

Introduction

In 2014, the Institute of Culture Studies saw the launch of the research project entitled *Mobility: Media, Urban Practices and Students' Culture*. We were interested in examining the transformations in contemporary culture that owe to the ever more natural presence of mobile media (both devices and applications) as well as increasing opportunities for physical mobility among inhabitants of cities today. The research team (Magdalena Kamińska, Marianna Michałowska, Agata Skórzyńska, Jadwiga Zimpel, Jacek Zygorowicz, Tomasz Żaglewski) have invited the subject of investigations, in other words the protagonists of the changes – the students – to participate and carry out their own research projects. Their case studies became the source of invaluable insights into the media-related experience of the young generation of users of mobile devices, as well as their involvement in the dynamic culture. Also, one has to bear in mind that the mobility of participants in contemporary culture is no longer limited to physical space but may denote “cybermobility” as well. The latter is discussed by among others Peter Adey and Paul Bevan, who understand it as “connected mobility of bits and information and their relationship with the subsequent movement of people and objects.” Numerous current studies regarding mobility take advantage of visual methods and target the domain of visual phenomena (photographs, films, blogs, interactive visual projects, maps); it would therefore appear that visuality – from the observation of mobile phenomena to their documentation and production – is a major factor determining the methodologies and the object of inquiry. Scholarly reflection on visuality drifts between two extremes: marginalisation and domination. This polarity of approaches in research is referred to by Gillian Rose, who writes that while initially “visual representations have been largely ignored in the social sciences,” what we witness now is a “fetishization of visual methods.” Yet the crux of the matter is that visuality needs to be taken into account without being absolutized. This is well demonstrated in studies into mobile media, which simultaneously utilise it and constitute visual items themselves (e.g. smartphones as visual objects or graphic interfaces of apps), as well as engender sensory interaction involving sound, touch and space.

The articles included in this issue constitute a commentary to one of the many aspects of conducted research. As we focused on the relationships between visuality and mobile culture, we have decided to invite media researchers from across Poland to collaborate. Consequently, certain aspects of inquiry that lie beyond our competence, such as the artistic, political and technological dimensions of mobility could be taken into consideration.

We attached importance to ontic questions, such as the status of visuality in the world of mobile technologies, as well as epistemological issues: the visual description, the experience of mobility and the usefulness of visual methods in studying said experience. We were thus interested in at least two dimensions of investigations into mobility: the application of mobile media in visuality research and visualisations of mobility in the cultural space.

The texts collected in this volume have been divided into four sections relating to questions about the visuality of movement, mobile practices of media users, media and data saturation, and representations of mobility. It was our chief goal to feature papers which draw on specific examples of contemporary cultural practice, therefore they may be seen as an overview of the manifestations of mobility witnessed today.

The first part, "Mobile Media Studies as Visual Studies," begins with a text in which Marianna Michałowska discusses the theoretical framework established for visual studies of mobility. This area of interest is probed further by Ewa Wójtowicz in a study of emersive media which explore the boundaries between the visible and the invisible. The analysis also demonstrates the potential to integrate artistic and engineering disciplines that mobile technologies appear to harbour.

In the following part, entitled "Mobile Cultural Practices," Agnieszka Dytman-Stasięńko takes a look at mobile infoactivism, deliberating on how the access to data and its flow may support actions geared towards mental, political, social or economic change. Subsequently, relying on the research into modes of habitation conducted by students, Agata Skórzyńska analyses the ways in which mobile media can be applied in educational practice. In this case, visuality is both the object and the tool of analysis.

Part three, "From Media Saturation to Saturation of Data," shifts the attention to correlations between mobile technologies, changes in communication processes and access to information. Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech shows how media saturation – the permeation of cultural reality with technological extensions of our presence in the world – generates new cultural activities, as evinced by "smartphonisation" of communication. Access to information and its management is also discussed by Paweł Wieczorek who exposes the mechanism of network surveillance through an analysis of algorithms in social media.

Finally, the section entitled “Re-presentations of Mobile Media” focuses on how mobile media are depicted in popular culture. Piotr Aptacy’s text concerns the iconisation of the figure of Steve Jobs, a process that was sealed with a number of cinema productions, whereas Tomasz Żaglewski delves, in the manner of an archaeologist, into graphic novels, finding artefacts which in a sense, were harbingers of contemporary mobile devices such as cell phones or smartwatches.

Hence, in this issue, visuality is shown as an aspect of contemporary mobile culture; it may be ubiquitous but it is not dominant. For this reason, we present it as something more than an image: an essential trait of devices, applications and interfaces which enables us to communicate with devices, and one of the means (next to sound, smell, and touch) of experiencing movement and being in motion.

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