the mobile phone would develop into a pedagogic media that would support the individual development of each child. One mother envisioned how the predictive text input could function differently from its original purpose: instead of the child teaching the system new words, the phone would observe the developments in the child's language skills and provide the necessary assistance in writing. Children's visions, too, often represent the mobile handset as a multifunction device. For 7-year-old Reeta, the future mobile phone would allow its user to browse through comics such as *Donald Duck* and become immersed in the adventures of Winnie the Pooh. Reeta's 10-year-old sister would also like to be able to flick through the gossip in the tabloids to pass the time. Interactive features are also strongly present in children's visions of future phones:

> Like a small joke book, it could ask you things, there would be riddles there, maybe ask something about TV. It could ask you things like, umm, 'When was the colour-TV invented?' and questions like that. (Viivi, 9)

Moreover, parents expect the mobile phone to teach the child responsibility, as a device that is perceived as valuable is entrusted to their care. Despite these considerations, the real reason for the purchase is often much closer to everyday life. It seems ironic that the poor facilities for after-school care provided in towns and cities and the discontinuance of village schools in rural areas have served to

enhance the popularity of mobile communication. When adequate care cannot be arranged for a child for the period between the time they finish school and the parents' return from work, the mobile phone is transformed into a nanny. In the extreme north and east of Finland, we have met families whose 7-year-olds manage their school journeys either by bus or by taxi depending on their schedules for the day. The parents of these children have expressed their resentment at the morally-charged debate that has been taking place in the Finnish media during recent years concerning 'mobile parenting', mothers and fathers attending to a number of their parenting duties through the mobile phone.

Kai Ekholm concludes that through the use of mobile telephony we have made an easy shift to remote parenting, which is represented in mobile-related advertising as an elevated form of parenthood.[5] The Finnish Information Society Advisory Board reminds us that the effects of the information society on children and on the opportunities of the new generation to obtain security and care from adults tied up in their professional engagements, constitute a whole new problem area. The development of the information society poses a challenge to parents as responsible educators.[6] Because using the mobile phone as a nanny is rarely parents' first choice but often constitutes a last straw in a near desperate situation, many resent the negative commentary voiced by the media and the immediate environment. Especially the mothers of these 'mobile families' relate that the pressures and criticism of their choices concerning child rearing sometimes seems unreasonable.

Why, then, do family members opt for mobile telephony in their internal communication? One reason is the general 'mobilisation' that has occurred: regular fixed-line phones are increasingly rare, even in family homes. Furthermore, home phones do not allow you to make a call from the bus stop to announce that the bus didn't show up today. Certain polemic questions are easily deduced from these observations. Is the model of the mobile information society, the so-called Finnish model,[7] which has gained renown

even outside of national borders, actually based on social defects rather than the well-being of families? Is the remote presence of family members a product of societal structures instead of being a volitional choice made by individual families? Official visions stress the aspect of democracy in the development of the information society; information networks are expected to provide equal opportunities for everyone by diminishing regional inequality. The fact remains, however, that although community centres with ICT facilities may provide adults with banking services, they will not mind the children or deliver them to school. It seems clear that not even mobile teledemocracy manages to entirely dispel the impact of actual physical distance.

Let us now return to mobile children. The school-starting age of seven was for some time considered the 'natural' starting point for beginning mobile use. This proved to be a misconception when children as young as 4 to 6 years of age became mobile owners. It should be remembered, however, that they represent a small minority and almost without exception have special reasons for acquiring a mobile phone. Factors that motivate the purchase may constitute the child's illness (diabetes, epilepsy), the parent's line of work (self-employed, shift-workers) or a specific family situation (single parents). Similar backgrounds can also be detected with somewhat older children.

> I was just talking about this to one mother whose children are of primary school age with the eldest one about to start middle school. They live a little off the beaten path and have diabetes, so I told her *of course* you'll have to get her a mobile phone to carry with her when she goes. (Mother) (emphasis ours)

In single parent or patchwork families the mobile phone occupies a dichotomist position. On the one hand, the children and parents stress that the mobile phone forms a tangible emotional bond to the parent who is not regularly present in the daily reality of the family:

> *Valtteri (11):* I have to phone dad, if I can come visit him, because I can't go see dad now, and then we have to arrange everything because he lives far away now. He's moving some place else, I don't really know about that. I hope he takes his phone with him if he goes, I can't remember where, abroad, maybe because of work. I have to ask him for the number so I can get in touch with him.

On the other hand, the child's mobile phone is perceived as a threat to the daily reality of the patchwork family. Parents state that they are better able to control their child's discussions on the fixed-line phone than on the mobile. The mobile phone thus affords the ex-spouse an access to the child's life that is not necessary applauded by other members of the stepfamily. In the minds of the parents, the mobile phone may function as a means for social eavesdropping on the part of a person that is perceived as an outsider. In the parents' view, children's capacity for expressing everyday experiences is not fully developed and thus results in distorted messages. In one of the families, the stepfather had told the girl not to eat snacks as she would not finish her dinner, resulting in the step-daughter (9 years) secretly keying in a message to her mum: 'They are forcing me to eat bad food. They won't give me anything nice.' Another example has to do with visiting rights. A mother makes the following promise to her child in a voice call: 'Of course you can stay with mum next weekend and the one after,' even though the court has ordered visiting rights once in three weeks only. The child does not understand why the mother lies, or why the family forbids the visit, even though her mother wants to see her. For the most part, however, the experiences of stepfamilies and single parents concerning children's use of the mobile telephone are very positive.

If the developments in terminal devices and in the communication culture in particular continue at the current pace, one may assume that the generally accepted age limit for beginning mobile phone use will settle even below seven, around five or six years of age. The devices have already found their way into children's play

in day care. In one day-care centre in autumn 1997, plastic toy telephones no longer sufficed for the children, who insisted on getting 'real mobiles' to play with. The day-care staff had no choice but to comply with the requests and produce playthings that were more in line with the current practices of the adult world. The new 'mobile phones' were actually pieces of wood with the appropriate keys drawn on them and equipped with a nail antenna. The children, satisfied with the outcome, continued their playing in imitation of mobile phone conversations they had heard enacted between their parents. The mummy of the make-believe family maintained the order in her household by inquiring of her husband and children in a somewhat demanding tone: 'Where are you? When will you be back? And get some milk, we're all out!'

The constant reassessment of the boundary between 'real' and make-believe use is an important part of children's mobile phone use.
Picture: Johanna Järveläinen, 1997.

Children on the move

'Mobiles must be really expensive, because the people who sell them have to get everything, even the gaps between the keys, all smooth,' observed 7-year-old Tatu while running his fingers over the shiny plastic keypad of his mobile handset. Some children become fascinated with the prestigious appearance of the phone and the device's association with adulthood. Children often mention the mobile phone as their most valuable or most expensive possession, yet it may not be their most treasured object. A tendency that contradicts the grown-up image of the phone is appropriation of the device through decorating it: some of the children's phones are covered with brightly coloured stickers. In the late 1990s, a persistent rumour about one of the mobile phone manufacturers preparing to launch a mobile phone designed specifically for small children circulated in the media. The device was rumoured to resemble a traditional fluffy toy, a teddy bear, and to initiate calls with the press of its stomach. The news turned out to be unfounded. There are still no teddy bear mobile phones on the market, although some manufacturers have tailored phones for children. The guiding principle behind these children's phones is that they only allow calls to certain pre-programmed numbers.

We have asked children to draw their dream mobiles. With 4- to 5-year-olds, the fantasy phone is often soft and nice to hold onto, a fluffy toy not unlike the teddy bear anticipated by the media, covered with fleece or a furry fabric. For slightly older children, the dream phone would be like the multifunction device mentioned earlier. When envisioning their dream mobiles, girls more often than boys came up with 'natural' shapes that depart from the present standard. Girls' drawings often depict devices in the shape of an apple, pear or a butterfly in bright colours. Boys' designs stress technological solutions and imitate real, existing technology: the keypad comes in miniature form attached to a wristband, the earpiece is hidden inside the ear, and the micro-

phone is pinned to the chest. The boys have also come up with folding and assembly-kit style phone models. What the dreams of both boys and girls have in common is that the mobile phone is seen as more than just a phone. The visions combine appliances such as television, the radio, tape recorder and computer, to mention but a few. Transmission of images is another common feature in the teens' mobile visions.

> *Researcher:* What kind of pictures would you like to send, and what would they mean?
> *Harri (11):* Well, if there'd be like a car driving along that could mean: 'I'm on my way.'

Despite recent developments in the technology, the gap between the mobile dreams and retail reality remains wide. In the 1990s, children's use of the mobile device entailed an even more striking contradiction: the first mobile phones purchased for children were almost without exception bought second hand. Commonly, it was the oldest and thus the most sizeable models that were purchased for children. Often the phone had become superfluous after the parents had acquired newer models for themselves or the older children. Thus the baby of the family ended up with the biggest mobile phone, which could be two or three times the size of the child's hand. If one stops to consider what it would feel like as an adult to carry around a device of similar proportions, the thought of slipping the device in a pocket or a handbag suddenly loses much of its appeal.

Repeated conflicts ensued from the disproportionate size of the device. The child had to act against what seemed logical to adults, as the oversized phone functioned to restrict the child's activities and movement. The phone did not fit in the jeans pocket, a pouch attached to the waist almost had the phone dangling next to the child's knees, and in a breast pocket the weight of the phone would cause the child to hunch. The early interviews contain numerous

narratives of the phones spending a night on a swing in the garden or getting soaked in the rain on a beach.

> *Researcher:* If you are playing outside with your friends, does the mobile get in the way sometimes?
> *Mirja (10):* It does sometimes. I always put it somewhere *safe*, like put it aside on the ground somewhere. I want it to be safe there. (emphasis ours)

The frequency of accounts of negatively perceived relationships to the object is notably greater among children than teenagers. Although the children appreciated the device as such, they did not want to take it with them when they went to school or visited their friends or to involve it in their play. In consequence, the phone was not used in the places and situations where it might have been the most useful. Unlike teenagers, children did not like to discuss the device with their friends.

Nevertheless, at home children were just as likely as their older siblings to favour the mobile phone over the fixed-line. Perhaps even more than adults, children experienced the liberation from attachment to the cord as exhilarating. Eight-year-old Senni let her imagination run wild when talking on her mobile phone. The living room carpet became the wide-open sky, she herself a planet in its orbit and the mobile phone an instrument for freedom.

> *Researcher (to the girl):* So you walk around the house with the phone, too?
> *Mother:* Yeah, she tends to go back and forth (laughs) on the rug.
> *Senni:* Before, every time I was on the phone I'd roll around on the carpet. I would go around in circles and think of planets circulating.
> *Mother:* Yeah, that's what I think is fun about a mobile phone, compared to the fixed-line, is that you don't need to stand in one place. Like with us, you have the phone in the hallway and there's nowhere to sit, so you end up just standing there, which is not that nice.

Over 10-year-olds appreciate the privacy afforded by mobile communication:

> *Mother:* He's at an age [11] where communication with friends is important. Sometimes he phones on his mobile, even if he's at home, when he wants to talk in private. Even though you can move the [desk] phone, it has a long cord, still phoning on the mobile is your own personal thing, like protection of privacy, when you can talk quietly in your own room.
> *Researcher:* Does the 9-year-old also take the phone in the bedroom?
> *Mother:* No, at that age they just ask: 'Are you at home?' and 'Do you want to go out?' They don't chatter on the phone at that age. They just go out and do what they do.

Gaming skills and communication

Young people and families with children have always been pioneers of technological change and development, whether more or less practical. Every new generation turns the technological novelties conceived by the previous one into a part of everyday life. For children, technological novelties do not appear as mystifying, glamorous or frightening; these things are part of the environment that they have grown accustomed to since their birth. While most adults remain unfamiliar with the principles behind the operation of many domestic appliances, children generally learn to use them at an early age.[8] For under 10-year-olds, the mobile phone represents a technology that has existed all their lives.

Children's dexterity in handling the phone may sometimes mislead parents. Parents may even describe children below 7 years of age as mobile phone virtuosos who have thoroughly mastered the skills necessary in mobile communication. The assumption is based on everyday observations: in mobile games, the youngest child often competes on an equal level with the older siblings. The parents have a tendency to generalise the children's skills in the

mechanic handling of the device to apply to communicative use of the phone. Parents often overestimate their child's skills in mobile communication and especially their competence in the use of their own handset. The difficulties connected with use are easily overlooked or forgotten in an interview situation. Parents often emphasise that they did not need to teach their child how to use the mobile phone; the children have taught themselves. They believe that the child manages relatively well at least the basic functions of the handset.

Children, however, relate problem situations connected with losing the mobile phone, difficulties in remembering its functions, and limited use. According to the children, their parents, siblings and friends have helped them significantly in learning how to use the phone. Observation has confirmed that a child of 6 to 7 years of age often remains unfamiliar with even the most basic functions of the phone. The child may only be capable of using speed dial to call mum or dad, and the task of finding numbers in the memory or selecting them him/herself may be impossible.

Some of the problems are tied to children's inability to understand the costs resulting from mobile phone use. A 6-year-old girl and her 9-year-old sister had been 'calling' each other on toy phones made out of two yoghurt containers connected on a piece of string, yelling their message from one phone to another with the result that their mother told them off for making too much noise. A little later the girls received mobile phones and the mother was pleased to notice how quietly they played with each other by make-believe calling from one room to another and talking to each other in a low voice without disturbing anyone. At some point, however, the discussion started to sound a little too logical: the mother suddenly realised that the connection from one room to another was not imaginary but provided by a mobile operator. The girls weren't convinced about the system's fairness: 'Does it cost just to call your own sister?'

Children are also confused over what they are and aren't allowed to do with a mobile phone. Parents advise against making unnecessary calls, but they also encourage children to contact them if they have something important they need to discuss. Yet what is important to a child and what is important to an adult are two different things. Typically, children's mobile calls to parents consist of little inquiries concerning everyday matters and may disrupt the parents' work several times a day: Can I take some biscuits? Can we eat the ice cream from the freezer? Can I go get some sweets? Where are my green socks? What time is my club? The parents are sometimes unduly concerned as a result of these calls: 'Every time the mobile rings and it's your child calling you get a pang in the chest, as you start to think what is it, what's happened now.' The following quotation is one mother's account of the difficulty of defining 'necessary calls':

> What is important for the child is so completely different to what is important for the adult. For instance if the child's awfully thirsty, asking if he's allowed to drink the coke in the fridge may be the most important thing there is.

The border between allowed and advisable use often seems unclear to children. Twelve-year-old Valtteri made hundreds of calls to an operator's free service number. He listened to the notice dozens of times a day although the information is updated with a delay of a few days. Furthermore, parents often act against their own advice and make 'unnecessary' calls to the child.

> *Researcher:* Do your mum and dad call you more or do you call them?
> *Sirpa (12):* Mum keeps calling me to ask, 'Have you got food there, is everything ok?' She worries about me quite a lot. That's good basically. Except that it's a little nerve-wracking at times when she won't stop calling. Every hour, 'Is everything ok?'

Children often perceive the instructions and limitations issued by parents as inconsistent. They may find it hard to interpret whether the restrictions set for mobile communication costs are real or not. The 10-year-old interviewed in the following extract had observed that no actual punishment ensues when the amount of use exceeds the limits agreed on with parents:

> *Sakari:* There's no limit . . . there's a hundred, if I call for more than a hundred marks.
> *Researcher:* Yeah?
> *Sakari:* My mum will whip my butt.
> *Researcher:* Ok. But there's no actual credit limit. You've just agreed with your mum?
> *Sakari:* That I can't go over one hundred.
> *Researcher:* Right.
> *Sakari:* I've got a little over a hundred right now.
> *Researcher:* How do you know?
> *Sakari*: I just do. I send a message to 400 to ask.[9]

A clash of authorities is visible in mobile communication during the schoolday. For under 12-year-olds, the teacher is an adult whose orders they want to comply with. Today, teachers also give advice concerning children's use of the mobile phone. The instructions vary between schools, but the general idea remains the same: do not take the mobile phone to school with you; if you want to bring the mobile phone to the classroom, keep it switched off in your bag for the day. Children are generally unwilling to defy these regulations because 'the teacher gets cross if the phone starts ringing in class'. After the school day, the child does not remember to switch the phone back on or to turn on the sound, and the parents' attempts to reach their child to make sure everything is OK are doomed to failure.

Children's mobile language

Children modify the mobile phone by developing their own terminology, which differs from the language of adults. Seven-year-old Julius relates how his phone has an *inside* (menu) that he's had a few peeks in, but that his mum and dad usually *insert* (save) everything he needs. He doesn't yet use *e-messages* (SMS). Children are also familiar with graphic monitoring of mobile phone's functions: they know that the lines on the screen increase or decrease according to the state of the phone's battery and that when the line is very small, they need to 'grow' or 'feed' it back to its original length.

The webwork of mobile terminology occasionally misleads children. Seven-year-old Mirka and her 5-year-old sister tried to check Mirka's current mobile bill as they had seen their mother do it earlier. The girls had remembered the service code incorrectly and were disappointed when they failed to receive the information about the size of their bill. Mirka goes on to explain, however, that she is pleased with the *bump* (extended battery) on the back of her mobile. Like Mirka and her sister, children often learn the use of the mobile phone through imitation of their parents. As four-year-old Sanni explains: 'I know how to make this "key locked" go away.' Despite her knowledge of the due course of action in this situation, she is unable to say what 'key locked' actually means.

Children's conventions in talking on the mobile phone and their SMS expressions are in many ways different from those of teenagers. One distinctive feature is the sending of apparently monotonous messages. This characteristic is also present in the usage culture of teenagers, but to a clearly lesser extent. Eleven-year-old Katri relates:

> Or you can just send a message saying 'Excellent' and fill it up with exclamation marks. Then they'd send one back asking what was that about. . . . Yeah, *pilaris* [see Chapter 4] and then you can browse it and send each other empty messages, ones with nothing written in

them at all. You can send messages like that or then you just fiddle with it for no reason.

The mother of 12-year-old Eemeli couldn't help noticing how the mobile phone her son had forgotten on the table kept announcing received SMS messages one after another. 'After the fifth one I said to my husband, I'm going to see who it is. I know I shouldn't, but I'm going to. I went to read them, and it was nothing but the letter i over and over again. All five messages.' We have found at least two explanations for the phenomenon. The practice is comparable to the desire to call 'somewhere, anywhere', mentioned by some of the informants. The apparent monotony of the messages may also be a way of expressing strong basic emotions. The repetition of one character often denotes extreme joy or sadness thus serving as a digital equivalent to crying, yelling or uncontrolled laughter.

> *Researcher:* In what situations will you send a text message to one of your friends?
> *Teppo (12):* Well, for instance if someone's mad at me I'll send them a really long message that's just one character over and over again.

In mobile communication between family members, even very small children are aware of their strengths and also make use of them. The use of SMS is one of children's strong points, and they like to discuss matters in SMS negotiations where they attempt to influence the parents' decisions. The computer has often been seen as enhancing the democratisation of cultural production, affording groups such as children the opportunity to produce various types of materials instead of simply consuming them.[10] Similar democratisation can be detected in SMS on the micro-level level of family communication. In a voice call, as a result of their position of authority, adults may issue direct orders to the child, whereas the text message turns the interaction into a game where each communicator has an equal turn. This means that the child, too, has a chance

at winning, whether through a display of verbal skills or by exhaustion. Eleven-year-old Vesa relates:

> Whenever I need to talk about something and don't always want to call and talk to the person, I send an SMS. Like when I should be doing the dishes I can send one to mum saying 'I don't need to do the dishes do I?' Then she sends one to me saying, 'Yes you do.' And then I keep going at her until she gives in. You see when she doesn't want to write anymore she'll say OK. Or then *she'll call* and tell me to do them. (emphasis ours)

Control and communication

> I get these messages sometimes, especially from mum, asking 'Where are you? Have you got your woolly hat on? Love, your worried mom at home.' They're a disgrace! I really lose it sometimes reading 'Are you wearing your woolly hat!' Don't expect me to answer that! It feels like they're in a completely different world sometimes. (Marja, 16)

Whenever teens are allowed direct the flow of the interview, the discussion will revolve around relationship and friendship communication. Discussing family communication is for most teenagers, if not distasteful, then at least clearly boring. At most, they will volunteer incidents where a mother or a father has used the mobile phone in an illogical manner. The teens may attempt to circumvent the whole subject of family communication by declaring that they hardly ever exchange phone calls or text messages with their parents. Yet many interviews are disrupted, often more than once, when the mother or father calls to ask where their child is and at what time he or she is planning to return home. In these situations, the teens themselves seem perplexed by the discrepancy. 'Well, yeah, she does call me every day to check on me,' is a common explanation for an unexpected instance of allegedly non-existent family communication. It seems clear that the teens do not per-

ceive these check-up calls as *actual* mobile communication. Instead, the calls are a manifestation of adult control that extends to the mobile phone; they reflect the power relations at work inside the family. Even though parents themselves perceive the communication as a sign of caring, their contacts often constitute 'woolly hat speech' as exemplified in the previous extract, with no emotional or thematic link to the teens' everyday life.

It almost goes without saying that this attitude does not apply to all teenagers. We have interviewed young people whose use of the mobile phone mostly constitutes communication between family members. However, it seems that in these instances the function of life management emerges as the most important reason for mobile phone use, as these teenagers use the mobile to organise everyday life inside the family, to agree on who is going to pick up whom, from where and at what time, or who is going to do the shopping. Nevertheless, innovators of family communication are becoming increasingly frequent in the data as a transition seems to be taking place at some level. For instance, some parents have used SMS to construct a momentary bridge to their teenaged child who, for one reason or another, has chosen to withdraw into him/herself. One mother spoke of her 15-year-old son who locked himself in his room after having his heart broken. The boy had no inclination to meet anyone or to talk to anyone. In the end, the mother attempted to resolve the situation by sending the boy a text message where she suggested that she might have an idea why the boy was so upset. In a few minutes, the mother's phone bleeped, announcing the boy's reply. The mother and son then proceeded to deal with the broken heart by SMS.

Mobile discussions enacted between family members are not easy to record. The collected text messages illustrate the gap between the communication patterns of teenagers and their parents, and it is probably relatively safe to assume that the contents of the messages are on similar lines with those of voice calls. Two opposing patterns emerge from the data. The first one is connected with

the management of everyday life. 'With children, my text messages are mostly instructions, advice and schedules. With the people from work there's quite a lot of different things, picture messages and jokes and such,' relates a mother of children aged 9, 14 and 16.

HI, ARE YOU IN THE BUS ALREADY? MUM
(SMS to 15-year-old daughter)

NOT YET.. I WILL BE SOON. I'LL TAKE THE ONE AT HALF PAST.
(SMS)

OK, WE'LL MEET YOU THERE. SAY HELLO TO EVERYONE! M
(SMS)

Another important group is control messages, where parents issue orders or control the teens' life in some other way. The tone of the messages is rather bossy, as in the messages received by a 14-year-old girl from her mother. Variations of the same theme are repeated more or less daily in the girls' SMS collection.

COME HOME RIGHT NOW
(SMS)

CALL MUMMY NOW
(SMS)

TURN YOUR PHONE ON AND CALL HOME RIGHT NOW
(SMS)

Some of the parents have clearly attempted to modify the commanding tone in the messages. Despite these attempts, the messages remain concise and focus on the main point, whereas many of the messages from teens to parents are filled with social softening and verbal acrobatics. The difference between the expression of the different generations remains evident.

> HI!WHAT TIME WILL YOU BE COMING HOME?*MUM*
> (SMS to 13-year-old girl)
>
> you should be getting home now
> (SMS to 14-year-old girl)

We maintain that mobile communication by parents often fails to reach the teens, as it is conducted through the wrong channel, or in the wrong mode of expression by refusing to tie in to themes appreciated by or interesting to teens. Besides calls, teenagers would like to communicate by SMS; in addition to direct orders they would appreciate social softening; and to ease up everyday life management they would value emotional expression.

> Hi daddy!How's it going?Going home..Played the cello for 4 hours and bought a pile of Christmas presents..Have you been good? How are things down there?
> (SMS, 15-year-old girl to father)
>
> Are you coming tomorrow?! Good night!! Kisses and hugs! (: Luv ya!
> (SMS, 15-old girl to father)

By criticising adults' communication skills we do not mean to imply that adults should adopt every pattern central to the use of mobile telephony by children and teenagers. In fact, too much imitation might appear artificial and would not benefit the communication. Nonetheless, in certain situations, finding some kind of middle-ground between the communication styles would serve to diminish the gap between the different communication cultures. Some parents have already taken to keeping in touch with their teenagers even when there is no immediate cause for issuing orders. Instead of control, this approach highlights genuine concern and positive caring. As 17-year-old Pasi relates:

Researcher: Do you like it when your parents send you SMS?
Pasi: Yeah, it's a lot better than if they wouldn't contact you at all. When you hear about them all the time it kind of makes you feel safe. I see a lot of parents not paying any mind to where their kids hang about.

In fact, some parents already seem to have adopted certain aspects of teen communication culture and assimilated them as part of family communication. Communication between 19-year-old Mika and his family extends beyond parental control over teens' actions.

SLEEP WELL! MUM AND DAD
(SMS)

HAPPY BIRHDAY! ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW MUCH YOU MEAN TO ME! MUM
(SMS)

Mobile-using children are skilled at combining expressions of caring and the management of everyday life. In the messages of children and teens, emotions and actions exist side by side; management of everyday life and conveying sentiments to family members do not overrule each other. The essence of communication competence characteristic of children is crystallised in the following statement by the mother of 11-year-old Tuija:

Researcher: How did you feel getting messages in the middle of a workday?
Mother: It's bound to make you feel pretty special, with the girl sending messages like 'I love you mum, took out the rubbish.'

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 7

1   A separate publication on the mobile communication of children
        and families is in preparation.
2   Cf. for example Kalliala 1999.
3   Suoninen 1994: 128.
4   A slogan repeated in numerous advertising campaigns by a large
        Finnish mobile operator suggested the benefit of mobile telephony
        in making the famously quiet Finns a little more talkative.
5   Ekholm 2001: 45.
6   *Suomi tietoyhteiskuntana* 2000: 53.
7   Cf., for example, Castells and Himanen: 2002.
8   Suoninen 1994: 128.
9   One of the operators offers a bill status query service at this number.
10   Sefton-Green and Buckingham 1998: 62.

8 AFTERTHOUGHTS

Venturing further into the world of mobile

The observations in this book are for the most part based on data collected between 1997 and 1999, although there are also references to more recent results. Since 1999, the research has broadened its scope in a number of different directions, one of which is young people's use of other media. The team has also conducted a comparative study of teen mobile communication in co-operation with research groups operating in the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan.

In 2003, the ongoing study is called 'Lifestages and Mobile Culture', financed by Sonera Mobile Operations and the Information Society Institute. Because the user group of mobile communication has in recent years expanded to cover all age groups, the current research focuses on two different age segments: young people and senior citizens. The aim of the study is to analyse their mobile communication and relationship to new media and technology, as well as to uncover the specific mobile-related needs and wishes related to these individuals' lifestyles.
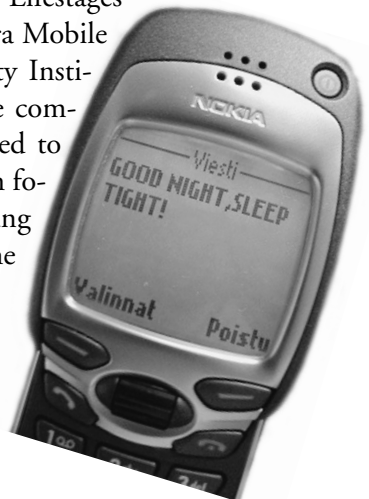
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APPENDIX:

The Living Environment of Finnish Teenagers

The youth culture of every country corresponds to the culture and way of life of the general population. In Finland, the position of young people is conflicting: they usually have a lot of say in matters concerning their life, yet are financially largely dependent on their parents. After leaving school, many Finnish teenagers continue to live with their parents during their first years as a student.

School and Free Time

The Finnish comprehensive school lasts nine years and is compulsory for children aged 7 to 16. It consists of a lower stage (grades 1 to 6) providing primary education, and an upper stage (grades 7 to 9) offering lower secondary education. A voluntary 10th grade is also provided. The usual school-starting age is 7, and compulsory education ends at the age of 16. Most teenagers continue their studies after comprehensive school and do not begin work until after the age of 20.

After comprehensive school, teenagers move to general upper secondary school or to vocational school, or they may begin work.

More than half of the age cohort continue in general upper secondary school, taking two to four years to complete, and this qualifies the students for tertiary education in a university or polytechnic. More than one third of teenagers complete a vocational degree in two to three years. Teenagers living in rural areas are more likely to opt for vocational schooling than their town peers. The educational background of the parents also has an effect as children of highly educated parents usually continue their studies further than children of less educated parents.

The comprehensive school system covers the whole of Finland, both urban and rural, although the size of schools and the range of choice in subjects varies considerably. The smallest schools have less than ten pupils, whereas the largest schools count nearly one thousand pupils, and larger schools provide more of a selection in choice of subjects.

What most schools have in common, however, is the emphasis they place on language learning. The teens' interest in languages is reflected in their SMS messages through frequent use of foreign languages. Languages other than Finnish are used in text messaging when they provide a more concise expression for long Finnish words, and thus enable the user to say more using less space. The interviewees also state that it is easier to express strong emotions in a foreign language; terms of endearment and declarations of love are frequently written in English. Moreover, the frequent abbreviations of the compressed SMS language, such as C U 2MORROW @9, often derive from English.

As there are no private schools, children of all socioeconomic groups receive the same education. It is thus not inconceivable for children of unemployed parents and, for example, the offspring of a head of a large company to be seated next to each other in the same classroom. This difference occasionally surfaces as social inequality in the classroom. A mobile-related example of this occurred in a school where a boy whose family owned a successful enterprise had the most expensive handset on the market – a mobile phone

with a retail price of nearly EUR 700 – and had his bills paid by his parents with no restrictions on usage. His classmate, a farmer's son, had to work on the family farm to pay his mobile bills. In the same class, some of the children from unemployed families did not possess a mobile phone at all.

Education is free for Finnish children and teenagers under 16, with the state, not the families, being responsible for most of the costs. Consequently, the consumption of both parents and teenagers can be directed outside of school, to areas such as mobile communication and a variety of different free-time activities. Typically, the hobbies of a family's teenager and the necessary equipment cost more than the hobbies of the parents. The popularity of different hobby groups can also be accounted for by the fact that the extracurricular activities offered by Finnish schools are rather limited.

Due to the fact that their hobbies take place outside of school and, especially in the rural areas, the distances to be covered are long, teenagers are forced to commute extensively as part of their everyday lives. In the course of one day, they may have to travel from home to school, back home, then to football practice or a dance studio, then perhaps to a friend's house and then, finally, back home again. In Finland, the minimum age for acquiring a driver's license is 18, so teens travel by means of public transport, or in the family car with one of the parents driving. Discussing rides to sport practice or other free-time activities is a frequent subject in teens' text messages and mobile calls to parents. Attending to mobile communication during a piano lesson or in a dance class is clearly impossible, but even when the owner may be occupied elsewhere, the devices are on constant standby to register possible calls and text messages. This aspect of the Finnish teenagers' lifestyle may be compared to the hectic communication routines in the tightly scheduled lives of business people.

Work and Money

While studying, some 20% of Finnish teenagers over 16 have part-time jobs cleaning, baby-sitting, working in fast food restaurants, coaching sports or directing other free-time activities. Most commonly, teens use the money they earn for their personal consumption: they buy clothes and pay for hobbies. Finnish teenagers rarely give any of the money they earn to their families. A family allowance is granted by the state to all families with children under 17, a minimum of EUR 90 per month for each child, and teenagers are usually allowed to use it for their own consumption. Most teens also receive an allowance at home, the sum varying from EUR 20 to 85 a month. Some of the teens pay part of their bills – such as mobile communication costs – with their own money, while for others, costs like this are automatically covered by parents. Finns' monthly mobile bills amount to EUR 35 on average. The economic boom that began in the latter part of the 1990s has improved the standard of living of families, which can be seen in the constantly increasing consumption of the young.

Religion

Eighty-five percent of Finns are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The year they turn 15, most Finnish teenagers take part in a religious confirmation, which takes place after a series of confirmation classes. The classes are most often realized in the form of an entertaining summer camp, considered by many as a rite of passage to adulthood. Confirmation is also a prerequisite for a church wedding. Corresponding camps are organized for non-members of the church.

The mobile communication of Finnish youth is closely linked to the institution of confirmation in Finland. In 1997, many parents were of the opinion that a teenager would have no need for a

mobile, at least not before confirmation. A year later, the mobile had become a typical confirmation present. As most participants take their phone to the camp, some congregations have been forced to set restrictions for mobile use in the classes, to prevent teenagers' SMS use from disrupting the teaching of the priests. The most recent models are still purchased as confirmation presents.

Going out

Finnish teenagers' independence and control over their own lives is particularly apparent in their use of alcohol. Officially, it is forbidden for anyone under 18 to consume alcohol. In reality, some 20% of Finnish 16-year-olds use alcohol weekly, and most of the age cohort drink at least occasionally. The young get alcohol from friends or acquaintances who have already turned 18 – or even their own parents. The teens' alcohol consumption is connected to 'quiet approval' of the phenomenon by adults.

As Finnish bars and pubs only admit people over 18, popular meeting places for teenagers include youth discos, cafés, rock festivals, and above all, regular city streets and shopping malls, where thousands of teenagers may gather on a Friday or Saturday night. Some sit by the sides of buildings, while others wander around looking for friends, or cruise around the block in their cars. Typically, the people gathering on the streets and in discos are over 13, but especially in larger towns the late-night street culture also appeals to children younger than this.

The street culture of Finnish teens is not gender-specific; both boys and girls gather on the streets. The phenomenon of dating does not really exist in Finland. Girls go out in pairs and groups of friends, and boys go out with boys. These girl and boy groups often consume alcohol amongst themselves before the actual party, which may take place at a friend's house, for example. As the night passes, girl and boy groups gradually mix. Girl-boy couples are

likely to already be involved in a relationship, or at least aspiring to be; asking a person out is usually a sign of a willingness to begin a long-term romantic relationship. Girls make the first move as frequently as the boys do.

Mobile communication forms a significant part of the street culture of Finnish teens: the mobile is used to locate friends who may have disappeared in the crowd, and new acquaintances are made by exchanging numbers. The mobile is also an inconspicuous personal bodyguard. The parents may make several calls or send several messages a night to check that everything is fine with their child spending a Saturday night at a house party, in a disco or on the streets. Curfews are also frequently negotiated on the phone.