

Keynote

Talking Phones: A cultural reading of mobile technologies



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Abstract

In June of 2002, Malaysian newsstands carried the latest issue of “Mobile Stuff” — a magazine geared toward Malaysia's growing population of mobile phone subscribers. On the cover, two young Malay men in clothing that suggests more LA hood and less KL suburbs, hold out their mobile phones to the camera beneath the banner headline “Real Men Uses SMS.” Six months later, billboards in Shanghai carried the image of a woman” shapely calves and ankles, bound with black patent leather ankle straps; positioned beneath one strap is her mobile phone. Using ethnographic and cultural data from her recent fieldwork in Asia, Bell will explore some of the ways in which mobile technologies are shifting function and form. Beyond their utility as a technology of information exchange, mobile phones specifically and mobile technologies more broadly, appear to have inserted themselves into the cultural fabric of societies across the world. In so doing, while the underlying technologies might not have changed per se, the applications, usage models and indeed, understandings of the objects have undergone radical shifts and re-purposings.

Bio

Genevieve Bell is a Senior Researcher with Intel Research. There she is responsible for a 2 year comparative ethnographic project focused on gaining a better understanding of the daily life of Asia's urban middle classes, paying particular attention to the role of new technologies. Bell is particularly interested in issues of cultural difference as they are expressed around technology adoption and use. Bell is a member of an interdisciplinary team of research social scientists and designers. Since joining Intel, Bell has conducted ethnographic research in a variety of consumer spaces, including malls, retail districts, and museums, as well as within a range of different American households. Bell has also conducted significant research beyond the US, including a five-country, strategically situated, ethnographic study of European domestic spaces for several Intel product groups, and a study of the emerging middle classes in China and India. Prior to joining Intel in 1998, Bell taught anthropology and Native American Studies at Stanford University. Bell received her BA/MA in anthropology from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania in 1991. She earned a PhD in cultural anthropology from Stanford University in 1998. http://www.intel.com/research/people/bios/bell_g.htm

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