



ROUTLEDGE

THE TWO BILL STORY

Narrative Practices with
Locative Technologies

EDITED BY
JASON FARMAN

THE MOBILE STORY

What happens when stories meet mobile media? In this cutting-edge collection, contributors explore digital storytelling in ways that look beyond the desktop to consider how stories can be told through mobile, locative, and pervasive technologies. This book offers dynamic insights about the new nature of narrative in the age of mobile media, studying digital stories that are site-specific, context-aware, and involve the reader in fascinating ways. Addressing important topics for scholars, students, and designers alike, this collection investigates the crucial questions for this emerging area of storytelling and electronic literature. Topics covered include the histories of site-specific narratives, issues in design and practice, space and mapping, mobile games, narrative interfaces, and the interplay between memory, history, and community.

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THE MOBILE STORY

Narrative Practices with Locative
Technologies

Edited by Jason Farman

First published 2014
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The mobile story : narrative practices with locative technologies / edited by
Jason Farman.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Mobile computing—Social aspects. 2. Digital media—
Social aspects. 3. Storytelling. 4. Spatial behavior. 5. Hypertext
literature. 6. Telecommunication—Social aspects. I. Farman, Jason.

HM851.M629 2013

302.23'1—dc23

2013005423

ISBN: 978-0-415-64148-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-70728-2 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-08078-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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PART I

Narrative and Site-Specific Authorship

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1

SITE-SPECIFICITY, PERVERSIVE COMPUTING, AND THE READING INTERFACE

Jason Farman

How do the examples in this chapter help us understand the practice of storytelling in the mobile media age?

This chapter serves, in part, as an introduction to *The Mobile Story* and offers a historical grounding for the projects analyzed throughout the rest of the book (which are discussed in more detail at the very end of this chapter). By linking mobile storytelling projects to the larger history of attaching narratives to specific places, these projects build on practices that have been done for millennia. From stone inscriptions to the stories that accompany religious pilgrimages, from graffiti in early Rome to historic walking tours of cities, the practice of sited narratives has many precedents. The desire to attach story to space is found in the connection between the historical context of a community and the need to determine the character of that space. Around these two points arises a contention over *who* is actually allowed to tell the story of a location. A site's dominant narrative is often told through durable media such as stone inscriptions, while the narratives on the margins are relegated to ephemeral media such as graffiti or the spoken word. These tensions persist in the era of site-specific digital storytelling, as elaborated in the subsequent chapters in this collection.

Keywords

- **Site-specificity:** The emphasis on the unique qualities of a particular location that cannot be transferred onto another place. When practiced in mobile storytelling projects, site-specificity embraces the characteristics of the location, including its histories, cultural conflicts, communities, and architectures (to name only a few) and makes these aspects foundational for the experience of the space.

- **Urban markup:** The various ways that narrative gets attached to a specific place in a city. Urban markup can be done through durable inscriptions (like words carved into the stone façade of a building or a statue) or through ephemeral inscriptions (ranging from banners and billboards to graffiti and stickers).
- **Creative misuse:** Creatively using a technology in a way in which it was never meant to be used, the results of which offer a thoroughly transformed view of the technology, its place in society, and future practices with the technology.

Introduction

As I look at the ways that people use their mobile devices in different regions around the world, one thing becomes obvious: these devices are being used in vastly diverse ways from community to community and from person to person. There is no single way that people use their cell phones, their tablet computers, their laptops, or other mobile media. There is no “correct” way of using mobile media; instead, we see a wide range of uses globally. There are contrasting—and even contradictory—uses of mobile media worldwide. For example, the idea of multiple people sharing a single cell phone, while out of the ordinary in a place like the United States, where the cell phone epitomizes technology designed for individual use, is a much more common feature in certain communities in India, where cell phones are shared even among strangers.¹ Another example of contradictory approaches to the use of mobile media involves location awareness: some people use their mobile devices to broadcast their location throughout the day, yet this might seem like a tremendous invasion of privacy to others. For example, Sam Liang (co-founder of the company Alohar, which designed an application called “**Placeme**”), leaves the location-aware services and GPS running on his smartphone in order to **track his every move** throughout the day (and share it with a broad group of people). Others, such as women who seek protection at a domestic abuse shelter, attempt to limit the amount of data that leaves their cell phones. Here, once a woman checks in, the organization takes her old cell phone (that poses a potential threat of **exposing her now-secret location**) and replaces it with an emergency-only phone that is able to only call the police or the shelter.

The vast number of ways that people use their mobile devices deeply resonated with me on an afternoon this past summer. I was sitting in the audience of a conference on mobile media listening to many international scholars and practitioners describe the ways they (and the people they study) use their devices. I heard about people in agricultural parts of Africa who use their mobile phone as a **banking system**, sending payments via text message to transfer money from one account to another when they sell their goods. I heard about people in

London who leave the Bluetooth on (and “discoverable” by others) in order to **send semi-anonymous flirtatious messages** with others while riding the Underground. I heard about artists who create **drawings the size of a city** by letting the GPS capabilities of their phones create traces of the pathways they journey as they walk out images across a large area. I heard about tourists who hold their phones up to signs in a foreign language and see **real-time translations** on their screens through augmented reality. From the creation of **flash mobs in New York City** with thousands of participants to the **Red Cross using text messages** as a way to track down people in crisis after a natural disaster, our mobile phones are being used in an amazing number of ways.

I had become so comfortable with my own mobile media practices that it hadn't dawned on me that others would see a phone just like the one I own and imagine such vastly different uses for it. The mobile device is, for many of us, one of our most intimate technologies. For me, it's one of the first things I touch in the morning (when my alarm goes off); thus, I often end up touching my cell phone before I even touch another human being! As I get ready for work in the morning, I put the phone in my pocket, and it sits close to my body nearly all day long. When I wait in line during lunch, I pull out my phone and check several social media feeds or my email. The mobile phone is now deeply woven into my everyday life, and I've become so comfortable with the ways I use it that I have gotten to a point where I don't think of my mobile media practices as noteworthy. These practices are so commonplace that I rarely take notice of them. The interface often even disappears into my actions throughout the day.²

When our perspectives of our mobile media practices go from being so familiar that they seemingly disappear and instead shift to a perspective where we see entirely new ways of using these devices, the results can be revolutionary. This shift is a transformative one. This book is about such shifts taking place around us. Emerging storytelling projects offer some of the best examples of the transformative potential of mobile media. The projects discussed in this book typically take the mobile device out of the realm of the everyday and insert it into practices that reimagine our relationship to technology, place, and our own sense of self in the spaces through which we move.

However, such shifts in perspective can be challenging to accomplish. Getting people to reimagine a technology they are extremely familiar with (and the places transformed by these technologies) is similar to asking them to get lost in their own homes. The goal, therefore, of some of the storytelling projects detailed in this book is to “defamiliarize” people with their places and the technologies that mediate these places. In order to accomplish this defamiliarization, artists, authors, and scholars often turn to what is called “creative misuse,” or finding a way to use mobile media and software, like iPhone apps, in ways that they were never intended for. The result is often a deeper sense of place and a stronger understanding of our own position within that place.

Ultimately, the level of depth and personal engagement offered by defamiliarization and creative misuse counters much of the contemporary distrust over mobile media. Over the last several years, we have seen a deluge of messages that argue that mobile media are **disconnecting us from “real” and genuine interactions** with our loved ones and with the places we move through. For example, a **2010 commercial for the Windows phone** showed a series of short clips in which people were staring at their phones rather than connecting with the people immediately around them. A woman getting married walks down the aisle while texting. A man on a rollercoaster is seemingly oblivious to the ride while he browses the Internet. A spouse is unaware of his wife’s sexual advances (as she stands next to the bed in lingerie) while he stares at his phone. Joggers who stare at their phones run into each other. People fall down stairs or sit in seats already occupied by someone else—all because they are seemingly somewhere else when they’re staring at their phones. What mobile media storytelling projects demonstrate, in contrast, is that someone can be staring at a mobile device and be more deeply connected to the space and to others in that space than other people might perceive. Storytelling with mobile media takes the stories of a place and attaches them to that place, offering an almost infinite number of stories that can be layered onto a single site. Readers of these stories can stand at a location, access the stories about that site, and gain a deep connection to that space (and the various histories of that space). Thus, not everyone staring into a smartphone is disconnected from his or her surroundings and from the other people in those spaces.

The History of Site-Specific Storytelling

People have attempted to tie stories to places for as long as stories have existed. The meaning of a story is affected by the place in which the story is told and, similarly, the meaning of a place tends to be told through stories. Pervasive computing scholar Malcolm McCullough has explained these practices by pointing out the various historical ways site-specific stories have been told. McCullough has contrasted “durable” inscriptions—such as those carved into stone or into the side of a building—to “ephemeral” inscriptions like graffiti, banners, and billboards that aren’t as long-lasting and are characterized by their transitory nature.³ He categorizes both of these forms of site-specific storytelling as “urban markup.” Interestingly, these two forms of site-specific storytelling also demonstrate the power dynamics and hierarchies involved in *who* gets to tell the story of a space. Those with economic wealth and political clout tend to be the ones who are able to place durable inscriptions throughout a city. They can afford the statue of a particular war hero or politician, linking the life of this figure to the place where the statue is located. In contrast, graffiti functions similarly to tell a certain story or life of a place but tends to be done by those without the power or political clout to

create durable inscriptions. These inscriptions often serve to stand in opposition to the legal and “authorized” ways of storytelling about a place.

There have been variations on these two forms of site-specific storytelling throughout history. Examples include stories that are intimately tied to the place they describe, such as the Stations of the Cross. Born out of religious pilgrimages (many of which also fall under the category of site-specific narratives), the **Stations of the Cross** emerged around the late fourteenth century as a practice in which Christian pilgrims would visit Jerusalem and walk the *Via Delarosa*, walking the path that Jesus took on the final days of his life.⁴ At each of these sites, pilgrims would recount the story of the site (e.g., the place where **Simon of Cyrene** was compelled to carry the cross for Jesus) and meditate in prayer about the significance of the events and the fact that these events happened in the very place at which they stood. Eventually, these sites were duplicated in regions around the world in an attempt to allow Christians the experience of the Stations of the Cross without the pilgrimage to Jerusalem (thus removing the site-specificity of this place-based narrative).

There are many examples of site-specific stories in contemporary society. Many of us have experienced the link between narrative and site-specificity when we have taken a historic tour of a city or a building, when we’ve gone on ghost tours of places like London or New Orleans, or engaged in historic reenactments of events like Civil War battles. Ultimately, these forms of site-specific storytelling aim to capitalize on the idea that there is value in standing at the site where an event took place; far more than simply reading about an event, being in the place where that event happened offers experiential value that gives us a deeper sense of the story and the ways that story affects the meaning of the place.

As McCullough notes, contemporary mobile media narratives fall somewhere along the spectrum between the durable and ephemeral inscriptions that characterize such urban markup. New forms of urban markup that utilize mobile technologies are “neither organized ‘media’ as the twentieth century knew them, nor random graffiti as all the ages have witnessed.” These forms of site-specific markup are seen in the “new practices of mapping, tagging, linking, and sharing [that] expand both possibilities and participation in urban inscription.”⁵ Thus, while it is vital to situate the digital storytelling projects in this book historically (and understand how they are building on things like stone inscriptions on buildings, graffiti, or the Stations of the Cross), it is also important to ask, “What is unique about storytelling projects that use mobile media?” We must explore how these projects make important advancements on the process of writing, distributing, and reading a story.

The Mobile Device and Medium-Specificity

As has been demonstrated thus far, stories told about a space (and stories that are deeply connected to the space in which they are experienced) have utilized

a wide array of urban markup throughout history. Similarly, mobile media have been used to tell the stories of place for millennia, taking shape in mobile media like books, letters, and more recent mobile media, such as portable radios, audio books for personal listening devices, and books for tablet computers. A key feature of *mobile* media is their relationship to space, since they can move across vast geographic distances. They are portable, unlike many of the media that preceded them (such as stone inscription or even a statue that commemorates the story of a site). They are spatial media (and spatially flexible media) and thus are uniquely equipped to engage with the narratives about spaces and places.

Yet, there are specific attributes of *contemporary* mobile technologies that do not have precedent in previous media for storytelling. Tapping into this mode of exploration is called “medium-specific analysis”; such an approach asks us to understand the medium’s unique capabilities (and constraints). These affordances and constraints will significantly affect the content of the story and the experience of it.⁶ In line with Marshall McLuhan’s famous adage that “the medium is the message,” a medium-specific analysis understands that the medium will often impact the ways a story is told, distributed, and experienced.⁷ This impact is often because of issues like the interface (does an author want to compose a long text on the small keyboard of a mobile phone?) or the cultural expectations (do we read stories on an iPad in very similar ways that we read them on a print book because that is what is culturally accepted?).

Throughout this book, while many authors acknowledge the deep historical roots of digital storytelling with mobile media, they are keenly invested in exploring the emerging medium-specificity of mobile technologies. Since mobile media are becoming the most pervasive technology on the face of the planet right now, how does such pervasiveness change the ways we tell stories and read stories? Is there a difference between reading a story on a mobile phone versus a tablet computer versus a PDF file? The answers that resonate throughout the chapters in this book point to some key attributes of emerging mobile technologies (such as their relationship to the particular spaces we move through, gained through the devices’ location awareness). Mobile media are location-aware and context-specific in ways that other media are not. Simultaneously, mobile media offer the possibility to layer multiple—even conflicting—stories onto a single space. Thus, the possibilities for storytelling are expanded because of the medium-specificity of mobile media. For example, unlike previous storytelling media, mobile media narratives can layer countless stories on that single site using digital urban markup. Due to the constraints of physical spaces and media (such as size and conflicting visualizations as when a painting covers up what was underneath), nondigital forms of storytelling are limited in the number of voices that can contribute to the meanings of a location. Thus, the potentials for digital storytelling using mobile media are truly profound.

The Problems of “Narrative” and “Story”

While we can layer multiple stories on a site to tell a range of perspectives about what a place means, the process can involve some challenging hurdles that are inherent in *all* acts of storytelling. Often, the idea of “narrative” itself is rife with problems because it tends to put forth an idea of a cohesive, linear story about a site, an event, or a community. The act of storytelling can be constrained by such challenges and can often be maneuvered into presenting a narrative that has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Stories also tend to offer the illusion that they present the events in their entirety (and if they leave out anything, the omitted portions are simply not relevant).

If we hold to the adage that “we are the stories we tell” (and as Indian film director **Shekhar Kapur has argued**, “[A] person without a story does not exist”⁸), then there is an enormous amount of pressure for stories to be foundational elements of our lives. Once they take on this status, stories must live up to often-unrealistic cultural expectations. The results can be narratives that are cleanly linear and tell a very particular story without regard for nuance and multiple perspectives. Certain historical narratives are a good example. Some approaches, as performance studies scholar David Román notes, seek to tell an “official history” of an event (Román cites the origin stories told about the emergence of HIV/AIDS). In Román’s example, these “totalizing narratives . . . [present a] genealogy of AIDS [which] overdetermines the arrival of AIDS and obscures the process(es) of AIDS.” As such, “AIDS will continue to be understood within the confines of these narratives of origin.”⁹ For Román, any narrative or history of AIDS needs to be presented as multiple and discontinuous rather than cohesive and linear. Another performance studies theorist, Sue-Ellen Case, echoes these ideas about narratives, feeling that stories themselves can never adequately present the fundamentally fragmented experience that constitutes life today. Case says, “I’m not against stories, but I think they’re not speaking to a lot of people who are looking at fragments, at images on devices of various sizes, and finding new ways of putting things together. I don’t know if the traditional notion of storytelling really works with new media. So I really don’t think storytelling has a great future.”¹⁰

This book is about some possible futures of the story and ways that mobile devices and locative storytelling practices might offer an intervention to Case’s concerns about the limitations of story. Therefore, the chapters in this collection present a wide range of storytelling practices, most of which embrace the subjective experiences of the storyteller and reader (and thus offer narrative practices that encourage fragmentation, limited point of view, and the insertion of many voices to help offset the limited perspective of the individual reader or storyteller). As such, the narrative practices in this book work to achieve what William Uricchio notes, in his work analyzing the practice of media history, any narrative must have: “multiple and sometimes contradictory causalities . . .

[which require] an embrace of multiplicity, complexity and even contradiction if sense is to be made of such a pervasive cultural experience.”¹¹

Structure of This Book

This book brings together scholars and practitioners who each offer a unique perspective on this emerging form of storytelling. While not putting forth a “totalizing narrative” about the landscape of mobile media storytelling today, the chapters offer important inroads to scholarship and practice working at the intersection of mobile media and storytelling. The book begins with a section about “Narrative and Site-Specific Authorship.” Building on the histories of urban markup and site-specific storytelling that I’ve laid out in this chapter, the rest of the section develops and extends existing narrative theories to offer an updated approach that is informed by mobile and pervasive technologies. Chapter 2, “The Interrelationships of Mobile Storytelling: Merging the Physical and the Digital at a National Historic Site,” launches the book by offering the perfect glimpse of what’s to come. Written by two scholar-practitioners, Brett Oppegaard and Dene Grigar, the chapter offers both a theoretical and practice-based approach to the implementation of a mobile media narrative. Drawing on the example of the Fort Vancouver Mobile storytelling application, a project that both authors developed, the practice of mobile storytelling is studied through the lens of “intermediality.” Through this term—which is a companion idea to the notions of media convergence, interconnectedness, and the global process of production—Oppegaard and Grigar point to four relationships in the practice of locative storytelling: the relationship between content and medium; between people, time, and space; between intersubjective participants; and between people and information.

In their chapter “Re-Narrating the City Through the Presentation of Location,” Adriana de Souza e Silva and Jordan Frith analyze narrative and storytelling through the various uses of location-based social networks (LBSNs). These networks ask people to “check in” at locations as they move through the city, typically attaching notes, images, or reviews that are broadcast to their network. In so doing, these social networks provide participants with modes of reading and writing the city. By reasserting the importance of location to the act of writing the self into being, the production of space and production of identity are intimately entwined.

Part II of the book offers insights on the “Design and Practice” of mobile stories. The section begins with an important theoretical and practical overview by Jeff Ritchie in his chapter, “The Affordances and Constraints of Mobile Locative Narratives.” Drawing on the work of Donald Norman—who notably theorized the ideas of affordances and constraints, or the properties of an object that determine how it may or may not be used—Ritchie discusses the various ways that stories are either enabled or constrained by these emerging mobile devices. Part of his investigation is to ask designers to also consider the affordances and

constraints of the spaces of these stories (and how they often demand “really non-trivial effort” on the part of audiences, since these participants have to physically move through various spaces to access the story). Ultimately, Ritchie argues that mobile locative narratives must foster far greater motivation for the audience to take part in the story in order to overcome the value threshold of the story.

Mark Sample’s chapter, “Location Is Not Compelling (Until It Is Haunted),” asks some foundational questions for locative storytelling designers: with so many people using locative media to broadcast their location to their social network, *why should anyone care about your location? Why is your location interesting or compelling?* These questions cut to the heart of why particular places and site-specificity are important to locative storytelling projects. His response is that, while your location might not be compelling, *stories are*. Sample thus sets out to discuss possible storytelling projects that seek to reconcile the poor connection between locational tools and narrative.

Chapter 6, “Dancing with Twitter: Mobile Narratives Become Physical Scores,” by Susan Kozel, investigates the relationship between performance, narrative, and mobile media. By looking at narrative through the lens of dance, the term “narrative” is questioned: are mobile narratives that emerge through dance practice considered scripts, scores, notations, archives, or simply documents of live interactions? Kozel investigates these terms (and the ways that narrative, mobile media, and dance can be woven together) through an analysis of her mobile dance project, *IntuiTweet*, in which dancers used Twitter to send short messages to each other describing movement or kinesthetic sensations. Performers across several cities then performed the movements described in the tweets. She ultimately points to the embodied nature of asynchronous forms like Twitter and the power of using a social medium in unconventional ways.

The section ends with John Barber’s chapter, “Walking-Talking: Soundscapes, *Flâneurs*, and the Creation of Mobile Media Narratives.” Walking-Talking is a proposed mobile storytelling project that uses mobile phones to produce a sound narrative focused on a particular urban location. In discussing the possibilities of a locative sound-narrative project, Barber notes that the experience of a story of this kind resembles the practices of the *flâneur*, the nineteenth-century walker whose leisurely strolls in an urban setting became emblematic of modern life. Walking-Talking projects—unlike previous forms of storytelling that transported users away from their location by immersing them in an alternate, imaginative space—transport participants *into* their physical surroundings.

Part III, “Space and Mapping,” offers three chapters that analyze the relationship between maps and mobile media (and how stories can be conveyed through these two media). The section begins with Didem Ozkul and David Gauntlett’s experiments with the creation of cognitive maps of London. In “Locative Media in the City: Drawing Maps and Telling Stories,” Ozkul and Gauntlett discuss their interactions with participants who were asked to draw maps of their city and their experiences of mobility within the city. These “sketch maps” offer a practice

of translating knowing into telling: a process of self-narration about memories, spaces, and everyday life in a city increasingly characterized by mobile media use.

In chapter 9, “Paths of Movement: Negotiating Spatial Narratives through GPS Tracking,” Lone Koefoed Hansen focuses on the artistic practice of Dutch media artist Esther Polak, especially her work using GPS technologies to map and track spatial movements. Polak’s work explores ways of tracking, visualizing, and discussing the many spatial narratives that emerge when location data is overlaid with everyday life. Through an analysis of Polak’s works, and with theoretical reference to Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and French theorist Michel de Certeau, this chapter discusses how mobile media seem to facilitate an informed (re)engagement with space and the spatial narratives that unfold when people and objects disclose the personal, national, and global stories that are expressed through their paths of movement.

The section concludes with Paula Levine’s chapter, “On Common Ground: Here as There.” In this chapter, Levine looks at several mobile mapping narrative projects to show how these projects can work to build empathy in participants. Empathy is fostered in these projects by bringing the “distant” into direct relationship with the “local.” The projects analyzed—which include Levine’s own work *San Francisco-Baghdad* and *The Wall-The World*, Paul Rademacher’s *The Gulf Oil Spill*, and *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*—each offer participants a sense of layering and juxtaposition, resulting in what Levine terms “spatial dissonance.” By bringing the distant/foreign to bear on the local and immediate surroundings, new narratives emerge and produce experiences in which empathy plays a key role.

Part IV, “Mobile Games,” discusses a range of mobile storygames that utilize both locative technologies and nonlocative media. Ben Bunting’s chapter, “The Geocacher as Placemaker: Remapping Reality through Location-Based Mobile Gameplay,” discusses the link between players’ movements in the physical world and the goals of the gameworld as offering a new dimension to in-game storytelling. Bunting looks specifically at geocaching (and his co-authored storygame project, *University of Death*) to show how gameworlds and physical spaces can merge to create engaging in-game narratives that utilize the site-specificity of the player as the immersive backdrop.

Rowan Wilken’s chapter, “Proximity and Alterity: Narratives of City, Self, and Other in the Locative Games of Blast Theory,” further develops this dynamic by looking at specific instances in locative games where players had to make connections with strangers. Looking at the work of Blast Theory, Wilken argues that such moments in locative games allow players to reimagine the city as a place that encourages connections with “the Other” (or those who are extremely different than we are). What emerges out of Wilken’s analysis is an interrogation of the idea of community: locative games can encourage interactions with diversity to such an extent that community becomes defined not through commonality, but through ongoing interactions with difference in the spaces we move through.

Chapter 13, “Playing Stories on the Worldboard: How Game-Based Storytelling Changes in the World of Mobile Connectivity,” by Bryan Alexander, traces the longer history of these storygames, noting how changes in gaming platforms have radically transformed the kinds of stories that these games can tell. The specific affordances and constraints of mobile games (from the Game Boy to immersive alternate reality games) offer unique advantages for storygames. Mobile storygames take advantage of the medium by allowing players to play interstitially, or in small pieces throughout the day. Similarly, emerging mobile storygames utilize the medium to incorporate the ability to capture and share content, as well as augment the space of the game with constantly transforming data.

The Mobile Games section ends with chapter 14, “‘I Heard It Faintly Whispering’: Mobile Technology and Nonlocative Transmedia Practices,” by Marc Ruppel. While much of this book thus far has focused on *locative technologies* (and the book itself is primarily concerned with this affordance of mobile media as noted in the subtitle, “Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies”), Ruppel’s chapter importantly expands this scope to note how mobile devices can be utilized for narrative and play in *nonlocative ways*. Focusing primarily on transmedia narratives, that utilize a wide range of media to tell their stories (mobile technologies being just one of them), Ruppel shows how mobile media become embedded in the transmedia stories while simultaneously becoming functional tools for the story to progress. In many of the stories he focuses on, such as the alternate reality game for the television series *Heroes*, the mobile phone becomes part of the characters’ interactions; however, at the same time, the phone is used by readers to engage with those characters. These uses greatly expand how mobile media is theorized for storygames. They must be understood within a larger media ecology that includes a wide range of technologies. They must also be understood as media that help extend the perceptions and sensory engagements of participants in these transmedia narratives.

Part V, “Narrative Interfaces,” begins with Gerard Goggin and Caroline Hamilton’s co-written chapter, “Narrative Fiction and Mobile Media after the Text-Message Novel.” This chapter aims to situate emerging reading practices among the various platforms for reading. Goggin and Hamilton look back at the history of reading from the novel to the cell-phone novel and, eventually, the e-reader and the location-aware device. Tracing the development of reading, writing, and distributing narratives through these platforms, Goggin and Hamilton show that reading platforms throughout history have encouraged several forms of “discontinuous reading” that extend beyond linear and enclosed models of reading. This form of reading has now dominated the emerging mobile media narratives and has subsequently opened up opportunities for much deeper engagements with narrative dynamics from a wider range of producers, consumers, co-creators and distributors.

Larissa Hjorth’s chapter, “Stories of the Mobile: Women, Micronarratives, and Mobile Novels in Japan,” builds on the previous chapter to further analyze the

specifics of the cell-phone novel. The Japanese *keitai shōsetsu*, sales of which far exceed the sale of print-text books in the West, sends out “micronarratives” in installments to readers. These novels are often written on cell phones and are designed to be read on cell phones. These cellphone novels, the majority of which are written by women and for women through “user-created content,” demonstrate how mobile media is undoubtedly transforming what it means to be creative and intimate. Through *keitai shōsetsu*, women can bring intimate and private stories into the public space, proffering new ways to experience storytelling in public places.

Chapter 17, “Telling Their Stories through iPad Art: Narratives of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities,” concludes the section on Narrative Interfaces. Co-authored by Jennifer Chatsick, Rhonda McEwen, and Anne Zbitnew, this chapter looks at the practices of the Visual Storytelling Club in Toronto, a group of college students with intellectual disabilities who use iPads as devices for nonlinear storytelling. Prompted by various scenarios, the students use the mobile devices to draw responses about their lives. These drawings, which serve as a means to work around their limited literacy skills, take particular shape when done on a tablet computer rather than on other media like desktop computers or even pen and paper. This chapter explores this medium-specificity to understand how different interfaces can foster certain kinds of narratives, especially in the context of students with disabilities.

Part VI concludes the book, looking at the topics of “Memory, History, and Community.” Alberto S. Galindo’s chapter, “Mobile Media after 9/11: The September 11 Memorial & Museum App,” uses as its main object of study the app released for people to tour Ground Zero and engage with the oral narratives recorded about the events of 9/11. The chapter is motivated by the question, “When considering how such national traumas like 9/11 are told—through oral histories, photographs, visualizations like timelines, to name a few—how might the mobile phone as a narrative interface transform our relationship to these stories and these memorializations?” The narratives of the “Explore 9/11” app take place across several spaces: the site-specific locations related to 9/11 experienced in tandem with images on the phone’s screen, the audio space of the oral narratives that are unlocked when walking by certain locations, and space of the archive of eyewitness accounts of the events. An analysis of the app thus shows that acts of memorialization, especially when experienced through emerging storytelling interfaces like the mobile phone, must be read through the lens of narrative—narratives that simultaneously interrogate these traumas as intensely public and private, in the past and ever-evolving.

Chapter 19, “Enhancing Museum Narratives: Tales of Things and UCL’s Grant Museum,” was co-written by scholars, curators, and designers at University College London and its Grant Museum of Zoology. The authors—Claire Ross, Mark Carnall, Andrew Hudson-Smith, Claire Warwick, Melissa Terras, and Steven Gray—discuss their design and implementation of QRator, a project that

utilizes mobile media and QR codes to encourage museum visitors to interact with specific objects. Visitors offer their own interpretations and thoughts about museum objects, connecting their ideas to the broader conversations about these objects. These “narrative engagements,” which stem from personal preconceptions (and how those preconceptions may have been challenged in the museum) subsequently become part of the object’s history through the interactive label generated by such interactions. Comparing the QRator project to other mobile museum projects, this chapter demonstrates the emerging trend to incorporate the “Internet of Things” into experiences with historical objects. Here, mobile media affords the ability for museum goers to become authors of dynamic content for museum artifacts in a way that was previously unavailable.

The book concludes with Mark Marino’s chapter, “Mobilizing Cities: Alternative Community Storytelling.” Looking at two mobile story projects that allow people to tell stories about the city of Los Angeles (as citizen journalists documenting stories and as fiction writers imagining possible futures), Marino looks at how mobile media can tell stories that often go untold. Through the main examples of *Mobile Voices (VozMob)* and *The LA Flood Project*, this chapter notes how mobile media can offer storytellers unparalleled ways of creating spaces of polyvocality, in which *many voices* are heard equally and marginalized stories are given voice. As with many of the projects discussed throughout this book, the examples in Marino’s chapter point to the importance of narratives that disrupt traditional notions of narrative creation and distribution. These emerging mobile stories are multivoiced, layered, situated, and tell important (and often contradictory) narratives about a place and what it means to live in that space.

Notes

1. Molly Wright Steenson and Jonathan Donner, “Beyond the Personal and Private: Modes of Mobile Phone Sharing in Urban India,” in *The Reconstruction of Space and Time*, ed. Rich Ling and Scott W. Campbell (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 2009), 231–250.
2. For ubiquitous computing researcher Mark Weiser, this mode of interaction is the most powerful. He writes, “The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.” See Mark Weiser, “The Computer for the 21st Century,” <http://www.ubiq.com/hypertext/weiser/SciAmDraft3.html>.
3. Malcolm McCullough, “Epigraphy and the Public Library,” in *Augmented Urban Spaces: Articulating the Physical and Electronic City*, ed. Alessandro Aurigi and Fiorella de Cindio (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 64.
4. Herbert Thurston, S.J., *The Stations of the Cross: An Account of their History and Devotional Purpose* (London: Burns and Oates, 1914), 21–23.
5. *Ibid.*, 69.
6. See N. Katherine Hayles, “Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 1 (2004): 67–90.

7. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
8. Shekhar Kapur, "We Are the Stories We Tell Ourselves," *TEDIndia* www.ted.com/talks/shekhar_kapur_we_are_the_stories_we_tell_ourselves.html.
9. David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xviii–xix.
10. Sue-Ellen Case, "Interview: Sue-Ellen Case on Her A.T.H.E. Career Achievement Award," *UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television*, <http://www.tft.ucla.edu/2012/04/interview-sue-ellen-case-on-her-upcoming-a-t-h-e-career-achievement-award/>.
11. William Uricchio, "Historicizing Media in Transition," in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 23–24.

2

THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF MOBILE STORYTELLING

Merging the Physical and the Digital at a National Historic Site

Brett Oppegaard and Dene Grigar

How do the examples in this chapter help us understand the practice of storytelling in the mobile media age?

This chapter focuses on the production of a mobile history platform used to explore Fort Vancouver, a historic site located on the banks of the Columbia River in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. Fort Vancouver, once dubbed the “New York of the Pacific,” is a major archaeological resource, with more than two million artifacts in its collection. Most of those pieces, gathered from more than fifty years of excavations, are kept in warehouses, along with the boxes of documents, drawings, and other assorted historical records in storage that, because of severely limited access, obscure the fascinating and multicultural history of the place. It is a goal of the Fort Vancouver Mobile project to make these materials available through a direct experience with the site with the aid of mobile phones. By drawing from this example of a mobile storytelling platform, the chapter points toward ways that mobile stories utilize “intermediality,” a term with expansive edges that helps us understand that a wide range of media should work together to transform the ways we experience space.

Keywords

- **Intermediality:** Action that takes place between the media, like an adhesive binding together the swirling mix of ideas inherent in an environment that includes otherwise unconnected media, delivered through mobile devices as well as the physical sensations of the place.
- **Mobile media storytelling:** A mode of storytelling that blends digital media on mobile devices with physical environments.
- **Fort Vancouver National Historic Site:** A National Park Service attraction based in Vancouver, Washington, that served in the nineteenth century

as the early end of the Oregon Trail. It later became the hub of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur-trading empire and the first U.S. Army Post.

Introduction

Paul Kane could sense a story that needed to be told. The self-taught painter, reared in Toronto around “hundreds of Indians,” realized in the mid-1800s that the “noble savages” he had befriended as a child had essentially vanished from his region. Inspired to document the indigenous groups before they were eradicated or assimilated in the rest of North America, Kane started exploring the Canadian frontiers and the ways in which he could tell this compelling tale. He used the mobile media of the period: paper and pencils as well as oil and watercolor paints. Those journeys eventually led him thousands of miles west into uncharted wilderness, where he drew sketches of chiefs, women, children, costumes, natural landscapes, and scenes depicting manners and customs of all sorts.¹ Kane then took those hundreds of drawings and detailed journals back with him to Toronto. He translated many of them into romanticized oil paintings. He hosted several popular exhibitions of the material. More than 150 years later, though, these irreplaceable interfaces into the past have become materially irrelevant: Kane's images and stories, extracted from their native homes, simply became disconnected from time and space. No longer tethered to a place, no longer new, the images and observations sank back into their containers, drifted deeper into the library shelves, were placed into storage, and then gradually faded from general concern and consciousness.

While that data has stagnated in a nether space, modern mobile devices—smartphones, tablet computers, portable technology of all sorts—have emerged with unprecedented power to reconnect worlds, recombine media, reconstruct images, recount observations, and reverse the alienation and separation epidemic of contemporary life. These devices also represent an opportunity to forage through our past, to find the stories, like Kane's, that matter and to give them relevance again. So swiftly is society shifting due to this technological innovation that wireless penetration in the United States surged from 34% to 93% during the past decade, with many American adults now carrying around information-rich mobile devices. Meanwhile, wireless data revenue grew over that same period from \$140 million to \$47 billion.² The epoch of pervasive media has begun, just as Kane in his time recognized the sudden ubiquity of European culture in wild northeast Canadian terrain. During Kane's life, Native Americans were almost annihilated; America fought in its deadliest conflict, the Civil War; colonialism, slavery, Manifest Destiny, and other monumental crises of humanity were experienced and debated in real time. While mobile stories need further examination in all forms—from fiction to nonfiction, from narrative to expositional, per the many examples in this book—the core of this chapter is inspired by George

Santayana's prescient yet still widely unheeded mantra, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."³

Mobile devices undeniably are changing the ways in which we view the world. They are affecting our projections of tomorrow and our remembrances of yesterday. These new tools, in turn, are creating unprecedented opportunities for digital authors. When composing mobile stories, a creator can now know where his or her users are (location awareness), what is physically around those users (spatial awareness), and even what the users have been doing before the moment of connection, all while crunching data to predict what they likely will be doing afterward (contextual awareness). These devices can level out the hierarchy of composition between author and audience as much as desired, creating the potential for a high level of collaboration and direct feedback to the story space. They also allow for creative expression by the audience to be incorporated into the content. These devices can even create tangible displays of social connectedness. In essence, mobile storytelling fosters interrelationships between four distinct entities—between content and medium; people and space/time; people and information; and people and other people. Mobile devices open new portals for rediscovering the forgotten, yet illuminating, stories of our shared history, including stories like Kane's on the American frontier.

This perspective has galvanized a team of academics, historians, archaeologists, curators, new media practitioners, and mobile developers who want to further explore this fertile mediascape. The collective effort, dubbed the "**Fort Vancouver Mobile project**," focuses on research into the field of mobile storytelling at a principal historical hub in the Pacific Northwest, the **Fort Vancouver National Historic Site**, where Kane spent the winter of 1847 and today more than one million people visit each year. This essay, then, looks at one aspect of its theoretical underpinning: the interrelationships made possible by digital media storytelling.

Ideas expressed in this essay are born out of the experiences of developing digital content and a mobile app at the historic site. Fort Vancouver originally served as the early end of the Oregon Trail, and later as the regional headquarters of the British **Hudson's Bay Company's** furempire, a hub of a 700,000-square-mile dynasty called the "Columbia Department," located on the north bank of the Columbia River. Later, the site served as the first U.S. Army post in the Northwest. The Fort Vancouver National Historic Site is now home to two million artifacts, most of which are kept in warehouses. These archaeological items, gathered from more than fifty years of excavations, only begin to tell the story of the place, once dubbed the "New York of the Pacific." Countless other boxes of documents, drawings, and assorted historical records add to the complexity of this multicultural mosaic. Because of its vast and diverse history, the site is representative of a long and thick narrative spine, one that materializes as more of a richly detailed realm, stuffed with intriguing characters and plots, rather than a straightforward

and narrow string of pearls. It is the kind of story that demands a medium capable of handling its many facets in a way that makes sense geographically, historically, and technologically. National Park Service staff members at the fort understand the potential that digital technology offers across those layers of experience and began, themselves, exploring options, such as on-demand podcasts and social media streams, as a way to augment traditional interpretation efforts like kiosks and printed materials. Yet the storytelling opportunities of a mobile app were thought to offer such a richer and deeper environment for site visitors that the Fort Vancouver Mobile team was formed to explore such melded space, mashing together the physical and the digital, while bringing together scholars and artists from Washington State University Vancouver, Texas Tech University, Portland State University, and the Center for Columbia River History, as well as regional experts in new media production, to conduct experiments in the field. All of us sensed something special emerging, but one of the first tasks was to try to pinpoint exactly what that was.

The Affordances and Challenges of Mobile Media for Storytelling

The handheld mobile phone has been around commercially since the early 1980s, but its secondary use as a device for composing and distributing stories is relatively new. As a point of reference, the first cell-phone novel, *Deep Love*, was created in 2003 in Japan. Other forms of digital stories also have been emerging, with more recent examples drawing on the improved connectivity and robust features made possible by smart technologies. In 2006, Henry Jenkins recognized that modern storytelling, in turn, had become more about world building, as evolving authors began to create compelling digital environments “that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium” because only a world can support the next developmental phase of storytelling in which multiple characters and multiple stories cross into multiple media.⁴ The affordances for storytelling as “world building” means that Fort Vancouver can be told as a biography of its founder, **John McLoughlin**, or from the perspective of any number of the characters who inhabited the place and later became important nationally and internationally, including **Ulysses S. Grant**, **George C. Marshall**, and **O.O. Howard**. Or it can be told from the viewpoint of any of the hundreds of uncelebrated and undocumented workers, or from the perspective of women who kept the semblance of Western civility, replete with Spode china, in the rough and ready frontier. The Fort Vancouver story can be set at the time of the founding of the fort, when the location was part of the **Oregon Trail**, or during its heyday, when the fort ruled the region as the hub of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s fur-trading empire, or afterward, when the U.S. Army pushed the Canadians north and created the first American military outpost in the region. Or it could show the time before the Europeans arrived, or even the moment of

first contact, à la the settling of Jamestown. The same relatively small piece of land supported all of that narrative activity. Yet people generally come to Fort Vancouver today and want to learn “the” story. History, in this respect, is closer to art and literature than science. Verónica Tozzi refers to the phrase “impositionalist narrativism” as a way to describe the coexistence of multiple interpretations of the same event, dependent upon the storyteller’s perspective.⁵ This idea presents a picture, of sorts, of the complex intertwining of the personalities and beliefs of the interface, or interpreter, with the individual and personalized interests of the user. The ultimate goal of mobile storytelling from this perspective is, then, as Mei Yii Lim and Ruth Aylett note, to provide ways for visitors to the site to navigate among this interconnected mass of information and gain access to free-choice learning.⁶

Historic sites inherently attempt to connect story and place, for without that tether, such sites have no clearly recognizable spatial or physical purpose, and therefore the community has no logical reason to devote space and resources to maintain them. In Western culture, at least, such a place provides a tangible link to the past, and the historical storytelling makes explicit what is implicitly embedded in the local landscape.⁷ Such sites have incorporated various technologies to make such connections for as long as they have existed, and they continue to try to find new ways to make their stories relevant to new generations, including a wide range of techniques such as physical exhibitions, outdoor panels, and audio tours.⁸ Despite such alluring affordances, mobile storytelling has been slow to attract architects of narrative realms. These essential producers, who place the portals and filter the noise, rarely are venturing into these types of interactive and immersive forms. With a few exceptions—such as **Evan Young’s** *The Carrier*,⁹ the *Tracking Agama* team,¹⁰ and the **Neighborhood Narratives** projects¹¹—it seems odd that arguably one of the most potentially powerful storytelling devices for connecting story and place instead has been relegated to the relatively narrow transmissions of text messages or as a platform for puzzle games. Yet, as this book testifies, those in the digital humanities and media arts are beginning to realize the enormous potential of mobile devices as storytelling tools.

Technical issues right now make authoring in any mobile space a frustrating and time-consuming endeavor. These devices tend to have a highly restricted energy capacity, relatively low computing power, and relatively small amounts of memory and storage space, plus limited color and font support. The keyboards typically are small and hard to use, and limited bandwidth makes downloads typically slow, causing lag.¹² Theoretically, mobile devices eventually will adapt universal standards and gain intuitive features and functionality. These standardizations will increase and allow for presentations that are more complex.¹³ Improved technology, higher-speed transfer rates, and more standardization eventually should solve many of the technical issues. Typical users of interactive technologies, though, tend to be less interested in the technologies themselves and more interested in the story or purpose of the interaction.¹⁴ Blank pieces of paper—like