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A cultural somatics of mobile media and urban screens: *Wiffiti* and the *IWALL* prototype

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Abstract

Mobile networked devices are transforming communicative and media practices in urban space and everyday life. Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that we should now recognise the mobile phone as the 'third screen' along with TV and the computer – that is, as a significant media form in contemporary culture in itself. At the same time, there has emerged another important screen – the urban digital display – which is also changing our experience of media content and perception of the built environment. This paper examines the connectivity between mobile phones and urban screens. Combining the insights of phenomenology and embodied interaction, we will explore the interrelations between body, screen, and material environment that are specific to our engagement with and across mobile and urban screen interfaces. In particular, we will observe and critically interpret the user-experiences and somatic involvement of participants as they interact with *Wiffiti* (currently in use in the US) and several deployments of the *IWALL* prototype (in Sydney and Brisbane in Australia).

Keywords: mobile phone, mobile media, video phone, urban screen, phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, embodied interaction.

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A cultural somatics of mobile media and urban screens: *Wiffiti* and the *IWALL* installation

Ian MacColl and Ingrid Richardson

Mobile phones are becoming increasingly ever-present, penetrating and transforming everyday cultural practices and spaces. Today's phones combine multimedia with connectivity through high-speed wireless third and fourth generation (3G, 4G) and Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) networks. Mobile communications technologies are thus effectively merging with other imaging and screen technologies – from standard camera phones to highly sophisticated multi-functional hybrids – and becoming more popular as media interfaces for movies, TV, photography, video, the Internet and location-based gaming. Many of the articles written by industry experts and by new media analysts and theorists in online industry-sponsored magazines such as *Gamasutra*¹, *Vodafone's receiver*² and *Nokia's the feature*³ consider how mobile media has evolved far beyond the provision of information and voice/text transmission into the domain of domestic and cinema screen entertainment. As Gerard Goggin argues, the media and communications industries recognise the mobile device as the 'third screen' with TV and the computer – a media form to be taken seriously (2006) in terms of analysis and in terms of digital content creation, provision, and aggregation.

Similarly, screens are becoming pervasive in public and urban spaces. Mark Weiser coined the terms *tabs*, *pads* and *boards* to classify the inch-, foot- and yard-scale interaction possibilities he foresaw in his vision of ubiquitous computing (Weiser, 1991). Alan Dix *et al.* extend this classification to include perch⁴-scale interactions. The increasing sizes reflect an increase in the number of simultaneous users, ranging from individuals or small groups at inch- and foot-scale (corresponding roughly to phones and PDAs, and laptops and desktops respectively) through to tens of individuals at yard-scale and hundreds at perch-scale. In this paper we use the term *urban screen* to refer to yard- and perch-scale displays, particularly the former, deployed in public places in urban contexts. Linking mobile phones with such screens creates the possibility of breaking down Wellman's 'networked individualism' (Wellman, 2002), as the personal small screen device is used to engage with larger screens situated in local gathering places and accessible to public or collective vision.

In this paper we offer a phenomenological and embodied interaction analysis of this connectivity of mobile phones and urban screens as a particular coupling of human bodies and mobile screens. Embodied interaction refers to the increasing interest in phenomenology in the field of human-computer interaction (HCI). Earlier work in HCI drew on psychology and sociology for inspiration. More recently, Paul Dourish (2001) uses the phenomenological notion of embodiment as a basis for analysing and designing interactive experiences, defining embodied interaction as "the creation, manipulation, and sharing of meaning through engaged interaction with artefacts" (126). Dourish reflects on work in tangible computing and social computing to formulate embedded interaction. Tangible computing (see, for example, Ishii and Ullmer, 1997) explores how interfaces can be moved off the screen and into the world, embedding computation and interaction in physical objects. Social computing, (see, for example, Suchman 1987) incorporates understandings of social practice into the design of interactive. Tangible and social computing, in turn, provide insights that underpin work in mobile computing, as well as in related fields such as ubiquitous and pervasive computing.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is equally applicable to tangible, social and mobile computing. Toni Robertson (2002) uses Merleau-Ponty's insights (1962) to explore the public availability of artefacts and embodied actions. Her analyses focus on supporting and designing for

¹ <http://www.gamasutra.com/>

² <http://www.receiver.vodafone.com>

³ <http://www.thefeature.com>

⁴ A perch is a unit of length equal to 5.5 yards, but the equivalent term rod is perhaps more accurate as perch is also used for area and volume.

awareness in computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW), arguably a specialisation of social computing. As Robertson points out, all new kinds of digital media depend on the phenomena of human motility and mobility, such that we ourselves become their 'intimate mobile hosts' (Robertson, 2005). Indeed, if each new mobile media device can be considered in Merleau-Ponty's (1962) terms a "fresh instrument" which dilates our corporeal being accordingly, are we learning a new range of collective bodily skills, spatial perceptions, postures and habits? Throughout the paper these issues will be discussed in terms of the somewhat strange interconnectivity between user-generated SMS/MMS content and urban screens in the use of *Wiffiti* in the US, and the *IWALL* in Australia.

As Richardson has argued (2005), considering mobile phones and media in terms of their specific corporeal and cultural effects implicitly assumes the much-used media theory concept of medium specificity. Although some might question whether medium specificity is still a central concept at a time of digital convergence, we suggest that each interface (and even experiencing different services and content within the one apparatus) can be interpreted in terms of its specific corporeal and communicative effects. Mobile media interfaces – or more precisely, the increasing array of third generation handsets – can be critically understood as complex and divergent instantiations of new media forms, each demanding a particular mode of embodied interaction. When previously discrete media functionalities come together and are mobilised – for example, by the inclusion of digital camera, television, radio, personal computer, multi-player, Internet and telephone functionalities – what emerges is not a single all-purpose device but a seemingly endless iteration of handsets with varying capabilities and design features, each prioritising a specific *technosomatic* arrangement (Richardson, 2004). Literally, the term *technosoma* connotes the irreducible relation between human bodies and technologies – what Mark Hansen (2006) refers to as the 'originary technicity' of the human, or in Don Ihde's (1993) terms the 'body-technology relation'. These concepts describe the way in which our being-in-the-world (*pace* Heidegger) is always-already a being-with-tools. Within this framework, and against claims for convergent perceptual experiences of media, we argue that we need to attend to the medium specificity of today's screens (large and small), and to the specific modalities and somatic involvements of mobile screens in particular.

This is not to say that the term 'convergence' holds no validity; rather we need a more nuanced or flexible understanding of the relation between convergence and medium specificity. For Henry Jenkins convergence is a term which broadly describes technological, industrial, cultural and social changes, and the complex interaction between old and new media (2006:3). It conveys how consumers "make connections among dispersed media content" (3) such that one technology or interface is used to provide many services, or many interfaces provide access to the same content/service.⁵ Thus convergence is a dynamic *process* that is fundamentally unstable, wherein divergent modes of delivering the same content (such as watching a movie via cinema, TV, PC or mobile phone) combine in complex ways with services that come together in the same interface (such as accessing telephony, Internet and broadcast media from your handset).

Clearly cross-platform interaction between the Internet, mobile phones, personal computers and the physical environment further complexifies the relation between software and hardware convergence and specificity. The application of medium specificity to new and convergent mobile media is also sustained by Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's (2000) concept of remediation (which in some respects is a reworking of Marshall McLuhan's 'laws of media' (1964)). In their collaborative work Bolter and Grusin suggest that this process is complicated by the way that contemporary digital media 'remediate' mature cultural forms and vice versa, either by appropriating and integrating aspects of older media, or incorporating new media developments.

⁵ Interestingly, Jenkins documents how this dynamic process of convergence was predicted by Ithiel de Sola Pool in 1983 (Jenkins, 2006: 10).

For example, the mobile phone 'remediates' photography and home video by rendering their transmission between geographically distant places all but immediate.

Hand-set makers have clearly taken a 'remedial' approach in designing their range of phones; a mobile multimedia device must be a subtle compromise between a multitude of convergent media acquisition methods and experiences while prioritising certain modalities above others. The Nokia N-series, for example, comprises half a dozen phones with enhanced camera and video editing capabilities for the mobile film-maker and content creator, enabling the capture of creativity 'on the fly'⁶. Similarly, LG have developed handsets specifically as 'music phones' (such as the U830 and L600V) with music controls on the front and stereo Bluetooth for wireless headphones. It is apparent that specific media and entertainment needs demand a redesigned interface, varying utility and functionality, and a consequent variety of handsets. As Lev Manovich points out, the making-apparent of mobile phone specificity to the consumer means that the interface is no longer transparent but treated – in itself – as an event (2006: 2). Indeed, using one's mobile phone becomes an aesthetic, corporeal and meaningful experience; the phone becomes a 'sensorial whole' of textures, colours, lines, materials, movements, and sounds (Manovich 2006: 3). In this environment of proliferating handsets it is relevant to examine the perceptual specificity of our interactions with, and experiences of, the mobile phone, and the ways in which the prioritisation of modes of use (listening to music, watching TV, film-making and editing, photography, web browsing, gaming, video-phoning, texting and media-messaging) reflect different relationships between users, content, handsets, and the physical environments or spatial contexts.

Moreover, as the mobile device 'makes room' for media, it is not the case that media content/creation is superseding communication, but rather that there is a complex merging of mobile-enabled media and communicative practices. Such hybrid practices are evidenced by the phenomena of 'moblogging', using a personal mobile phone as a camera and documentary photo archive, SMS/MMS-ing posts to public forums and urban screens, and 'showing and telling' one's immediate surrounds by video-phoning (itself an often discomfiting hybrid of video conferencing and mobile voice telephony). In this paper we are interested in the latter two of these practices, and, more generally, the phenomenology of mobile phone use and the embodiment of handheld screen devices as hybridised new media and communication forms. In both cases the mobile phone is a focal device, yet both interfaces afford quite different attitudes, postures, motility and body-space relations – what Kenton O'Hara et al. (2006) refer to as micro- and macro-mobilities (respectively, small and 'handy' motor movements such as those required by orientation of the mobile screen or use of the number pad, and 'larger' full-bodied or pedestrian actions such as walking while talking/texting). In other words, each interface educes its own medium-specific mode of embodiment and use. Before turning to the use of urban screens as spaces for mobile content, however, we will elaborate briefly on the theoretical basis of our critique of the screen-body relation in contemporary culture.

Merleau-Ponty famously claimed that the body "applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument" (1964: 5), an 'application' that depends as much on the specificities of perception and bodily movement as it does on the materiality of the tool-in-use. In his well-known description of the blind man and his stick, Merleau-Ponty describes how the corporeal schema of the body 'dilates' and 'retracts' to accommodate tools:

The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch and providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressively as a middle term: the blind man is aware of it through the position of objects rather than of the position of objects through it. The position of things is immediately given through

⁶ See <http://www.nokia.com/nseries/index.html>

the extent of the reach that carries him to it, which comprises, besides the arm's reach, the stick's range of action (1964: 22).

This quote describes the actuality of what Merleau-Ponty refers to as our corporeal or body *schema*, which is not determined by the boundaries of the material body but rather reflects the way that our corporeality extends and retracts – changing its very reach and shape – in its dynamic apprehension of tools and things in the world. Merleau-Ponty argued that this schematic is inherently open, allowing us to incorporate technologies and equipment into our own perceptual and corporeal organisation. Indeed it could be argued that the corporeal schema is just another name for Hansen's "originary technicity of the human" (2006: ix).

In these terms we see how the specificity of media interfaces and apparatuses is deeply integral to our individual and collectively realised corporeal schemas. Subsequent theorists such as Don Ihde (1993) and David Morris (2004) have complexified this body-tool relation by including the nuances of personal practices and cultural specificity. As Morris states: "The dynamics of perception...are not anchored in a fixed, objective framework, they are intrinsic to the situation of perception, and can differ across individuals, habits, and social setting" (2004: 23). Of course, we would add to this list of influences the specificity of media technologies and interfaces; in fact, considering the number of hours that many people spend engaging with media, the body-screen relation may be one of our most significant relations.

For Paul Dourish (2001), human-computer interaction is an embodied phenomenon that happens in and is framed by a world that is both physical and social. Dourish argues that embodiment is not restricted to physical reality, rather, it is "the property of being manifest in and part of the world", encompassing physical and social phenomena unfolding in the world in which we, and our interactions, are situated:

[The] meaning of a technology is not inherent in the technology but arises from how that technology is used. Meaning is something that comes about through an encounter with the technology (or with other people) and so arises from the interaction between parties. (p. 239)

At the very least, as theorists such as Don Ihde (1993) have shown, the fragmentary and disparate nature of contemporary vision is the partial effect of the many screens encountered in the everyday — televisual, cinematic, information/text display, closed-circuit, video, mobile — each with their own technical, environmental and interfacial specificities. Our use of handheld screens on-the-move further disrupts the corporeal schema particular to screen and televisual media; our relationship with the mobile phone as a multi-sensory device which can be used as a dedicated aural *or* visual medium, for example, can effectively shift eye-behaviour from a continual fixed-ness on the screen to a sporadic, oscillating and context-dependent mode of viewing. And, as Goggin notes, camera phones have brought about a new way of recording social and cultural contexts; they occupy "a dynamic and contingent niche in a rapidly changing scene of digital photography, image circulation, and visual culture" (Goggin, 2006: 153). Even so, we can't generalise across all mobile media; as we suggest below, the visual demands of the videophone sit awkwardly with other habitual routines of mobile phone use.

It is worth mentioning, in the context of a study of mobile media and small-screen technologies, that phenomenology conceives of movement, mobility, motility, and gesture as fundamental to our somatic involvement with the world, and integral to visual perception. This means that the corporeal schema is not primarily fixed in, or constituted by, our physiology or cognitive capacities which then form some kind of blueprint for interaction; rather, it is an emergent and dynamic *relation* with our environment – it "comes from movement" (Morris, 2004: 33) and is therefore always a mode of 'doing', always situated and contextual.

In a general sense, as bodies we clearly have a frontal and gravitational ontology that impacts upon the way in which we perceive and navigate screens. The emergent body-tool relation we have with mobile screens has seen adjustments to this corporeal schematic; for example, the postures surrounding mobile phone photography, the practice of 'sharing' one's screen with others, or, more simply, developing habitual skills, such as becoming adept at texting while walking. In these cases the dedicated frontal orientation we have towards screens becomes compromised by our mobility, the screen size and resolution, and the interrupted nature of mobile phone use.

After the development of the camera phone it seemed possible that video calls and MMS would become fashionable, if not predominant, modes of communication. Yet, as Goggin points out, as 3G and 4G mobiles become part of network media more generally, the most "intensive activity and cultural ferment" around mobile camera and video phone use (especially user-generated content) came from the Internet (Goggin, 2006: 151). Such a shift, as new media theorists have claimed for digital and online interactive media in general, means that 'consumers' become 'users' and creators, a development that has popularised the term 'user-generated' content. The proliferation of mobile online activities –via mobile phones, laptops, pagers, PDAs, MP3 players and other hand-holds – has also changed the way we think about being 'on', 'at' or 'in' a simulated or computer space, and the way we think about being 'on' or 'off' line (Lantz, 2006: 4). As Adriana de Souza e Silva argues: "Because many mobile devices are constantly connected to the Internet, as is the case of the i-mode standard in Japan (NTT DoCoMo, 2006) users do not perceive physical and digital spaces as separate entities and do not have the feeling of 'entering' the Internet, or being immersed in digital spaces, as was generally the case when one needed to sit down in front of a computer screen and dial a connection" (2006: 263). Being online and networked thus becomes another function of the mobile phone, but it is importantly a *different* experience of the Internet and online connectivity: the supposedly dematerialising effects of cyberspace and telepresent interaction become enfolded inside present contexts, at best scattered moments amidst an array of other micro- and macromobilities, like the embodied and itinerant acts of walking, driving, face-to-face communication and numerous other material and somatic involvements.⁷

One of the consequences of this mobile-online merger has been a turn towards 'locative media' – interfaces enabled by GPS which can determine where we are in geographical space, and 'behave' accordingly by providing us with context-aware information (and communicating this information to other mobiles and/or online computers in realtime). Apart from the much talked about phenomenon of location-based gaming,⁸ emergent mobile-online activities include moblogging, the spread of online made-for-mobile movie repositories such as Mobifest⁹, and public message-boarding. One significant effect of the rise of locative and location-based media is a breakdown in our perception that virtual online interaction (often referred to as cyberspace) and the physical space of our local and material environment are distinct experiential domains. For example, posting text and images via the web to a screen in a social space such as a bar or café, or onto even larger urban screens,¹⁰ effectively cuts across virtual and actual spheres of communication and information.

There is a substantial body of related work on smaller scale urban screens used as interactive digital noticeboards in public places within place-based communities. Examples include *eyeCanvas*, which

⁷ Though it is not possible to expand on the following point here, the 'corporeal turn' in cultural and post-semiotic theory, which has incorporated the work of Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists, has been used effectively as a counter-argument against those who claim that online interaction is 'disembodied'. In this context, the oppositional relation between virtual and locative spaces would be moot, since both dedicated internet use and use of context-aware mobile devices would be considered different ways of being embodied, each educating distinctive corporeal schematics.

⁸ See McMullan and Richardson (2006).

⁹ See <http://mobifest.net/>

¹⁰ Struppek describes *The People's Portraits* by Zhang Ga which enabled people to send their photos around the world to a network of city screens such as the one in Times Square, New York (Struppek 178).

provides café information and public scribbling in a San Francisco café and art gallery (Churchill et al, 2006), *CowCam*, which incorporates a digital camera trained on a small set of animal figurines in a Portland café (Sherry et al, 2005), *MobiLenin*, which supports control of a multi-track music video via mobile phones in an Oulu restaurant/bar (Scheible and Ojala, 2005), and an adaptation of the Hermes photo display for the Wray post office (Taylor et al, 2007). Much of this work has a socio-technical focus, applying novel technologies to the enhancement of place and community. Both *eyeCanvas* and *CowCam* involve close, relatively private interactions (scribbling and posing figurines respectively), with effects revealed on the publicly visible screen. In contrast, *MobiLenin* and the Wray system use mobile phones as intermediaries for interactions at a distance (but still within the confines of the particular public places).

It is the online multi-user or 'glocal' aspect of moblogging and messaging to urban screens that is of interest here. In their introduction to the edited collection *Public and Situated Displays* (2003), O'Hara et al. suggest that public displays structure group activities, "complementing verbal communications and shaping group dynamics" (xvii), and impacting upon our communicative and embodied experience of public space. More recently, developments in networked computer technologies have enabled innovative possibilities in the linking of mobile devices with urban screens. At a recent conference on Urban Screens, Maria Stukoff stated that next generation mobile phone users are primed to engage "with cinema on-the-go, mini galleries and cultural information via their hand-held devices" (Stukoff, 2006). Indeed, as she suggests, mobile devices that deliver broadcast and online media should themselves be considered "viable" urban screens and vital nodes in the network that delivers content to these media interfaces. In what follows we comment on the specific body-screen relation particular to this connectivity between mobile phones and urban screens, referring to *Wiffiti* and *IWALL*.

The mobile phone graffiti board 'Wiffiti' (a contraction of the words wireless and graffiti, with a play on the term Wi-Fi), has been placed in cafés and bars in several U.S. cities, allowing anybody who knows the number and code to post text messages to the yard-scale screen¹¹. The messages are updated by-the-minute, and can be viewed in the venue and on the Wiffiti website as slowly shifting sedimentary layers of text "reminiscent of a tag cloud" (Green, 2006). The purpose of Wiffiti, according to its creators, is to "empower public expression..., fostering an open and strong sense of citizenship and community" (<http://www.wiffiti.com/>), a desire reflective of the proliferation of 'Web 2.0' services that provide web-based interfaces that facilitate the free upload and management of user-generated 'glocal' content. Although it is possible to post messages remotely and grab screen shots from the website, an important feature of Wiffiti is that it is located spatially 'in-the-world' and temporally 'in-the-moment', focusing not on a multi-player community (as with location-based games), but on the more immediate and co-located community socialising face-to-face while 'sharing' the normally exclusive privacy of SMS.

From a phenomenological perspective, Wiffiti is experienced unlike any other domestic, urban, large or small screen. The image is comprised of chronologically layered text (the most recent post being largest and overlaying previous messages), with a meandering, fragmentary or non-existent 'narrative' in the typical abridged style of SMS-speak (depending on the frequency of and interaction between each post). As such, it requires only an occasional casual glance without necessary orientation towards the screen. As with our often sporadic engagement with the mobile phone screen, this runs counter to the suggestion that proliferating private and public media interfaces have us fixated on the 'virtual window', and for the most part immobilised by the continuous frontal demands of the screen interface. In Heidi Rae Cooley's terms, it is also a tactile vision once-removed, as the mobile phone screen serves as an intermediary holding-place for the message prior to its dissipating existence on the large screen. The cross-platform nature of the

¹¹ See <http://www.wiffiti.com/>

Wiffiti phenomenon – the website also links to a lively blog called “txt out loud”¹² –coalesces the urban, computer and mobile screens, suggesting that we need to consider the *hybridised* and *networked* disposition of contemporary mediated vision.

The *IWALL* is an interactive digital display system developed within the Suburban Communities project in the Australasian CRC for Interaction Design (ACID) and installed in a number of public venues. It acts as a digital community notice-board for the community to add and alter content via their mobile phones. The content is ‘scraped’ from the Internet or provided by the public. Initial observations pointed to the impact of the spatial positioning or situatedness of the *IWALL* in each of its various deployments upon the user-interaction experience. For example, in the ‘transitional’ space of the staircase landing in a university building, people were reluctant to halt their pedestrian progress for casual and spontaneous image upload, which can be contrasted to the *IWALL* ‘installation’ at an arts festival where playful interaction is part of the art experience, and to the Wiffiti-like screen encouraging co-locative interpersonal interaction in a café in Brisbane. Indeed, as O’Hara et al (2003) notes, the content modality of public displays (i.e., video, text, image, fixed or evolving content, informational or creative content etc), and the way that content is interpreted and engaged with, is bound to the ‘situatedness’ of the urban screen (e.g., in a gallery, public thoroughfare, café or other ‘third place’), and the way this positioning locates bodies in space, demanding particular postures, gestures and ways of moving through the environment. In Michel de Certeau’s terms, urban screens, and mobile-urban screen interconnectivity, dynamically reworks the spatial order of the urban environment and opens up a new ‘ensemble of possibilities’ (1984: 98). We illustrate this point in our discussion of the *IWALL* below.

The initial *IWALL* deployment was at University of Technology Sydney (UTS) on a staircase landing in the Design and Architecture building (Figure 1). The prototype was rear-projected onto a translucent wall and displayed video of passers-by, local weather observations, RSS feeds of campus and national news, and photos and images submitted locally from mobile phones via Bluetooth.

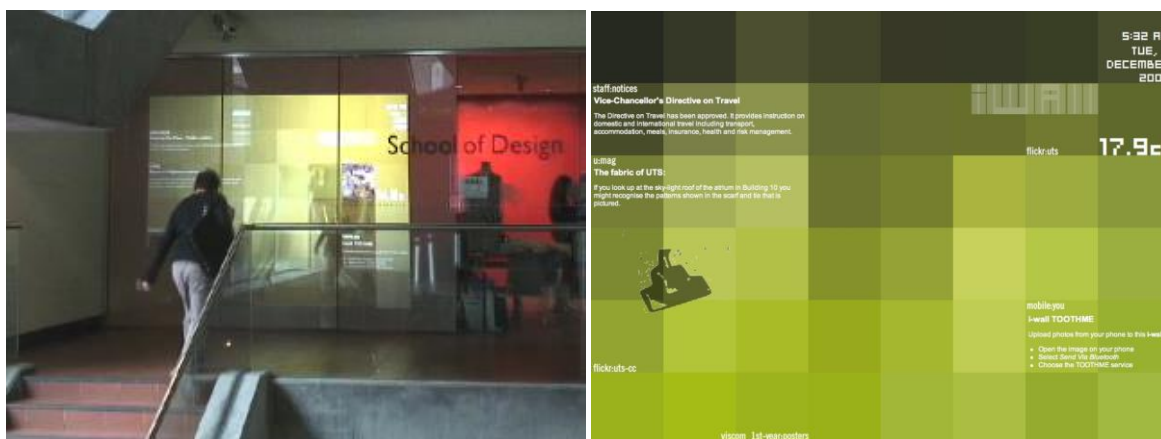


Figure 1: UTS *IWALL* prototype deployment

As indicated above, in our initial observations the UTS deployment revealed issues arising from its location in a ‘transitional’ space, which obliged people to stop mid-passage on their ‘motivated’ or intentional way to somewhere else in the building. We suggest that this is an effect of both our communicative and corporeal habits when using mobile devices, i.e., we are unaccustomed to coalescing our experiences with mobile screens (as interpersonal and portable) and urban screens (as public and fixed), and as communicative devices they clearly induce quite distinct kinds of content. Yet such habits or our individual and collective technosoma are rapidly changing with the

¹² See <http://www.wiffiti.com/txtoutloud/>

proliferation of handsets with multi-media functionality, and the evolution of the mobile phone as a cross-platform media hybrid.

In phenomenological terms, we are also unused to being 'hailed' by urban screens to upload our own mobile content; moreover, the requirement to upload images, via Bluetooth or MMS, rather than text via SMS also proved problematic, as it is evident that people have different attitudes towards image and text-based mobile communication that are accentuated by the invitation to post content on an urban screen. In particular, posting photos and images provokes concerns about privacy, security and liability, and discomfort about the opening up of connectivity between one's handheld device and an urban screen. Indeed as noted by a number of theorists (e.g. Okabe and Ito, 2005; Richardson, 2007), more so than the digital camera, the mobile phone is ever-present – a portable, personal, safe and always-accessible data archive carried on the body – educing a particular kind of ubiquitous visual access, a photo-readiness enabling the capture of immediate and often intimate objects and events. One implication of this intimacy is that mobile phone photos are frequently shared by physically showing one's mobile phone screen to friends in face-to-face interaction, rather than via the mobile phone network.

The most recent *IWALL* prototype adopts Wiffiti-esque SMS-based interaction and visual aesthetic to explore self-moderation (similar to physical noticeboards), support for cafés as 'third places', and interpersonal co-proximate communication via mobile-urban screen connectivity. The prototype (Figure 2) has been developed for a café in the retail hub of the Kelvin Grove Urban Village (KGUV), an inner-suburban, master-planned infill development in Brisbane, Australia. In this prototype SMS is used to lower barriers to entry for long-term deployments "in the wild and in the world", providing a basis for understanding issues of embodiment and appropriation.



Figure 2: KGUV *IWALL* prototype screenshot

The Village comprises a diverse and dynamic population consisting of university and college students and staff, short- and long-term workers and retail and research centre staff, and village residents from various socio-economic backgrounds due to a deliberately heterogeneous housing mix. The *IWALL* deployment aims to investigate its potential as an enabler of informal communication among members of this diverse populace when temporarily co-located in a public space. Clearly, the use of SMS rather than MMS, the co-location of users, and the deployment of the prototype in a 'third place' rather than a transitional or open space (i.e., its 'situatedness'), provokes quite a different technosomatic and communicative experience than that observed at UTS. As with Wiffiti, SMS enables direct communication and immediate responses to posted

messages amongst the transitory café 'community', and although it is possible to post from elsewhere in the city, generally communication remains discretely within the café, with patrons engaging in a more laissez-faire and occasional manner with both the large and small screens. Although users of the UTS deployment could also be said to be 'co-located', there is little sense of meaningful or sequential communication, and their orientation to the large screen is more formal, frontal, fixed and deliberate. Moreover, the UTS prototype demanded a 'break' in the activity of walking through the building (users customarily stood facing the large screen during the interaction) whereas both Wiffiti and the *IWALL* at Kelvin Grove require a casual and intermittent orientation to the large screen. Moreover, both Wiffiti and the KGU *IWALL* are integrated into the familiar technosocial activity of texting while in a café, bar or similar third place, and the experience is intermixed with other activities such as face-to-face and mobile conversation, eating and drinking. Such differences in users' experiences of the *IWALL* indicate that we need to account for the specificities of content modality, situatedness, corporeal attitude and habit when addressing the impact of mobile-urban screen interconnectivity.

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In pondering the social-cultural effects of the mobile phone in his aptly named paper 'The Mutable Mobile', Geoff Cooper makes the insightful comment that the mobile phone is an indiscrete technology (2001: 25). In response to the question raised in the introduction to this paper, we suggest that mobile media provoke us to rethink cultural, somatic, perceptual and technical boundaries between the screen and the body, vision and tactility, and telepresent and co-located interaction. At the same time, we need to remember that mobile media and communications devices are works-in-progress "comprising dynamic networks and assemblages" (Goggin, 2006: 12). From a phenomenological perspective, our *soma* is also a dynamic work-in-progress, as we attempt to coordinate technologies and interfaces – often on-the-fly – into our ever-pliable corporeal schemata. In this paper we have articulated several key insights particular to the practice of posting text and media messages to urban screens. Yet this is just one form of mobile phone use amongst an increasing array of possibilities; clearly any analysis and interpretation of the mobile-body relation must remain adaptable to the way our experience and perception 'dilates' to accommodate emerging technical and cultural developments in mobile media and cross-platform communication.

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