



Editorial

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Giuliana Cucinelli, Line Grenier and Kim Sawchuk

Are we living in a culture that places a premium on mobility and constant connection? If so, then what are its contours, shapes, and manifestations? What new practices arise, what is transformed and what persists? How are such transformations experienced?

“Mobile Cultures” examines the intersections between culture and mobility, an intersection that is articulated in at least three ways.

First articulation

Mobility as it is connected to the emergence of portable, wireless mobile devices, from tablet computers to cellphones, which instigate distinct socio-cultural practices that become integrated into culture, as ‘everyday life.’ Twittering. Facebook. Blogging. While these issues traverse a number of papers, they are foregrounded most notably in the contributions of Krista Melanie Riley and Mariam Esseghaier on the Twitter phenomenon. Riley’s “Tweeting from Mecca: Mobile media, time, and sacred experiences” focuses on the tweets, blog, and website created by Toronto Star journalist Muhammad Lila, the self-described first journalist to “live-tweet” his pilgrimage to Mecca in 2010. Looking at Lila’s reports from the perspective of mobility, Riley asks what an analysis of pilgrimage, a physical form of experiencing mobile subjectivity, can bring to the study of mobile media. Her paper connects and contrasts the use of these new technological platforms of social media to rhythm, movement and temporality as a part of religious ritual.

Mariam Esseghaier's "Tweeting out a Tyrant: Social Media and the Tunisian Revolution" looks at the use of social media within the context of a wide range of communication practices that were used to share news on a moment by moment basis during the spring of 2011. Based on over fifty email-interviews with both Tunisians and Canadian-based Tunisians who were deeply connected to friends and relatives during the "Arab Spring," Esseghaier queries the "orientalist" naming of the revolution as "the Twitter revolution." This gesture, she argues, denigrates the political agency of those who were part of the democratic movement and erases the use of other forms of communications during this time. Her respondents affirm that Twitter and social media were important alternative channels for receiving news because of the censorship of other broadcast media, such as television. At the same time, those involved from the ground-up in Tunisia assert the importance of face-to-face encounters with friends and neighbours on the street as vital. In this respect Esseghaier's contribution, as well as Riley's, are a reminder of the persistence of physical presence even with the adoption of social media.

Second articulation

Mobility with respect to new forms of networking that transform both our spatial and temporal conditions of existence and connection. As Adriana de Souza e Silva would say to be portable, mobile, and wireless institutes "hybrid forms of networked space." While the networking is clearly important to all the contributions in this issue, networking and the experience of "users" are brought to the fore in Maude Gauthier's analysis of the Facebook feature "Places." Gauthier's "Default Users": An Exploration of the Use of Geolocation on Facebook" offers an analysis of this geo-localization service. Gauthier is interested in the ambivalence felt by her interviewees towards these technologies for

networking within friendship circles. Her interest, intentionally, is not on the “exuberant” users of this application but the casual uses of the technology who use it “by default” because of its “automatic availability.” Her work, although based on a small sample, opens up new pathways for thinking through different kinds of use-positions with respect to social media.

M.E. Luka’s “Media production in flux: Crowdfunding to the rescue” examines two international crowdfunding platforms “Kickstarter” and “Indiegogo” and their use by Canadian documentary filmmakers to raise money for their projects. Luka takes a close look at the effectiveness of crowdfunding by cultural producers in an era where government funding for arts production is abeyance. Crowdfunding is a response to the current “flux” state and change in public funding, and appears to offer the opportunity to mobilize a network of investors. However as Luka points out, these virtual networks are largely built upon existing social networks raising questions about how sustainable they are for cultural producers, who may not be able to extend their support networks as radically as one might assume. Using the idea of “cultures of circulation” to analyze this new arrangements, as Luka says the fantasy of crowdfunding as a viable long-term option has yet to be seen, but is already having a profound effect on how creativity is funded in the context of North America. Gauthier and Luka’s articles indicate that when we use the term “social networking,” we are also talking about affective relations between people, and not just a technological assemblage.

Third articulation

Mobile, networked communications also has spawned new forms of cultural production and inventiveness. Christina Haralanova’s “Jailbreak Me, Possess Me: Mobile Hacking

Practices” examines how “hacker culture” has cracked some of the proprietary aspects of mobile phone ownership and corporate control. She does so, by first looking at the phone as an object and device that is extremely personal and intimate, indicating that there are different levels at which devices are personalized: from the appearance of phones, to the customization of applications. Hacking is, in this sense, part and parcel of this desire for device customization at the level of the technology and code. Hacking is also situated as a part of a DIY ethos of usage and design that advocates the technology can be opened for play, repair or learning about its functioning. This is based on three ideals within hacker culture: repair, reuse, repurpose. Although jailbreakers and hackers are often either stigmatized or made into heroes within popular culture and the news, Haralanova’s research on actual hacking practices illuminates the value system underlying their practices and underscores the key role that hackers play in terms of design and innovation.

Jacqueline Wallace’s “Yarn Bombing, Knit Graffiti and Underground Brigades: A Study of Craftivism and Mobility” explores these topics and underground alternative networks of cultural creation. Her research brings feminist craftivism, and the concept of cultural production, into dialogue with mobility studies. Like Haralanova’s work, the politics of technology is a definite thread in Wallace’s reflections. Wallace considers the “wooly” interventions of feminist knitting cultures into the landscape of everyday life and meandering negotiations through urban space. Her paper connects ‘traditional’ craft culture to the present mapping practices used by some craftivists to geo-locate and document their activities. Like Esseghaier’s piece on Tunisia which contextualizes social media practices, Wallace’s work is a reminder that within mobility studies as practiced

in communications, we cannot reduce the field to a mere concern with electronic digital devices.

Finally

Finally, Samuel Thulin's "Mobile Audio Apps, Place and Life Beyond Immersive Interactivity" looks at the trend to link audio content with a place, a perspective that resonates with several papers in the issue. At the core of Thulin's reflections on immersion and interactivity is the mobile audio application RjDj, which allows users to combine pre-recorded sound with recordings of sounds connected as one moves through space in "real time." Working from a phenomenological perspective that considers his own practice as a sound composer, Thulin argues that "the fostering of connections between the world inside the listener's headphones and the world outside often means that place becomes conceived of as an extension of the app's interface" and provides a novel way of interacting with the music. In this sense immersion and interactivity, at least in this application, attempts to bridge subjective experiences of listening, often associated with interiority, with the world.

Two final contributions round out the issue: an interview with social theorist Fred Turner, conducted by Dr. Simone Natale in 2012. First published in Italian the interview considers the politics of the new wave of social movements –the push for democracy in the North Africa, the occupy movement, the Québec student movement- as an integral part of the mobilities agenda. Magda Olszanowski offers a review of the 3rd Pan-American Mobilities Conference, "Local and Mobile: linking mobilities, mobile communication and locative media" held at North Carolina State University in the

spring of 2012. As her review points out mobile media and social media applications are transforming how we experience and participate in conferences

<http://communication.chass.ncsu.edu/mobilities/cfp.html>.

The papers speak to a number of key issues in the study of mobile communications.

They are pilot projects, all, but they resonate with several key themes in the literature on mobilities and mobile media studies. In the first instance, they address the contingent place of the cellphone within the analysis of mobile culture, as well as advocating an approach to mobile technology that stresses that they are cultural artifacts. As Goggin (2006) notes in *Cell Phone Culture*, “the cell phone has become much more than a device for phone calls: “it has become a central cultural technology in its own right.”

(p.2). With the introduction of wireless portable devices for interpersonal communication as a new dominant social technology, a whole new set of cultural practices and values are introduced: texting and sexting, reading the paper on the phone, staying in contact new forms of remote parenting, mobile commerce, locating people, posting to a variety of ‘social media.’ As cultural technologies they are part and parcel of a cultural shift where we have the expectation of being constantly connected, while we are on the move- a culture of mobility.

As mentioned, the title cultures of mobility suggests that we are always already capable of being networked with each other. As we roam the physical world of our everyday environment, walking down the street, taking a bus, or a tram, riding a car, we find ways to be virtually connected. In her classic text on mobile communication, Adriana de Souza Silva (2006) suggests that these are “hybrid spaces,” which she defines as “networked social spaces defined by the use of portable interfaces as the nodes of the

network. ” (p. 11) Hybrid spaces are not constructed only by, through or with mobile technologies. They are, as she says, “built by the connection of mobility and communication and materialized by social networks developed simultaneously in physical and digital spaces.” (de Souza Silva , 2006, p.10) Such mobile communications are also part of active, vibrant culture milieus that may also influence and affect the terms of sociality within a particular location. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the pieces for this issue were written from within the context of Québec, before the student strikes of the spring of 2012. While the research for these peer-reviewed papers pre-dates the strikes, the contributors to this issue are nevertheless attentive to the social, cultural and political dimensions of mobile communications in this moment in this place.

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