10. Coming to Terms with the "Smart" Phone

Wanda Strauven

Abstract
This chapter explores the rich terminology of the mobile phone in various European languages, from the Belgian "GSM" to the French "portable," and from the Italian "cellulare" to the German "Handy." What do these different terms promise, proscribe, and "technicize"? Which techniques and gestures are imbedded in brand names like BlackBerry and iPhone, or in more generic terms, such as cell phone and PDA? And why did the term "smartphone" never really kick off in everyday language? These questions are at the basis of a personal journey that takes the form of a terminological reflection with forays into the history of confectionary, literacy, smileys, and gaming. Ultimately, it briefly considers the phone's role in the creation of a new type of cinema.

Keywords: mobile phone, Smarties, smileys, mobile gaming, plastic archaeology, personal media archaeology

My Fake BlackBerry

The term "smartphone" was allegedly coined by Ericsson in 1997 for a prototype that never reached the market (for reasons I will come to below). Thus, it started off as the name for a failure. In that same year, in June 1997, computer scientist Philippe Kahn hacked a Motorola StarTAC flip phone by hooking it up to a digital camera and a laptop computer so that he could take a picture of his newborn daughter and upload it instantaneously to a webserver that friends and family could log onto after receiving an email alert. Baby Sophie's photo entered history as the very first cell

Baer, N. and A. van den Oever (eds.), *Technics: Media in the Digital Age*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024
DOI 10.5117/9789048564552_CH10

Fig. 10.1: Nokia E61. From author's personal collection.

phone picture.[1] About ten years later, when my daughter was born, I created a website featuring a photo album where each day I would upload a new baby-in-action picture, which was then still taken with a non-phone camera. In my early years of motherhood, I mainly used a digital point-and-shoot camera for documenting this new phase of my life. During that period, I was also a proud user of a Nokia E61 that came with a 4.5 x 6 cm LCD screen and a full keyboard (Fig. 10.1). I remember how my Nokia was often mistaken for a BlackBerry, even if it was silver-colored instead of black and its keyboard buttons were squared and not shaped like drupelets – the most recognizable feature of the classic BlackBerry (and the fruit after which it was named). This might have been a symptom of BlackBerry's success as a brand name and its potential for becoming a generic trademark before other smartphones conquered the market and BlackBerry rapidly lost ground.[2] Introduced in 1999 as a two-way pager, the BlackBerry smartphone was released three years later, but most users would call their device by its brand name rather than referring to it as a "phone." In terms of fruit sizes, it can be said that an apple fits better in the hand than a blackberry, but then Apple called its smartphone "iPhone."[3] It was Steve Jobs who famously announced its "birth" at the Macworld Convention on January 9, 2007.

For many years, I resisted the iPhone temptation, attached as I was to my Nokia E61. I liked its (fake) BlackBerry shape and the tactility of its QWERTY keyboard that would allow me to type much faster than my friends who still had a cell phone with a twelve-button keypad. But most important was its affective value: after all, it was the phone my baby girl

1 When *Time Magazine* included Kahn's picture on the list of the 100 most influential photos of all time, it was said to have "forever altered how we communicate, perceive, and experience the world and laid the groundwork for smartphones and photo-sharing applications like Instagram and Snapchat. Phones are now used to send hundreds of millions of images around the world every day – including a fair number of baby pictures." (TIME 2016)

2 On the rise and the fall of BlackBerry, see McNish and Silcoff 2016.

3 One of the main reasons behind the bite in the Apple logo is precisely scale, as it would allow distinguishing it from a cherry. See, for instance, Conradt 2015.

grew up with. My Nokia E61 bond lasted beyond my daughter's toddlerhood. So it should come as no surprise that it also became an improvised toy in her hands. One day she accidentally opened the calculator application, making a grid of buttons appear on the screen that she tried to push with her little fingers, as if it were a touchscreen. Yet her favorite "game" was typing on the physical keyboard. She quite soon understood that the phone was not just a mini-typewriter but also a message sender. Once she knew all the letters of the alphabet, at the age of four, all she wanted to do was send her own messages. Obviously, she could not write on her own yet, but she knew how to use the smartphone's full alphabet keyboard while I dictated letter by letter, word by word, at her request. Often she would add a decorative string of "little monkey tails," as at-signs (@) are called in Dutch (Fig. 10.2).

Fig. 10.2: Sending a message with mommy's phone. Summer of 2012.

Literacy and gaming are just two of the many aspects that I will explore in this terminological quest that is interwoven with my personal life, an ongoing research project on children, and childhood memories. It can be considered a form of personal media archaeology that connects my own narrative (mostly on the level of anecdotes) to some larger narrative of media history, which is "practiced" in a media-archaeological fashion, not as a technologically progressive development but as a nonlinear entanglement of various historical layers. In this case, I am looking at (or rather stumbling upon) the hidden genealogies of the smartphone, ranging from the production of sugarcoated chocolate candies (Smarties, Bonitos, M&Ms) to the phenomenon of "plastic archaeology" on the beach, and from the success story of the smiley as pre-emoticon icon to the craze of early mobile games like Pac-Man and Snake. Which of these layers brings us closer to the "smartness" of the smartphone? What makes the smartphone "smart"? What other promises does the term entail?

I am less intrigued by the smartphone's technology (or its evolution as a technical device) than by the history of its various terms, and what those terms can tell us about the emergence of new techniques and gestures that come with the device. Following Benoît Turquety's distinction, I am adopting here the French notion of *technique*, which is broader than the English

one, as it does not separate the gesture from the machine (or technical object, as Gilbert Simondon named it). In French, *technologie* refers to the science that studies *techniques*, while the latter is a combination (or, even better, intertwinement) of technical objects and procedures. Machines and techniques, as Turquety puts it, are "complementary aspects of one single phenomenon, that is to be understood in its complex cohesion" (2018, 243). I suggest searching for the procedures or gestures that are embedded in the terminology, as a variation on the Latin saying *nomen est omen*: namely, the technique is in the name (*technē estin en onoma*; in Greek, τέχνη ἔστιν ἐν ὄνομα).[4]

Can I Phone You Tomorrow?

In the early 2010s, it seemed that "iPhone" was on its way to becoming a generic trademark, taking over from "BlackBerry." It was a smart term, short and deceptively personalized, as if the homonym of the verbal construction ("I phone") ensured a close relationship between the user and the device ("my phone"). It was immediately clear that this relationship would involve much more than the technique of (tele)phoning (others), especially thanks to the capacitive touchscreen and the new visual functions of (self-) image capturing and displaying that were added to the more traditional telecommunication tools, like emailing or texting. Yet to this day the original iPhone's successors and its competitors are still considered, or simply called, phones. Launched in January 2007, Apple's smartphone was logically named after its "siblings" iMac and iPod, with the "i" referring to the internet – as well as to "individual, instruct, inform, inspire," a nice list where the term "intelligent" is conspicuously missing (Griffin 2016). Its success in becoming a metonym for a specific noun seemed to lie in the fact that the trade name contained that noun: after all, the iPhone was a phone. Yet it is the iPod, and not the iPhone, that made it into the list of most common generic trademarks in the mid-2010s (Atkins 2013). Now discontinued and disappearing also linguistically, the term "iPod" used to stand for all portable music devices.

In the mid-2010s, I began using "iPhone" as a common noun in conference papers and early versions of book chapters for the collaborative research project on children's creative and playful media uses, entitled #kinderspiel,

4 I would like to thank Maria Poulaki for helping me with the formulation of this idea in anachronistic ancient Greek.

that I had started with Alexandra Schneider.[5] In 2012, Schneider had contributed to the edited volume *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, which was symptomatic of the euphoric iPhone experience at that time and its promise as "an ever-expandable mobile media machine" (Snickars and Vonderau 2012, 2). In her contribution, Schneider proposed reading the iPhone as an "object of knowledge" and discussed, among other things, how the new touchscreen-based gesture of pinching could be placed in the register of love. Interestingly enough, she also recounted how Apple failed to register "iPhone" as a trademark in Switzerland, as it was argued by the court that, "unlike the brand name iPod, which is a new verbal coinage without precedent in any natural language, iPhone is a homophone of an English language sentence," therefore belonging to the public domain and unprotected by intellectual property laws (Schneider 2012, 59).[6] One might also observe that "iPhone" made a nice couple with another pronominal media coinage – that is, "YouTube" – to which the same editors, Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, had already dedicated a volume in 2009.[7]

In the early 2020s, after having put our book on hold for some years, Schneider and I began revising its chapters and realized – with a certain historical distance – how some of the terminology no longer applied, or at least needed to be updated, which included abandoning the use of "iPhone" as a generic trademark. On the one hand, this was clearly related to the increasing popularity of Android devices over the past decade; on the other hand, it also appeared that older terms persisted in the everyday language of (our) different cultural-linguistic contexts within Western Europe.[8] In Belgium, for instance, the acronym "GSM" is still commonly used by both Flemish- and French-speaking communities as a *totum pro parte*. Originally referring to the committee *Groupe Spécial Mobile* that was created in 1982 to develop a European standard for mobile telephony, GSM came to stand for

5 The project was officially launched at the 2014 NECS conference in Milan, where we presented the beta-version of our blog, "Kinderspiel: A Project on Children as Media Archaeologists, Media Makers and Media Players." See https://kinderspielproject.wordpress.com.

6 However, it should be mentioned that the verb *to pod* exists in the English language, more specifically in the meaning of producing pods of plants, thus without explicit reference to the music industry or the use of portable media players.

7 In 2010, Jan Simons would bring the two terms together in a pun to serve as the title of an article: "YouTube but iPhone" (2010).

8 This perspective is by definition limited and would need to be expanded beyond European boundaries, also in response to the more general critique of media archaeology's Eurocentrism. On the urgency of global(ized) media archaeology, see Morgan 2022. More specifically, for a study of mobile phones beyond Western boundaries, see Blaylock 2015, 2021. Jennifer Blaylock's postcolonial media archaeology focuses on the history of new technologies in Africa.

the standardized system itself (Global System for Mobile communications), which was first implemented in Finland, the home country of NOKIA, in 1991.[9] While Belgians will ask for each other's GSM number, the Dutch call it their 06 number, which refers to the nationally standardized area code for mobile phone numbers. In the Netherlands, the device operating a 06 number is colloquially (and diminutively) called "mobieltje," reinforcing the notion of mobility that distinguishes it from landline phones. In Italy, on the other hand, it is the notion of cellular data usage that takes precedence over the size of the device, nowadays less frequently called "telefonino" (small phone) than "cellulare" (cell phone). And let us not forget the wonderful term used in German-speaking countries, "das Handy," which emphasizes, whether intentionally or not, the device's convenience as well as its handheld (and hands-on!) dimension.[10]

Handy Terms

From a Latourian or Actor-Network Theory (ANT) perspective, one could say that the German expression "das Handy" reflects one of the artifact's most fundamental prescriptions, that is, that users hold the device in their hands.[11] Conversely, it projects human qualities to the nonhuman, as it turns the phone into a hand(y). In other words, the German (nick)name for the device is profoundly McLuhanian, as it implies that the hand has become an extension of the human body. But it also anticipates the emergence of new bodily techniques, especially hand gestures, formed or shaped by the new technical object. As a *pars pro toto* for the body, which Marcel Mauss defined as "man's first and most natural instrument," the hand will undergo physiological changes by its constant use of the phone; in short, the hand will become the phone (1973, 75). Already in the early days of the twenty-first century, half a decade before the release of the first-generation iPhone,

9 With Australian, North American, and Asian providers shutting down their GSM networks since 2017, GSM as a 2G network is on its way toward extinction. Yet, according to Wikipedia, the acronym GSM has become a generic term for designating the "plethora of *G* mobile phone technologies evolved from it." See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GSM.

10 In fact, the origins of the German term are disputed, but most likely it emerged as an Anglicized abbreviation of *Handfunktelefon* (handheld mobile phone). It should also be mentioned that the Swiss use their own term, the generic trademark "Natel" – a radiotelephone brand name that originated from *Nationales Auto-TELefonnetz*. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natel.

11 On the notion of prescription as a "behavior" that the nonhuman imposes on the human, see Latour 1992.

concerns were raised about possible transmutations of the thumb due to an increasing use of the short-message-service (SMS) protocol that youngsters had adopted for texting by multi-tapping the twelve-button keypad of their phones (Cloosterman 2002). This led to the development of a new language, SMS shorthand, with its text-based emoticons (Taylor and Vincent 2005).

Paradoxically, the hand seemed more independent of, or at least less reliant on, the sense of sight *before* the introduction of the touchscreen. In retrospect, it can be said that the operation of early cell phones, with their small screen and twelve physical buttons (from 1 to 9, plus 0, *, and #), was truly tactile; for instance, as some will nostalgically remember, it allowed for composing a SMS in the darkness of the movie theater by depending on fingertip sensitivity and blind typing experience. It is precisely because of the eye dependency of touchscreen gestures that more recent physiological concerns no longer relate to our thumbs but rather to the curve of our spine, which is compromised by constantly looking down at our devices – a body posture typical of the antisocial habit of phone snubbing or *phubbing* (Strauven 2016).

On the other hand, the medium's promises of freedom and unlimited accessibility and/or data usage are embedded in terms like the Dutch "mobieltje," the French "portable," the Italian "cellulare," and even the Belgian "GSM," as it stresses the link with the available (2G) network. Despite the international scope of our research project that brings together material from children growing up in different European countries (and languages), Schneider and I abandoned the *couleur locale* of these geographical terminologies, while updating the book, in favor of the more generally accepted English terms "cell phone" and "mobile phone." If the iPhone's interconnectivity or internet-based apps might best be captured by the expression "cell phone" (or, colloquially, "cell"), it is our inclination to use "mobile phone" as a common denominator for all phones with a so-called mobile phone number, that is, all phones, old and new, real and imaginary (or imagined), that are not landline phones.[12] The phone's mobility is related to its other basic feature: portability. The two are complementary to each other: portability implies compact size, light weight, and ease to carry (in your hand or in your pocket), while mobility underlines the possibility to go from one place to another, to be on the move, out of your house, on the street, and in the world (the promise of ubiquity).

12 Historically, this is also the oldest term emerging in the mid-1970s in the wake of the race between Motorola and Bell Labs to make the first call on a handheld mobile phone. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the first known use of the term "mobile phone" was in 1975, while "cell phone" appeared in 1983.

"Only Smarties Have the Answer"

But what about the smartphone? Why not simply replace "iPhone" with "smartphone"? Not only does this term have the advantage of not being a brand name, it also predates the iPhone's launch by a decade. Introduced by Ericsson in 1997, it has been widely adopted since then, at least in writing, from sales and marketing to journalism and academia. Yet, as Schneider and I had to conclude, the term was not – and still *is* not – frequently used in everyday speech by smartphone users themselves. Indeed, who says: "Where is my smartphone?"; "Did anyone see my smartphone?"; "I love your new smartphone!"; "Wow, that's a cool smartphone you have there!"; and so on? In our perception, people tend to simply call their smartphone a "phone," even if they are rarely using it for the purpose of making voice-based phone calls (that is, phoning). A telling anecdote, which we also recount in our forthcoming book, is that once, in Italy, my old compact camera was (mis)taken for my new phone by an eight-year-old boy. Along with some other mothers, I had accompanied a group of second graders to the park and we had asked them to line up on top of a little wall and pose for some pictures. When I took my camera out of my purse, the boy asked in great surprise: "Is that your new phone?" The boy used the generic Italian term "telefono." Let me emphasize the technique behind my gesture: I was not making a phone call but taking a picture!

To stay within the anecdotal register, it was about the same time that I asked my daughter, then also a second grader, for a definition of the smartphone while I was preparing one of my classes.[13] If I remember correctly, I asked her if she knew what the term "smartphone" stood for. Without hesitation, she answered: "Smarties!" As my follow-up questions remained unanswered, I just smiled and let her return to playing. But of course I wondered if there was more at stake than simple wordplay. What had prompted this association? Was she thinking of the phone as a candy? Had she already discovered Candy Crush (available on iPhones since November 2012) and been playing it behind my back? Or did she make a "smart" connection between the colored chocolate candies and iPhone's icons or, even better, the smileys of its messaging app?

From a media studies perspective, the history of Smarties is quite revealing, as it covers very diverse areas ranging from the techniques of branding and packaging to literacy, education, and environmentalism. For clarity,

13 This was during my teaching appointment at the University of Udine in the academic year 2015-2016.

I am not talking here about the candies produced and distributed in the United States under that name, which come in the form of chalky tablets. The reference point for my daughter must have been Nestlé's oval-shaped and sugarcoated pieces of chocolate, originally introduced as "Smarties Chocolate Beans" by the British confectionary company H. I. Rowntree & Co. in 1937, then shortened/rebranded as "Smarties."[14] In Europe, and later also in Canada and other parts of the world, they became extremely popular largely thanks to the witty advertising puns and questions (to which "Only Smarties have the answer"), the colorful cylindrical boxes that you could shake as a rattle, and the plastic lids which were imprinted with the letters of the alphabet (and occasionally with a limited edition design, like spaceships or football phrases). There was the thrill of opening the tube to discover which letter you got on the lid, as it was "embossed on the underside, so you could run your finger over it like Braille" (Cocozza 2013). Considered a "useful teaching aid," these lids were supposed to encourage kids to recognize the letters, to collect them, and to create words with them. In 2005, Nestlé introduced the hexagonal box or hexatube, replacing the plastic caps with cardboard lids, which put an end to this sweet hobby of collecting.

Yet the linkage between literacy and confectionary, which was part of Rowntree's "smart" marketing campaign, suddenly took on an ecological twist at the beginning of the twenty-first century when Smarties lids were washing up on beaches, as happened, for instance, on the English Channel coast of Cornwall. As a form of "plastic archaeology," which is the term used by the Cornish Plastic Pollution Coalition (CPPC), these artifacts can now be dated fairly precisely due to changes in size, font, and manufacturer, and as such they are "an excellent example of how long plastics last in the environment" (Channon 2018). As one of the CPPC coordinators observes: "They also pose the question of where some of these vintage plastics are coming from – erosion of sand dunes/landfill, etc., as well as from the sea itself" (Channon 2018).

While it is easy to imagine the letter lids being arranged in sentences or even as a keyboard of an improvised toy computer, they must surely have been (mis)used in all kinds of games. Indeed, when Nestlé announced they would discontinue the tube-shaped packaging, some childhood memories

14 Founded in 1862, Rowntree's had been producing so-called chocolate beans since 1882, more than a century before they were acquired by Nestlé, which happened in 1988. The beans were renamed "Smarties Chocolate Beans" in 1937 by the firm's marketing director George Harris (Potts 2017). According to a collector's facts page, the shorter brand name "Smarties" was introduced in 1938, together with the cylindrical Smarties tubes, which quickly became collectables (northerntrumpet 2008a).

about lid shooting were posted in online comment sections: one person refers to it as "karate-chop," while another explains how the fun started after having eaten all the Smarties, as you would put the lid back on the empty tube, "rest it on a surface, and bang the edge of your hand down hard about half way along the tube, to see how far you [could] fire the plastic top" (*BBC News* 2005). Incidentally, TV commercials of the 1980s featured the lids as flying saucers or sliding discs going through the maze of a pinball machine or the like.[15] The animated adverts were also responsible for introducing Smarties with faces or, rather, *as* faces, very similar to the smiley face icon. A 1988 ad, for instance, features two children at a kitchen table looking inside a Smarties box and discovering an (animated) world full of colorful and happy faces, some with fancy sunglasses or long eyelashes, others with a bowtie or a presumptuous moustache (donkeyshines 2011). Nestlé's Smarties occasionally had drawings printed on the candies themselves (from Smartians and bugs to the Canadian maple leaf) (northerntrumpet 2008b), but the key question is: Did they ever come with the smiley design?

Funny Faces

In my memory, Smarties did come with funny faces in the 1970s and 1980s. That's probably why I immediately made a connection with the facial emojis after my daughter's smart(ies) exclamation. Yet my internet search – skimming fandom pages in various languages, visiting discussion forums, and looking for images and vintage ads – yielded nothing. Until I found the Bonitos …

Passing for France's Smarties, Bonitos were owned by Mars and sold under that name in various European countries from 1955 to 1986. In the mid-1980s, however, "Mars candy company abandoned successful European brand names in the pursuit of standardized global brands" (Herbig 2014, 46), and this is how, for instance, Raider became Twix and how Bonitos, together with the chocolate-covered peanuts Treets, were renamed M&Ms. As is well known, the first M of M&M stands for Forrest Mars, while the second refers to Bruce Murrie. As the sons of two competing confectionary families, Mars and Hershey, Forrest and Bruce had partnered up in the early

15 Compilations of Rowntree's and Nestlé's adverts can be found on YouTube. See, for instance, Smarties lids sliding through a maze (Webster 2015, 3:55; https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=gVGwg2YmloE) and Smarties lids as flying saucers (Acidonia150reborn 2021, 0:30; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fp5zyQxObg&t=193s).

1940s to launch the American version of Smarties.[16] According to the Hershey Archives, Forrest maneuvered Bruce out of the partnership in 1948, so M&M became *de facto* a single M – like the trademark "m" which is printed on their chocolate sweets. The renaming of Bonitos in the mid-1980s was indeed accompanied by the printing of this lowercase letter on every candy, forever changing the face of those "funny little heads full of milk chocolate" (*drôles de petites têtes pleines de chocolat au lait*), as Bonitos used to be advertised.

In the early 1970s, Bonitos had become the testing ground for the lucrative licensing potential of the smiley, trademarked in 1971 by French journalist Franklin Loufrani. Whereas freelance artist Harvey Ball, the American "inventor" of the smiley face icon, forgot to register a trademark on his very simple drawing ("a bright yellow circle with black oval eyes and a creased smile"), Loufrani was born with an entrepreneurial spirit and immediately secured a French trademark for a very similar drawing, also in yellow, which he famously launched on the front page of the newspaper *France-Soir* on January 1, 1972, to "alert readers to positive news" (Crockett 2022). In 1973, Mars became Loufrani's first business partner, with Levi's and Agfa following, and so Bonitos became candies with smiley faces.[17]

Yet, like Smarties, Bonitos came in different colors – with brown, red, green, and yellow as the basis, and orange and pink as additional variations – and their funny faces were not just smiley: some would stick out their tongues, others would be winking or wowing. In fact, another advertising slogan humorously defined them as "a bunch of little jokers with a heart of chocolate" (*une bande de petits rigolos avec un coeur en choco*). The simple design of their faces somehow – anachronistically – evokes the technique of the ASCII-emoticons, which would emerge in the 1980s and become the center of attention of Loufrani's son, Nicholas, in the late 1990s (Collomp 2010). In short, the yellow smiley icon that would become associated with

16 The legend goes that Forrest Mars got the idea for his chocolate candy in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) where he had seen soldiers eating Smarties. After his stay in Europe, where he had created the famous Mars bar and worked for companies like Nestlé and Tobler, he partnered up with Murrie for the creation of M&Ms. Launched in 1941, M&Ms were first exclusively made for the soldiers at war. Originally, they came in cylindrical tubes, like Smarties, but in 1948 the packaging was changed to brown plastic bags, still in use today.

17 Given Loufrani's partnership with Mars, one would assume that M&Ms also became imprinted with smileys, but I have found no evidence of this so far. M&Ms appear as animated figures in commercials and on merchandise, always with the "m" very prominently on their bellies and the facial features limited to the upper part of their bodies, which take the form of a slightly stretched circle. On the other hand, M&M candies would become available with special party texts and designs. Since the 2010s, personalized printers have been installed in M&M shops allowing customers to make and print their own designs.

house music and ecstasy in the late 1980s has a multicolored and multi-expressive past.

Snapping Games

Where does this candy genealogy lead? From Smarties to Bonitos, from the former's plastic letter lids to the latter's humorous faces, there is a clear investment in language education and visual communication which, it could be claimed, the smartphone (or rather its users) would bring together in the technique of texting. But I would like to draw a bit further on the entertainment side of the candies, as they were not only introduced as funny characters but also envisioned as building blocks of gaming. This started in the early 1980s, three decades before the release of Candy Crash Saga, when Rowntree's came out with a robot-themed Smarties commercial featuring a "very smartie" robot playing a slot machine and hitting the jackpot with three red candies in a row. Most remarkable is the three-second opening of this commercial, which offers a variation on the Pac-Man arcade game: the Pac-Man character, here wearing a green cap, eats its way through the blue-lined maze snapping its mouth open and shut as in the original game, but the dots have been replaced by Smarties in all the different colors and the center of the maze is occupied by a Smarties box.[18]

In those years, Pac-Man became available on home video game consoles, Atari and Nintendo, and then, in the 1990s, on the portable Gameboy device. On the one hand, it can be said that Gameboy, together with other handheld apparatuses such as the personal digital assistant (PDA), prepared the ground for the smartphone; on the other, it is the smartphone that arguably marked the beginning of the technique of mobile gaming. I am referring here to the smartphone both as a device and as a concept, the term itself entering the vernacular in the second half of the 1990s.

In the language of engineers, more specifically in the field of computing, the term "smart" has a long history, being used with reference to systems with processing power. In other words, it does not necessarily have an intelligent connotation (comparable to AI) but is linked to the technique of processing data. From this perspective, I wonder what my new neighbor, a first grader in New York City, means when he calls his father's smartphone

18 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYbKvBBvAG4 (Retrontario 2016). Questions about copyright arise here, as Rowntree's ad unmistakably copies the screen design of the Pac-Man arcade game.

a "dumb phone." Is the phone obsolete? Is it not functioning properly as a system with processing power? Or is the little boy simply not satisfied with the answers the device produces or the games it has on offer?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first appearances of the term "smart" in combination with "phone" can be traced back to 1980, but those were two-word occurrences with *smart* usually placed between scare quotes. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, on the other hand, dates the first documented use of the term "smartphone" to 1996, which is the year that Nokia released its 9000 Communicator. Yet this new device was not advertised as a (smart)phone but rather as an all-in-one communication tool that fits in your "jacket pocket" and allows you to have "Everything Everywhere."[19] Two years earlier, IBM had released its Simon Personal Communicator, generally considered the very first smartphone for combining the mobile phone with PDA features in one device, which had already been achieved by IBM in their 1992 prototype known under the code name "Sweetspot." In 1995, IBM Simon was presented on American television as an "interesting PDA built around the cellular phone," enabling a businessman waiting in a hotel lobby to be fully "computer functional" and not waste time.[20]

The year that interests me here is 1997. Exactly ten years before the launch of the iPhone, Ericsson developed its GS88, code name "Penelope," and Nokia announced its 6110. While the former never reached the market, it came with Ericsson's coinage of the term "Smart Phone," which was printed on the packaging designed for the device. One of the shortcomings of this prototype seems to have been its weight. Like Nokia's 9000 Communicator, Ericsson's GS88 had a lid covering a full QWERTY keyboard and touchscreen with stylus. Among its features were "16-bit operating system GEOS, POP3 email, SMS, world clock, browser, speakerphone, integrated modem, infrared port

19 Here is a transcript of the TV commercial: "Nokia 9000 Communicator. It's everything you need to communicate when you are on the move but it's so small it fits in your jacket pocket. The Nokia 9000 Communicator. Everything Everywhere." See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyv49CqC6D4 (İlişkiler 2015).

20 This is how Stewart Cheifet introduced the IBM Simon on the PBS TV show The Computer Chronicles at the beginning of the episode entitled "Mobile Computing" (1995): "I am in the lobby of the Marriott Hotel in San Francisco waiting to meet someone and they are late, and I got work to do, and I can't find AC or a phone line, but no problem. I am totally computer functional thanks to this Simon PDA of BellSouth and IBM. It is a really interesting PDA built around the cellular phone. So with it I can get a page, I can check my email, I can send or receive faxes, I can use it to make a phone call, *of course*, and I can use it like a normal PDA. I can check my calendar, I can look up a phone number, even scratch a note to myself on this touch-sensitive screen" (emphasis added). See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8Mgc8dYLro&list=PLR6RS8PTcoXTO90bAQSR2zQm60tJPQ7RA&index=6 (The Computer Chronicles 2013).

and PC connection" (Ericssoners 2016). Nokia's 6110, on the other hand, was successfully released in 1998 and had three games preinstalled: Memory, Logic, and Snake – that is, a variation of the old card game, a precursor of today's Wordle ("but with pictures instead of letters"), and a mobile upgrade of a two-player arcade game, respectively.[21]

Snake immediately became a phenomenon: it was simple, fun, and addictive. There was no maze as in Pac-Man, but you had to move the snake around in a similar way, up and down, right and left, in order to eat pixel candies. In the Nokia 8290 User Manual, the game is described as follows:

> Feed the snake with as many goodies as possible and watch it grow. Use keys 2, 4, 6, and 8 to turn the snake toward food. The longer the snake's tail grows, the higher your score. If the snake runs into its own tail or the surrounding wall, the game is over. (Nokia 2000)

While Snake could be played as a two-player game by pointing the infrared ports of two phones at each other, it must have been its one-player version that made the game extremely popular.[22] More generally, Nokia's preloaded games turned the smartphone with its monochrome 2.5 x 3.5 cm screen into a very portable and individual game console, and phone users into mobile gamers.

The Phone Says "I" (Not "Hi")

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Thomas Elsaesser formulated some hypotheses about cinema in the digital age in a seminal text that would lay the foundation for his "film history as media archaeology," outlining two possible scenarios or "killer applications" for digital multi-media, as he then called it. What would conquer the market in the near future? Would it be the "play station computer-game" as a true convergence device, or would it be the "mobile phone as mini-laptop" (Elsaesser 2005, 17)? While envisioning these two ways forward as "possibly distinct," Elsaesser may have underestimated at the time the possibility of their total merging – that

21 On Logic, see tylaste 2022; https://www.reddit.com/r/nokia3310/comments/g8nre3/retro_nokia_game_logic/. On the history of Snake and its precursors, see Angelos 2021.

22 Like many vintage games, the original Snake '97 is available for downloading on today's smartphones. You can choose between seven different Nokia phones, each with their own screen and twelve-button keypad, to be operated on the touchscreen.

is, of the smartphone becoming not only a mini-laptop but also a game console. Instead, he wondered:

> Will it be the sheer everyday usefulness, the universal popularity, and – lest we forget – the ruinous sums telecom firms have invested in licenses for "third-generation" cell phones that wins the day, or kids playing computer-games that simulate ever more sophisticated parallel worlds? Whatever redefines the function of sound-and-images combinations in our culture, the entrepreneurial risks and the profitable stakes are equally high. (Elsaesser 2005, 15)

Taking the publication delay into account, this text was written half a decade before the iPhone was released, when the new generation of media users, among them Elsaesser's students at the University of Amsterdam, were in awe of the latest flip phones.[23] Elsaesser does not use the term "smartphone" but refers to it as "mobile phone," "cell phone," and "telephone." As a groundbreaking thinker, he urges cinema scholars to fill the gaps of traditional film historiography, to question its absences and to include, among other things, the history of mobile telephony. Whereas the history of telecommunication had already been addressed by other cinema and media scholars (see, for instance, Ronell 1989; Gunning 1991; Uricchio 1997), Elsaesser proposes integrating the telephone's genealogy into film history because of the role played (or, rather, to be played) by the mobile phone in the field of cinema. It is an imagined future for (new) film historians, a history that was about to materialize in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Another early attempt to inscribe handheld telecommunication devices into the history and theory of visual media is Heidi Rae Cooley's 2004 illustrated essay "It's All About the *Fit*: The Hand, the Mobile Screenic Device and Tactile Vision." Again, it must be stressed that this text was published before Apple's iPhone launch and the widespread use of smartphones. While inspirational for my research on the (early) touchscreen, Cooley's well-found acronym MSD (standing for "mobile screenic device") did not really catch on.[24] It was probably meant as a successor to PDA with the idea of drawing attention to the screen and its visual dimension rather than to the phone's "everyday usefulness," mentioned by Elsaesser. As Cooley explains in the

23 A good example was the Motorola Razr V3, released in the fall of 2004. For a discussion of its "cool" TV commercial, see Strauven 2020.

24 Indeed, the copyeditor of my recent book strongly advised me not to use the acronym, as it is not widely adopted and would confuse the reader. See Strauven 2021.

first footnote to her article, MSD is conceived as an umbrella term for all types of handheld devices with an embedded screen, therefore including also portable cameras and game consoles. She writes,

> In addition to mobile phones and personal digital assistants, I intend mobile screenic device (MSD) to refer to digital cameras and digital camcorders with color or standard LCD screens, as well as any other handheld electronics device with LCD screen, including handheld gaming devices, such as GameBoy. In employing the neologism, I emphasize the devices' integration of mobility and visuality, which becomes a characteristic of tactility. (Cooley 2004, 151)

With foresight, Cooley identifies an important shift from "window-ed seeing" to "screenic seeing," from transparency (seeing through) to opacity (looking at), from visual framing to tangible engaging – a trend that the smartphone would only reinforce. As the visual part of her essay also illustrates, this new way of seeing is literally in our hands. It creates a new bond, or relationship, between the user and the screen, between the hand and the device, which Cooley theorizes through the notion of the "fit" as a dynamic happening and a reciprocal molding.

The notion of personal relationship is also central to Roger Odin's writings on the mobile phone, to which I want to pay brief tribute here. In the early 2010s, the French film theorist introduced the concept of "p film" (or "p cinema") to indicate the new communication space for viewing films shot on mobile phones, with the "p" referring to multiple related notions (such as phone, portable, and pocket). As a semio-pragmatic scholar, Odin focused on the role played by the phone in our changing spaces of communication, by analyzing its impact on the cinematic viewing experience as well as on the production of films. The "p cinema" is a new form of cinema; it is "cinema made while thinking portable" (Odin 2016, 51). But it is also a very personal cinema, for the mobile/portable phone caused a shift "from an impersonal utterance, as Christian Metz described it [...], to a personal utterance" (Odin 2012, 168).

As Odin further explains, it is not film language itself that changes or that says "I." The passage from impersonal to personal enunciation is defined or made available by the new apparatus, by the camera embedded in the mobile phone, which is a personal device. Odin writes,

> It is the use of mobile as an everyday tool, the fact that it belongs to an individual (as opposed to the traditional phone that belongs to a place

> or family), which enables it to give this personal value to the images it produces. (2012, 168)

While Odin's reflections mainly concern cinema's reconfiguration as a "cinema in my pocket," he also captured very well and succinctly the essence of the mobile phone as an "eminently personal device," as a "device that says 'I'" (2016, 52). Isn't that a wonderful observation? The phone as a device that talks in the first person, that is enunciative and self-affirmative, that says: "I." One might wonder if there is a better definition for the smartphone today, now that it also comes with mobile ID technology and facial recognition. So, after all, has it truly become an I-phone?

References and Further Reading

Acidonia150reborn. 2021. "Néstlé Smarties Animated Adverts 1980's to 2005." YouTube video. February 26, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fp5zyQxObg&t=193s.

Angelos, Ayla. 2021. "The History of Snake: How the Nokia Game Defined a New Era for the Mobile Industry." *It's Nice That*. February 23, 2021. https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/taneli-armanto-the-history-of-snake-design-legacies-230221.

Atkins, Alexander. 2013. "When Brand Names Become Generic." *Atkins Bookshelf*. September 27, 2013. https://atkinsbookshelf.wordpress.com/tag/what-is-term-when-a-brand-name-becomes-a-common-noun/.

BBC News. 2005. "Smarties Set to Lose their Tube." February 18, 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4276553.stm.

Blaylock, Jennifer. 2015. "Spectacular Mobile Technologies: The State and the Remote." ASA 2015 Annual Meeting Paper. *SSRN*. March 23, 2015. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2582118.

—. 2021. "'Who Wants a BlackBerry These Days?': Serialized New Media and Its Trash." *Screen* 62, no. 2: 1-17.

Channon, Max. 2018. "Dozens of Decades Old Plastic Smarties Lids Found on Beaches in Mount's Bay, Cornwall." *Cornwall Live*, November 21, 2018. https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/dozens-decades-old-plastic-smarties-2242474.

Cloosterman, Guido. 2002. "Mobiele telefoon doet duim muteren." *Gazet van Antwerpen*, March 24, 2002. https://ww.gva.be/cnt/oid185902.

Cocozza, Paula. 2013. "The Argos Catalogue – and Other Small Losses That Hit Us Harder Than Expected." *Guardian*, October 24, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2013/oct/24/argos-catalogue-small-losses-blue-pen.

Collomp, Florentin. 2010. "Smiley ou l'histoire d'une OPA sur un sourire." *Le Figaro*, January 13, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20100121111329/http://www.lefigaro.fr/societes/2010/01/05/04015-20100105ARTFIG00704-smiley-ou-l-histoire-d-une-opa-sur-un-sourire-.php.

Conradt, Stacy. 2015. "Did Alan Turing Inspire the Apple Logo?" *Mental Floss*. June 1, 2015. http://mentalfloss.com/article/64049/did-alan-turing-inspire-apple-logo.

Cooley, Heidi Rae. 2004. "It's All About the *Fit*: The Hand, the Mobile Screenic Device and Tactile Vision." *Journal of Visual Culture* 3, no. 2 (August): 133-155.

Crockett, Zachary. 2022. "The $500m Smiley Face Business." *Hustle*, July 8, 2022. https://thehustle.co/who-owns-the-smiley-face/.

donkeyshines. 2011. "Smarties." YouTube video, 0:29. April 1, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq9pKx_eMVU.

Elsaesser, Thomas. 2005. "Early Film History and Multi-Media: An Archaeology of Possible Futures?" In *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, edited by Wendy Chun and Thomas Keenan, 13-25. London: Routledge.

Ericssoners. 2016. "GS88 'Penelope' | Smartphone Concept by Ericsson." *Ericssoners. Keep Ericsson Mobile Phone History Alive*. https://ericssoners.wordpress.com/2016/06/13/gs88/.

Griffin, Andrew. 2016. "This Is What the 'I' in 'iPhone' Stands For." *Business Insider*, February 19, 2016. https://www.businessinsider.com/this-is-what-the-i-in-iphone-stands-for-2016-2.

Gunning, Tom. 1991. "Heard over the Phone: *The Lonely Villa* and the de Lorde Tradition of the Terrors of Technology." *Screen* 32, no. 2 (Summer): 184-196.

Herbig, Paul. 2014. *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Marketing*. New York and London: Routledge.

İlişkiler, Halkla. 2015. "Nokia 9000 Communicator Commercial TV Ad." YouTube video, 0:20. May 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyv49CqC6D4.

Latour, Bruno. 1992. "Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts." In *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, edited by Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law, 225-258. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mauss, Marcel. 1973. "Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1: 70-88.

McNish, Jacquie, and Sean Silcoff. 2016. *Losing the Signal: The Untold Story Behind the Extraordinary Rise and Spectacular Fall of BlackBerry*. New York: Macmillan.

Morgan, Daniel, ed. 2022. "Globalized Media Archaeologies." Special issue, *boundary 2* 49, no. 1.

Nath-Didile. 2012. "Les Treets et les Bonitos." *Les Petits Dossiers des Copains d'Abord* (blog), February 29, 2012. https://lescopainsd-abord.over-blog.com/article-les-treets-et-les-bonitos-par-nath-didile-100481303.html.

Nokia. 2000. "Nokia 8290 User Manual." *Manuals Lib*. https://www.manualslib.com/manual/112230/Nokia-8290.html.

northerntrumpet. 2008a. "Smarties: The History and the Facts." Smartiescollector.com. http://smartiescollector.com/northerntrumpet/smarties_history_2.html.

—. 2008b. "Smarties – Smartie Designs." Smartiescollector.com. http://smartiescollector.com/northerntrumpet/Smarties_Smartie_Designs.html.

Odin, Roger. 2012. "Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone." In *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, edited by Ian Christie, 155-169. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

—. 2016. "Cinema in My Pocket." In *Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory*, edited by Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever, 45-53. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Potts, Lauren. 2017. "Smarties: How the Stocking Staple Got Its Name." *BBC News*, December 26, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-42244389#:~:text=The%20history%20is%20far%20more,oldest%20chocolate%20in%20its%20repertoire.

Retrontario. 2016. "Smarties – When You Eat Your Smarties Do You Eat the Red Ones Last? (1984)." YouTube video, 0:30. October 21, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYbKvBBvAG4

Ronell, Avital. 1989. *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Schneider, Alexandra. 2012. "The iPhone as an Object of Knowledge." In *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 49-60. New York: Columbia University Press.

Schneider, Alexandra, and Wanda Strauven. Forthcoming. *Children Reinventing Cinema: Snapshots from the 21st Century*. Lüneburg: meson press.

Simondon, Gilbert. 2017. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* [1958]. Translated by Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove. Minneapolis: Univocal.

Simons, Jan. 2010. "YouTube but iPhone: Quanto sono cinematografici i film girati con il telefonino." In *Bianco e Nero*, edited by Roger Odin, 28-45. Rome: Carocci.

Snickars, Pelle, and Patrick Vonderau, eds. 2009. *The YouTube Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.

—. 2012. Introduction to *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, 1-16. New York: Columbia University Press.

Strauven, Wanda. 2016. "The Screenic Image: Between Verticality and Horizontality, Viewing and Touching, Displaying and Playing." In *Screens: From Materiality to Spectatorship – A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment*, edited by Dominique Chateau and José Moure, 143-156. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

—. 2020. "The Art of Teaching against the Grain: A Tribute to Thomas Elsaesser's Media-Archaeological Methods." *Journal of Early Popular Visual Culture* 18, no. 4: 368-382.

—. 2021. *Touchscreen Archaeology: Tracing Histories of Hands-On Media Practices*. Lüneburg: meson press.

Taylor, Alex S., and Jane Vincent. 2005. "An SMS History." In *Mobile World: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Lynne Hamill, Amparo Lasen, and Dan Diaper, 75-91. London: Springer.

The Computer Chronicles. 2013. "The Computer Chronicles – Mobile Computing (1995)." YouTube video, 25:55. August 1, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8Mgc8dYLro&list=PLR6RS8PTcoXTO90bAQSR2zQm60tJPQ7RA&index=6.

TIME, The Editors of. 2016. *100 Photographs | The Most Influential Images of All Time*. Foreword by Geoff Dyer. London: Time Home Entertainment.

Turquety, Benoît. 2018. "On Viewfinders, Video Assist Systems, and Tape Splicers: Questioning the History of Techniques and Technology in Cinema." In *Technology and Film Scholarship: Experience, Study, Theory*, edited by Santiago Hidalgo, 239-259. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

tylaste. 2022. "Retro Nokia Game – Logic." *Reddit*, February 2, 2022. https://www.reddit.com/r/nokia3310/comments/g8nre3/retro_nokia_game_logic/.

Uricchio, William. 1997. "Cinema as Detour? Towards a Reconsideration of Moving Image Technology in the Late 19th Century." In *Der Film in der Geschichte*, edited by Knut Hickethier, Eggo Muller, and Rainer Rother, 19-25. Berlin: Edition Sigma.

Webster, Russel. 2015. "Rowntree's Adverts from the 1980s." YouTube video. January 2, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=gVGwg2YmloE.

About the Author

Wanda Strauven is Adjunct Professor of Film and Media Studies at Columbia University. Her research focuses on early cinema, media archaeology, touch-based media, and screen practices of post-cinema. Her most recent book is *Touchscreen Archaeology: Tracing Histories of Hands-On Media Practices* (2021), which won the Limina Award for Best International Cinema Studies Book.