Mobile Phones, Japanese Youth, and the Re-placement of Social Contact

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9.1 Introduction

The mobile phone is often perceived as an emblematic technology of space–time compression, touted as a tool for anytime, anywhere connectivity. Discussions of young people's mobile phone use, in particular, often stress the liberatory effects of mobile media, and how it enables young people to escape the demands of existing social structures and parental surveillance. This chapter argues that the mobile phone can indeed enable communication that crosses prior social boundaries, but this does not necessarily mean that the devices erode the integrity of existing places or social identities. While Japanese youth actively use mobile phones to overcome limitations inherent in their weak social status, their usage is highly deferential to institutions of home and school and the integrity of existing places. Taking up the case of how Japanese teens' mobile phone use is structured by the power geometries of place, this chapter argues that characteristics of mobile phones and mobile communication are not inherent in the device, but are determined by social and cultural context and power relations. After first presenting the methodological and conceptual framework for this chapter, I present ethnographic material in relation to the power dynamics and regulation of different kinds of places: the private space of the home, the classroom, the public spaces of the street and public transportation, and the virtual space of peer connectivity enabled by mobile communications.

9.2 Method and Conceptual Framework

9.2.1 Research

This chapter draws from ongoing ethnographic research on mobile phone use and location, centered at Keio Shonan Fujisawa Campus near Tokyo. I draw primarily from two different sets of data. One is a set of ethnographic interviews I conducted in the winter of 2000 with 24 high school and college students about their use of media, including mobile phones. The central body of data behind this paper is a set of 24 "communication diaries" and interviews collected between July and February 2003 with Daisuke Okabe. For this study, our intent was to capture the usage patterns of particular individuals. We adapted data collection methods piloted by Rebecca Grinter and Margery Eldridge (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001), where they asked 10 teenagers to record the time, content, length, location and recipient (or sender) of all text messages for seven days. As with interviews, this data collection method still relies on second-hand accounting, but has the advantage of providing much more detail on usage than can be recalled in a stand-alone interview.

We expanded the communication log to include voice calls and mobile Internet, and more details about the location and context of use. Participants were asked to keep records of every instance of mobile phone use, including voice, short text messages, e-mail and web use, for a period of two days. They noted the time of the usage, who they were in contact with, whether they received or initiated the contact, where they were, what kind of communication type was used, why they chose that form of communication, who was in the vicinity at the time, if there were any problems associated with the usage and the content of the communication. After completion of the diaries, we conducted in-depth interviews that covered general attitudes and background information relevant to mobile phone use and detailed explication of key instances of usage recorded in the diaries. Our study involved seven high school students (aged 16–18), six college students (aged 18–21), two housewives with teenage children (in their forties) and nine professionals (aged 21–51). The gender split was roughly equal, with 11 males and 13 females. A total of 594 instances of communication were collected for the high school and college students and 229 for the adults. The majority of users were in the Tokyo Kanto region. Seven were recruited in the Osaka area in southern Japan to provide some geographic variation. This paper focuses on the communications of the high school and college students. I turn now to the theoretical and conceptual framework for the analysis.

9.2.2 Mobile Phones and Youth

In countries where there is widespread adoption, there are cross-cultural similarities in the intersection of youth and mobile phones. For example, Ling and Yttri (2002) describe adolescence as a unique time in the lifecycle, how peers play a central role during this period, and how the mobile phone becomes a tool to "define a sense of group membership, particular vis-à-vis the older generation (2002, p. 162). In a more recent paper, Ling and Yttri (to be published) extended this developmental perspective to examine how mobile phone use is located in the power relations of family and peer group. A growing body of work with teens in locations such as the UK (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Green, 2003, to be published; Taylor and Harper, 2003), Finland (Kasesniemi and Rautianinen 2002; Kasesniemi, 2003), Norway (Skog, 2002) and Sweden (Weilenmann and Larsson, 2002) finds similar patterns in other countries. Text messaging appears as a uniquely teen-inflected form of mobile communication, in that is lightweight, less intrusive, less subject to peripheral monitoring, inexpensive and allows easy contact with a spatially distributed peer group (Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Kasesniemi and Rautianinen, 2002; Ling and Yttri, 2002).

Our data and other material on Japan (Matsuda, 2000, 2005b; Okada and Matsuda, 2002; Yoshii et al., 2002; Habuchi, 2005) also support these general findings. My analysis here, however, focuses less on the distinctive qualities of youth communication and more on the institutional and material conditions in which this distinctiveness is produced. Rather than locating the affinity between messaging and youth in the developmental imperatives of teens, I take a context-driven approach. I argue that the practices and cultures of youth are not solely outcomes of a certain state of developmental maturity, or even of interpersonal relations, but are also conditioned by the regulative and normative force of places. I shift the center of attention from the practices and identities of youth themselves to their institutional and cross-generational surrounds.

Behind our approach is the "new paradigm" in childhood studies that has argued that "youth" and "childhood" are categories constructed and consumed by people of all ages, and produced in particular power-geometries (James and Prout, 1997; James et al., 1998). In other words, youth practices need to be analyzed in relation to adult social structures that limit and regulate youth activity as well as discourses and research frameworks that often construct youth as frivolous and not fully "socialized". Modern teens, despite their physical and psychological maturity, do not yet have access to a full repertoire of adult rights, responsibilities and resources, such as their own homes where they can meet friends, and lovers, or a workplace where they are considered productive members of society (as opposed to "consumers" and "learners"). Teens are considered

legitimate objects of external regulation, control and redirection in a way that even young adults are not. While enjoying mobile phone use to stay in touch with friends and current technology and fashion trends, young people also use these devices to push back at their own disenfranchised position within adult-controlled institutions and spaces of activity. I cut our data along these lines as well. I apply the category of youth to those institutionalized as such – high school and college students who are financially dependent on adults.

Among the many contextual factors that drive youth patterns of mobile media usage (Ito and Okabe, to be published), our focus here is on the structuring force of place. For a theory of place, I look to cultural geographical conversations on new media. I see place as a hybrid of the social, cultural, and material (including technology, architecture and geography). Massey's (1993) insistence that hierarchical relations are key components of place-making are particularly important in the analysis. Critiquing "easy and excited notions of generalized and undifferentiated space-time compression", Massey argues that

> different social groups are placed in very distinct ways in relation to late modern flows of media, people, and capital. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility; some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey, 1993, p. 61).

I draw from Massey's framing, but also work further to specify the particularities of these power geometries of space–time compression by looking at the particularities of intergenerational power dynamics. Just as social theory has interrogated race, class and gender, generational dynamics need to be analyzed with a similar social structural lens (Alanen, 2001). Further, it is not only that certain people are differentially located within power geometries. The same person can be alternatively in control or lacking control of communicative and cultural flows depending on lifecycle stage, different spatial and temporal locations and their access to new technology. Youth communications are regulated by peers or adults depending on place and time of day, and that access to mobile media takes a central role in managing and inflecting that control. Conceptually, our approach shares much in common with Green's (2002) and Ling and Ytrri's (to be published) analysis of the role of mobile phones in surveillance and monitoring between adults and teens and among teens. Mobile phones are embedded in existing power geometries and create new social disciplines and accountabilities. After an overview of issues in Japanese youth usage of mobile phones, I examine the institutionalization of mobile phone use in relation to

the urban home, school, street, public transportation and online mobile space.

9.2.3 Japanese Youth and Communication Technology

In Japan, young people have led mobile media adoption since the early 1990s. Although both the pager and the mobile phone were originally designed and marketed as business-oriented devices, in both cases, teenage girls appropriated the technology for their personal communications and in turn, informed the design of subsequent devices. Mobile texting, in particular, was an innovation largely initiated by young people, with origins in pager cultures where girls sent numeric codes to pagers from home phones and payphones (Fujimoto, 2005; Okada, 2005). Short message services on mobile phones were developed in direct response to teenage pager texting. In the case of short message services and the mobile Internet, again, young people drove adoption. In his study of youth mobile media cultures, Fujimoto (2005) describes "the girls' pager revolution" as a technology-linked paradigm shift, where certain cultural values became embedded in mobile technologies that have now infiltrated the general population. Although mobile phones are not pervasive among people of all ages and occupations, young people continue to use their phones more, spend more on phones and engage in higher frequencies of text mobile e-mail[1] exchanges (VR, 2002; Yoshii et al., 2002).

As the stereotypical user shifted from the businessman to the teenage girl in the mid-1990s, the popular press reported on rising concern about young people's mobile media usage. In her review of popular and research discourse surrounding young people's mobile phone usage in Japan, Matsuda (2005a) describes how mobile phone use stirred anxieties about young people making indiscriminate social contact, devolving manners and unruly behavior in public places. In particular, public attention focused on *kogyaru* (high school girls), a label attached to the newly precocious and street-savvy high school students of the 1990s who displayed social freedoms previously reserved for college students. *Kogyaru* sported new school uniforms with extremely short skirts, congregating in city centers and disrupting prior social norms that young girls should be tightly regulated by the imperatives of home and school. Until recently, the popular assumption has been that heavy mobile phone users are low-achieving socialites. Even worse, ongoing reports suggest links between mobile phones and teen prostitution and crime, and a new term was

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[1] I use the term mobile e-mail to refer to all types of textual and pictorial transmission via mobile phones. This includes what Japanese refer to as "short mail" and Europeans refer to as "short text messages" and also the wider variety of e-mail communications enabled by the mobile Internet. At the time of writing, this includes text, graphics, photographs and, just recently, video clips.

coined, *enjo kousai*, to refer to high school girls dating middle-aged men for cash (see Tomita, 2005).

In contrast to these widely publicized images of undisciplined, footloose, mobile phone-wielding youth, research has demonstrated that young people's usage is not particularly distinctive in term of manners and promiscuity of social contact (Matsuda, 2005a), and their communications are overwhelming developed within the frame of adult-run institutions of family and school. Matsuda (2005b) argues that most young people are becoming more selective rather than superficial in their social relationships, focusing on friends with whom they identify closely. Most of these friends are tied to institutions such as schools, family or local community. In her study of American and Japanese youth, White (1994) sees fewer conflicts between Japanese parents and youths than their American counterparts, and less pathologization of youth as a problematic life stage. Dependency has less social stigma than it does among Euro-American youths, and this is institutionalized in the protective functions of family that extend through college and often beyond. White (1984) also describes how youth are defined by marital and employment status rather than by age, and "such institutional definitions have more weight than social and psychological identities" (11).

The daily rhythms of young people are largely determined by school, and life rhythms of high school and college students are substantially different. High school students spend most of their free time in school, particularly if they have sports and other after-school activities. By contrast, college students have extremely flexible schedules, routinely miss classes and keep late hours and do not adhere to the household schedule for meals. Rather than a time of independence, however, where they leave the parental home, most urban college students live with their parents and are financially dependent. Our sample of college students for the communication diary part of our study is slightly skewed in this respect, as our student pool at the Keio campus was largely comprised of youth living on their own. As a suburban campus of an elite urban university, the situation at our campus is unique in attracting students from around the country in an area with a relatively low urban density. I turn now to our ethnographic material in order to explicate how these power geometries of place operate in the everyday practices of young people's mobile phone use.

9.3 Mobile Youth Culture and the Politics of Place

9.3.1 Mobile Phones in the Home

There are peculiarities to the urban Japanese case with respect to the politics of location, particularly the home context. Most notably, Japanese

youths, through college, have less private space compared with their U.S. and European counterparts. The Japanese urban home is tiny by middle-class American standards, and teens and children generally share a room with a sibling or a parent. Most college students in Tokyo live with their parents, often even after they begin work, as the costs of renting an apartment in an urban area are prohibitively high. Unlike the U.S., there is no practice for teens to get their own landline at a certain age, or to have a private phone in their room. The costs of running a landline to a Japanese home are very high, from US$600 and up, about twice what it costs to get a mobile phone. It is therefore extremely rare for a home to have more than one landline.

Here is an excerpt from an interview with four high school girls who are close friends.

> *Interviewer:* You all live close to each other. Do you visit each other's homes?

> *Student 1*: We don't. It's not that we are uncomfortable, or our parents get on our case, but it's like they are too sweet and caring, and you worry about saying something rude, or talking too loud. You can't be too rowdy. So we don't meet in our homes.

> *Student 2*: Occasionally. Maybe once a year. Actually, that's not even occasional.

> *Student 1*: And if it happens, it is at a friend's house where they have their own room.

This stance was consistent across the youths that we interviewed. Meetings among friends almost always occurred in a third-party space run by indifferent adults, such as a fast food restaurant, karaoke spot or family restaurant. Even for college students living on their own, their space is generally so small and cramped that it is not appropriate for hanging out with groups of friends.

The phone has always provided a way of overcoming the spatial boundary of the home, for teens to talk with each other late at night and to shut out their parents and siblings. As noted in other studies (Green 2002; Ling and Yttri, 2002, to be published; Skog 2002), the mobile phone has further revolutionized the power geometry of space–time compression for teens in the home, enabling them to communicate without the surveillance of parents and siblings. This has freed youths to call each other without the embarrassment of revealing a possible romantic liaison, or at hours of the day when other family members are likely to be asleep. All those interviewed were consistent in stating a preference for calling a friend on a mobile rather than home phone, despite the higher cost. Youths now do not have the home phone numbers of any but their most intimate friends. A high school girl describes how she makes gender-based choices of what phone to call:

> If it is a boy, I will call their mobile. If they have one, I will call their mobile. If it is a girl, I will call their home. If it is a girl, well, I'm a girl right? So if I call they think I am just a regular friend. But if it is a boy, his family might tease him, and I've made a friend very uncomfortable in the past because of this. I've also been told some nasty things by a parent. I was totally pissed off when a parent of a boy told me off like I wasn't a proper girl. So since then, I don't use the home phone.

This girl describes how the home phone is tied to household collective identity, where it is appropriate for a teen to have childlike relationships with same-sex peers, but the more adult identity of romantic liaisons is an uneasy fit. The person-to-person mode of the mobile phone is a more comfortable alternative "place" to conduct these kinds of communications that exceed the young person's status of a "child" in the power geometries of the home.

The home phone once was a means for parents to monitor and regulate their children's relationships with their peers. With the mobile phone, the spatial boundaries of the home become highly porous to discretionary communication. The spatial dispersion of homes, coupled with the freedom of communication via the mobile phone, is an inversion of the dynamics of the classroom, where kids occupy the same physical space, but are not in control of their communications with each other. In addition to enabling communications with peers who would not call on the home phone, the mobile phone also supports frequent and lightweight communication that would not be appropriate with a household-identified communication device. Among close friends and couples, most youths (two out of three in our sample) maintained ongoing lightweight contact as they went about their daily routines, sending each other messages about their current status and thoughts, such as: "Just woke up with a hangover," "The episode (of the TV drama) really sucked didn't it," or "good night." They enjoy a sense of co-presence with peers that they are not able to realize physically because of their dependence on the parental home.

For teenage couples living with their parents, this means that the mobile phone can be the primary means for staying in touch. The logs of one teenage couple in our study represent a somewhat more intense version of couple communications that we saw in other instances. Their typical pattern is to begin sending a steady stream of e-mail messages to each other after parting at school. These messages will continue through homework, dinner, television shows and bath, and would culminate in voice contact in the late evening, lasting for an hour or more. A trail of messages might follow the voice call, ending in a good night exchange and revived again upon waking. On days when they were primarily at home in the evening, they sent 34 and 56 messages to each other. On days that they were out and about the numbers dwindled to six and nine. The content of the messages ranged from in-depth conversation about relational issues to coordination of when to make voice contact, to light-

weight notification of their current activities and thoughts. Messaging became a means for experiencing a sense of private contact and co-presence with a loved one even in the face of their inability to share any private physical space.

Informants for our communication diary research included 10 cases of high school students living at home: seven high school students, three mothers and one father. We also had one example of a college student living at home. Parents appreciated how the device can extend the parameters of their own contact with and surveillance over their children, but they were less comfortable with the ways in which their children use their mobile phones to engage in peer communication. In communicating with their kids, parents exploited the fact that their kids were constantly checking their mobile e-mail. Without exception, parents with children at home would send messages telling them that it was time to come home, or coordinating details such as pickup and meeting times. We saw mild to acute tensions surrounding the extensive use of mobile phones by the children. Parents and children alike voiced a rule that e-mailing should not happen during mealtimes. All the parents we interviewed described a sense of unease and curiosity about their children's mobile communications. Conversely, all the children took measures to keep parents in the dark about the content of their e-mail and calls. Generally this was done by going to their bedroom or other location out of earshot when taking a voice call. One mother voices what we take to be a typical parental stance:

> *Interviewer:* Do you have a problem with her using her mobile phone during meals, or after meals in the living room, when you are together?
>
> *Mother:* I don't have a problem with it when we are just lounging around. But during meals or when she is studying, I try to tell her to tell the other person on the line.
>
> *Interviewer:* Are you curious or concerned about with who and what she is communicating?
>
> *Mother:* I am concerned about all of it … though I can usually guess who it is.
>
> *Interviewer:* When you tell her to stop, does she stop?
>
> *Mother:* She goes to her room … if I am strict about it.
>
> *Interviewer:* Do you ever ask her, like "What in the world are you talking about?!"
>
> *Mother:* I do ask sometimes. But I just get a vague reply.

This mother is curious and concerned about the content of her daughter's mobile communications, but is largely in the dark. She is able to regulate, to some extent, the degree to which mobile communications disrupt specific activities in the home (meals, studying), but largely fails to regulate the content, partners and overall frequency of her daughter's communications.

Young people's heavy reliance on mobile phone usage grows out of the constraints on communication imposed by the home and the home phone, but this usage does not substantively challenge or reshape the power geometries of the home. Rather, mobile phones become a tool for circumventing the normative structures of the home with minimal disruption to its institutional logic. Dobashi (2005) has described how Japanese housewives use mobile phones in ways that are consistent with and supportive of gendered household roles. Although these uses by housewives, focused on accomplishing household coordination, are completely different from their children's uses, in many ways, both forms of uses have the effect of maintaining the integrity of the place-based logics of the household. Rather than intrude on the family unit and household expectations with calls to the home phone, young people take their personal communication elsewhere, to their mobile phones.

9.3.2 Mobile Phones at School

In the school context, there is variability in how teachers deal with mobile phones. Almost all schools officially ban phones from the classrooms, but most students do use e-mail during class at least occasionally. It is not uncommon for students to leave their mobile phones out on their desks during class, claiming that they use the clock function. All students, in both high school and college, voiced the rule that they would not use voice communication in class, but almost all said that they would read and sometimes send messages. The mobile phone gets used most frequently during lunch time and immediately after school, as students scurry to hook up with their friends. We saw e-mails being sent during class in only two of our communication diary cases, but almost all students reported in their interviews that they would receive and send messages in class, hiding their phones under their desks. Here is the response from one of the high school students who we did see using her phone during class:

Okabe: What sorts of places and situations do you use your phone a lot?

Student: At school, during class … I leave my phone on my desk and it vibes.

Okabe: Do you take voice calls during class?

Student: No. That would be going to far.

Okabe: Oh, so you wouldn't answer. What kinds of exchanges do you have over e-mail during class? Do you send e-mails to people sitting in the same classroom?

Student: Yes, I do that too.

Okabe: What do you say?

Student: "This is boring."

Okabe: And you get a reply?

Student: Yes.

Okabe: When you write your e-mail, do you hide it?

Student: Yes. When the teacher is facing the blackboard, I quickly type it in.

Like this student, three other students described conversations with students in the same classroom, making comments like "this sucks," "this is boring," or "check it out, the teacher buttoned his shirt wrong." More commonly, students reported that they conducted "necessary" communications during class, such as arranging a meeting or responding to an e-mail from somebody with a specific query. The communications in class that we saw in the diaries involved coordinating meetings after school or receiving e-mails from friends who were absent, asking for notes or other class information. In all these cases the mobile e-mail is being used to circumvent the communicative limitations of the classroom situation, much as passing notes and glances across the classroom did in an earlier era. Perhaps more uniquely, the mobile phone in the classroom is a way to challenge the communication hierarchy of the traditional lecture format that insists that students passively listen to an active teacher. Mobile e-mailing enables students to resist their role in this one-way communication and to make more productive use of their attentional "dead time" between jotting notes and waiting for teachers to finish writing theirs (Taylor, this volume, Chapter 10). Just as in the case of the home setting, the low-profile modality of mobile, particularly text communication, means that students can engage in personal chatter while remaining respectful to existing power geometries of the classroom.

9.4 Mobile Phones in Urban Space

Our research has focused on the greater Tokyo metropolitan area, which is an extremely dense urban setting well connected to its more suburban surrounds. This urban landscape is amenable to appropriation by youth because of the extensive public transportation system, and the fact that it is safe to be on public transportation and out on the street even for young women at night. Youth will take public transportation from city outskirts and congregate in city centers such as Shibuya and Ikebukuro, considered the epicenters of youth culture. Not surprisingly, Shibuya crossing has the highest density of mobile phone use in the world.

In the early years of mobile phone adoption, when business uses dominated, there were few efforts to regulate usage in public spaces and transportation. It was only after young people became prominent users of the

mobile phone in the late 1990s that public institutions stepped up efforts to regulate usage on trains and buses, in the midst of a wave of articles in the popular press about poor mobile phone manners and the annoyance of having to listen to teenage chatter in public space (Matsuda, 2005a; Okabe and Ito, 2005). Now, most trains and buses display "no mobile phones" signs, and announcements about mobile phone usage are made after every train stop. These announcements have been evolving towards more specificity through the years. Currently, they say, "We make this request to our passengers. Please turn off your mobile phone in the vicinity of priority seating [for the elderly and disabled]. In other parts of the train, please keep your mobile phone on silent mode and refrain from voice calls. Thank you for your cooperation." In a separate study, we observed uses of mobile phones on trains and subways. In hundreds of cases observed, almost all involved text input. When voice calls are received, people will, generally cut the call quickly and speak in a low voice, often shielding their phone and mouth with a hand or magazine. When passengers do take a voice call, they are often subject to subtle social sanctioning by other passengers in the form of quick glances or even sustained glares (Okabe and Ito, 2005).

In contrast to voice calls, mobile e-mail is considered ideal for use in public spaces. Although recent fears of negative effects on pacemakers have initiated a trend towards blanket prohibition in some areas, the prevailing social norm is that non-voice mobile communication is permissible. Although bus drivers will prohibit someone speaking on a mobile phone from entering a bus, we have not observed any instances of regulation of silent mobile phone uses. Just as the power geometries of the home and classroom make e-mail a privileged, private form of communication, regulatory efforts on public transportation have also contributed to the rise in e-mail as a preferred form of mobile communication. Largely because of the risk that their interlocutor may be on public transit, a social norm has arisen among the younger generation that you should not initiate voice calls without first checking availability with a text message. Unless certain that their recipient is at home, most youths (there were two exceptions in our study) will send a message first asking if they can call.

During a physical gathering, youth will generally prioritize the co-present encounter, but there are instances when they are interrupted by a mobile e-mail or call. Unless in public transport or fancy restaurants, they will attend to the interruption. All interviewed voiced a general rule that family and fast food restaurants were acceptable for voice calls. E-mail will be attended to regardless of place. Those that require an immediate response, such as a mother asking when they are going to return, or a message from somebody they are planning to meet, will be responded to right away. When with friends, youth will almost always take the call, but will cut it short if it is a one-on-one gathering. When multiple parties are

meeting up (we saw this in two of our documented cases), it is common for mobile communications to be used to contact those that have yet to appear on the scene, adding relevant information to the current co-present encounter. At other times, contact with distant others can be used to augment a particular gathering. In one observation I made on a bus, a group of high school students were discussing a gathering they were arranging. As they discussed who was or was not coming among themselves, they also sent numerous text messages to others not co-present, confirming whether they were coming or if they had information about others.

A feeling of urban anonymity is disappearing as youths stay in ongoing and lightweight contact though messages with their peers and loved ones. Out shopping, a lone girl sends a picture of the shoes she is buying to a friend. Another sends a message announcing that she just discovered a great sale. After a physical gathering, as friends disperse on trains, buses, cars and on foot, a trail of messages often continues the conversation, thanks somebody for a ride or announces that they forgot to return an object. Rather than fixing a meeting place, gatherings between youth are now almost always arranged in a fluid way, as people coordinate their motion through urban space, eventually converging on a shared point in time and space. At the same time, mobile communications are highly responsive to the power geometries of urban space and an emergent set of social and communicative norms. I present one example from our communication diaries of one female college student who carried on a text message conversation while moving between different forms of public transportation. She has just finished work, and makes contact with her boyfriend after she boards the bus.

22:30	(boards bus).
22:24	(send) Ugh. I just finished (>_<).[2] I'm wasted! It was so busy.
22:28	(receive) Whew. Good job (>_<).
22:30	(send) I was running around the whole time. Are you okay?
22:30	(Only other passenger leaves. Makes voice call. Hangs up after 2 minutes when other passengers board).
22:37	(send) Gee I wish I could go see fireworks (; _ ;).
22:39	(receive) So let's go together! I asked you!
22:40	(gets off bus and moves to train platform).
22:42	(send) Sniff, sniff, sniff (; _ ;). Can't if I have a meeting! I have to stay late!
22:43	(receive) You can't come if you have to stay late?

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[2]Japanese emoticons are written "head-on" rather than sideways. (>_<) is a grimacing face, (; _ ;) is a crying face, and (^o^) is a happy face.

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22:46	(send) Um, no … I really want to go … (; _ ;).
22:47	(receive) Can't you work it out so you can make it?
22:48	(boards train).
22:52	(send) Oh … I don't know. If I can finish preparing for my presentation the next day. I really want to see you (>_<). I am starting to feel bad again. My neck hurts and I feel like I am going to be sick (; _;). Urg.
22:57	(receive) I get to see you tomorrow so I guess I just have to hang in there! (^o^)
23:04	(gets off train)
23:05	(send) Right, right. I still have a lot of work tonight. I can't sleep!

In our interview, she describes how her messaging embeds subtle clues that indicate her status and availability for communication keyed to her physical location. She keeps the conversation going as she continues her ride on bus and train, even though she is not terribly interested in the content of their chat. As she prepares to get off the train, she initiates a change of topic (about feeling bad and her neck hurting) as an indicator that the conversation has come to an end. She has enlisted a companion on her solitary bus ride, successfully filling dead time with small talk, ending it at precisely the moment when she arrives at her destination. This is but one example of many that we have gathered that attests to the highly nuanced and place-sensitive nature of mobile communications made in transit. Approximately half of the students in our study engaged in this sort of chat-like sequence while in transit. The regulatory efforts of public transport operators in Japan have structured a set of emergent social practices coordinated to the rhythms of youths' motion through urban space and relying on the non-disruptive modality of text communication. We conclude with an analysis of the technical and social structuring of the online space of mobile connectivity.

9.4.1 Mobile Virtual Places

The use of e-mail, and the growing expectation that mobile phones define a space of persistent connectivity, point to an alternative sort of technosocial space being defined by new mobile technologies for Japanese youths. While mobile phones have become a vehicle for youths to circumvent the power geometries of places such as the home, the classroom and the street, they have also created new disciplines and power geometries, the need to be continuously available to friends and lovers and the need always to carry a functioning mobile device. These disciplines are accompanied by new sets of social expectations and manners.

When unable to return a message right away, there is a sense that a social expectation has been violated. When one girl did not notice a message sent in the evening until the next morning, she says that she felt terrible. Three of the students in our diary study reported that they did not feel similar pressure to reply right away. Yet even in these cases, they acknowledged that there was a social expectation that a message should be responded to within about 30 minutes unless one had a legitimate reason, such as being asleep. One describes how he knows he should respond right away, but doesn't really care. Another, who had an atypical pattern of responding with longer, more deliberate, messages hours later, said that her friends often chided her for being so slow. All students who were asked about responses delayed an hour or more said that they would generally make a quick apology or excuse upon sending the tardy response.

With couples living apart, there is an even greater sense of importance attached to the ongoing availability via messaging. The underside to the unobtrusive and ubiquitous nature of mobile e-mails is that there are few legitimate excuses for not responding, particularly in the evening hours when one is at home. Five of the 10 student couples in our study were in ongoing contact during the times when they were not at school, and all these couples had established practices for indicating their absence from the shared online space. They invariably send a good-night e-mail to signal unavailability, and would often send status checks during the day such as "are you awake?" or "are you done with work?" We saw a few cases when they would announce their intention to take a bath, a kind of virtual locking of the door. Just as mobile workers struggle to maintain boundaries between their work and personal lives, youths struggle to limit their availability to peers and intimates. Although the "place" constructed through the traffic of e-mail and voice calls on a mobile device does not have the same institutionalized weight as places such as home, classroom and train car, an emergent set of social expectations are defining the parameters of these new power geometries.

9.5 Conclusions

This chapter has described the institutions and places which condition Japanese youths' mobile phone use. We see place as a power geometry that integrates the social, material and cultural. We have argued that this perspective is a useful inflection of prior research that has examined the more personal and relational aspects of mobile phone use by teens. Another goal of this work has been to argue that far from destroying the integrity of place with unfettered communication, mobile phones are keyed to the norms attached to existing places, and participate in the structuring of new forms of place-based norms and disciplines.

Given this perspective, we can understand youths' penchant for text messaging as an outcome of a wide range of factors. These include the unique expressive functions and styles of this form of communication, in addition to certain economic and historical factors unique to this generation (Ito and Okabe, to be published). In this chapter, we have focused on factors that relate to regulation and surveillance in particular places. Japanese youth, particularly high-school students, move between the places of home, school and urban space that are all subject to a high degree of regulation and surveillance by adults. Unlike the institutions of family and school, youth peer groups and couples are "institutions" that lack ownership and control of place. The outcome of these power geometries is that couples and friends have few opportunities for private conversation. Although a limited form of contact, mobile e-mail has fulfilled a function akin to co-presence for people that lack the means to share the same private physical space. New technologies become infrastructure for new disciplines and institutional relations as much as they challenge old ones that they grow out of, and the mobile phone is no exception.

In addition to explicating some of the factors behind distinctive patterns of youth mobile phone usage, our analysis argues more generally for a socially and culturally contextualized vision of technological "effects". The mobile phone is not "inherently" a device that disrupts existing social norms and places. Rather, its form, functionality and use are keyed to specific social settings as well as specific social groups occupying those settings. In the case of Japanese youth, this has meant the prevalence of devices with mobile Internet and e-mail access, and uses that operate under the radar of adult institutions and surveillance. Mobile e-mailing on a handheld device is lightweight, low-profile, concealable and not disruptive to the normative structures of most places that young people find themselves in. As Alex Taylor (this volume, Chapter 10) suggests, these everyday maneuverings with a handheld device are not so much subversion in the macro-political sense, but are "concealed, locally assembled resistance against an established set of social structures or 'rules'." In the case of young people soon to graduate into a full repertoire of adult rights and responsibilities, circumventing rather than overthrow of existing power geometries seems an appropriate strategy. By contrast, other groups (most famously, in the Philippines) with more pressing macro-political agendas have mobilized similar features of the mobile phone to defy governments (Rheingold, 2002; Agar, 2003) or challenge their financial disenfranchisement (Ilahiane, 2004). Whether the mobile phone functions as a socially conservative or transformative tool is determined by its status as a socio-technical device, embedded in specific social contexts and power geometries.

9.6 Acknowledgments

9.7 References

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