

Place on hold: Mobile media practices and contesting east/west 'imaging communities' in the Asia-Pacific region

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ABSTRACT

In a period of globalism marked by what Manuel Castells' (2001) dubs as 'flows' and Arjun Appadurai (1996) defines as 'disjunctures' we are left with a picture that is far from the McLuhanian 'global village' (1964). As a symbol of global ICTs (Information Communication Technologies), the mobile phone is informed by the socio-cultural particularities of place. In short, the force of the local ensures that mobile media never puts place on hold. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the divergent usage of mobile media in the Asia-Pacific region, where we can see multiple versions of 'east' and 'west'. Discussing some case studies in the Asia-Pacific region, this paper meditates on 'east and west intersections' through the rise of mobile media and its impact on the local. By outlining some of the emerging forms of the mobile media phenomenon and the pivotal role of place and locality, the discussion questions the socio-technological and pedagogical possibilities for the twenty-first century's equivalent of the flâneur: what Robert Luke dubs the phoneur (2005).

Magnetic mobility: The place of global mobility

Considering place and mobility in a global world, it seems impossible to avoid acknowledging the impact of Castells' (2001) global flows and networks on practices and definitions of place. To define place in our new world of electronic connectivity requires an examination of the role of the mobile phone in creating new senses of 'being in the local'. Mobile telephony is often assigned responsibility for the purported demise of place, the blurring between public and private and the rise of the individual at the price of the community, which some believe characterises the global world (Putnam, 2000; Bauman, 2003). However, rather than announcing the death of place, ethnographies of localised mobile practices describe ways in which place has taken on new significance and importance (Ito, 2002; Yoon, 2003). As Mizuko Ito's (2002) ethnography in Tokyo and Kyongwon Yoon's (2003) ethnography in Seoul have demonstrated, mobile phones are pivotal in the "micro-coordinations" (Ling, 2004) of face-to-face contact and attendant modes of intimacy, which are bound to a sense of place and community.

For Doreen Massey (1993) a sense of place is defined through representational processes, a practice that is always mediated. It is easy to romantically conceive of technology as the scapegoat for increasing feelings of dislocation in redefining place. But this can be too convenient and requires further analysis. As Massey notes, place has always been mediated – by projections, imaginings, representation and the very acts of practising culture and performing identity. Domestic technologies (Haddon, 1997; Ling, 2004), such as TV and mobile phone, have been integral to the

staging and regulating of public space, although they have also been pivotal to the merging of public and private spheres in what has been described by Raymond Williams (1974) as “mobile privatization”.

As David Morley (2003) observes, the mobile phone has further eschewed the blur between public and private as it no longer brings the public into the private as was the case for TV, but it inverts the flow so that the private goes out to the public. However, whilst the domestic (technology) may have physically left home it psychologically still resonates in a sense of place and acts as a way of defining home (Urry, 2002). Thus one could argue that the cartography of mobile telephony is one that is deeply bound by our ways of localising and personalising imagined notions of home and place. This resonates with Genevieve Bell’s (2005) ethnographic research in the Asia-Pacific region where definitions of home were seen as integral to the ways cultures adapted mobile telephony. By conducting research in locations such as China, South Korea, Indonesia and Australia, Bell demonstrates the diversity of ways in which both users and usage are subject to the forces of the socio-cultural.

Benedict Anderson (1983) noted in *Imagined Communities* that the notion of a nation as we understand it today was born through the rise of distribution and printing techniques such as the printing press. As vehicles for modernity, technologies such as the printing press changed how people related to a sense of place and its relationship to other locations. Thus events that happened far away were made immediate and intimate through newspapers and other mechanically reproduced printed matter, contributing to and transforming conceptions of space and time and opening the way for newly formed desires to redefine boundaries in the form of nation-state. By “imagined”, Anderson suggests that the production, representation and identification with nation-state are constructed on both individual and collective levels.

One could argue that mobile technologies are taking Anderson’s imagined community one step further, with nation-states now being defined through the rhetoric of prosumers (producer plus consumer) and their ‘imaging communities’. Alvin Toffler (1980) first discussed this idea of the consumer being transformed into a producer, through the analogy of consumers having to fill their own petrol tanks. The prosumer concept was furthered by Don Tapscott (1995) in terms of the “promise and peril” of networked intelligence. But are everyday users creating any new forms of images and identification or are they but mimicking the images they see in mass media? Are users being empowered or is global mass media profiting from the exploitation of users’ time, energy and need for identification? Regardless of these questions about agency and empowerment, one point remains evident: the integral role of mobile media in the construction, both at a corporate and grass-roots level, of what it means to experience the ‘imagined community’ of the local. This is most evident in the case studies on mobile telephony in the Asia-Pacific region.

Locating the mobile: The politics of co-presence and place in the Asia-Pacific region

The mobile phone, symbolic of global ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), demonstrates the significance of the local. The uneven dissemination and appropriation of the mobile phone is nowhere more apparent than in the Asia-Pacific region. This region is marked, for example, by uneven penetration rates and usages of mobile technologies – from ‘3G centres’ (3rd generation, i.e. mobile with broadband) such as Tokyo and Seoul, to the Philippines, known as the text capital of the world with over 300 million messages sent daily with many Filipinos participating in the “texting god” phenomenon (Ellwood-Clayton, 2003).

In Seoul, mobile phones (*hand phones*) are used by the youth to document, edit and upload their lives onto mobile web logs – such as Cyworld’s SNS (Social Network System) mini-hompy – that emerge online and offline as new forms of socialising. Unlike western SNS equivalents such as MySpace, Cyworld has cute avatars and ‘mini-rooms’ that are interconnected with other friends and family pages. Friends can visit other friends’ mini-rooms (cyber-rooms that often reflect offline

spaces). This seamlessness is ensured by the fact that South Korea boasts the highest broadband rates in the world (OECD, 2006). But with this seamlessness comes a price in the increasing compulsion to document and share co-presence: a phenomenon dubbed as “fast-forwarding present” (Hjorth, 2006; Hjorth & Kim, 2005). This phenomenon is evident in the so-called immediacy of these mobile technologies where users are often too busy documenting and sharing (via virtual communities) to actually experience the present in the present. In Tokyo, the ubiquity of mobile phone (*keitai*) practices has seen the rise in a phenomenon dubbed by Sadie Plant (2002) as the “*oya yubi sedai*” (thumb generation). This is so marked that the yearly revenues of the *keitai* ring tone industry is surpassing that of karaoke sales (Okada, 2005). Genevieve Bell (2005) notes that in China, “an estimated 100 million messages per day for the more than 340 million cell phone subscribers” has seen the phenomenon described as “the age of the thumb” (*muzhi shi dai*).

The emergent genres and applications such as SMS (Short Messaging Service), MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service), camera phones and mob logs (mobile phone web logs or mobile Internet) have seen a variety of mobile phone practices arise – all mediated by the forces of locality. In Melbourne, the importance of SMS in negotiating place and intimacy has become increasingly prevalent. Melbournians are high users of SMS as a means of maintaining co-presence with intimates and negotiating face-to-face meetings. While camera phones are on the rise, the importance of SMS and its particular form of textual co-presence continues unabated (Hjorth, 2005b). This is in direct contrast to the situation in Hong Kong where industry incompatibilities between service providers have created difficulties in the use of SMS with many users preferring the synchronicity of voice calling (Goggin, 2006).

It is important to remember that the “imagined community” of nation-state is also reflected in the artifice of regionality. In the face of globality, regionalism emerges as a tenacious force. The consumerist narratives and identities in Asia after the 1997 economic crash have led to new and multiple forms of Asian modernities that cannot be viewed as a simple reworking or mutation of the nebulous condition or epoch called ‘Western modernity’. Chua Beng Huat (2000) has succinctly discussed the political agendas after 1997 that sought to redefine consumption, as distinct from westernisation, as a re-energising of the economies both in terms of production and consumption. It is after 1997 that consuming ‘Asia’ becomes big business bringing about shifts in the correlation between nation-state and cultural capital. For example, investment in South Korean cultural capital has become big business in the region - from Korean dramas consumed in Hong Kong and Taiwan to Korean online multiplayer games consumed in China and Taiwan, and Korean films being consumed globally. Korea is also investing heavily in cultural and technological education ensuring that Korea is positioned globally for its innovation. Chua (2006) further asserts that today’s imagined communities are indeed defined through the cross-cultural pollution of ‘communities of consumers’. In this sense cultural and technological education have become modes of consumption in the fast expanding consumer-based economies of the Asia-Pacific region.

In this region as a whole, we can find many contested notions of the ‘east’ within the trans-Asian production and consumption patterns. In turn, the region is marked by versions of the ‘west’ with locations such as Australia dubbed the “west in Asia” (Rao, 2004) or “the south” of both Asia and the world (Yue & Hawkins, 2000). Locations such as Hong Kong, having experienced over 100 years of British colonisation before the hand back in 1997, were seen as the portal between the East and West, constituting what Ackbar Abbas (1997) calls a “hyphenated” national identity. Eric Ma (1999) argues that Hong Kong’s east/west history results in Hong Kong’s position as a form of “satellite modernity” in relation to east/west formations. This is evident in the use of the mobile phone in Hong Kong, which could be identified as a battlefield for global hardware and software customisation; often a Nokia phone will be customised with cute objects such as Hello Kitty (from Japan) and Disney (from the US) (Hjorth, 2005a). By consuming certain objects associated with specific cultures, users demonstrate their affiliations; these micro-politics, in turn, reflect the way in which the locality is defined and redefined. In this region there are many contested notions of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” that have various conflicting images of what it means

to be 'east' or 'west'. Far from eroding national boundaries and identities, the emerging trans-cultural "communities of consumers" are further marking these borders. As a metaphor for global communication and border-crossing, mobile technologies are revealing a situation that may surprise in that far from de-emphasising the importance of place, mobile phones are helping to re-define the significance of place and notions of home (Bell, 2005).

The symbolic value of the mobile phone in many locations in the Asia-Pacific region is indisputable, operating simultaneously as an extension of both identity (micro) and community (macro). As a symbol of global communication, individualism and capitalism, the mobile phone in the region demonstrates the adaptation of such concepts for a non-western context. The exploration of mobile practices in the region can no longer be equated with a mere collapse between westernisation and modernisation; each location produces a different history of mobile phone adaptation corresponding to the ways home and identity are conceived (Bell, 2005).

In considering what it means to think about east/west intersections in a period of globalisation, the next section explores some case examples of mobile media in the region. Through these examples we can reflect upon new and remediated forms of representing regional particularities and multiple versions of modernisation and globalisation.

Calling on place: A case study of mobile media

Customisation is integral to the politics of convergence. As Castells (2001) notes, in the growth of standardised global technologies and virtual spaces such as the Internet (and the mobile phone), customisation is needed to make sense of the newness of these forms of mediation. Practices of customisation are informed by the local as they localise the global. So what does it mean to locate 'customisation' practices of mobile telephony and what does this reveal about emerging forms of place and time? Customisation is a term often interchangeable with personalisation and domestication. This process can occur at both an industry level and as a UCC (User-Created Content); often there is contestation between the *industry image* and the *user identification* of certain forms of customisation (such as 'cute' being consumed by young females). It is this second level – the UCC – that is my major concern as, throughout my case studies over the last seven years in the Asia-Pacific region, this has been the dominant *modus operandi* of the user. The phenomenon of the rise of mobile media highlights the displacement of the user as *consumer* by user as *producer*. During the last seven years mobile phones have shifted from a predominantly voice-calling or texting (SMS) medium into a form of multimedia par excellence – camera phone, mp3 player, internet portal – which has seen a growing intensity of UCC in the face of industry's attempt to cater and customise. An example is the well-cited incident in the 1990s dubbed the "pager revolution" (Matsuda, 2005) whereby the trendy young Japanese female (*kôgyaru*) hijacked the pager that was marketed at the salary-man (*oyaji*). This resulted in the technology being transformed into a tool of subversion.

Over the last seven years of this century customisation has shifted from a predominantly 'outside' activity – that is, hanging cute characters from the phone and painting the face-plate – to an 'inside' the phone activity in the form of customised camera phone images for wallpapers/screen savers and 'sharing' these mobile moments through face-to-face and virtual communities. Customisation operates on two levels simultaneously, individual and social. Or, put another way, it is both a personal activity and a collective process that signals a shift in the different modes of cultural and social capital. Often there is a productive tension between the meanings associated for the individual and their intimates and how those forms of customisation can be read in a social or collective context (Hjorth, 2003; 2005a). For example, one female Hong Kong respondent had a mobile phone covered with cute characters that she detached when going to work. While she and her friends enjoyed the customisation, she was worried that she could be viewed as 'childish' by older superiors.

From 2004 to 2006 I conducted case studies in four locations – Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong and Melbourne – with 80 participants to sketch some of the ways people’s relationship with, and usage of, the mobile phone was changing (Hjorth, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). By 2004, technologically progressive locations such as Tokyo and Seoul were already utilising the multimedia dimensions of mobile media as heralded by global depictions of Japan’s *i-mode* known as “the mobile phone with Internet” (Matsuda, 2005) and South Korea’s hardware companies such as Samsung’s pioneering of high-resolution camera phones that sought to blur hierarchies between stand-alone cameras and camera phones. With the rise of UCCs – and SNS as sites for distribution – users found more and more possibilities for exploring the three s’s that Ito and Okabe (2003) identify as key to contextualising the content of mobile media: sharing, storing and saving.

The growth of virtual communities and ‘sharing’ websites, as new modes for UCC distribution, are representative of the role of social capital to inform the context of content. For anyone who has trolled through the online free video space of YouTube it is undeniable that the material is very patchy and much time can be wasted looking at meaningless ramblings. Murdoch’s purchase of the online community space, MySpace, in 2006 was demonstrative of the growing importance of co-present social capital in the form of virtual communities as *the* mode for distributing content (and advertising) to the public. Here we are reminded of the aforementioned Koskinen (2007: 48–60) who argues that mobile multimedia, unlike mobile telephony, “re-territorialises” experiences and communication (see also Scifo, 2004). An emphasis on co-present social identifications underscores the motivations for documenting and sharing camera phone images through both online and offline means.

However, for Koskinen, the implications of MMS are multiple and situated around “the mundane as a problem” (2007: 50). As Koskinen asserts, it is the demonstration of the banal that is important in defining the sender as ‘ordinary’ and thus deemed to be reliable in a normative sense. This can be seen as a furthering of the politics of the everyday and personal as legitimated by Kodak snapshots. Certain archetypical images of homes and family occasions were an important part of presenting a family as normal both to themselves and others (Bourdieu, 1990; Gye, 2005).

Camera phone practices, as an extension of photography, are about performing normalcy. However, due to the distributive and networked logic of mobile phones one is now left to contextualise these often-banal shots rendering them newsworthy and relevant to the receiver (Koskinen, 2007: 51). As Koskinen (2007: 52) observes, there are three main categories for MMS types: firstly, a newsworthy event; secondly humorous reports; and thirdly, making the trivial sublime. In analysing the “banality” aesthetics and politics of MMS practices, Koskinen argues that it is this banality and triviality that separates the agenda of the camera phone from that of the stand-alone camera; and he concludes that the mundane function in interaction needs to be overcome as the possibilities for more “relevant” usages grow. These possibilities are, in part, due to the low-resolution quality currently designated to camera phones. However, with Samsung’s launch of a 10 mega-pixel camera phone in March 2006, maybe the DIY aesthetics and modes of realism will be transformed although this possible future is still far removed from the everyday user.

Barbara Scifo (2004: 365) notes that camera phone practices operate on “two different levels of experience” ... “on an individual level” and “on the socialization level”. However we can add to this process a *meta-social* level, a concept whereby users become hyper-reflexive and hyperconscious of the ways strangers can de-contextualise their mobile customisation. For example, in the case of camera phone practices, female users often re-appropriate the depictions of female imagery seen in media (Lee, 2005) in a sense of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) that could be read without irony and parody by strangers. Hence, the important issue for mobile media content is the user’s choice of viewing/sharing context. Customisation, whether ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the phone, is highly inflected by gender, age and locality.

The ubiquity of mobile technology in the Asia-Pacific region is undeniable. In Hong Kong, phones hang from the necks of both young and old, taking the place, literally and symbolically, of a

lanyard; symbolising both a 'freedom' and movement at the same time as suggesting naming, placing and fixing. As two so-called centres for mobile technology, Tokyo and Seoul, have differed greatly in their cultural, social and economic climates: as well as sharing a violent history of conflict and imperialism, both locations have gained global attention for their state-of-the-art mobile technologies and techno-nationalist agendas. Initially, Japan gained global attention with the launch of i-mode and the "keitai IT revolution" (Matsuda, 2005) further ensuring its cultural capital in the region. However South Korea soon gained attention with the rise of k-pop (especially Korean dramas) and technologies such as mobile TU/DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting). On the one hand, the act of comparing Japanese and Korean mobile practices is deeply problematic because of Japan's colonisation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, and on the other, it is precisely this fact of history that makes the study so curious. Both locations, unlike the rest of the Asia-Pacific region, have had walled ICT communities nurturing their own mobile telephony industries from locally grown service providers to handset/hardware developers. By having their own frequency codes, they have ensured that users from outside have to purchase phones when in both Japan and Korea, and along with such significant local markets, both the Japanese and Korean mobile telephonic industries have been able to grow locally into global ventures. This process guaranteed an innovative economy for mobile media in Japan and Korea as opposed to other locations such as Hong Kong and Melbourne where global competition has resulted in little technological originality or specialisation.

In Tokyo, eight years after the infamous implementation of DoCoMo's *i-mode* (coined as 'mobile with Internet'), the mobile device is catering to so many forms of convergence that it has superseded the wallet as the essential everyday item. Japanese high school girls, or the notorious *kôgyaru* (fashionable girl in early twenties), have become renowned for their ability to hijack new technologies (such as the PHS [Personal Handyphone System] and pager). This uptake of mobile technologies can be seen as continuing the tradition of "kitten writing" (Kinsella, 1995) in which Japanese alphabets such as *hiragana* and *katakana* are playing in reworked forms to the point that they are indecipherable to onlookers. For Kenichi Fujimoto (2005), the rise of *keitai* in Japan is marked by its adaptation from symbol of the *oyaji* (businessman) to that of the *kôgyaru*. This adaptation concurrently marked the demise of the *oyaji* as synonymous with Japan's nation-state.

In Seoul, young people are using their *hand phones* to construct their virtual community, Cyworld, mini-hompy pages whereby users take photos and write texts on the run to upload to their home pages (via the phone) in a process or self-regulatory practice that is best described as the aforementioned "fast-forwarding present" (Hjorth and Kim, 2005). Here, these web pages with their assemblages of photos, text, music and cute customisation operate as sites for discussion and virtual 'catching up'. This fast-forwarding present means that users are often documenting and sharing while also experiencing, and sometimes the documenting mediates the experience so much that users are only able to experience the moment in retrospect. This was particularly the case with events such as music gigs where users were too busy trying to get the 'right' shot that they could only experience the moment after the event. In this way, to be co-present can jeopardise a relationship to the present putting the present on hold. Moreover, the need to document a shared moment between friends often resulted in users continuously taking photos, deleting and re-taking them, and inevitably sabotaging the present 'joy' of the moment. The compulsion to document and share has resulted in users discussing the fact that if they are deemed the photographer for their friends, they are thus responsible for 'capturing' the moment, and can spend much time customising the photographs for their friends to share via their virtual community, Cyworld, mini-hompy pages.

Aesthetics of delay: Deference, delay and disjuncture in current global ICTs

Rather than saving time, applications such as camera phone image making, and the attendant customising and sharing, give rise to users spending time sharing and editing the immediate. The tyranny of immediacy, as heralded by the ICTs industry and especially prevalent in the use of mobile media, becomes part of the users' legacy whereby they can spend much time and effort creating a

feeling of immediacy and candor. However, far from being immediate, these processes are about making time in order to monument a moment that, often for the user, is less about a participatory moment and more about a mediated observation. Here, the co-presence between participant and observer, especially with camera phone making and sharing, means that users live between the moment and their role to memorise it. Thus they experience the moment as both the present and past simultaneously. Connecting intimate gestures with place is the preoccupation of mobile media such as camera phones with the increasing need to document everyday gestures and events.

This fast-forwarding present highlights the way that mobile media exemplifies the dilemma of new media as a remediated practice. In their book on remediation, Bolter and Grusin (1999) reworked McLuhan's (1964) proposal that the content of a new medium is always that of the previous medium. McLuhan had pointed to the then new media of TV and its borrowing of radio's content and modes of address. *Déjà vu* can be found throughout the invention of new technologies. As Lev Manovich (2003) argued in his discussion of the rise of the digital, that rather than diminishing the influence of cinema and the analogue, the digital serves to further fetishise the analogue. This process can be noted with current camera phone practices and their re-enactment of early analogue vernacular photography as symbolised by the introduction of the Kodak camera in the late 1800s/early 1900s (Gye, 2005).

Just as contemporary practices of digital storytelling are haunted by analogue metaphors, practices of immediacy are fraught with the politics of delay. This is most apparent in the current work around mobile media and pervasive location-aware (i.e. GPS, geographic position systems) mobile games that remind us of the inertia between online and offline spaces. Globally there have been multiple location-aware mobile projects that have often been replicated in other locations with completely different outcomes. Thus we can see that global technologies are very much subject to the contingencies of locality.¹

Telecommunication and technology companies are seemingly keen to help support the rise of the prosumer with its associated cheap labour (i.e. content for free). While pervasive (location-aware) projects are invaluable in geo-caching (such as GPS, geographic positioning systems) and demonstrating the importance of place and specificity in a period of global technologies, they also serve to highlight one of the greatest residual paradoxes of mobile media as a metaphor for socio-technologies. The more we try to overcome difference and distance, the less we do. Or put another way, the more we try to partake in the politics of immediacy, the more we succumb to the poetics of delay.

Imaging communities: Mobile media as emerging pedagogical tool

How can we use these new (but remediated) forms of media expression to think about learning and literacy and its relationship to locality? What new forms of teaching and learning are evolving in the contested 'imaging communities' of the Asia-Pacific region?

Researchers and educators are starting to implement mobile media, as an example of multimedia par excellence, into pedagogical and m-learning practices. One example is the five-year (2001–2006) MELL (Media Expression, Learning and Literacy) project, financed by Japanese telecommunication giant NTT DoCoMo at University of Tokyo, that sought to utilise interdisciplinary methods to deploy mobile media in various levels of education from primary to tertiary. MELL, organised by Shin Mizukoshi, included work with broadcasters and primary school children to link museums, regional areas and the everyday. The project responded to three key issues: (1) Media literacy: the cycle of expression and reception; (2) Media play as the foundation for media literacy; and (3) Media practice as an intent of media literacy. In the MELL project such applications as SMS, mobile emailing and camera phone practices were explored with students actively contributing to the ways mobile media could be deployed in pedagogical situations. These studies operated to make students think creatively and engage actively in the educational process. Moreover, the

workshops allowed students a space in which to think critically about mobile media technology, something that does not generally occur in its everyday usage.

Researchers such as Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe (2003) have orchestrated many visual ethnography camps whereby participants have used their camera phones to document and represent the everyday. In my own research I have been conducting mobile media seminars with university students both in Korea (Hallym University) and in Melbourne (RMIT University), with the aim of highlighting the role of delay, both temporal and spatial, in the proclaimed rhetoric about the immediacy of mobile technologies. The workshops that focused on the usage of location-aware mobile phone games allowed the students to consider the disjuncture between online and offline spaces. Other workshops on camera phone ethnographies encouraged students to think reflexively about the storing, saving and sharing practices and how these 3 s's have differed between the digital and the analogue. Students became both the subject and object of their research. From this I would argue that Ito and Okabe's three s's are also moderated by three d's: *deference*, *delay* and *disjuncture*. The 'imaging communities' are contingent on multiple macro and micro narratives forming around constructions of self and collective identities. While these images may seem generic and formulaic, it is through the mode of sharing that context brings content to the messages.

The implementation of mobile media as a new medium or context for thinking through cultural identity and what it means to be local in a period marked by the global is most notable in the DIY aesthetics of mobile movie making. These aesthetics are about, as Koskinen notes, banality and the ordinary. However it is this ordinariness and the prevailing modes of realism (or reel-ism) that make it such a compelling medium for thinking through cultural and cross-cultural identification. While the democratic possibilities of mobile media as the 'people's media' in locations such as the Philippines and South Korea have been problematised (Kim, 2002; Pertierra, 2006), the portable and personable nature of the medium does lend itself to nascent forms of collectivity and cultural identity.

Examples such as South African, Kaganof's feature length movie *SMS Sugarmen* (2006) are providing ways in which we can rethink national and cultural identity in a period marked by transcultural processes. However, many of the mobile media projects are currently being funded by either telecommunication or technology-based corporations. While this has not necessarily ensured a compromise – such projects as MELL were not shaped by DoCoMo's interests – it is definitely a concern regarding conflict of interests. And yet, maybe we can learn from the history of mobile media. This history has been one in which users continuously surprise industry expectations. Undoubtedly the mobile phone, on both a macro and micro level, is demonstrating intersections between multiple 'wests' and 'east', clearly highlighting that place is far from on hold in an epoch of global ICTs.

Getting reel: Conclusion

As noted by Koskinen (2007) and Manovich (2003), the legacy of the digital is undoubtedly that of the analogue. In the rise of UCC one genre is the most prevailing: that of realism. This realism is attached to the 'reterritorialisation' of place. As Koskinen (2007), and Ito and Okabe (2003) observe, 'realism' provides a sense of authenticity and reliability that makes mobile media utterly compelling as a form of sharing and symbolic gift giving as a way of maintaining social relations. If Ito and Okabe's three s's – sharing, storing and saving – are determined by the logic of realism and if such a logic is applied to formations of identity and social relations, then what part will such references play in our conceptions of future educational and artistic interventions?

One factor becomes apparent when exploring emerging mobile media: it is the fundamental role of paradox. As Michael Arnold (2003) noted in his phenomenological study of mobile telephony in Melbourne, mobile media is a janus-faced process. Borrowing from the Greek myth where the two heads moved in opposing directions, Arnold outlines how the push-pull force of mobile telephony

can set us 'free', on one hand, and, on the other, can keep us on a leash (through being always contactable). As Jack Qui (2007) notes in his study on mobile media in China, rather than the phenomenon being defined through the Ito (2005) rubric of "personal, portable and pedestrian", the concept of personal, portable and panoptican might be more fitting in an age controlled by the 'wireless leash'. These paradoxes manifest in everyday life as they are integral to all forms of mediation and co-presence, driven by the insatiable role of desire in interpersonal communications and community formations. The more we desire immediacy, the more we are surrounded by delay; the more mediated we feel, the more we compensate with modes of realism. But this 'realism', as a form of genre and mediation, has its genealogy firmly planted in analogue constructions of the real. Thus, the current dominant mode of realism is about the 'reel' rather than any notion of the actual 'real' (which is already highly contestable). This practice of the reel makes mobile media so easy to locate, and yet so difficult.

The particular aesthetics characterising mobile media – intimacy, portability, ubiquity, immediacy, miniature, and fleeting – influence the types of multimedia content that is made. According to Daniel Palmer (2005: 4) mobile media is part of what he dubs "participatory" media. Palmer argues that the dominant "modes of address" of mobile media "function to blur the line between the production and consumption of imagery". He further notes, "that all forms of media participation need to be considered in relation to defining characteristics of contemporary capitalism – namely its user-focused, customized and individuated orientation"; and "rather than fundamentally altering the nature of *public* and *private* visuality, mobile phone cameras appear to further privatize experience", so much so that "the Nokia moment is far more intimate than the Kodak moment, and the mobile phone a further material support for 'networked individualism', as Manuel Castells puts it" (Palmer 2005: 4).

And while Palmer's argument is indeed compelling in a world dominated by prosumer rhetoric, we must remember that the construction of the reel in the contested imaging communities of locality, regionalism and globalism is contextualised through the three s's: sharing, storing and saving. It is these contextual forces that are pivotal to understanding the new emerging discourses around mobile media as a barometer for translating the global at the level of the local. Each region can be seen as being marked by distinctive forms of micro and macro connectivity. On a micro level, there are multiple and contesting 'imaging communities', on a macro level, there are divergent forms of 'communities of consumers' that constitute the transcultural modes of the region. As a barometer for global ICTs, mobile media could shed light on the emerging forms of community and the so-called intersections between multiple 'east' and multiple 'west'. In this way, in an age of global flows inhabited by what Robert Luke (2005) dubs the *phoneurs*, mobile media could help us to keep it *reel*.

Abbreviations

DMB	Digital Multimedia Broadcasting
GPS	Geographic Positioning Systems
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MELL	Media Expression Learning and Literacy
MMS	Multimedia Messaging Service
PHS	Personal Handyphone System
SMS	Short Messaging Service
SNS	Social Networking Systems
UCC	User Created Content

Note

1. For example, the location-aware mobile media projects of UK's proboscis' *urban tapestries* (2003–2005) can be witnessed in Korea's Art Center Nabi's INP *Urban vibe* project (2005) but with dramatically different results. UK's blast theory has conducted many versions of their hand-held GPS online/ offline tracking projects *Can you see me now?* and *Uncle Roy All Around You* in different locations in the world with surprising results. The importance (by way of its ubiquity and accessibility) of mobile media has certainly taken off overseas as identified by the 2004 ISEA that focused on wireless experiences and Nabi's *Resfest's Wireless Art Competition* (2004), *Urban Vibe* (2005) and *Mobile Asia* (2006). Competitions such as Siemens *MicroMovies* awards <<http://www.micromovie-award.com/>>, Nabi's *Mobile Art* <<http://www.mobileasia.org/>>, UK-based *Nokia shorts 06* <<http://www.nokiashorts.co.uk/>>, and German-based *interfilm* Berlin <<http://www.interfilm.de/>> add to the collective possibilities of mobile media as a source for social commentary and rethinking the role of art and identity politics within the everyday.

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