

# The Goretex principle: the *hytte* and mobile telephones in Norway<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper examines the interaction between the use of *hytte* and the development of mobile telephones. Based on qualitative analysis, the authors examine the role of *hytte* in Norwegian culture, the issues relating to the use of mobile telephones in this context and issues surrounding the boundary between private and public life. It is here that we see the development of what we have called the goretex principle, i.e. a form of control over the in- and out-flow of information. This is interesting from a social perspective in that we are having to learn how to manage our telephonic accessibility.

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# 1 Introduction/Methods

Nobody does the sociology of toasters. They are not the locus of any great moral debate. To steal a phrase from Berger and Luckmann (1967), the toaster is a device and has become part of the “taken for granted” equipment in many homes. We are not surprised or provoked by the presence, or the absence, of a toaster. We do not need to call on overarching moral legitimations when discussing the use of this type of device.<sup>2</sup> The same is not true of mobile telephones, particularly when it comes to their use in more exotic and remote locations.

Mobile telecommunication technology has changed the boundary between self and others. This technology means that one can be reached in almost any location, regardless of what they otherwise may be doing. Unimpeded access has with it the threat of socially embarrassing situations. In addition, it can be the motivation for the development of barriers and sanctuaries in which one is not pestered by the telephone. This is easier said than done since one person’s sanctuary is another’s prison. Thus, there is disagreement as to the desired porosity of the barrier and how sanctified the setting should be.

This paper examines the intrusion of new communication technologies into settings which have traditionally been reserved for relaxation and free time, specifically the use of mobile telephones in Norwegian *hytte*<sup>3</sup>. The *hytte*, both the physical structure and the set of behaviors and routines associated with the visit to the setting, has a central place in the Norwegian culture. One visits the *hytte* to relax and to share time with one’s family. In the eyes of many it is a place of renewal, a sanctuary, a womb into which one can retreat in order to regain a certain perspective.

This cultural backdrop provides the social scientist with a setting in which we can examine the explosive growth of mobile telephony in Norway, the country with perhaps the greatest concentration of mobile telephones in the world (Bakke 1996). The ability to maintain contact with one’s job and other day-to-day activities has set into relief the cultural meaning of the *hytte* and the degree to which one is willing to let the technology intrude. The discussion has many facets. In its most absolute form the simple presence of a mobile phone destroys one’s ability to experience nature. For others it is OK and perhaps even positive to have a telephone at the *hytte*. This latter perspective includes a complex mixture of the desire for accessibility, security, freedom of movement and even what has been called the desire for efficient relaxation.

The work here represents a cooperative effort. First, we take up the social meaning of the *hytte* in the Norwegian psyche that is drawn on Krogh’s much larger work covering the cultural meaning of nature in Norway (1995). Krogh collected 60 qualitative interviews during his fieldwork describing the cultural landscape of Jomfruland, a small island in southern Norway. Over a four year period he built up an analysis of how three groups on the island — the year-round residents, the owners of summer *hytte* and the inhabitants of a camping area — had built up their social understanding of the local landscape.<sup>4</sup> His work provides an analysis of the role of the *hytte* and nature in Norwegian society.

In the second portion of this paper we examine the integration of mobile telephones and the *hytte*. The discussion of mobile telephony vis-à-vis the *hytte* is based on an analysis of and reflections upon the information provided by informants collected in focus groups. These six groups included 50 persons, 34 men and 16 women.<sup>5</sup> Of the respondents, 30 reported experience with a mobile telephone

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<sup>2</sup> This has not always been the case. As discussed in Marvin (1988), technologies such as the common toaster evoked a discussion upon their introduction. Aspects of safety, public welfare as well as the existential need for such devices were common at the dawn of the what one might call the consumer appliance age.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper the Norwegian word *hytte*, which means cabin or cottage, will be used. This is done to avoid the coloration of the English words. Its use is somewhat problematic since the grammatical rules for number construction of the definitive are not the same in Norwegian and English. Rather than adopting the Norwegian grammar to the English used in the paper, the definitive singular form without the definitive marker (i.e. *hytte* as opposed to *hytter*, *en hytte*, *hyttene*) will be used throughout.

<sup>4</sup> Thirty of the interviews were with those using the camping area. In addition there were 20 interviews with the owners of *hytte* and 10 interviews with year-round residents of the island.

<sup>5</sup> The focus groups were conducted in Norwegian and the analysis of the talk was largely undertaken before the material was translated into English for inclusion in this paper.

while the remaining 20 reported only limited experience. It is worth noting that men were far more likely to have reported experience with mobile telephones. The preponderance of men, ca. 75%, reported having used the devices while only slightly more than 30% of the women said the same. Also, as will be discussed below, one of the groups was made up of younger respondents who reported a relationship to mobile telephones that was unique on several counts. The data was examined using standard qualitative analysis techniques. That is, the text was examined, classified, re-examined and further classifications and concepts formed the basis for the material reported below (Spradley 1979 Glaser and Strauss 1967).

In the final section of the paper we develop the idea of the management of availability. Respondents in the focus groups expressed an interest in controlling the barrier between themselves and the world. The title of the paper takes its inspiration from this discussion in that like the water resistant material Goretex, respondents were interested in a "one way" barrier. We use this as a point of departure to discuss the way in which the developing norms around new forms for telecommunication allow one to manage and adjust their accessibility. Julsrud's discussion regarding accessibility forms the basis for this portion of the article (1996).

## 2 The *hytte* and nature in the Norwegian psyche

When considering the role of mobile telephony as a social force at the *hytte*, it is necessary to consider the way in which Norwegians use nature. These two objects, the mobile phone and the *hytte* represent in many respects opposite tendencies. The former is often associated with progress and a stressful life-style while the latter is associated with older, simpler times along with relaxation. In this section we will examine the cultural context in which the Norwegian *hytte*, and nature in general, are placed.

The landscape is an integral part of the Norwegian cultural background and its national self-image. More than perhaps any other country in Europe, the Norwegians revere nature and cultivate an active relationship to it. The *hytte* is often the central element in this relationship. It is that physical, emotional and social location where the individual can connect with the old traditions and reinvent themselves as an inhabitant of a culture in which nature is central and the idealized ways of their ancestors and their nation can be experienced first hand. The *hytte* is far more than a physical structure. In many respects it is the manifestation of one's background and one's location within the larger national culture. It is almost an icon representing the active immersion in nature. While one can observe class, age and gender based differences a common theme is the concern with peace and quiet. This means that symbols of stress should be removed or minimized during one's vacation. Thus, the introduction of new technologies is not a casual affair. It is the result of a families' negotiations over their collective and disparate identities.

### 2.1 Norwegian's relationship to nature

Scandinavian anthropologists, ethnologists and geographers have recently been concerned with the relationship between social, historical and cultural conditions and peoples' understanding, experience and use of nature (Allwood 1983, Ekman 1991, Gullestad 1989, Gullestad 1992a, Hafsteinsson 1994, Hjort 1983, Löfgren 1989, Olvig 1984 Rahbek Christansen 1986, Daun 1989, Gullestad 1992b, Löfgren 1981, Löfgren 1987, Löfgren 1992).

Even though the active use of nature in work and recreation by Scandinavians is often pointed out in these studies it seems as though Norwegians have been particularly concerned with nature and its uses (Nedrelid 1991, Nedrelid 1993). Each Scandinavian nation's landscape was used ideologically by the respective nationalist movements in the 1800's (Löfgren 1992, 150-155), but in Norway this received particular meaning since the active use of the mountain landscape in winter sports was a central ideological element in the creation of a national self-image from the middle of the 1800's to our own time (Bomann Larsen 1993, Faarlund 1992). For example, Nansen's exploits in the Norwegian wilderness along with his and Amundsen's Polar explorations are parts of the national folklore. A more recent example is the broad support for the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics in Norway. Both of these underscore the important meaning of winter sports and outdoor life in the collective consciousness.

Norwegians use of nature is today tied to hunting, fishing, collecting of berries and mushrooms, more openly commercial pursuits and simple walks in the forest. This special and common interest in walking in nature is based on the search for peace and quiet (*fred og ro*), cleanliness, healthiness, sharing time with family and friends and the ability to get away from stress (Vaagbø 1993, 8).

One can perhaps summarize the Norwegian relationship to nature by saying that it is something in which one physically immerses oneself. One must feel the sweat, the cold, the sun and the rain. Participation and inclusion are central here. In this way there is a type of primal connection with the culture and the folklore. This differs from other tourist traditions which focus more on distanced observation of beautiful scenes.

## 2.2 The physical and social placement of the *hytte*

At a concrete level, the Norwegian relationship to nature is often tied to and experienced through vacations in *hytte*, tents and camping trailers (Rosander 1992, 7). Norway has almost 400 000 *hytte* for a population of 4 million people, that is one structure for every 10 persons. *Hytte* can range from simple one room affairs that are smaller than 20 m<sup>2</sup> to elaborate homes with many hundred square meters of floor space and costing well over \$1 million. The average is probably about 80 - 100 m<sup>2</sup> costing \$50 - \$100.000. *Hytte* are traditionally located either near the ocean on the many islands and inlets along the Norwegian coastline, or in the mountain areas of the country. Indeed, well off families may have two, one along the coast to be enjoyed during the summer and one in the mountains to be used for skiing during the winter and spring.

In spite of a common cultural foundation, the Norwegian understanding and use of nature and the landscape is characterized by sub-cultural differences along class lines and between those living in the country side vs. those living in the city (Arèn 1995, Højrup 1983, Krogh 1991, Rahbek Christensen 1986, Rahbek Christensen 1988, Woon 1993). An analysis done by Statistics Norway for 1992-1993 shows that more blue than white collar workers spend their vacations in either tents or camping trailers. By contrast, higher level white collar workers spend twice as many nights in *hytte* which they own (Vaage 1994, 27). Not surprisingly, there are also differences when one compares those with a high school education vs. those with more advanced degrees. These factors, of course, result in a different type of experience and variations on the common cultural heritage.

Another cultural difference is seen in the contrast between *hytte* along the coast and those in the mountains. Many of the *hytte* in the mountains draw on the traditions associated with the *sæter*, i.e. the summer dwellings of the farmers where they lived while tending their grazing animals in the mountains or spent the nights during the hunt. *Hytte* in the mountain areas tend to be less expensive and thus their owners include a large proportion of wage earners, lower level office workers and those employed in primary industries. Because of their traditional isolation, *hytte* in the mountains are, to a greater degree, associated with a simple style, living near nature and a "do it yourself" mentality (Hjemmer Mortensen 1993). One finds many *hytte* without plumbing or electricity.<sup>6</sup> The desire to live near nature, maintain traditions and to distance one self from daily stress often translate into a critical eye when adopting new equipment and technical devices. At the same time, the remoteness of the experience can also bring out a desire to insure one's security in the case of accidents. This is a theme that will be further developed below.

While the *hytte* in the mountains may represent solidarity and communion with nature, a vacation to the coast perhaps places a greater emphasis on social interaction. It is both a trip to water activities, sun and summer and at the same time a trip back to one's youth where preferably time stands still. Through this process Löfgren has suggested that Scandinavians try to recreate "the summer of their childhood" (1992, 168). *Hytte* in the coastal areas generally have a higher price tag than *hytte* in the mountains and are often populated by higher level white collar workers and businessmen.<sup>7</sup> A final group includes those who vacation using boats, tents and camping trailers for their summer vacations.

## 2.3 Variations in the search for peace and quiet

Krogh reports that a common point for all summer guests on Jomfruland – the small island he studied – is to reduce stress and to experience a relaxed daily life. The activities in which one partakes and the daily routines are a way to realize "peace and quiet." Both camping guests and *hytte* owners point to the absence of organized activities in a natural setting as a formula for a quiet and peaceful vacation. In addition, all the summer guests experience peace and quiet in that Jomfruland creates a complete experience. They complain that everyday life is stressful and diverse. Both work life and free time is filled with meetings and responsibilities and that "The appointment book is full."

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<sup>6</sup> One must also point out, however, that there are exceptions to this picture. Newer *hytte* often have quite advanced standards and include most of the modern conveniences.

<sup>7</sup> By way of illustration, an older home of 100 m<sup>3</sup> with an attractive location in the Kragerø archipelago sold for \$1,56 million kr in 1996.

When I am home I lay there a couple of hours and wait for the clock to ring and wonder how I am going to get everything done. I am so proud that down here [on Jomfruland] I can sleep to eight thirty. There is a calmness and a relaxation that is very good (male *hytte* owner and academic from Oslo).

Jomfruland represents a particular contrast to daily life both in terms of time use and in terms of space. All activities take the time they require. One fishes until it is dark (often as late as 10-11 PM in the mid-summer tourist season), eats when one comes home from walks and goes to the store when one needs food or beer. Similar findings have been found in studies done in other countries (Kaplan and Kaplin 1989).

Within this common search for peace and quiet, however, Krogh reports on variations. The camping guests on Jomfruland associate peace and quiet with the informal social life in the camping area. They combine their daily routines with social motives to a greater degree than those who own *hytte* on the island (Krogh 1995). The higher concentration of people and the smaller living areas among the camping families mean that they tend to meet informally in front of their camping trailers for a cup of coffee or a BBQ, initiate a soccer game and generally “are a little less formal than usual.”

By contrast, *hytte* owners often have more comfortable and more expansive indoors areas and greater distance between families. Many of the *hytte* tourists on Jomfruland reported using the landscape in a more solitary manner. While there are organized activities among this group and while they also participate in the general social life of the island, they have the ability to withdraw and seclude themselves from the ongoing social life found during the summer season. They are concerned with the “creative” use of nature such as painting and polishing rocks for jewelry. In addition to aesthetic activities, the creative use of nature also includes exploration.

I think that to set out a fishing net is fun. It is only a small trout net, but not for trout, but because it is easy to use and it is always fun to see what you can get, isn't it. Not so much for necessity and to give one contact with all of that ecology (male academic and *hytte* owner from Oslo).

When it comes to the need for communication, the camping guests are more concerned with face-to-face than telephonic. To the degree that these guests are hourly wage workers as opposed to salaried employees, they do not have the need for ongoing contact with their work, particularly when on vacation. Telecommunication for these guests, then, is more focused on personal than job related issues. On the other hand, as we will see below, those summer guests who own *hytte* are often have salaried jobs, or own the companies in which they work. This means that they have a different need for telecommunications.

### **3 Integration of the mobile telephone and the *hytte***

Based on the preceding discussion, we now turn to an analysis of the data describing respondents' use of mobile telephones at the *hytte*. The material reported here, that comes from a series of focus groups, was not particularly focused on this type of use, rather, this theme arose from the comments of the participants. With the exception of the focus group for younger respondents, the theme came up in all of the forums indicating the importance of the issue.

#### **3.1 Positive aspects of mobile telephones at the *hytte***

Many respondents expressed an openness to the use of mobile telephones at *hytte*. One respondent summarized their feelings by simply saying “I think it is great when I am at the *hytte* and I forward my calls from home.” Those who were positive to the use of mobile telephones at their *hytte* generally referred to four themes. These were those of freedom, security, responsibility, efficient relaxation.

##### **3.1.1 Freedom and security**

In the previous section, there was a discussion of the *hytte* as a sanctuary in which one tries to attain “peace and quiet.” On the surface, it seems clear that a device which disturbs this goal would not be welcome. The data from the focus groups shows, however that the mobile telephone welcome, however to the degree that it allows freedom and security.

Some informants had an almost palpable excitement when discussing the device. It was a technology that solved many practical issues and resulted in a type of geographical liberation while at the same time providing a type of safety.

Freedom of movement, a feeling of security, others have, perhaps elderly parents that they don't dare leave behind. . . . Mobile telephones are helping to create a new type of freedom that we did not have before. You had to be there, not just with your job but also with the family, [now] the family can communicate over undreamed of distances.

Others spoke in terms of security combined with geographical mobility. They talked about the ability to move securely about in relatively uninhabited forests and wilderness areas.

I thought that when I was retired that I will go walking exactly when I want to, especially in the mountains. . . . Then there is the problem that my wife says that she doesn't want to take the chance of me being up there. You go skiing and can be laying there and freeze to death. . . . If I go skiing and I am lying there I can call Norwegian Air Ambulance, I am a member, then I can lay there and wait for help.

I wanted to take it with me on walks either in Nordmarka (the large forest area immediately north of Oslo) or in the mountains or wherever to say if something had happened, so that I could move freely. It can be a little difficult to walk in Nordmarka on a weekday because in from Kikut (a lodge ca. 20 kilometers north of Oslo) there is not a single person so that is the only reason that I wanted to get one.

I got my first mobile telephone eight or nine years ago. I bought simply because I often go to the mountains alone. Suddenly your car stops and it is -20C, what am I to do then? . . . Plus I have a *hytte* without electricity. I have a phone mounted in the car and I am very happy with it. . . . In addition I have a little one that I use when I go around. It is insecure and things can happen, suddenly break a leg, the kids might need me and so on.

When I am out hunting I could think it would be nice to have a mobile phone.

While many respondents discussed the theoretical potential of accidents, others had less abstract reasons for the use of mobile telephones. Respondents talked about relatives and friends who needed better access to medical facilities.

I have a mother-in-law that bought a mobile telephone. She had angina and they have a *hytte* in Bodø and she bought one because she thought that it was better to have a mobile telephone.

Other respondents talked about yet more concrete situations where they had moved beyond the possibility that something might happen, to the reality of things that have happened. Here the theme is not just personal security, but also the ability to render aid in the case of an accident.

I was involved in a collision and I had a mobile telephone. It was good to have that. It was out in the country and a long way to the next house, it was really good to have it.

We once had a camping trailer and we ran over a girl and it was good to have a mobile telephone . . . it was good for calling in assistance.

The respondents felt that mobile telephones extend the boundary of safety further into the wilderness. The technology extends the range of activity into areas that were "something could happen" or there may be an "emergency situation." This is, however, not a complete freedom. The respondents were quite knowledgeable about where the mobile phones would work and which were more reliable in various situations. They understood the limits on their freedom as determined by their distance from the local antenna, by the life of the batteries, etc. The informants displayed a nuanced understanding of the various systems and the coverage for the two competing operators.<sup>8</sup> The knowledge regarding coverage is, in some cases, quite detailed. It is mapped onto specific portions of the countryside and even down to parts of the *hytte*.

I have a *hytte* up near Nesbyen up in the mountains there, and I had to move it up to the mantle, there it was good, but in the kitchen it didn't work.

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<sup>8</sup> The three systems available in Norway include NMT450 and NMT900 and GSM. There are two operators offering the latter type of service, Telenor and Net-Com.

The failure of batteries or the poor coverage of certain areas means that the boundary is not absolute, rather it moves and is, to a degree unstable. It is not something upon which one can rely absolutely.<sup>9</sup>

- You don't buy a telephone and take it into the mountains.
- That is what the younger people do. I know one that bought a mobile telephone and he went hunting alone. . . .
- If my children went hunting in the mountains I would be much more secure if I had a mobile telephone.

The comments examined in this section, i.e. the use of the device for freedom, security and for assistance in crisis situation, show that beneficial use of the mobile telephone has become a part of the lore surrounding the device. They play on various themes that are well entrenched in Norwegian culture, i.e. immersion in the wilderness, the desire for security and an interest in aiding others in crisis situations. These comments become a gloss that legitimizes the device in that they produce new social meaning that serves to integrate the meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 92). These legitimations can, for example, be employed in discussions regarding their purchase or use, or to counter other, more critical, portions of the lore.

Another dimension of this discussion is that the device can allow an asymmetrical form of accessibility, i.e., the ability to call out to others if the need or desire arises, while at the same time one can turn it off when they do not want to be disturbed. The ability to control this boundary is not unique to a mobile phone. As we will see below, strategies for control of the communications boundary have existed before. It is perhaps now, however, that they have been made overt in the form of an "off" switch.

### 3.1.2 Responsibility

A second common justification for the use of a mobile phone at the *hytte* is the notion of responsibility. In some cases this may have been responsibility to one's family, as mentioned in the first quotation in the previous section and in the following citation.

. . . in other situations I think it is positive because we have older parents and we could not have traveled all the time if we didn't have a telephone and they can reach us so I see the two sides but I see that we couldn't avoid having it. We have had it since '82-'83 and if we are spoiled with it, it is difficult to say.

Several of the respondents, particularly the men, focused more on responsibility towards their jobs. These comments, largely made by men, reflected a loyalty to their work, a recognition of the importance of that portion of their lives but also a marking of their status as business leaders.

I am a sales consultant and I work all over Hegeland, visit all the stores, kiosks, gas stations in all of Hegeland. Have had a mobile telephone for seven or eight years and I need it in my work. . . . It is mobile so I have it in the *hytte* in the mountains and use it there, have a *hytte* on the fjord in Narvik, and I use it there and a place in the country in Finnmark and so I use it there I rely on it so much and I have a boat also and I have it there also. I travel a lot in my free time. It is the mountains and the sea. The mountains in the winter and the sea in the summer and I use it both in my free time and in my work I am so dependent on it. I bought it privately, the one I have now, have not had it all the time. Use the private one at work and I am compensated for it.

This respondent describes a clear enthusiasm for his mobile phone, as well as his plethora of vacation possibilities. He describes a life style in which there is an unclear boundary between work and leisure. This is a characteristic of well established higher level white collar workers. The respondent also describes a lifestyle wherein he feels the need to be in contact with his work in an ongoing basis. Lower level white collar and blue collar workers, such as those described as camping tourists in the previous section, would not be likely to cite these types of concerns when describing their use of mobile telephones.

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<sup>9</sup> The degree to which one should rely on mobile telephones can take on the proportions of an urban legend. It is not so difficult for people to cite examples of hunters or hikers who have falsely relied on mobile telephones only to find that coverage or battery life was not adequate.

### 3.1.3 Efficient relaxation

The last positive theme which arose from the data, and which is in many ways an extension of the previous discussion, was what one might call efficient relaxation. The idea is that the device allows one to quickly dispatch their work related assignments while actually vacationing.

I combine the important with the pleasant when it comes to mobile telephones. I have a firm in the tourism branch and have people that travel with tourists in the summer. They are out the whole summer and it is good to go to the *hytte* and know that they can get a hold of me if things happen. I can go and fish or sail and all the while be accessible, that is quite pleasant.

I would not have had the possibility to take three weeks vacation without my mobile phone.

Here we see the integration of work and private life, or perhaps their existence in parallel. The advantages are increased flexibility and the minimizing the need to be physically present at a workplace. While this facilitates the phone users ability for what one might call multiple co-presence, it also means that one must juggle two presentations of self. The shifting back and forth between the situations can result in awkwardness, particularly if the business related telephone assumes a particular decorum. There is the need to engage in a type of verbal staging of the performance to either cover over the fact that one is not really in their business mode, but rather in a vacation mode or to make sure they know of their welcome. If this work is not done, it might lead them to think that they had intruded (Ling 1996a, Ling 1996b).

In summary, then, there are several justifications that the respondents used when describing the use of mobile telephones at the *hytte*. These include the issues of freedom and security, the sense of responsibility to one's job and finally the notion of efficient relaxation. Now we will turn to the ways in which the respondents tried to manage their use of the devices.

### 3.2 The *hytte* as a sanctuary

In the previous section we have discussed the situations in which a mobile telephone at one's *hytte* was seen in a positive light. Now we turn to the dark side of the interaction between these two social components.

Several respondents described the *hytte* as a type of metaphorical boundary between job and leisure time, a place "to relax, not to work." It is here that they appealed to the search for peace and quiet, and for the chance to withdraw from routine activities. In the words of one respondent. "I am not interested in having people get in touch with me on the telephone regardless of where I am and whenever. Leisure time is a little sacred." Another respondent recognized that it is difficult to be absolute, but at the same time, there is a definite desire for seclusion:

When it comes to the *hytte*, I think it is fantastic to be without a telephone for three or four weeks. That is real vacation. But people who have older parents and such things, it is OK. I have to strongly support that there should be a telephone there, but I feel that it is vacation when we don't have a telephone.

These comments show that the introduction of the mobile telephone can be controversial. The *hytte* is a semi-sacred, but yet vulnerable icon. The fact that one can besmirch it through the purchase of a mobile phone underscores precarious nature. The mobile phone hinders ones ability to "get away from it all. The telephone allows – or perhaps forces – the individual to blur the work/leisure boundary and blurring of boundaries is a socially risky activity.

To the degree that social interaction is dependent on shared understandings, the introduction of new elements can cause friction, frustration and lack of coordinated interaction. It can be the cause of renegotiation of how an individual, or a family defines their time. One informant noted "One is never free from their job. Are we always at work?" Is vacation the time you have between telephone calls? Universal access has its price. "If you have [a mobile phone] there is no choice, you can not tell the difference between work and leisure." Another informant said "The only thing wrong with this is that people can reach me everywhere."

There is a sense in the comments of some respondents that there needs to be a strong boundary between work and leisure. The mobile telephone can breach this barrier and is thus a potential threat to the moral economy of the home.

But doesn't one have leisure? Should your job always be able to reach you? From my perspective you are never free, and if you have a job where you need to have

that mobile telephone then there are times that we could have turned it off, but because of the job he feels that he needs to have it on. Either you are free or not.

I think that you are never free and if you have a job where you need a mobile telephone there are times when I feel that we could turn it off, but in consideration to his job he has to have it on. Either you are free or not. During Easter we usually have 25-30 telephone calls per day and you begin to wonder if you have a vacation or not.

Finally, some respondents seemed to make a division between using a mobile phone in their *hytte* but not while they are out walking or skiing. They expressed the sense that it was not in the spirit of being in nature to have electronic communication technologies. In the words of one respondent, "I think that it is a little strange to walk in the forest with a mobile telephone." There seems to be the sense that when one is out walking in nature, away from the *hytte* that this time is not to be disturbed by calling.

I try to avoid being telephone crazy but I see the use in it. . . . I have a *hytte*. I go cross-country skiing, but I don't have the telephone out on the trails, but I have it with me in the *hytte*.

When I am in the mountains I could think it would be good to have one, but not when I am going cross-country skiing. It is enough to keep my feet underneath me, but otherwise it is fine if something should happen.

I use it as a tool, I am dependent on it, my customers and my employer need to be able to contact me and so when I am working I use it in relation to work, and it is great to give messages home when you are out traveling a lot. It is great to have and it absolutely increases security but as I just said I used it in the mountains, I meant at the *hytte* in the mountains, I do not have a mobile telephone with me in my pocket when I am hiking in the mountains. That thing is great but I have a private life and so I don't use the telephone. I use the phone a lot and so in my leisure time I almost never call it is only to take messages when somebody wants to get a hold of me.

We never use it out in the street or such places. I could not imagine walking along with that thing.

In summary, one is struck by the way in which many of these speakers are wrestling with their relationship to the device. On the one hand they take an absolute line vis-à-vis the mobile phone, i.e. "either you are free or not." But in almost the next breath there are exceptions. One's husband needs it for his job, or there is a sick mother etc. The thing that many of these comments have in common is, at best, a begrudging acceptance of the device. The comments are focused on defining the boundary between necessary and unnecessary use. This, however is a slippery concept that varies from person to person and situation to situation. In this way it is a gold mine for social scientists interested in the process of the social definition of emerging culture.

### 3.3 Gender and age based differences

The results of the focus groups indicate that there are both gender and age based elements in the definition of proper and improper use. To first take up the issue of gendered use of the mobile phone, it was noted above that one of the positive aspects of mobile telephone use at the *hytte* was based on a sense of responsibility towards one's job. This was generally a line of reasoning used by men.

Women who participated in the focus groups were somewhat more critical of this type of legitimization. The following citations betray an almost resigned attitude toward the device. One woman said "OK, that is his way to be responsible." another noted:

We use a mobile telephone because my husband has a firm. When we are, for example, at the *hytte* we have it with us. We don't have a telephone at the *hytte*. It is in case he needs to be reached.

These comments fix the responsibility for the mobile phone on the man in that the phone is OK "in case he needs to be reached." There is a recognition of the mobile telephone as a portion of the work-

ing world. There is no sense of the mobile telephone as a device used in the social maintenance of the family. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional telephone. (Fischer 1992, 235; Moyal 1989, 288)<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to aged based differences, there was a sharp contrast between the perception of the participants in the focus group for younger respondents when compared to that for older persons. In the latter group there was, in fact, no mention of the wilderness and *hytte* at all. Informants in that group were far more concerned with the connectivity and accessibility provided by mobile phones since their lives were oriented towards being in the city, studying or meeting friends away from their homes.

Finally, the issues of freedom and security are almost exclusively discussed by middle aged and elderly respondents. In fact, in the focus groups for young adults, there was no talk of *hytte*, wilderness or other non-urban use of mobile phones. To some degree one can expect this since it is the older respondents who use their free time walking in the forest or at their *hytte*. As noted above, the younger respondents were far more concerned with the issues of connectivity and accessibility. That is, their life was oriented towards being in the city, studying or meeting friends away from their homes. Thus the mobile phone allows them to maintain contact with a social network.

## 4 Managing unreachability

The comments of the respondents in the previous section underscore the ways in which we are moving into a period where the possibilities for telecommunication are becoming more intense. If one measures the number of available telephone numbers, e-mail addresses etc., one can see the possibilities for communication increase from day to day. The earlier distinctions are being swept aside and other approaches are taking center stage.

These communication channels cross the boundaries between one's private, social and their work life, areas that were quite separate in earlier times. Giddens has pointed out that our understanding of co-presence is being influenced by the new forms for electronic communication (1984) and the same is true of our sense of accessibility (Bakke 1995). We are moving from a period when availability was static and taken for granted to a period where we are having to coin new institutions and conventions for management of our availability. A common characteristic of many of the new forms of communication, be they mobile telephones, pagers, e-mail or answering machines, is that they provide us with what we might call variable availability. As in many other cases, while the technology has arrived, our social adjustment has only begun. To be adequately accessible in one situation is to be inadequate – or even overly – exposed in others. Thus, electronically induced variable accessibility is socially problematic. The discussion in the focus groups indicate that we are still in the process of institutionalizing and legitimating electronic availability in various settings (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 47-116).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The other interesting aspect of the citation is that the speaker draws a very concrete boundary between polite and impolite use of the mobile telephone in public places. While the younger person sees it as “cool” and practical to use the telephone on the street (a notion of status?) the older people want to retain the privacy of telephone conversations. Use of the mobile telephone in the street is seen to be like smoking. Thus, just as it is uncouth to be seen walking down the street with a cigarette in your hand or your mouth, use of the mobile phone is in somewhat the same class.

<sup>11</sup> A parallel institutionalization process took place during the early growth of the telephone industry regarding the correct way to greet others on the telephone. The device stripped away visual information meaning that conversants of unequal social status were unable to determine the appropriate style of greeting to be used. Here we see the introduction of a technical device forcing the establishment of new social conventions (Ling 1994, 9-10).

#### 4.1 Modes of availability

Several researchers have tried to categorize media technologies regarding their capacity to transport information. Robert Lengel and Richard Daft have presented a hierarchy of media technologies, based on the idea that technologies have variable “richness” (Lengel & Daft 1988, Lengel & Daft 1990). Interactive media such as telephone and e-mail have for example higher richness than impersonal media, such as flyers or bulletins. These categories echo Marshall McLuhan’s older distinction

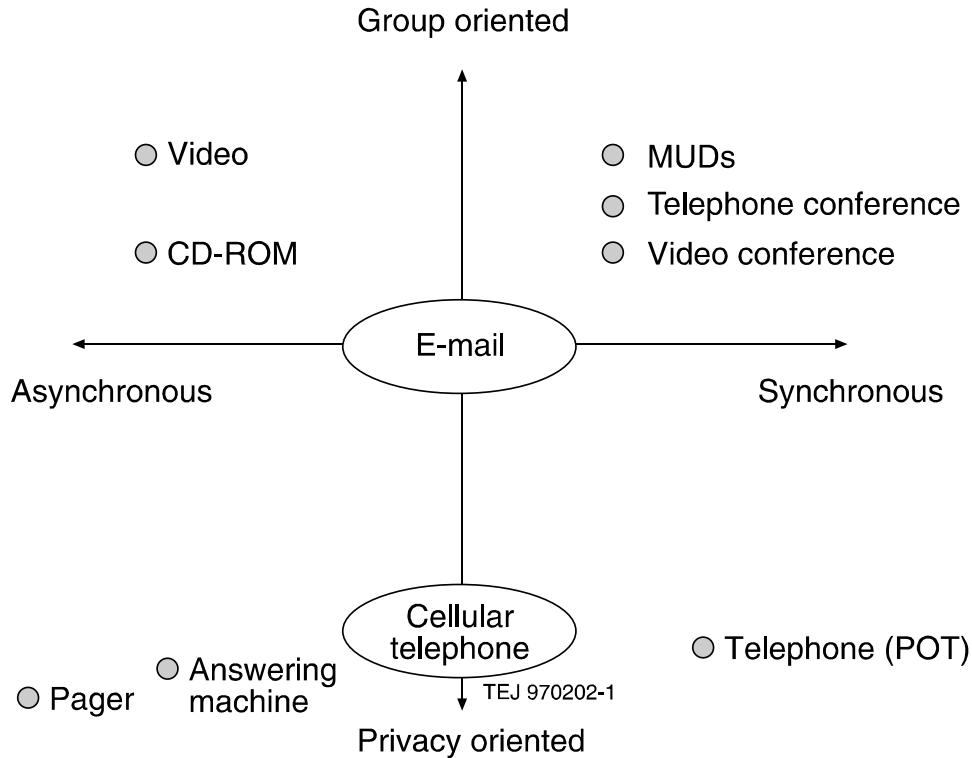


Figure 1 Technological modes of accessibility

between “hot” and “cold” media, based on the number of senses activated in the communication situation (McLuhan 1968).

In a certain sense, it is true that media which offers both visual and audio based information give the impression of higher social presence. A video conference can approximate an ordinary face-to-face situation, because it has the capacity for direct experience, multiple information cues and immediate feedback. The theory of information richness however, seems to offer a very static and simplistic framework for studying the media’s different characteristics. More critical to the discussion of availability is to what extent the technology is dedicated to individual or to group use. For example, you may reach a person by sending a message through a radio program, but they are not necessarily available. Another and crucial dimension (which is neglected by the information “richness” theorists) is the synchronicity between the sender and the receiver. The sense of availability is almost always stronger when the communication technology offers immediate contact. This is in contrast to indirect contact via for example e-mail or answering machines, strongly delayed interaction via traditional postal services or older one-way mass media.

Thus, we can raise some important distinctions between different forms of availability, based on the technology’s capacity to provide individual communication (individuality), and an immediate contact between the users (synchronicity). The figure shows that different media will have variable qualities of availability based on their information capacity and the way they give the user opportunities to control their time-bias.

A central aspect of modern telecommunication technologies and services is the mode of availability has become more elastic. A cellular telephone is, in principle, used for real-time conversations, but the telephone operators are increasingly offering voice-mail. Computer mediated communication, for example through the use of e-mail, opens communication to a range of different availability-modes. The messages can be distributed to large groups of receivers, but can also be addressed to only one person. Most e-mail is used for asynchronous communication, but messages can also be used for real time conversations with, for example Internet relay chat. This indicates that the computer as a com-

munication tool has wider potential for viability, than other media. This is in particular the case when the computer is combined with mobile telephone equipment and personal telephone services.

#### 4.2 The duality of availability

From a sociological point of view, the idea of variable availability has several different moments. On the one hand it allows for greater integration. At the same time it can allow for control and spying or eavesdropping. In addition, the new technologies can provide us with a certain discretion in the way we communicate. To take up the first point, having more open communication channels gives one the possibility to establish and maintain contact with others in new and uncharted ways. "Accessibility technologies" can help to integrate us since people can exchange ideas and information in spite of time and space. If one carries a pager in their pocket one is accessible for colleagues, spouses and others on a continual basis. One does not need to worry about missing important messages. Having access to people via electronic media means increased possibilities for nearness over distance.

Accessibility, alas, is a two-sided institution. To gain accessibility, one generally becomes accessible. When one adopts the use of electronic media it means that others can reach *you*. In this way there is always a slight unease associated with the use of electronic communications equipment. This unease increases with the number of communication channels one has since it gives others the possibility to find out when you are at home, at work, who you are, what you consume, when you consume it, etc.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the particular situation in which one finds oneself defines the degree to which they want to be accessible.

It is not difficult to see how increased accessibility is easily tied to the concept of control and spying. This control does not have to concern itself with broad issues of national security, but can be used to control one's children, spouse or co-workers. Parents in Oslo, for example, purchase pagers for their children. This provides the parents with a universal electronic connection to their children. Couples use mobile telephones to remind each other of errands such as picking up the children or buying milk on the way home from work. Companies in the trucking industry or taxi operators can connect mobile telephones into the GPS system to locate their vehicles, and their drivers, thus controlling their productivity. Here we have the implementation of an electronic panopticon (Foucault 1979, 195-230; Lyon 1994; Marx 1996).

The multifaceted nature of these technologies also mean that these technologies provide the individual with a certain discretion. "Caller ID" functions, e-mail, answering machines etc. all allow the individual a chance to tailor their interactions. They give the person receiving the call the chance to think through their interaction beforehand and the opportunity to arrange their presentation.

It is obvious from this discussion that the new telecommunication technologies seem to give us everything at once, i.e. contact, control and discretion. If this is the case, what is the big problem? The issue is that while the technologies give us these possibilities, they also force us to manage them and to develop new forms of interaction with our communication partners. The new technologies are not simply part of the background, they are in our faces demanding that we manage them and that we construct routines for their use. One must also ask about the degree to which the individual has the need for sanctuary in all of this storm of communication. Where is it that one can draw back and regain a perspective on life.

#### 4.3 The Goretex principle

The interviews showed that people was well aware of the technology's potential for regulating and controlling the individual availability. One of the management metaphors that arose from the focus group discussion was that of a one-way barrier between themselves and the world. In the words of one respondent:

I think it is good that I can get a hold of people, but I don't always think that it is so great that people call me all the time.

This is an operative definition of what one might call the Goretex principle. With Goretex garments, moisture can go one way, but not the other. Thus one can sweat and the moisture dissipates through the garment, however, rain and snow can not come through the fabric. In a similar way, the mobile

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<sup>12</sup> The fear here is that one might be inundated with unwanted communications. It is, however, possible to imagine the opposite, i.e. that in spite of wide accessibility, no one calls. Thus in an ironic sense, one's enhanced but unused telecommunication potential may serve to confirm one's social undesirability. This is the electronic version of "Suppose you gave a party and nobody came."

telephone serves as a membrane between the user and the world. One can turn off the device and close out the messages from others or turn it on only in the case of having to call out to others. The Goretex metaphor breaks down, however, in that the membrane provided by Goretex is only one way and one can not adjust its effectiveness.

As we have seen, with the mobile telephone and other telecommunications devices people have access to a simple control over the flow of information. The users can to a greater and greater degree determine when and how they are available. While before, becoming technically “unavailable” by unplugging the phone contained in itself a slight moral dilemma, new communication technologies are changing this equation. People are having to determine when they want to be reached and when they want to become unavailable. In short we are having to learn how to manage our telephonic accessibility. The process of determining this boundary, however, is not always simple. There is a contradiction in investing in a mobile telephone only to turn it off.

Person 1: You can turn [the mobile phone] off.

Person 2: Then what is the point if you are always turning them off.

Person 3: Yea, that is even more irritating if you call up people and they have turned it off.

Person 1: But you **can** turn it off.

Person 2: If you turn it off you are not in contact.

This illustrates the paradox of discretionary communication. While one can choose to limit their use of telephones by switching them off, it limits their accessibility vis-à-vis those who will reach them via the phone. If all were to limit their accessibility then the value of the device is reduced. This sequence also points to the ambivalence of accessibility and the management of unreachability (see for example Haugen cited in Gullestad 1994, 167). There is also an asymmetry here that is further underscored in the following citation.

The desire to control information flow, however, is not new with the mobile telephone. With traditional telephones people have reported various strategies for control of the barrier that are more or less effective. One can engage in ringing signals, i.e. a two rings followed by a pause indicates the call of a known person, pulling out the plug (Ling 1994, 19),<sup>13</sup> hiding the phone under pillows (Haddon 1994), the use of answering machines to filter callers (Berg and Håpnes 1990) and as one respondent in the current study reported, controlling who has one’s telephone number.

My name is not listed in the phone book under mobile telephone because of that. The closest know that I have a mobile telephone, and I have a lot of friends and acquaintances, and my customers know that I have it, and it is on my business card, but not in the phone book. I believe in a private life with a mobile telephone that you carry with you where you go and risk being called.

The issue here is about finding the balance between access and over use. There is the active management of the boundary between accessibility and isolation. The comments reported here outline some of the dimensions along which the legitimization process of mobile telephones is reaching. In this discussion it is also clear that there are certain conflicts in the symbolic universes the various speakers evoked when discussing their use, or rejection, of mobile telephones. In the next section we will conclude by looking into the clash between two of these.

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<sup>13</sup> In this paper it was noted that unplugging the phone was seen as a moral issue as can be seen in the following citation.

Focus group participants considered freedom from the device as opposed to the responsibility to be available to others. One woman noted that “I believe it is a right to unplug the telephone.” Another informant reported unplugging the phone “almost every night.” This comment was countered by an elderly man who noted that “I feel it is a responsibility to have the telephone plugged in, I know that others unplug it occasionally, but I feel that I am doing something wrong if I unplug it.” Here, the discussion of freedom from the telephone is elevated to a discussion of one’s rights as opposed to the implicit social contract which states that one is available to others whenever they choose to call.

## 5 Conclusion: The cyborg or the rustic?

At the most concrete level, this paper is an examination of the ways in which mobile telephones have influenced the institution of *hytte* life in Norway. By way of conclusion it may be useful to outline two contradictory metaphors, that of the cyborg versus that of the rustic. It is not the suggestion here that either of these actually exists as other than social facts. The point is that in the contrast between the two we can, perhaps see that reality is in the shadow and that we draw on such symbolic constructions in the constitution of our daily lives.

The cyborg is, of course that “being” existing only in a non-geographical electronically defined space, usually associated with the Internet, but also other types of telecommunication systems. In its most extreme articulation the cyborg is said to represent the end of the subject and the entry of a new, dispersed subjectivity. The idea of the cyborg holds out the promise of fusing the corporeal and the electronic into a single but always changing entity. In effect humans become at one with their machines and co-create a synergetic identity, indeed the Cartesian sense of individual, singular identity is challenged in this perspective. The “individual” is somewhere in the boundary between a physical object and a stream of information. Identity is not fixed but rather is always evolving and developing into new dimensions. In this approach the “location” of the “person” is uncoupled from its physical location which is then available for social mediation.

The cyborg, the multiple personality, the technosocial subject, Gibsen’s cyberspace cowboy all suggest a radical rewriting, in the technical space . . . of the bounded individual as the standard social unit and validated social actant (Stone 1996, 43).

While this discussion is often taken up in relation to the use of the Internet, it has relevance for the use of the mobile telephone. In the very same sense as when one is on the net, mobile telephones can induce a type of place-independent interaction. It does not matter where one is when one wants to talk to people, we are only as far away as the nearest telephone, which is in our pocket. We are at once everywhere and nowhere.

At the other extreme is the notion of the romanticized rustic who is, to paraphrase Thoreau, living deliberately and confronting only the essential facts, i.e. food, clothing, fuel and shelter. This hardy individual – and we must underscore the word individual – endeavors to know the world by direct experience. He or she has felt the cold on their face and seen the sublime with their own eyes. The boundary between the person and the world is well defined and understood; identity is fixed. The point is to focus on that which is important and not the irrelevant.

Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in an extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on a thumb nail (Thoreau 1975, 247).

This sturdy individual is one of the ideals associated with the *hytte* while the mobile telephone can represent a prosthesis for the melding of the individual into the cybersphere, i.e. the cyborg. If we can, for the moment elevate the *hytte* and the mobile phone up to a more symbolic plain, one can see the way in which the two clash. It is impossible for the one metaphor to accommodate the other. The person aspiring to cyborgdom can be at a *hytte* but that physical and social context is not, to use a phrase from the 60’s, where they are at. They are occupying some electro/mental space in which geographical location is irrelevant. By contrast, the rustic would not be interested in entering cyberspace, much less a telephone conversation. These distractions would simply get in the way of their direct experience of nature. In their more extreme stances they want to dispense with society itself since it is society that is the major threat. Thoreau writes, for example that he had three chairs in his home at Walden Pond, “one for myself, one for a guest and a third for the world.” That was enough.

If we now step back from these metaphors, that which is interesting is the way in which we as social actors are flexible enough to adjust and redo our symbolic furniture in order to adopt the new while still appealing to the old revered ideas. The respondents in this survey indicated their desire to draw on amputated versions of both of these metaphors. They took convenient aspects of each, and for that matter many other social metaphors, in order to construct a meaningful existence, an ontological security in the words of Silverstone (1994, 5-8).

We keep the *hytte* in order to maintain the notion of the rustic but put in a TV, electricity or a mobile phone in order to appeal to the modern. We pay homage to the symbols and adopt technologies that allow us to do this while living in a technologically advanced world. The adoption process is not

painless, it requires some heavy symbolic lifting which is always somewhat stressful. In addition, there are those who are more or less flexible in their adoption process.

So, while the cyborg and the rustic are there, the less clearly drawn, real-life persons appeal to their images as we go about their everyday lives. These we draw in the appropriate symbolic images in various situations, and in this process carry on the institutionalization of these new communication possibilities. We will adjust and tailor the technologies to our needs and to our ideological perspectives. In the end they will recede into the taken for granted background.

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