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Interviewer: Simone Natale

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# Micro Politics and Mobile Intimacies

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Interviewer: Simone Natale

Gerard Goggin is Professor of Media and Communications and ARC Future Fellow at the University of Sydney. He has particular research interests in disability and digital technology, as well as mobile media. Gerard's publications include: *Routledge Companion to Mobile Media* (2014; with Larissa Hjorth); *Disability and the Media* (2015; with Katie Ellis); *Locative Media* (2014; with Rowan Wilken); *Global Mobile Media* (2011); *Cell Phone Culture* (2006); and, with the late Christopher Newell, *Disability in Australia* (2005) and *Digital Disability* (2003).

## **When did you first become involved with mobilities research?**

I suppose I first became involved in mobilities research when I became involved in the telecommunications policy area in the early nineties. Not many people at that time were so concerned with mobilities and mobiles. By the end of the nineties, I had done quite a bit of work in terms of policy and sat on committees about mobile phones and radiation and started to look at some of the issues arising with mobile phones. So then, I finished my PhD at the end of the nineties and I had a lectureship in media studies and it occurred to me that the mobile phone was really starting to be widely used by people but there wasn't a lot of work into the cultures of mobile phones. So, really, that was my cue. In the early 2000s I started to work on mobilities, in earnest, I suppose. Then it was called "mobile phones" or "cell phones" more than mobilities, per say.

### **How do you use mobilities in your research?**

My research has been firstly focused on mobile phones and then increasingly on mobile media and when I published the book *Cell Phone Culture* in 2006, I suppose I was really interested in the ways in which there were cultures of mobile phones, in particular, and that, increasingly, mobile phones were starting to move into centre stage in terms of media. My second book on the subject, *Global Mobile Media* (2011), really unpacks that theme. In terms of mobilities, per say, in some ways I am a late comer to the area because it's more latterly that I've really come to appreciate the relationship between the systems of mobility that mobile phones and mobile media represent and the range of other kinds of ways that there are systems of mobilities in our society.

Now, this rubric of mobilities is useful because it broadens our focus. It turns out that at this stage, in terms of mobile communications and media, that broader focus is needed anyway. With things like mobile Internet, you have mobiles that really interact in terms of location. You have mobiles in cars and mobile Internet in cars. You have this real proliferation of ways in which mobile media is broadening beyond a narrow communications research focus. So, I think mobilities is a really interesting area and one of the things I am interested in now is the area of disability and the way that thinking about mobilities helps us to actually frame disability or disabilities perspectives on mobiles.

## **How is the everyday use of mobile technologies connected to issues of politics and power?**

A great question is about this sense in which we have this relationship between mobilities, and mobiles, and systems of power. It comes on different levels, I think. To start, with everyday life, with the micropolitics, the mobile intimacies. We have a situation, over the last twenty years, where mobiles have become a fabric and connective tissue of society. They've insinuated themselves into our cultural practices. And so this raises, I suppose, a whole new set of questions about the relationship between the public and the private spheres that researchers have really started to explore and unpack. Whether that's about the role of emotions and affect; whether that's to do with the reproduction of dynamics of power, around gender, or class, or race, or inequality, or justice. There are whole sets of questions. And then I think we can look at how these microsettings have been related to more macro and some of the middle level settings of power as well. We have a situation to sort of look at the way the politics and the platforms, the politics and the affordances, where many of the mobile media platforms are very complicated assemblies of complicated sets of different technologies. Very large, organized power interests – particularly large corporations – dominate those. We think of Facebook, for instance, which has come in the space of ten years to be a massive corporation – and it's a private corporation. When governments seek to regulate it in 'the old fashion' way, that's often pretty hard to do.

So, one of the issues for me is how do we connect these questions about the platforms – mobile platforms – to systems of mobility? And, whether they meet our visions –

whether we are able to shape them in ways that, democratically, we would like to do.

And I think, in many ways, we can't. And this is a problem and we need to connect those kinds of vistas and debates under the debates around the micro politics of mobiles in every day life. So, I think this is very urgent and fertile ground.