

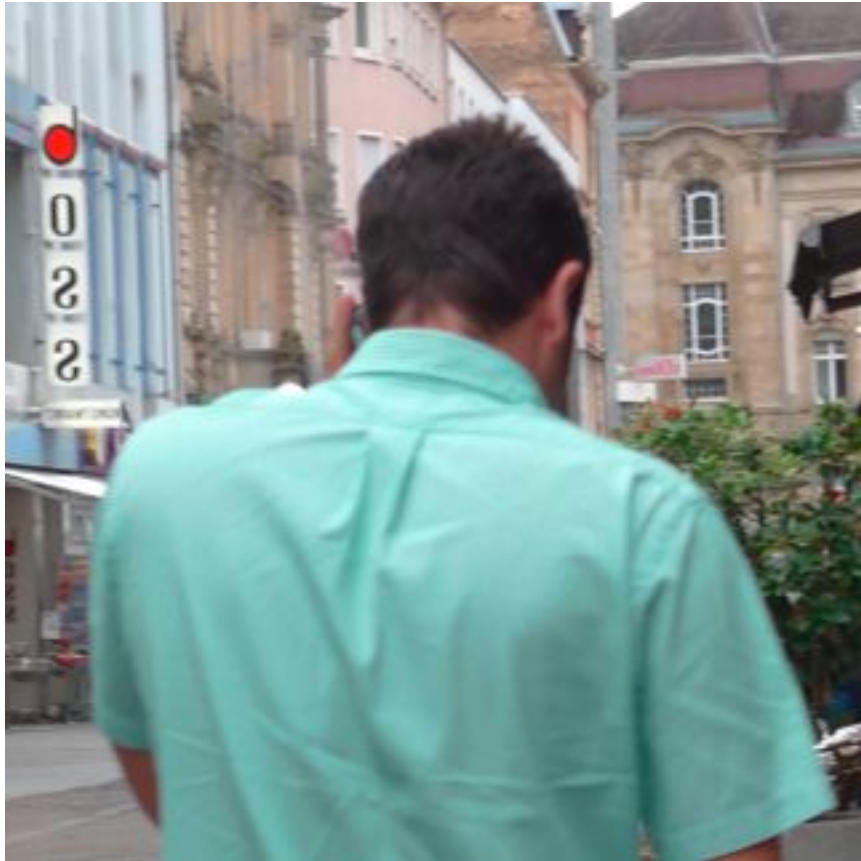
# THE PLACIDITY OF TECHNOLOGY

– a snapshot of two thousand and twelve –

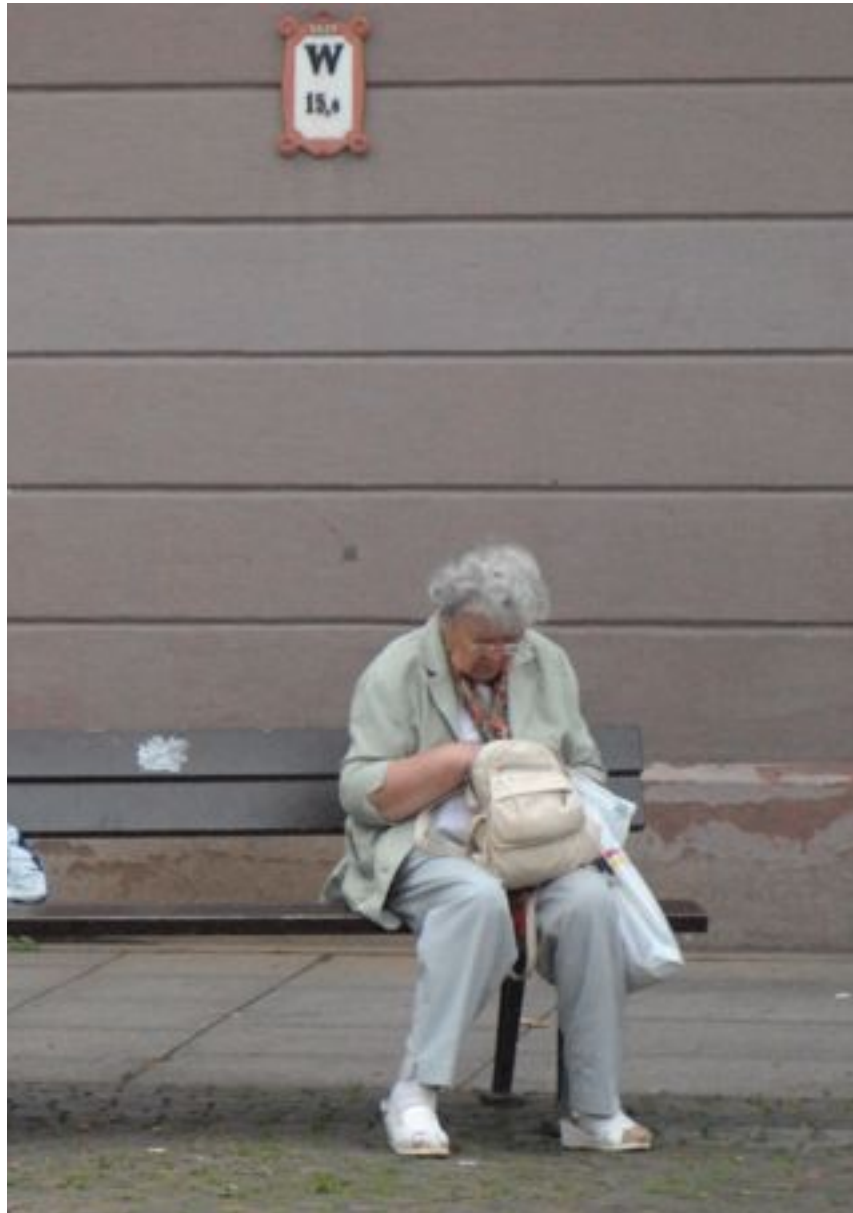
Project by Sam Hecht and the students of HfG Karlsruhe  
with an Essay by Alain de Botton













































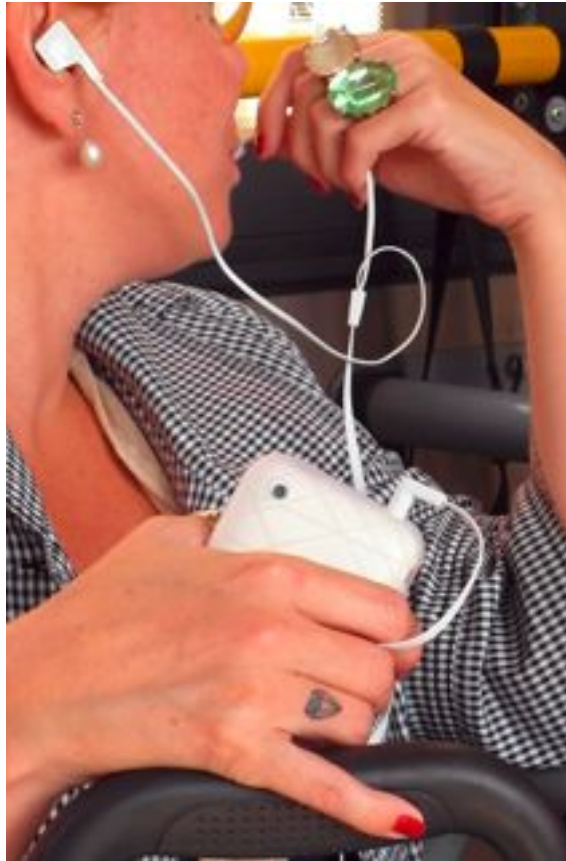








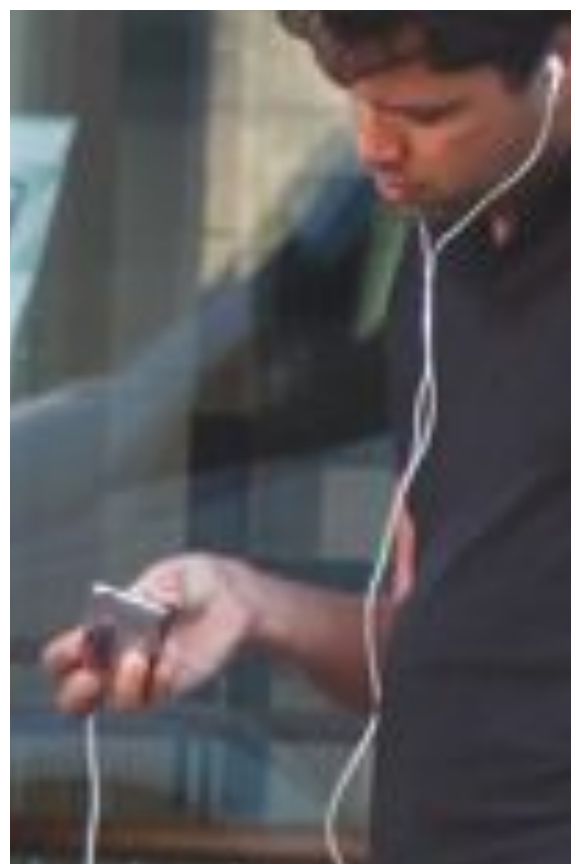
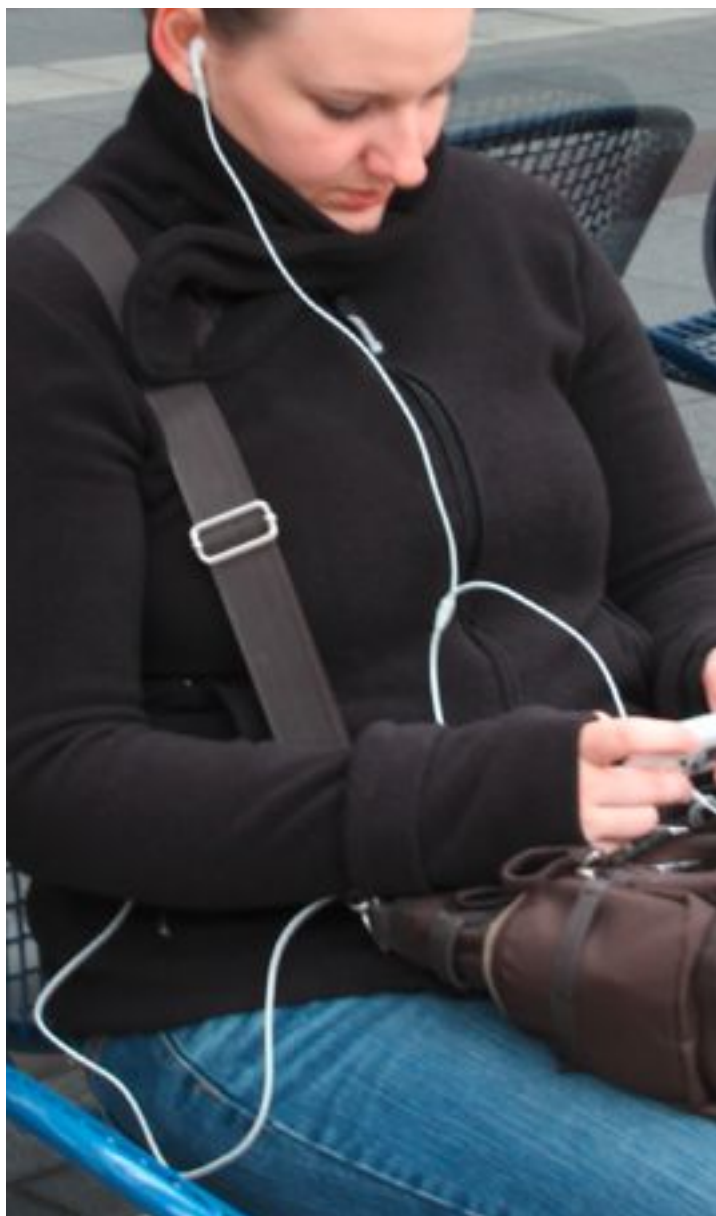






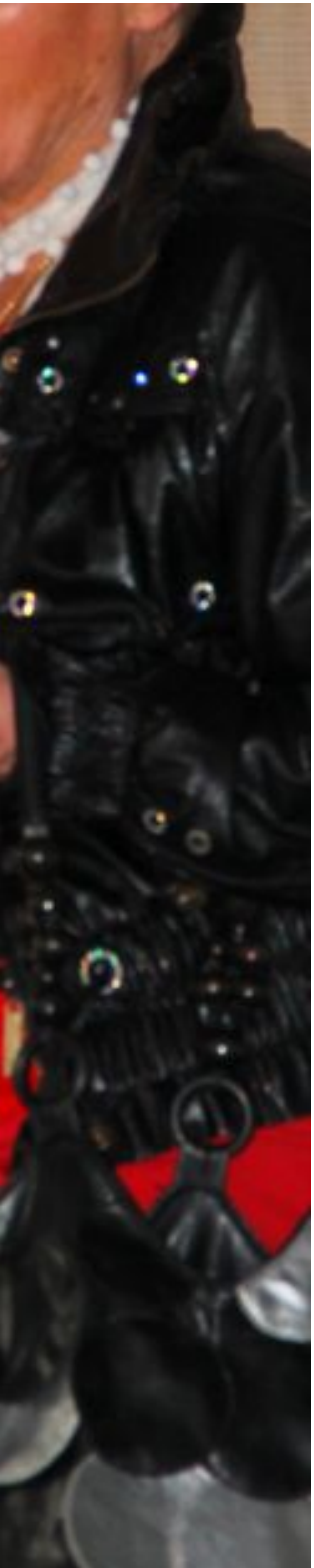




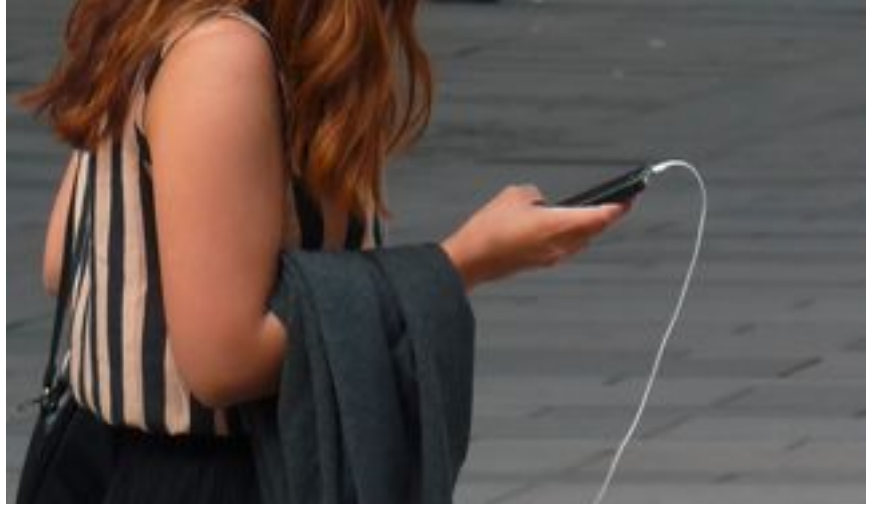
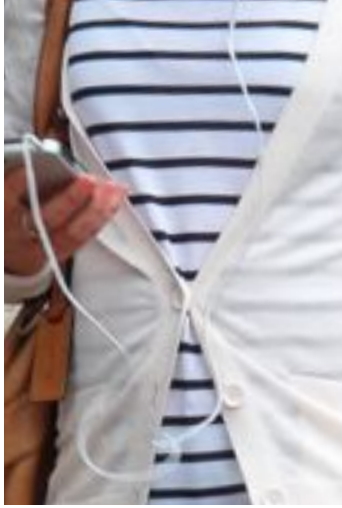


















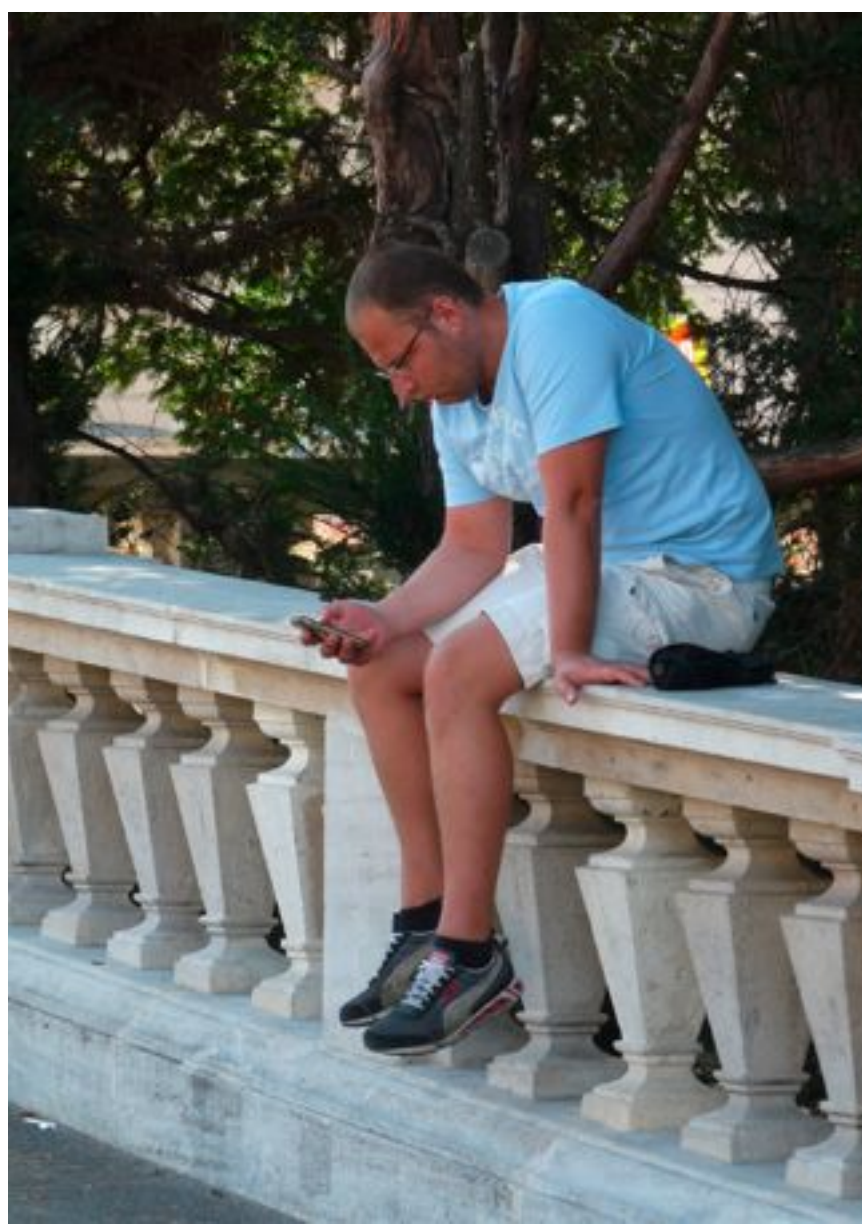












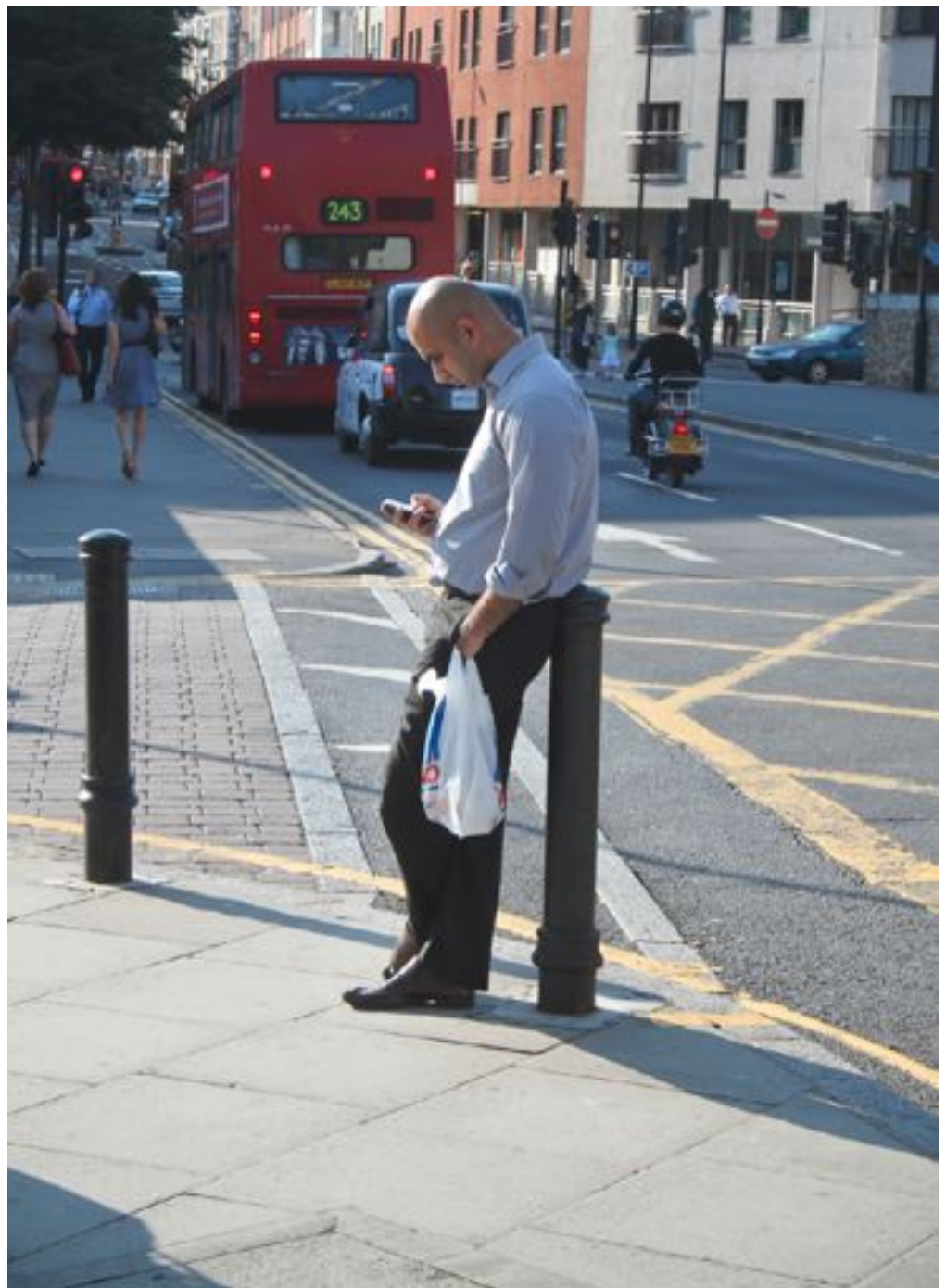










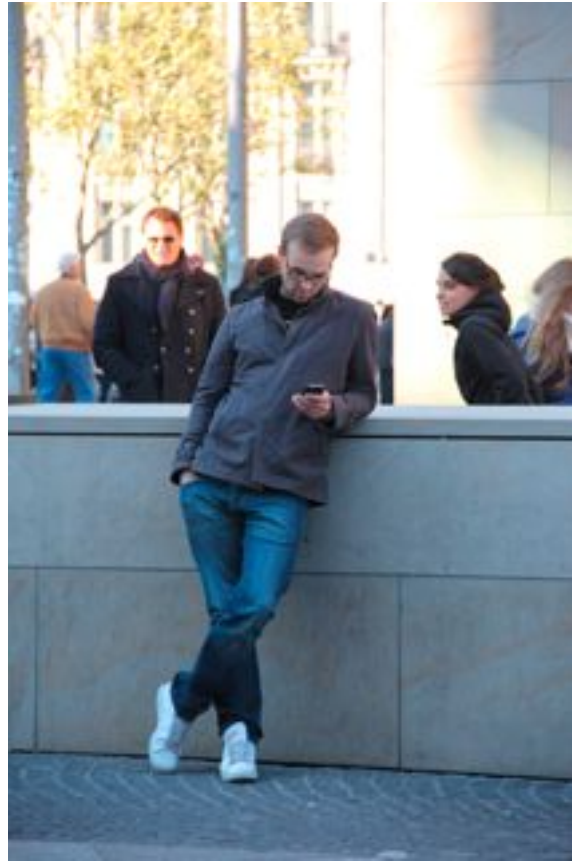












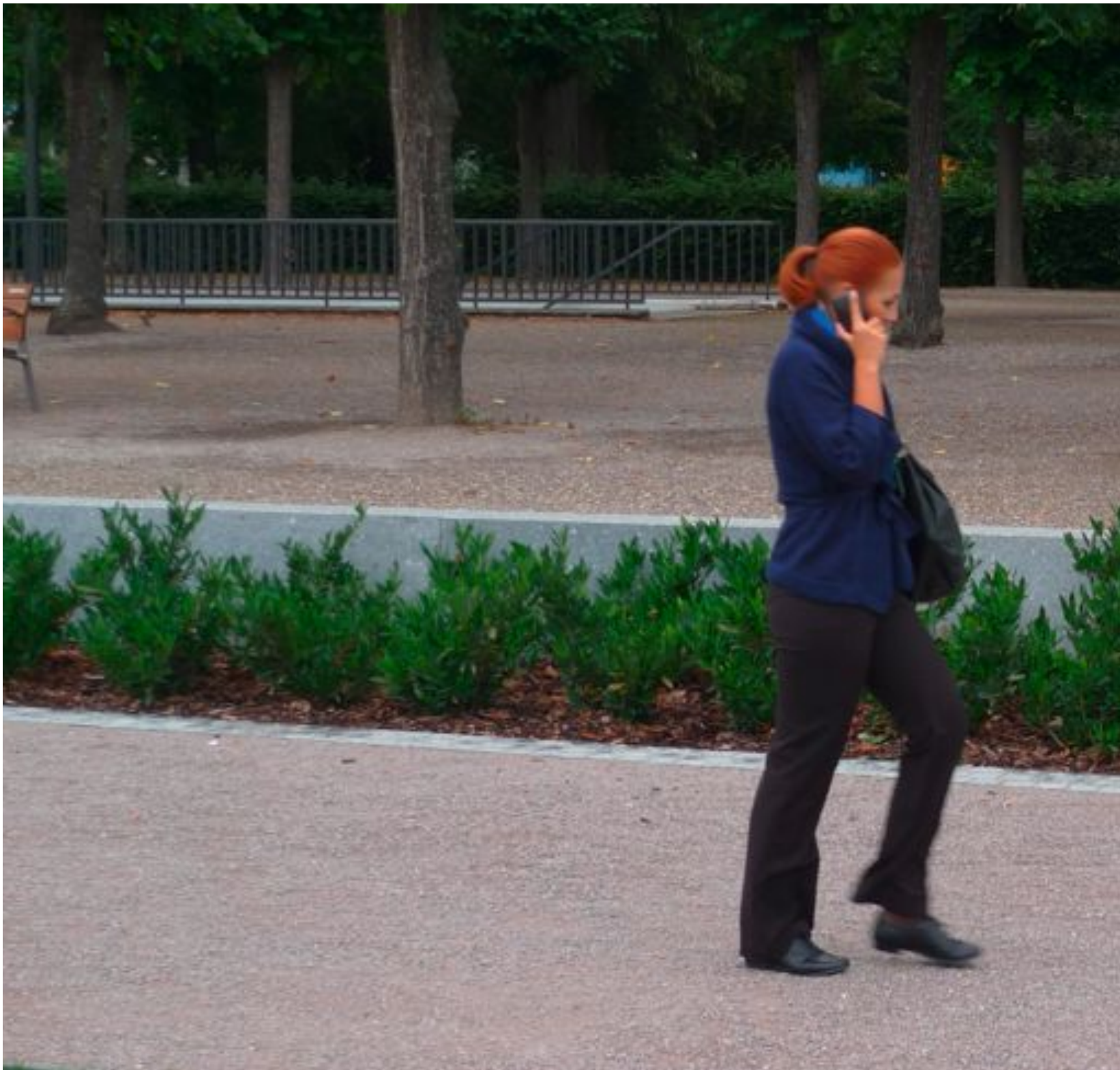




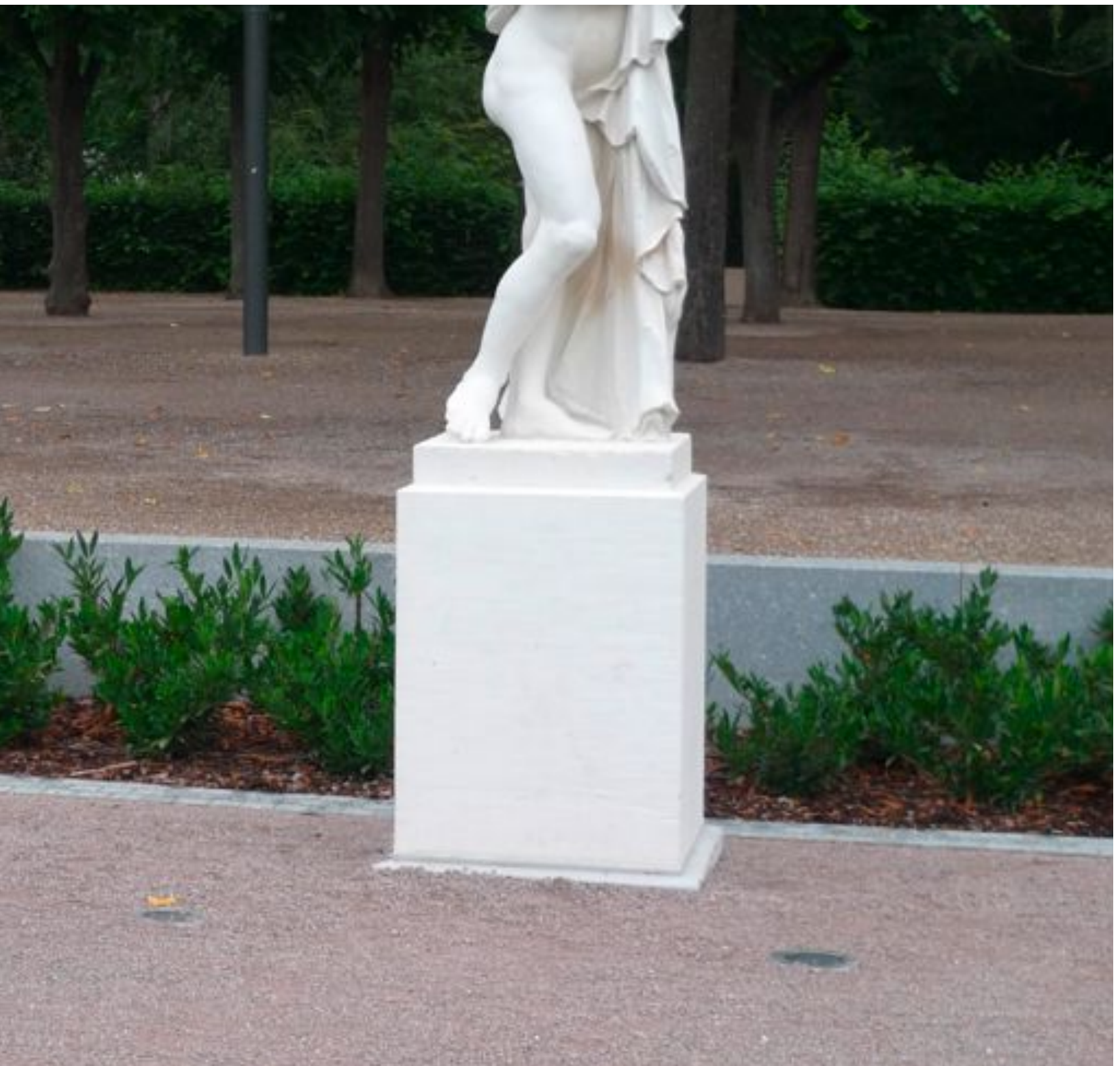


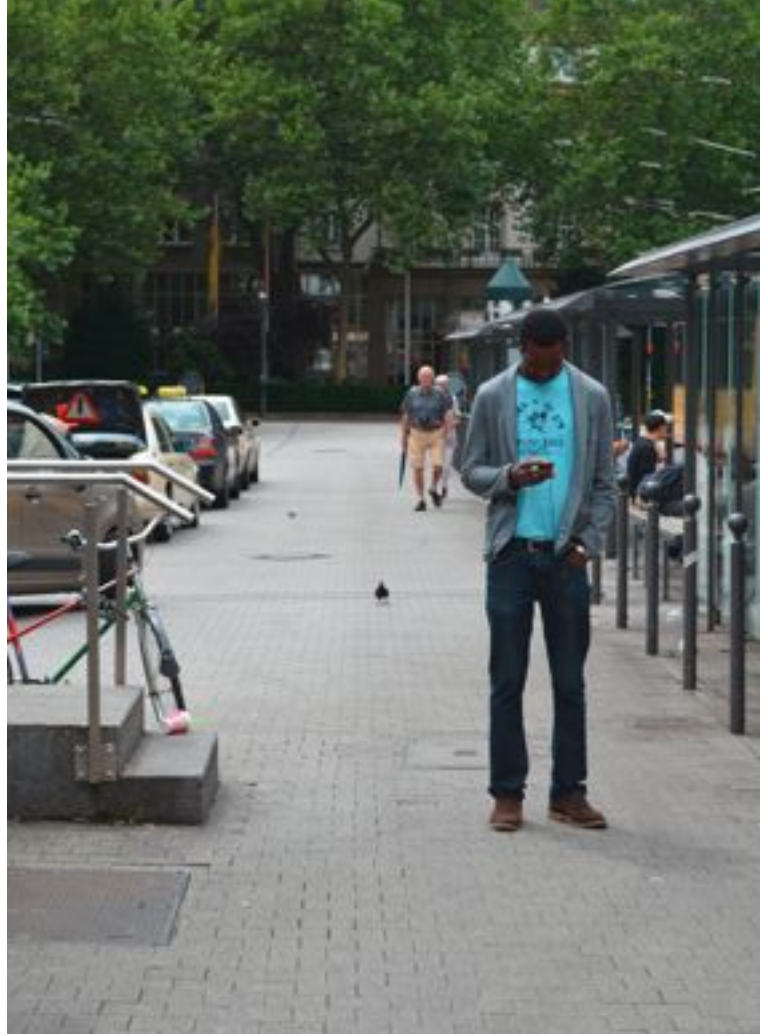


































































































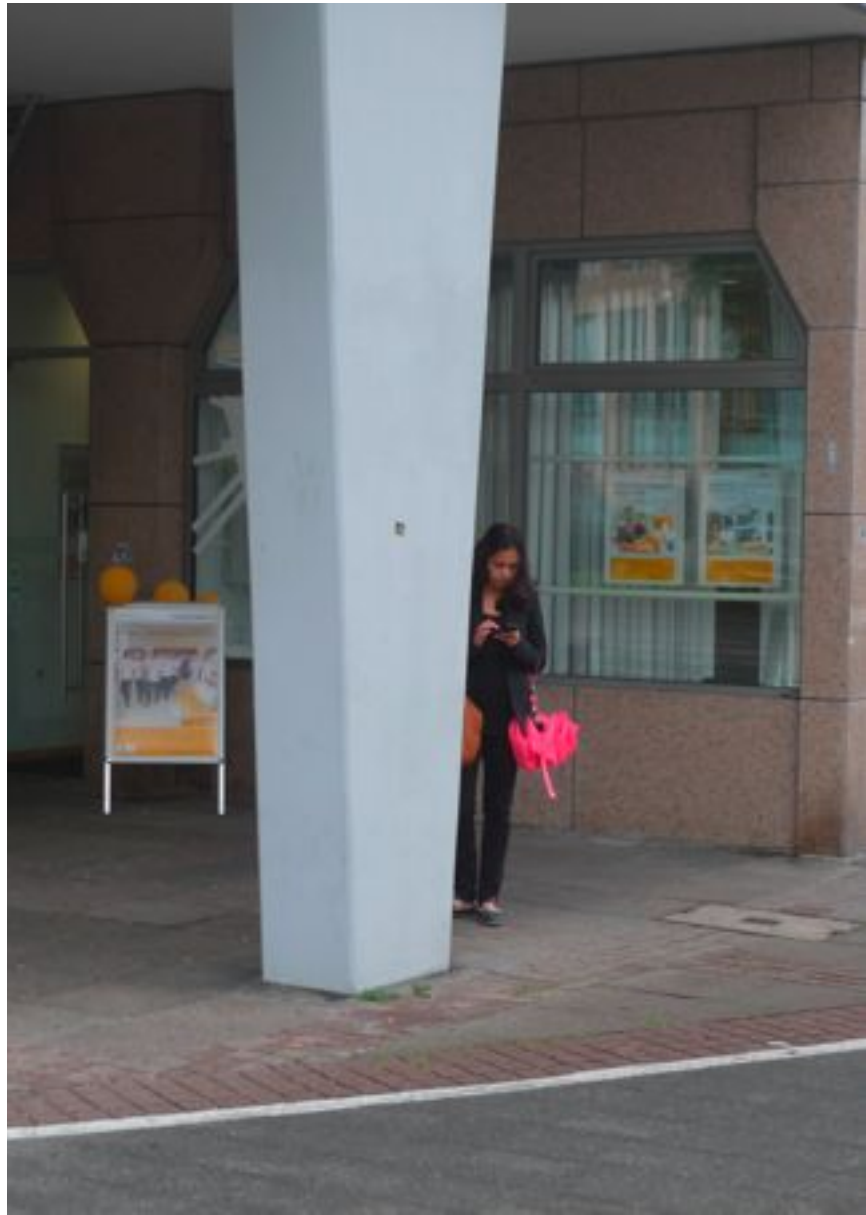








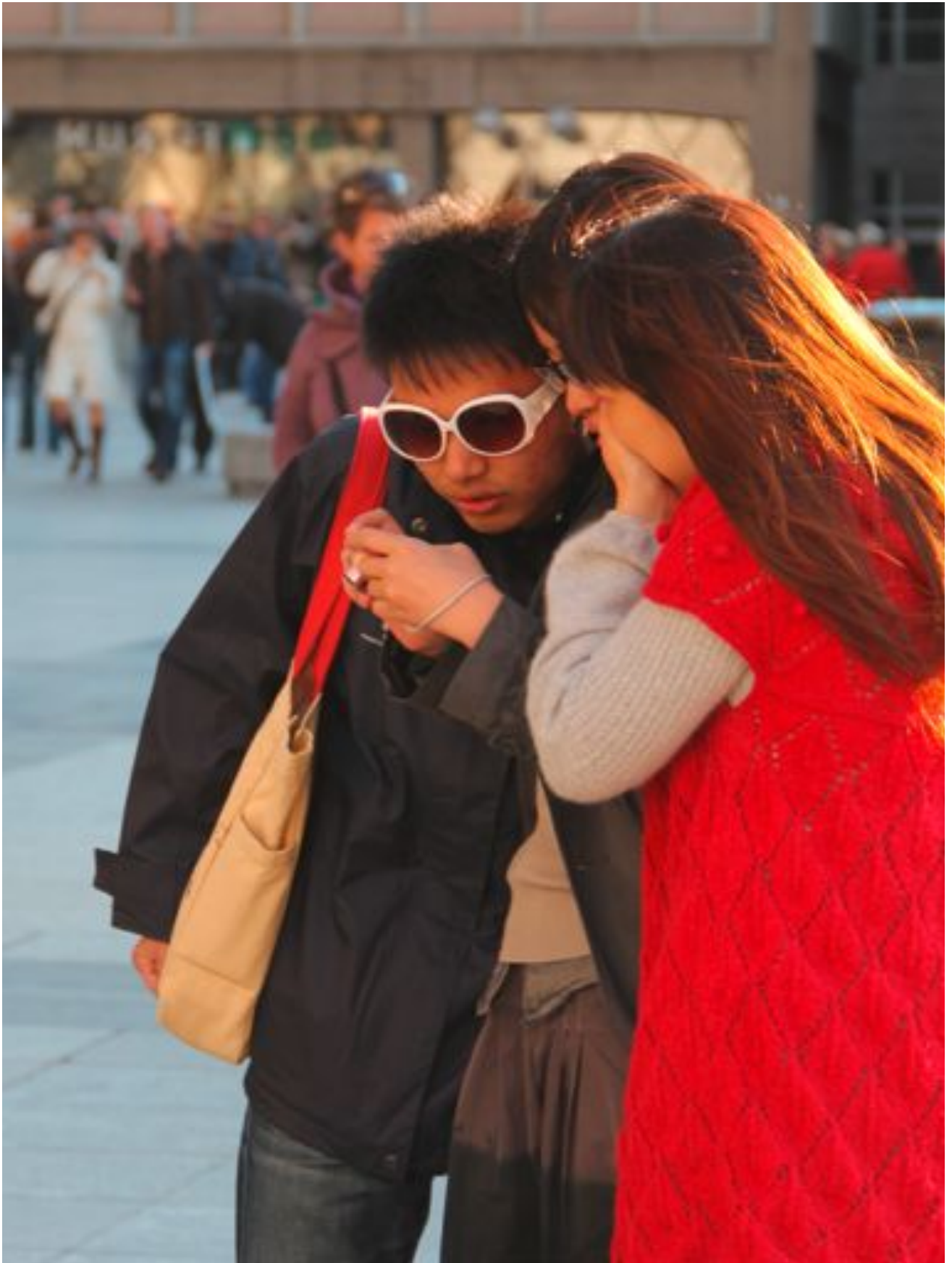








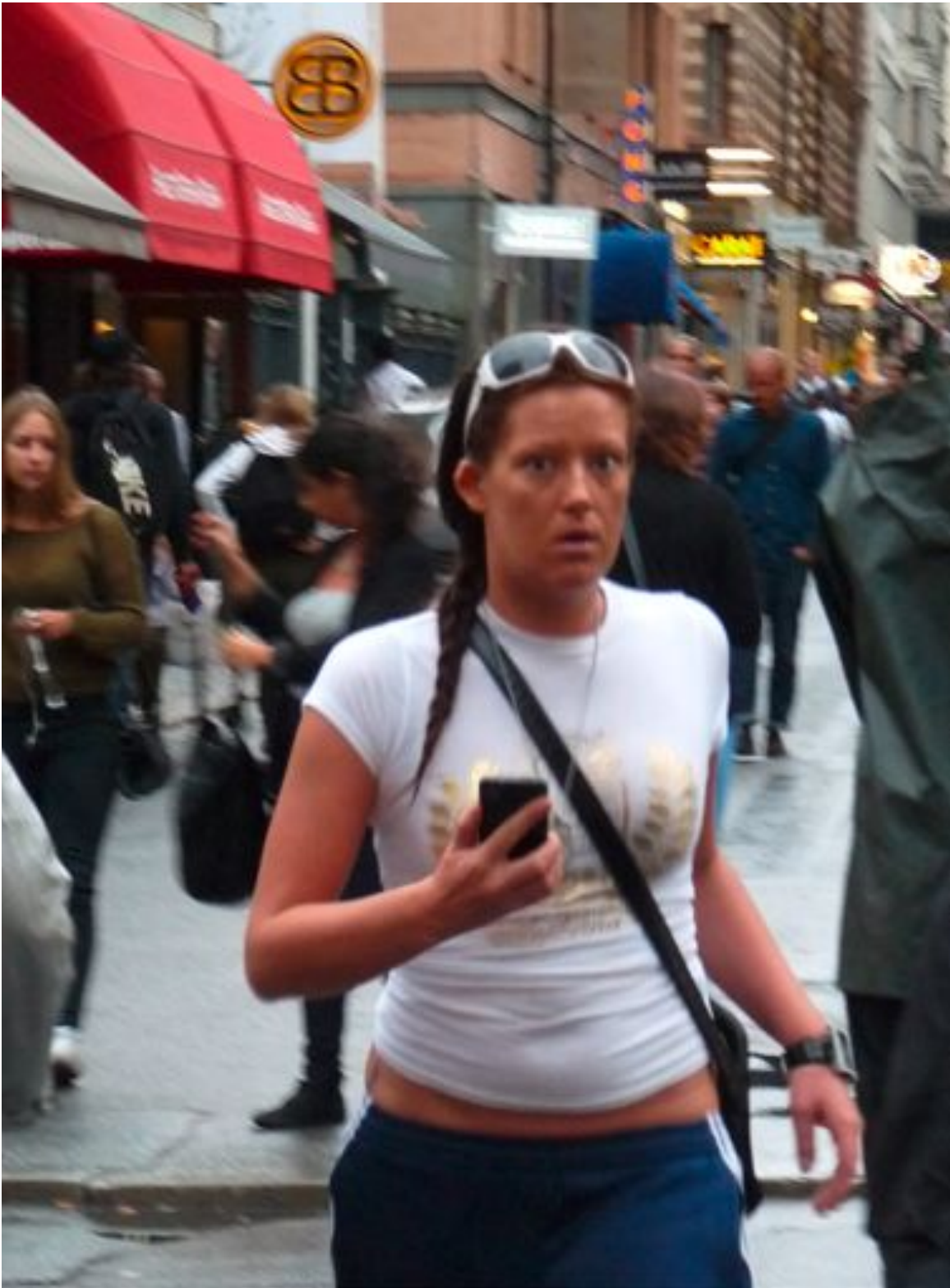
















# THE PLACIDITY OF TECHNOLOGY

by Sam Hecht

It is a strange view for our cities looking back at us, seeing us entranced by our own personal mobile devices, while we supposedly inhabit 'public' space. Lately, it looks like we are all alone, together. Smartphones, tablets, Kindles, laptops, iPods and cameras all find their real value when being used in transitory places and spaces. It's as if a cappuccino, the park and a smartphone have become what many describe as the ultimate combination of intelligence and freedom.

If this is the truth, then it's surprising that few people – other than perhaps some social anthropologists – are actually looking at this situation. Take a closer look and you can witness the banal and featureless expressions of people as their fingertips tap onto screens; the person checking Facebook who slides into a trance while taking a city train home, defenseless against the motion graphics and twinkly screens; and the bizarre alienation of a jogger running on an MP3 through a park at dawn.

The purpose of this book is to capture my students' collective curiosity and to document the peculiarities of these moments, in all their placid glory. These photographs reveal the obliviousness we show the world around us when immersed in personal technology, in public spaces. The students, who come from all parts of the world, went home for the summer of 2011 and spring of 2012, and it was during these periods that the photographs were taken. The absurdity is of course that the photographs were captured with the very products that they were looking for.

The results were colossal in quantity and astounding in their variety. While having a conversation with Professor Florian Pfeffer from the Graphics department, we agreed that this subject – of people appearing placid in public by virtue of what technology they were using – should be made available to a wider audience. A book seemed an appropriate vehicle.

The students went about editing and categorising the photographs – not by type of product, but rather by the type of human condition – loneliness, sharing, boredom, etc. You might wonder what possible role such a project would have in design education. I feel, more than ever, that designers make the best viewers of society, of people, and of things. They have the power to see what others cannot see, simply because they have a trained and creative eye. You could call it creative anthropology, and from these discoveries, creative acts can take place with greater relevance.

# MOBILE DEVICES

by Alain de Botton

One of the dreams of what a public space should be like comes to us from Ancient Athens. From what we can gather, Athenians liked the concept that public space should be just that: space where members of the public could meet one another, exchange ideas, do business, buy a chicken or a loaf of bread and have a natter, as humans like to do.

The dream of Athens has resided down the ages, so much so that when we contemplate our own public spaces, we get rightly worried by the lack of public interaction in them: we go shopping, but we don't talk to anyone. We crowd together but we don't get to know each other. We look into one other's eyes, but our minds are elsewhere. We are together, but very much apart.

The anonymity of modern public space is all the more insulting because the possibility of closeness and dialogue is apparently so near. It's particularly weird for two people to ignore one another when they are sharing the same park bench or railway banquette. Alienation is thrown into relief by the simultaneous presence of proximity and distance.

This is where the contemporary addiction to mobile devices comes in. They enrage and puzzle us because they make concrete just how unable we've become to connect with our fellow humans. We laugh at ourselves holding these machines, as we might whenever a guilty secret has been exposed.

More paradoxically still, these machines show us that we do want to connect with humans, but very much on our own terms: through language but not voice, through a blog entry or a tweet, not an ongoing dialogue. We crave others, but others who've been silenced and compressed and made palatable by the magicians of data. The raw uncurated encounter with another human is what's become so problematic.

We're aware of how much has been lost. There's no one who doesn't complain that they have lost an important part of their authenticity to their mobile phone. The artists of this book have shown us what we have lost. They have, with charm and humour, made us acknowledge our addiction. Now it's for another set of artists to work out how to dig us out of this.



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