Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology Student Journal

Volume 5 | Issue 1 Article 6

2016

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The Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology Student Journal 5(1)

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Abstract

Our relations with the physical world, with others and ourselves, is becoming mediated through technologies, which have increasingly become accessible, diffuse, and invisible, to the point where we often do not think about them or how they impact our experiences. Mobile technologies, such as cell phones, have altered our sense of space and temporality in ways we often do not notice, as conceptualised by Agger as "iTime". However, these forms of technology have now increasingly been used by people as tactics to combat alienation and disenchantment in their everyday life. In this essay, I show how cell phones, MP3 players, and the growing emergence of ubiquitous computing highlight ways that individuals can use technology to engage with their environments and with each other, embedding spaces with new meaning and reinventing them. I also raise some concerns about the capabilities of these mobile technologies.

Technology has altered the way we experience our everyday life in unprecedented ways when you consider how our relations with the physical world, with others and with ourselves, and how these relations have become increasingly mediated through various forms of technology. Although technological advancements were once associated with incredible and elite products that the "common people" could not dream of using, technologies have become increasingly accessible, diffuse, and invisible, to the point where we often do not think about them or how they influence our experiences. Mobile technologies, such as cell phones, have altered our sense of space and temporality in ways we often do not notice, as conceptualised by Agger as "iTime." However, these forms of technology have now increasingly been used by people as tactics to combat alienation and disenchantment within the everyday. Cell phones, MP3 players, and the growing emergence of ubiquitous computing highlight ways that individuals can use technology to engage with their environments and with each other, embedding spaces with new meaning and reinventing them.

In understanding the way technology permeates our everyday, it is useful to begin with some concepts from Lefebvre. Lefebvre described society as undergoing a technicization or cybernetization that was a means to no end other than domination, social control, and fragmentation (Gardiner, 2000). He saw everyday life as being increasingly commodified, routinized, fragmented, and homogenous, which will ultimately lead to social isolation and a lack of intersubjectivity (Gardiner, 2000). Lefebvre is correct about this conclusion in some ways, but he homogenizes social actors to the point where he does not anticipate the myriad rich ways we are able to use technology, which I later show. Lefebvre (1971) was pessimistic about the role of technology; he saw it as being used strategically for the goals of those in power, but having no real social purpose or utility that could improve everyday life, which was one of his revolutionary goals. Contrary to

this, I discuss how certain forms of technology employ various tactics to alter everyday life. Lefebvre (1991) is also critical of the way that modernity has made our sense of time disconnected from our sense of social space, as opposed to the way that time is connected to space in nature, where there is a sense of the seasons, Earth rotations, hours of the day, et cetera. We are constantly in movement, and time is something that simply passes. It is hidden, or rather ignored, and not actually intelligible to us – we spend time without really thinking about what it. Lefebvre (1991) saw the exception to this being the time we spend working; however, Agger (2011) shows how even this is no longer true, with his concept of iTime.

iTime, brought about by smart phones and laptops, allows us to be online anytime and anywhere, which has many consequences for the way we conceptualise and experience time and space – as it blurs the borders of public/private, day/night, and work/leisure (Agger, 2011). Agger (2011) sees iTime as greatly altering our labour: in iTime, labour is mainly writing (emails, texts, et cetera); there is a lack of boundaries between the process and product of work; labour can be done anytime and anywhere; labour reproduces itself, as each message triggers another one; and iTime becomes diffused everywhere.

Indeed, these features of iTime require one to be "on" at any time, because there is always the potential that you can do work. To give an example, project managers are expected to keep their phones on so they can receive work-related messages and calls 24/7. Even if they are not on work-hours or on-call, clients, coworkers, and bosses alike may contact the workers, assuming they will be available and ready to solve everyone's problems no matter where they are (even on days off). If smart phones and laptops give some of us the *ability* to work anywhere and everywhere, it is, nowadays, expected that we *will,* because if we unjustifiably ignore messages or calls, we could risk becoming reprimanded. Indeed, iTime extends the surveillance capabilities of our employers, but this is not seamless; because iTime is so mobile and diffuse, it is difficult to control, and we find ways to resist this surveillance (Agger, 2011). This "always on" status blurs the distinctions of paid and unpaid labour, and of work and leisure. If our senses of time and space were once connected to each other and to our workday (i.e. tied to a particular location and a set time slot), in iTime, they become distorted due to our mobility. Our labour time becomes potentially endless while our leisure time dwindles. We hardly understand the flows and rhythms of time, but it continues to weigh on us; all we know is that we have "too much to do, [and] not enough time to do it" (Agger, 2011:124). This creates the compulsion of having to be connected to others at all times; a *need* for the latest smart phone and laptop technology is created, especially for younger generations, so that we are never disconnected.

For Agger (2011), this constant connectivity is both a way of seeking community, and a diversion or distraction from one's self, one's situation, and the larger questions of history and revolution. Users are both active and passive in their use of these technologies. Although Agger (2011) sees the internet as relatively shallow, and that our texting is often limited in keystrokes and consequently substance, people, especially youth, are writing and reading *constantly*, and it is a short step from channeling this into substantial discourse and critical analysis. I think Agger underestimates youth and the public here,

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as I would argue that this is already happening. Although posts on personal domain blogs, which require someone to go to your webpage to read, are probably not going to reach a large audience, platforms such as Tumblr or Reddit, allow for a mass distribution of posts, sharing your ideas and discourse with a large audience. People, especially youth, are using these websites to generate dialogue and critical analysis about anything from the news, theoretical concepts, media, personal experiences, and more.[1] Users often override even the 140-character limit of Twitter, which can otherwise hinder meaningful discourse, by numbering their tweets pertaining to a certain point they are making, allowing them to be concise but still discuss nuanced issues. Although Tweets and Tumblr posts have the potential of being misunderstood or be taken out of context, potentially losing the larger significance of the text, there is still a way of resisting a format that is meant to make us complacent and uncritical thinkers. I do not accept, as Agger (2011) does, that those living in connectivity cannot be radical thinkers or utopians, because, as we can see, people are intertwining both of those realities constantly. Although iTimes' aim is to commodify human activity through technology, we find ways clever to resist this and attempt to gain control over our time.

Using de Certeau's concept of strategy vs. tactic, we can further explore the way that mobile technologies are used in the everyday as a form of resistance and to gain control over our time, spaces, and environment. De Certeau (2002) saw two types of spatial practises (ways in which we alter and appropriate objects/spaces for our own needs) that shape urban spaces: strategies and tactics (Liao and Humphreys, 2015). Strategies are visible manifestations of power that occupy a physical place, for example, governments having the authority to design and control spaces; tactics are dispersed and temporal ways (ordinary) people create meaning and move through these spaces subversively (de Certeau, 2002).

Urban spaces are often not created with the needs and desires of the individual in mind. They are places we are meant to pass through, often on our way to work, but not necessarily engage with or feel comfortable in. Bull (2007) describes these spaces as "chilly" and "cold" in their inability to meet our desire for proximity and warmth. Indeed, the spaces often reflect the monotony, routine, and miseries of the everyday in capitalism and its failure to meaningfully engage us. For Bull (2007) and Lefebvre (1991), music is a way for individuals to compensate for this and gain control over urban spaces. Mobile listening devices, such as MP3 players, allow us to listen to our large music collections anywhere and everywhere, creating a self-curated soundtrack for our day. Music allows us to create our own personalised rhythms of the everyday. In a sense, music can be used to combat the messiness of iTime, in that we often ground ourselves in our music. That is, we use it to measure time – like a clock – which in turn connects our sense of time to the music we are listening to in the everyday.

For example, short of constantly checking your clock, you often do not how much "real" time has passed during a commute through the city, but you know that it has been five songs. Music provides a sense of companionship and intimacy as you are moving alone through the city. However, Bull (2007) argues that in the

[1] Although do not get me wrong, a lot of the content on the internet remains trite and offensive.

midst of using music to create our own individual warm spaces, we risk further isolating ourselves from others and the environment. While I concur with the former, for many people music does not isolate us from the environment, but allows us to enhance our experience of the physical environment. For example, someone might use certain music to fit the tone or mood that they get from the environment, or use it to imagine themselves in a film, with the physical space as their setting and the music as their soundtrack. However, not all hope for meaningful engagement with spaces and with other people is lost when we use technology, as we will see with the possibilities of ubiquitous computing.

Ubiquitous computing involves any combination of "networked, mobile, embedded, location and context-aware technologies that can support anywhere, anytime communication" (Galloway, 2013:53). This includes the global position system (GPS), a location-aware software, and radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, context-aware software that can be embedded into almost any object and uses radio signals to obtain and share data between mobile and fixed computing devices (Galloway, 2004). The initial aim was to make ubiquitous computing embedded in our everyday lives in a way that they are invisible (Galloway, 2004). Like many aspects of the everyday, this means that we may take the computing for granted, which is dangerous as it prevents us from thinking about the way our experiences increasingly become negotiated through these technologies.

However, the belief was that it was best for these technologies to be invisible so that we focused less on them and more on our own consciousness and lives, and in our relationships to other people and the environment (Galloway, 2004). There was a common rhetoric around ubiquitous computing being "calm;" by keeping the computing functioning but out of the way, it were meant to make people feel serene, at home, and in control (Galloway, 2004; Galloway, 2008). This is reminiscent of Bull's use of the word "warmth" when discussing the use of personal music in urban spaces. We can also recall Felski's (2000) discussion of "home" and everyday life. Felski (2000) asserts that the discourse of modernity advocates for mobility, movement, and boundary crossing, and Agger would argue that "post-modernity", such as in iTime, blurs these boundaries even further.

In contrast, our conception of "home" is a familiar, dull, static space, and therefore location antithetical to the goals of modernity (Felski, 2000). Of course, this distinction between home and not home is not actually this clear-cut and Felski (2000) sees home as any often-visited space whose familiarity becomes a manifestation of the self, layered with meaning and memory. With ubiquitous computing, this aim for "calm technology," we can see a rejection of that first home/non-home dichotomy, and an embracing of Felski's definition. This technology suggests that there is something in our everyday that is distinctly *not* serene, that the hustle and bustle of everyday modernity leaves us cold and uncomfortable. There is a desire to negotiate a balance between embracing the mobile and flighty nature of modernity, and feeling grounded enough in something familiar so that we can still function calmly, and ubiquitous computing is offered as a solution to that. Ubiquitous computing, as an extension of "home", also allows us to layer spaces with meaning, a point I return to later on. On one hand, this calmness would indeed allow us to focus more on our realities, on our relationships with others and

with the environment, if we are pacified by the technologies yet are not focusing on them. On the other hand, this invisible and calm ubiquitous computing can work to pacify the public to the extent that they are not thinking about technology as it influences their everyday, indeed they are not thinking about the everyday much at all, and are thus not revolutionarily motivated.

When something in everyday life remains invisible, such as technology, it can be used as a strategy of the powerful, and it can keep the public complacent and unassuming. A lot of the pushback against ubiquitous computing was because of the fear surrounding transparency, privacy, and surveillance (Bohn et al., 2005; Galloway, 2004; Galloway, 2008). The "anytime, anywhere" aspects of ubiquitous computing greatly extends GPS and RFID capabilities, which can be used by corporations and governments to track and monitor individuals, whether for marketing purposes or more nefarious reasons, in ways that would normally otherwise be restrained by space, time, and social boundaries. This puts individuals' privacy at risk, if the technology is indeed so ubiquitous that we do not have a choice in whether or not we wish to participate, and in what information is obtained. If this computing is invisible and hidden in the background, we may not even know *when* we are under surveillance or interacting with the technology, just that it is always a possibility.

The dual action of surveillance and documentation that some ubiquitous computing technology is capable of is particularly troubling in the way it reflects Foucault's (1995) analysis of the role of the Panopticon in everyday life. The knowledge that you can be watched at any time, and the uncertainty in knowing whether or not you are being watched, can lead people to regulate their own behaviours and actions in compliance with the norms they are taught to follow (Foucault, 1995). With enough repetition, they may possibly internalise the norms, which subsequently makes them more likely to conform to them, as they now believe the norms are necessary. Documentation further exasperates this effect, as it makes people not just constantly "visible", but objects to be known; we become constructed and differentiated by documentation throughout our lives (Foucault, 1995). With ubiquitous computing, people, places, and objects are "coded", a process of "identification and…layering and cross-layering…these identifications through software algorithms" (Crang and Graham, 2007:796). With documentation, it is easier to normalise behaviours, bodies, attitudes, et cetera, in the everyday, and therefore identify norm violations that must be "corrected." When used by those in power, ubiquitous computing can just be another means of regulating bodies and behaviours in the everyday. Its all-encompassing nature, as well as its invisibility, can function to keep people passive and docile. Partly because of these concerns, ubiquitous computing researchers are advocating for more "visibility" in the technology, as well as piloting more projects that are meant to be used by "regular people", individually or collectively, not necessarily corporations (Galloway, 2004; Galloway, 2008).

Certain ubiquitous computing technologies as used by the masses in everyday life are ways of augmenting our realties and environments, re-imbuing our environments with meaning, and sharing them with others. In other words, the technologies can be used as tactics to resist the alienation of everyday life. It necessarily implies that there is something lacking about everyday life in modernity. It shows that we

can recognise our disenchanted experiences in the everyday, and are motivated toward improving them and having engaged relationships with the environment. Even if we may not all be able to put a name to the issue, we know that *something* should and can be fixed. Mixed-reality spaces are those that combine elements of physical and virtual worlds; a concept closely related to the visions for ubiquitous computing is "amplified reality", which is about "enhancing the expressions of objects and people in the world" (Galloway, 2004, p. 390). As opposed to simply altering our impressions of objects, ubiquitous computing enhances the environment/object itself, as well as our engagement with it.

Many of these technologies reflect the Situationist techniques of *dérive* ("play"-driven urban nomadism) and *détournement* (appropriating cultural/textual materials for resistance and criticism), as well as de Certeau's "tactics", with users attempting to regain control over their time and space and construct their own lived realities (Galloway, 2004; Gardiner, 2000). The project *Sonic City* turns the city into a musical instrument, allowing people to create music as they walk through urban spaces, with the use of wearable and context-aware devices that identify place, time, situation, and activity, and apply it to audio creation (Galloway, 2004; Galloway, 2013). This takes using music as a soundtrack as you wander through the city one-step further. Here you are not just choosing pre-made music from your collection to listen to, you are actively creating music as you go about your journey, which directly reflects your current reality, engaging the user with their environment while they meander through the space. *Tejp* is a prototype that lets people record messages and then leave these audio tags in public spaces where they are shared with passers-by who choose to either engage with them or hear the messages by accident as they walk by the tag (Galloway, 2004). This allows users to not only playfully engage with their environment, annotating and re-creating spaces, but to welcome other people into their engagement as well, sharing the space together in a particular way. This allows for intimate, yet fleeting, connections to be made between people who would have otherwise likely not have interacted. *Glitch* is a project where speakers are hidden in public spaces and make loud glitch noises when passersby get incoming messages or calls (Galloway, 2004). This abrupt noise, although probably very annoying, disrupts and de-familiarises something so common in our everyday that we rarely think about it,—the use of our cell phones—drawing attention to them and their place in our lives.

Layar is a mobile augmented reality browser that allows users to create content reflecting about and through spaces, showing their relationships to and interpretations of these spaces (Liao and Humphreys, 2015). Interestingly, however, increasingly *Layar* users are creating content that historicises and challenges the meanings of place, as well as adding their own narratives (Liao and Humphreys, 2015). The program uses "points of interest (POIs), user-created annotations, or graphics based on the…GPS location of the device," letting other users download content layers and overlay that content onto a physical space by pointing their mobile device at it (Liao and Humphreys, 2015:1419). This allows users to appropriate spaces and visually imbue them with their own meanings, significance, and memory. It also allows them to engage with the content of others, opening themselves up to new perspectives and sharing an intimate connection with a likely

stranger, as well as to share their own content with others.

Liao and Humphreys (2015) find that this can change the user's perceptions of place, and the participants in their study express that they look at spaces differently even when they are not using the program; they are constantly thinking about ways to augment their environments. One distinct way *Layar,* and augmented reality in general, is used is to create memorials of people or events (Liao and Humphreys, 2015). For example, *The Border Memorial: Frontera de los Muertos,* adds augmented *calacas* (Oaxacan skeletons honouring the deceased) on spaces near the US/Mexico border where remains have been found; the project is meant to memorialise and honour the thousands of migrants who died trying to cross the border (Liao and Humphreys, 2015). This allows users to reframe the way they think about and relate to the space, and to the larger political issue, with this new politicised meaning incorporated into the physical location. This draws attention to an often-ignored issue,—the plights and struggles of Mexican migrants, particularly undocumented workers—refusing to be complacent. By situating the augmented images in real public locations, it adds previously silenced narratives to these spaces, as well as challenges the meanings that have been created about them (the US/Mexico border) by those in power (the US government). Although they do not necessarily change the physical spaces, which are produced and controlled strategically by those with power, these technologies allow users to tactically move through the spaces, reinterpreting them in their own ways.

It is difficult to know where the limit to these technologies would be, but they need to be designed with limits in mind. While many of the individual uses I discussed are positive, the point where they become troublesome is when they start to prevent people from experiencing the city on their own terms. While we do need to understand and negotiate what ubiquitous computing means for human/non-human relations (Galloway, 2013), it is important that we do not become controlled by the technologies, and do not lose our abilities to meaningfully engage with our environments and with others. For example, the program *Ample Time* provides users with context-aware spatial and temporal information about locations on a digital map, suggesting routes for you to take and places to discover (Galloway, 2004).

However, as Galloway (2004) points out, this is commercialised as businesses presumably need to pay to have themselves included in the program, and the program encourages people to go to stores and other locations of consumption. These types of technology can be seen as reflecting utopic visions of progress, as being "solutions" to "problems" and "needs", the enduring promise that science will greatly improve our qualities of life, even with "science's" history of reproducing existing power structures (Bohn et al., 2005; Galloway, 2008). It is important that we continue to question the ways that these technologies operate and how they relate to us, our environments, our everyday, and larger global implications, so that we do not risk allowing something as impactful as technology fade into the background and be taken for granted. We cannot simply assume that these technologies, or any, are neutral and will only have benign uses.

It is undeniable the way that our everyday lives are mediated by technology. Some outcomes, such as iTime, which confuses our conceptualisations of space

and time, can be troublesome. Using de Certeau's concept of spatial practises, I showed how technologies could be used in our everyday lives to gain control over our time, spaces, and environment, such as with mobile listening devices and ubiquitous computing. It is important, however, that we do not allow technologies, and the way they operate and interact with us, to be invisible. This invisibility, although with the good intentions of keeping us calm and comfortable, can have the dangerous consequence of rendering us too complacent in our everyday and unassuming of the alienation of modernity. We must constantly negotiate our relationships to these technologies, and not allow ourselves to become consumed by them, but to instead use them for our own ends to make meaningful connections with the environment and other people.

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