



Love, Longing, and the Smartphone: Lena Andersson, Vigdis Hjorth, and Hanne Ørstavik

Christian Refsum

The smartphone is arguably the most important of various technological devices restructuring the experience of space and time in late modernity. It regulates rhythms for attention and relaxation, communication, participation, and isolation. It is both an extremely important device for communication across distances and a thing we become emotionally attached to. For more and more people it is the last thing we look at before going to sleep and it wakes us up in the morning. If we need to switch the sound off, we can keep it close to our bodies and be alerted by its vibrations. It has a visual, auditive, and haptic component. It contains our calendar, phone book, and address book, and serves as a platform for all kinds of information, business, and entertainment. It is an extension of our eyes and ears, as well as a means of structuring and organizing our reality. In modern cities more and more people can now be observed looking down into a screen as they stroll down the street, perhaps they are navigating with Google Maps, or they might be watching a YouTube clip posted on Facebook by a so-called friend.

C. Refsum (✉)
University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

The smartphone is an example of what Giorgio Agamben calls a *dispositif*, usually translated into the slightly misleading word *apparatus* in English. The term, taken from Michel Foucault, resonates with Hegel's concept of "positivity" as well as with Martin Heidegger's *Gestell*. What is common, according to Agamben, to these concepts is that:

(...) they refer back to [the Greek word] *oikonomia*, that is, to a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings. (Agamben 2009, 12)

And later in the same essay:

I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. (Agamben 2009, 14)

This broad definition of "apparatus" thus becomes more operative than both the Heideggerian *Gestell*, which designates a certain enframing of reality,¹ and the Foucauldian *dispositive*, consisting of heterogeneous elements in complex relational systems exercising power, though not from a fixed or stable source.²

According to Agamben, processes of subjectification and desubjectification take place in the interaction between, or rather in a fight between, "living beings" and various apparatuses. Such fights go on all the time. For example, in religious practices, both the sacrifice and the confession serve as apparatuses. In sacrificing or confessing, the sinner regains a renewed or strengthened subjectivity at the same time as he adapts to society. Agamben argues that through modern technology, such as the mobile phone,³ subjectification becomes more and more abstract. Modernity is characterized by a constant adding up of apparatuses, which leads to a proliferation or dissemination in the processes of subjectification (Agamben 2009, 15). The problem is that processes of subjectification and desubjectification seem to become mutually indifferent, and so desubjectification does not give rise to the recomposition of a new subject, except in larval or, as it were, spectral form (Agamben 2009, 21). This could very well be the case with the cell phone (*Telefonino*, in Italian, which Agamben confesses to hate), as well as the more advanced smartphone, which is a platform for performing all the functions of a computer. Such apparatuses would appear

to be tools for agency and subjectification, but for Agamben the opposite is the case. The mobile phone turns living beings into objects of control. In *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2014), Jonathan Crary argues similarly that our consumption of more and more information takes place within what Foucault called “a network of permanent observation” (Crary 2014, 47). For him, the smartphone is just one of many devices which confirms and enhances a cultural situation defined by capitalism’s constant aim to maximize profit. Through interactive media, capitalism works 24 hours a day:

(...) capitalism is not simply a continuous or sequential capture of attention, but also a dense layering of time, in which multiple operations or attractions can be attended to in near-simultaneity, regardless of where one is or whatever else one might be doing. So-called “smart” devices are labeled as such less for the advantages they might provide for an individual than for their capacity to integrate their user more fully into 24/7 routines. (Crary 2014, 84)

While we are using the networks for our own needs and entertainment, our attention is captured, often in preprogrammed routes. This happens in a cultural climate where engagement, participation, and interaction are highly praised values. The economic principle of maximizing productivity and profit has crept into our private lives. Users of smart devices are deprived of time gaps, zones for relaxation, meditation, and sleep—all crucial for positive subjectification. According to Crary, all means are used to minimize sleep, recuperation, and inactivity. As a result, people are getting tired and depressed. We are unable to sleep properly during the nighttime, and are too tired to work well during the day. Crary can be criticized for nostalgia and for overstating his argument, but whatever the scope of the problem is, I think his arguments deserve to be discussed.

My contribution to this discussion is to highlight some literary descriptions of how the cell and smartphone are media for expressing, mirroring, producing, and structuring emotions like love and longing. I will leave the question of control and the explicit critique of neoliberalism aside, and stress instead on how mobile phones are apparatuses for capturing and holding attention. They are apparatuses for *availability*, a word that gives slightly different connotations from that of control, but which is also related to it, since availability is an important precondition for modern control systems.

First, mobile phones open up the possibility of simultaneous communication at any time, (without any guarantee that such communication actually will be established). Second, mobile phones are apparatuses for producing subjects who understand themselves as constantly *available*. A third aspect by which the mobile phone influences the temporality of love and longing is that it weakens our sense of being tied to a certain place, a certain time, and a certain situation.

The reason we accept entering into a state of availability typical for the world of smart devices is that we expect to get something in return. Agamben is clear that even if it were possible to fight the mobile phone, it would be pointless, since “[A]t the root of each apparatus lies an all-too-human desire for happiness” (Agamben 2009, 17). For contemporary love studies it is of wide interest to investigate how the desire for happiness manifests itself, and how it is met in the interaction with the apparatus. Much has already been done in examining ideologies of happiness. Sara Ahmed has criticized the “imperative” to be happy in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and Lauren Berlant has analyzed how *Cruel Optimism* (2011) might prevent us from making important decisions that can change our lives for the better. Within critical theory there is widespread skepticism about the role of new media in relation to promises of happiness. Zygmunt Bauman has argued in *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003) that mobile phones and other network technology take part in a wider and problematic process in Western societies where communication is separated from relationships. Scholars with a special interest in how new media actually works often have a more positive approach. Sunil Manghani (2009) has, for example, argued for reading text messages of love like a form of minimalist love poetry. He also criticizes Bauman for not seeing how texting can draw people together, creating new forms of intimacy. And even the harshest critics of new technological apparatuses must admit a certain positive potential.

When Agamben (2009, 21) claims that desubjectification does not give rise to the recomposition of a new subject, except “in larval or, as it were, spectral form,” the formulation is deeply ambiguous. The specter/ghost is usually seen as an effect of the past, but it might also signal a power which is yet to be realized, some sort of change, as in Marx’s famous opening of the communist manifesto: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism.” The connotations of the word “larval” are more positive than those of the specter, since no butterfly evidently will emerge without first being a larva. Despite Agamben’s overtly pessimistic view on modern

technology, his pessimism is not unconditional. In my interrogation of literary cell and smartphone experiences, I aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues raised by Agamben, Bauman, and Crary. But first it is necessary to say a few words about how the language of love and longing has been developed in epistolary literature.

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE AND LONGING

The sentimental novel from the eighteenth century is to a large extent an epistolary genre. Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), and Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) are only the most famous in a genre mapping emotions of attachment, love, and longing through fictive letters. The letter seems to be a privileged sentimental form for the simple reason that the discourse on love presupposes *separation and longing*. Love letters are written while the lovers are apart. And in the process of longing the lovers use letters (in the double meaning of this word) to give shape and meaning to their affects, to become loving subjects. The discourse on unsuccessful love is far more extensive than that of consummated love. This also seems true of other genres. Fairytales often end by stating that the two lovers, after trials and suffering, "lived happily ever after." We are not told what actually happens or what the lovers feel during this "ever after." Comedy celebrates couples coming together in the end, but the dramatic stuff is all about obstacles. The highly influential Swiss cultural theorist Denis de Rougemont also underlines the crucial status of longing within the language of love in his classic *Love in the Western World* (1940), which centers on the legend of Tristan and Isolde. Roland Barthes makes a similar point in his *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977), using Goethe's *Werther* as a primary example of obsessive, impossible love.

In the digital age, the epistolary genre has become an anachronism. Letters and epistolary texts still convey and arouse emotions, but the conditions for the success of the sentimental novel have more or less been removed. As conventions for communication have now been redefined by smart devices, as well as by new applications like email, Skype, the internet, and FaceTime, the kind of separation that motivated the traditional letter no longer exists. What happens with the discourse on love and longing in this situation? Some answers seem obvious. Communication is speeded up and is often fragmented, and in the era of the smartphone, pictures, voice,

and sound become equally important as writing. The discourse on love developed in epistolary literature will hence change. To investigate such changes one would have to investigate the technology and use of smart devices in a systematic way, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I shall discuss three novels by three highly praised contemporary Nordic female writers. In my examples, the role of the cell and smart-phone is described with a literary sensibility related to the old media regime of literature. In none of these examples do mobile phones play a particularly important role. The heroines in the books are not, for example, on Tinder. But references to mobile phones can still contribute to a better understanding of the issues raised above.

RESTLESS LONGING IN A STANDBY MODE

Lena Andersson's novel *Egenmäktigt förfarande—en roman om kärlek* (2013/2015; *Wilful Disregard: A Novel About Love*) has been much debated in Sweden and Norway because of its descriptions of a stereotype called *Kulturmannen* ("The Culture Man"), a man with cultural capital, a huge network, influence, often to be seen at cultural gatherings, and attracting younger women who admire him. They listen to him, but he does not listen to them. He engages with them, but is not willing to commit himself.⁴ The Culture Man in Lena Andersson's novel, the artist Hugo Rask, is a rather flat character, contrary to the female protagonist, the poet and essayist Ester Nilsson. What touched me with the novel was the description of Ester's plunge into love as passion in the sense of suffering. Ester falls in love, but is confused since Hugo, the man she loves, is unwilling to commit himself to her—nor, however, does he clearly reject her. She is left, therefore, with an exhausting and destructive sense of hope. She waits for Hugo to call, for him to respond to her long philosophical SMS messages and her emails. She writes: "Ju mer du tiger desto mer talar jag, det är hegelskt" (Andersson 2013, 103) ("The more you stay silent the more I speak, it's Hegelian") (Andersson 2015, 95). The situation becomes unbearable and she leaves Sweden for Paris. Paris, however, turns out to be a city that one should *not* visit to cure heartache (as if that would come as a surprise to anyone). It is as if she actually wants to suffer. She wanders around in the city of love, waiting for Hugo to reply to her text messages:

Varför fattade hon inte att avgrundsängesten över ett obesvarat SMS var densamma varje gång och enda sättet att undvika den var att inte skicka några? (Andersson 2013, 118)⁵

Why could she not grasp that the abysmal anguish of an unanswered text was the same every time and the only way to avoid it was not to send any? (Andersson 2015, 110)

In one way there is nothing special with Ester, Paris, or the mobile phone, for the novel describes a well-known feeling of longing very convincingly. However, the mobile phone holds the longing person in a *permanent standby mode*, and this is Esther's problem throughout the entire book: there is no way for her to find peace. At any moment, the phone might ring; she is always on her guard. Then, suddenly, walking around in Paris, it actually rings. Hugo Rask's name appears on the display. She prepares herself, pushes the button, and hears his voice, as well as some other voices in the background, but he cannot hear her even if she screams back at him. He has called her without knowing. But she cannot believe that the call was accidental. She interprets the call as a sign that he actually needs her as much as she needs him, perhaps without knowing it, as a sign of deeper and stronger feelings.

In Friedrich Kittler's (1999) psychoanalytically inspired media theory, transmissions of images can be understood as experiences of the imaginary, whilst transmissions of sound connects us to the Lacanian real—to a sort of proximity characterized by an overwhelming materiality which cannot be subsumed under the symbolic order established by language. The mobile phone thus combines absolute distance and extreme closeness much more effectively than for example a letter. Hugo's voice—processed by the apparatus—establishes a strong spectral presence across the continent. It is partly a presence beyond understanding, which rules out any communication. In this scene, Andersson brilliantly captures the vulnerability of the modern neoliberal subject: potentially always connected, always affected, potentially very close to other persons, but at the same time, very, isolated, very alone.

LONGING FOR A VOICE

In *Snakk til meg* (2010; "Speak to Me") by the Norwegian writer Vigdis Hjorth, the protagonist Ingeborg is middle aged. Her husband passed away many years ago, and her son has left her to study in Stockholm. Ingeborg travels to Cuba. She meets a man whom she marries, and after many difficulties with the immigration authorities manages to get to Norway. The novel partly describes how their relationship develops before

he leaves her, and partly how she tries to establish contact with her son in Stockholm, before the son shouts into his cell phone that he never wants to see her again (Hjorth 2011, 260). The book is seemingly written as diary notes or as a long letter to her son, perhaps after he has broken contact. Ingeborg, like Ester in *Egenmäktigt förfarande*, is connected to the literary world. Ester is a critic and Ingeborg works in a public library. They are both working with the written word on a daily basis, and for both of them writing is an important means of dealing with emotions as when they experience longing. They both try to communicate through the written word, and suffer from a lack of response. The words give order to their lives, but an order which is not sufficient to interpret their deepest longings and fears, and which eventually fails in the attempt made to communicate with the beloved.

Ingeborg waits for letters, telephones, and text messages from Havana and Stockholm, and like Ester she is trapped in a sort of cruel optimism. She realizes how her cell phone occupies her attention and tries to defend herself by leaving it at home when she goes to work so as not to look at it constantly (Hjorth 2011, 220). But eventually it is too tempting to take it along with her. The “promise of happiness” that Agamben saw as crucial in the appeal of the apparatus, is too strong to resist, even if she tries.

The particular social effect of this promise can be compared to a description of longing in a previous novel by Hjorth from another technological age, when the promise of happiness worked differently. In the novel *Om bare* (“If Only”) from 2001, the female protagonist is in love and awaits a telephone call from her unreliable lover. Since she does not have a mobile phone, she stays at home, afraid that he might call when she is out. Here the promise of happiness leads the protagonist into isolation. In *Snakk til meg*, written ten years later, Ingeborg, like Ester in *Egenmäktigt förfarande*, is free to go wherever she wants, but remains in a psychological prison of waiting. This is partly an individual choice, but it is also a result of historical and culturally variable conventions and expectations. When Hjorth wrote *Snakk til meg* in 2010 it was not taken for granted in Norway that everyone would be reachable by mobile phone during working hours, even if it was common. Leaving one’s mobile phone at home would not therefore be considered strange. In Norway in 2018, however, many would consider it impolite not to carry a mobile phone and be unreachable. It is striking how technology in its initial phase appears to be an opportunity, but becomes redefined as a duty once it is used by the majority of people. Its social significance is thus radically altered. The mobile

phone becomes a much more powerful apparatus for interpellation and social control once it implies the command of availability.

The relationship between Ester and Hugo in *Egenmäktigt förfarande* exemplifies perfectly how the question of availability is also a question of power. Ester is constantly available for Hugo, whereas he is in a position where he can choose to be available when it pleases him. Ingeborg in *Snakk til meg* is also trapped in a waiting mode. Both Ingeborg and Ester make themselves available and both of them try in vain to make contact with a loved one who does not respond. (In Ingeborg's case this is most noticeable in her relationship with her son.)

Ingeborg's uncertainty about how to approach her son and her lover is also reflected in her understanding of the conventions of the apparatus. She worries constantly about when and how she should send messages, both to her husband, Enrique, and to her son, Torgrim. The turning point comes on the last pages of the novel when Torgrim, after having rejected her calls and messages for a long time, suddenly calls back and screams that he never wants to speak to her again. After that she writes:

Det er deg jeg savner. Det er fraværet ditt som gjør vondt. Smerten man føler ved et tap er målestokken for håpet man har hatt. Å vite hvordan du har det. Høre stemmen din en gang til, skal det aldri skje?

Hvordan var det for deg? Jeg vil så gjerne høre, skal tåle alt, vær så snill, snakk til meg! (Hjorth 2011, 262)

It is you that I miss. It is your absence that hurts. The pain you feel from a loss is a measure of the hope you have had. To know how you are. To hear your voice once more, will it never happen?

How was it for you? I would so much like to hear, I can take anything, speak to me!

Even if the telephone conversation comes as a shock, and strikes her with pain, it is contrasted with the even worse impersonal effects of text messages. Here is a quote about longing for contact, from a few pages earlier:

Opplevde månedene etterpå nærmest som en kjærlighetssorg. At du ikke svarte, ikke lot høre fra deg vondt *som om du hadde sendt en SMS om at alt var over*, som om du gjorde det slutt, uten forklaring, sånn opplevde jeg det: uten årsak. (Hjorth 2011, 254; My italics)

Experienced the following months more or less like a heartache. That you didn't reply, didn't give a sign hurt *as if you had sent an SMS saying every-*

thing was over, like if you broke up, without explanation, that's how it felt: without reason. (My italics)

The SMS is here used as a simile for rejection (*as if you had sent an SMS saying everything was over*)—and due to the short format—a sort of empty, cold rejection impossible to fully comprehend. A text message thus serves as a paradoxical simile for not getting any message at all. However, the passage also indicates that, not only is the break up via SMS painful, it is similar to no message at all. In the context it is clear that waiting for a call is *like* an endless series of breakup messages. The silence of a mobile phone is in one sense similar to no communication, but in another sense the silence is worse than it would have been without the mobile. For with the mobile phone we have the possibility of communication in all environments and at any time, and therefore we also have the complete and utter rejection at all times and everywhere. The mobile phone is thus an apparatus for keeping its user in a state of cruel optimism, hoping and waiting, preventing the subject from taking control over her own life. Most of Ingeborg's life is lived in a waiting mode. She tries to console herself, thinking that he will make contact:

(...) Sånn beroliget jeg meg selv og ventet på den angrende telefonen, den unnskyldende mailen, postkortet, det kom ikke. (Hjorth 2011, 255)

(...) This is how I calmed myself and waited for the regretful phone call, the apologetic email, the postcard, it didn't arrive.

As is clear in this passage, the phone is in no way the only apparatus that nurtures the hope of reconciliation and happiness. It is just one item of technology among many that serve a similar purpose. The mobile phone continues to serve functions that were earlier met by other apparatuses, but it also introduces new ones. It partly coexists with and partly displaces other apparatuses.

THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF A MEETING

Ruth, the protagonist in Hanne Ørstavik's novel *Det finnes en stor åpen plass i Bordeaux* (2013; "There is a Big Open Square in Bordeaux"), is an artist from Oslo who goes to Bordeaux to set up an art exhibition. She has a boyfriend, Johannes, in Norway, who is an art historian from the west

coast. He says that he loves her (Ørstavik 2013, 17), but refuses to have sex with her, drinks too much, is unfriendly and often neglects her calls and messages. The plan is that he will come to Bordeaux with her, but he starts to drink, and things do not go according to plan. One night, while having dinner with her friend, Abel, Ruth suddenly receives a picture message from Johannes showing a half-naked woman standing on a table in a strip club. Underneath the picture, he writes.

Her er jeg nå. (Ørstavik 2013, 153)

Here I am now.

The picture upsets her, and she and her friend move on to another bar to have another drink. Here she reflects on her situation:

Hun [her friend, Abel] ser på meg som om hun forstår, eller at det er helt greit, helt åpent, virker det uansett som. Det merkelig store ansiktet hennes. Men hun er så langt borte, jeg registrerer det bare, jeg er bak en hinne, inne hos meg selv, når ikke gjennom til de andre, det er bare han som når meg her. Som sender meg bilder her. Som sender meg ingenting her, her inne, hvor han er det eneste jeg venter på, som ikke kommer. Jeg lar meg gli ned krakken, tar veska, går mot døra (...). (Ørstavik 2013, 178)

She [her friend] watches me as if she understands, or finds it okay, completely open, it nevertheless seems. Her remarkably large face. But she is so far away, I just notice it, I am behind a film, inside, at my place, cannot come through to the others, it is only he who can reach me here. Who sends me pictures here. Who sends me nothing here, inside here, where he's the only one I'm waiting for, who doesn't come. I let myself slip off the stool, take my bag, walk towards the door (...).

The repetition of the Norwegian word *her* (here) is of course an ironic reminder that there is no “here” in a traditional sense, neither for Johannes, nor for Ruth. What “here” refers to is an imaginary space defined not only by the actual setting but also by the picture she has seen as well as her memories and fantasies.

In the remaining 40 pages of the book Ruth wanders about in Bordeaux, speaks with Abel, thinks of Johannes, and of a love relation between Abel's daughter Lily and her relationship to a boy, Ralph. She sends and receives text messages to and from Johannes, and she speaks into his telephone answering machine. Ørstavik's prose combines all the various planes of *her*

(here) in a presentation of a simultaneous imagined reality (historical time, past, present, future).

After receiving the picture from the strip club, she decides to go to a strip club herself. She wants to take a photograph of a stripper and send it to Johannes as if to establish a common experience of “here”—of being in a similar place. His message, “Here I am now,” is both a rejection and an invitation: it communicates first *I am not with you*, but it also communicates that he actually *is with her* in another sense, since he thinks of her and sends her this message when looking at the naked body of a stripper in Norway. He wants her to know all about himself—including his less sympathetic sides, what he has earlier called his pornographic desire—something that fits well with what Ruth has thought of as a robust openness between them. The picture he sends thus represents a highly ambivalent declaration of love. It also breaks down traditional borders between absence/presence as well as private/public.

She is not allowed to take photographs in the club she visits so she leaves. It is not possible to establish a common “here” with him. He misses his plane and when she calls him the next morning he says that he will come, something he subsequently fails to do.

The book is about actual and imagined meetings. It lingers on the imaginary. The title of the book, *Det finnes en stor åpen plass i Bordeaux*, refers to a square where Ruth fantasizes about meeting Johannes. The square serves as a symbol for openness and vulnerability. In earlier times executions were carried out there. Ruth’s fantasies represent a longing for a radical, dangerous openness that she has felt in the presence of Johannes—in meetings that have been strong and good, but that have also implied a risk of decapitation, a fatal self-destruction. Ruth, both the person and the artist, seeks a deep existential confrontation with Johannes. She wants and needs him, regardless of the pain caused by their contact, despite his unsympathetic behavior and rejection of her, it seems. She is kept in a waiting mode for messages and phone calls as she wanders about in Bordeaux at night. But her waiting does not seem as futile or destructive as in *Egenmäktigt förfarande* or in *Snakk til meg*. What is so skillfully described in the novel is how Ruth opens up mental spaces, where reality, dreams, and visual projections transgress geographical, psychic, and gender boundaries. This is clear from the beginning of the novel when we meet Ruth the artist as she reflects on a picture she has gotten in her head:

I bildet går jeg ut av en vogn, bøyer meg, og går ned de to trinnene. Jeg vet ikke om jeg er mann eller kvinne. Jeg har svarte klær, bukser, ser det ut til, jeg ser bare det, nedover beina, og skoene, svart lær. Det er en hestedrosje. Det er ved en stor åpen plass, med trær langs tre av sidene. (Ørstavik 2013, 12)

In the picture I leave the wagon, bend, walk down the two stairs. I don't know whether I'm a man or a woman. I have black clothes, trousers, as it seems, that's all I see, covering my legs, and my shoes, black leather. There's a horsecab. It's by a big open square, with trees along three sides.

This passage demonstrates how Ruth analyzes her situation not only in letters and words, but also in mediated and imagined pictures. What is striking about the image is that it presents a mode of existence beyond traditional distinctions ("I don't know whether I'm a man or a woman"). It thus opens up a process of desubjectification and a wide range of possible subjectifications. A page later, she thinks about a mental image from New York, two girls in underwear, one of them resembling her daughter. These are just two examples of how various forms of referentiality are combined in the book, leaving the reader with the experience of a highly reflexive imaginary work of art. It is as if all the impulses obtained and processed by the artist, who is also the protagonist and narrator, play out roles in a complex drama of desubjectification and subjectification. In the last part of the book communication via the smartphone starts to dominate Ruth's actions and thoughts. But the complex imaginary of the book leaves the reader with the impression that Ruth's waiting and longing has a strong creative potential.

CONCLUSION

These three novels all contain passages that indicate how the cell or smartphone might function like a new sense organ and how it frames personal, intimate experiences. For the three longing protagonists the cell or smartphone can be considered an extension of the self, an object of proxemics in Roland Barthes's (2012, 111–13) sense of the term.⁶ The mobile phone is kept close to the body in every situation in order to transmit signals across distances at any time. All the novels deal with the relationship between geographical and mental distance in modern relationships and in all of them the mobile phone plays an important role in negotiating distance. The themes of availability, uncertainty, waiting, and longing are combined to form the dominant chord in all the examples. And in all of

them the main protagonists at times seem to lose connection with the place they are in. Ingeborg in *Snakk til meg* is neither completely in Cuba, neither in Stockholm, nor in Norway. Ester in *Egenmäktigt förfarande* is neither completely in Paris, nor in Hugo Rask's atelier in Stockholm. Ørstavik's repetitions of the word "here" clearly indicate that the question of place is both crucial and impossible. These people are out of place.

All the female protagonists enter a waiting and longing mode. Through the mobile phone they make themselves constantly available, and they all try to establish contact with a man who doesn't respond in a manner that gives them the confirmation they want and expect. As de Rougemont (1983) has shown, male lovers have often found themselves in a waiting and longing position in Western literature, especially in the courtly tradition, where a knight desires a lady who is married. Such histories have been especially important for the development of romantic ideals in Western culture. The reflexivity of Petrarch and Dante take its cue from the absence of the beloved. And the topos of a man in love with his own capacity for suffering due to experiences of impossible love became an early cliché. Cervantes, for example, made fun of his hero playing the stereotypical role of a man who suffers from an impossible love in *Don Quixote*. And both male and female fictional heroes have repeatedly been destroyed by unreciprocated love. Seen in this context, it is striking how the unrequited love stories of contemporary female Nordic heroes fall into a well-known literary pattern. In a culture with a high degree of equality between the sexes, several female writers describe a situation of longing and waiting with deep roots in the male Western discourse of love. The female contemporary writers presented here also create self-reflexive art works which linger on the experience of separation, longing, and the impossibility of meeting. In addition, the works open up a discussion on how the temporality of love and longing changes as the conditions for communication and the negotiations of space change.

The smartphone is a platform for a wide range of messages and sense experiences. It captures all the mental layers which have been described in Friedrich Kittler's (1999) media theory: symbolic text messages, imaginary pictures of realities and dreams, and "the real" of the materiality of the apparatus and the mediated voice. In Ørstavik's novel, there is a strong emphasis on the imaginary dimension. In Lena Andersson's novel, as well as in Vigdis Hjorth's, there are passages that reflect on the directness and frightening reality of the voice, as well as on the neutral arbitrariness of symbolic text signs.

Waiting and longing are psychic dispositions that might lead to stagnation and renewal, to desubjectification and new subjectification. In this respect, mobile devices serve various functions. The apparatus marks an affective, intimate space and carries a hope of happiness. It might function as an apparatus for communication, liberation, and subjectification. Examples can no doubt be found in contemporary literature, film, or TV series. My examples point, however, in a more pessimistic direction. Here the apparatuses are shown as devices for keeping the female protagonists in a constantly waiting position, in a virtual prison that is carried around everywhere, depriving them of time gaps where they are not available, gaps for rest, recreation, reorientation, and sustainable subjectification. *Egenmäktigt förfarande* describes this cultural situation and its heart-breaking consequences. The novel describes a state of mind where there seems to be no way out of the waiting and longing mode. Ester has found the perfect apparatus to keep her in this longing position. However, it is important to see that a waiting and longing mode is not necessarily a passive mode. Ester is a highly reflective writer. Like the frustrated Provençal troubadours from the twelfth century, she suffers from unconsummated love, but does gain self-reflexivity instead.

All the novels contain passages where desubjectification seems to pave the way for a renewal of the self. This perspective seems particularly relevant for the two Norwegian novels written in the first person, *Snakk til meg* and *Det finnes en stor åpen plass i Bordeaux*. In both books there is a genuine concern to open up a shockingly dangerous but also potentially liberating mental space. When Ingeborg's son Torgrim shouts: "I never want to see you again" in *Snakk til meg*, Ingeborg's whole frame of reference breaks down, establishing a new open space where she has to reorient herself. She has lost Enrique, and now she has lost Torgrim, and for the first time she is confronted with fierce anger. It is a personal catastrophe, but also potentially liberating, since it requires a radical reorientation. For the first time she is forced to respond in a manner that will not conform to established roles of attachment. Her frames of reference for playing the role of the loving, waiting, longing subject become impossible and she has to build a new frame. From this point on, a possibility of a new subjectification arises.

Even though waiting and longing is also a major theme in *Det finnes en stor åpen plass i Bordeaux*, it does not dominate in the same way as in the two other books. One possible reason is that the book has an artist as a protagonist, who is constantly in a process of renewal and reformulation

of her own sensibility and understanding. Her thoughts, as they are presented in the novel, are not solely centered on her contact with Johannes, except in some of the last parts of the book. It rather seems as if her interest in Johannes is part of a larger experimental and open attitude to the world and to various life forms. The book also relates to all sorts of mediated messages, photos, pictures, exhibitions, and sounds, leaving the impression that Ruth lives in a world of opportunity and potential freedom.

As already mentioned, the protagonists in my novels have all grown up in an old media situation, one not defined by mobile media. Young people, who have grown up with smart devices and have integrated the new media as extensions of their subjective sensibility, who don't read novels, would perhaps describe their experiences of love and longing differently than in my examples. A media theorist might object to my perspective by claiming that my examples convey an outdated understanding of love and communication. But the experience of not being at the height of the dominant media regime is a reality that most of us live with. I would argue that the experience of not being up to date actually *is* the dominant experience of engaging with communication technology in late modernism. This reality is a valuable subject matter for investigation in itself, and contemporary novels tell stories of this reality.

NOTES

1. In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger defines *Gestell* as "the essence of modern technology (...) which is itself nothing technological" (Heidegger 1977, 20). *Gestell*, in English, means "enframing (...) the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve" (Heidegger 1977, 20).
2. "What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (Foucault 1980, 194). Even if Foucault's *dispositif* can be associated with the political economy of the household, Foucault tends to see the *dispositif* as a strategic means which serves a particular purpose in a conflict.
3. Since I refer to texts from different stages in late modernity, I sometimes refer to cell phones and at other times to smartphones, depending on the

text I am referring to. I use “mobile phone” as a term covering both cell and smartphones. The enormous differences in the technology and potential use of mobile phones will only be taken into consideration where they are relevant to my argument.

4. The Swedish writer Åsa Beckman introduced the stereotype *Kulturmannen* in an essay in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens nyheter*, April 27, 2014. She sees *Egenmäktigt förfarande* as an exemplary study of the Culture Man. The term was later picked up by several other writers and critics, the most influential perhaps being Ebba Witt-Brattström in her collection of essays *Kulturmannen och andra texter* from 2016.
5. Translations from the Scandinavian texts are my own except for Lena Andersson’s novel, which was translated into English by Sarah Death in 2015.
6. In an essay on Roland Barthes, “Proxémie,” Reinhold Göring (2018, 267) suggests that the lamp, the bed, and the smartphone can be considered extensions of what we understand as ourselves, as interfaces for the transference of affects.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Edited by Werner Hamacher. Translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Andersson, Lena. 2013. *Egenmäktigt förfarande: en roman om kärlek*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.
- . 2015. *Wilful Disregard: A Novel About Love*. Translated by Sarah Death. London: Picador.
- Barthes, Roland. 2012. *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*. Translated by Kate Briggs. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2003. *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Crary, Jonathan. 2014. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso.
- Foucault, Michael. 1980. “The Confession of the Flesh” (1977) Interview. In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, 194–228. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Görling, Reinhold. 2018. Proxémie/Proksemikk. In *Living Together: Roland Barthes, the Individual and the Community*, ed. Knut Stene-Johansen, Christian Refsum, and Johan Schimanski, 267–277. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. The Question Concerning Technology. In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 3–35. Translated by William Lovitt. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Hjorth, Vigdis. 2001. *Om Bare*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- . 2011 [2010]. *Snakk til meg*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Kittler, Friedrich. 1999. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated, with an Introduction, by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Manghani, Sunil. 2009. Love Messaging: Mobile Phone Texting Seen Through the Lens of Tanka Poetry. *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2–3): 209–232.
- Ørstavik, Hanne. 2013. *Det finnes en stor åpen plass i Bordeaux*. Oslo: Forlaget Oktober.
- Rougemont, Denis de. 1983 [1940]. *Love in the Western World*. Translated by Montgomery Belgion. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

