Locative media and the reshaping of proximity and encounters in urban public spaces

Christian Licoppe and Yoriko Inada
Département de Sciences Economiques et Sociales, Telecom ParisTech

Network Cultures, IT university, Copenhagen, 29/04/2011
The development of locative media as a part of ubiquitous computing

The way it produces « hybrid ecologies » (Crabtree et Rodden, 2008)
  • « Hybrid ecologies are a new class of digital ecology that merge multiple environments, physical and digital, together »

« Seamful situations », fragmented encounters, layered participation frames

Reshaping our experience of spatial proximity and co-presence
Our research

• A real need for in depth ethnographies of long term use of locative media in actual settings

• The design of locative games aiming at the creation of « urban playful spaces » (de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009)

• Ethnographies of the uses of:
  • A location aware game in Japan : Mogi (2003-2006)
  • A proximity game in Japan and in France : Dragon Quest 9 (2009-2011)

• Interviews, collected messages exchanged between players (forums, game servers), direct observations in public places.
1. Location-based games and proximity games
1.1. Location-based games: Mogi Mogi
Mobile players have one kilometre-radius visibility based on the ‘radar’ interface.
PC Players see the whole gameplay

A feature introduced to enable collaborative behavior between immobile PC players and mobile players: guiding, etc.

PC players see position of Mogi friends and same team members
Locations are public and noticeable all the time; unusual locations are ‘mentionables’ and mentioning them is a resource to start an interaction.

Locations are treated as public data particularly between mogi-friends and same team members.
1.2. Proximity-based games: DragonQuest 9
Mobile terminals and proximity connections

- Proximity game as a particular way of articulating the real world and the digital world into emergent « hybrid ecologies »
- Mobile terminals may interconnect within a 20-meter radius (Bluetooth, Wifi)
  - Dragon Quest 9: Nintendo Ds: game terminals
- A game design which turn connection and disconnection into serendipitous events in the game play (Soderlund, 2010)
Turning proximity into a game event and an ‘encounter’

Surechigai tsushin’

- Activating the random encounter function
- The character of a nearby player appears onscreen (or ‘visits’ your game world)
- If she/he has made available a map, it is automatically transferred
- A maximum of three such ‘encounters’ before the terminal has to be updated
- Such ‘encounters’ are not necessarily symmetrical

- Players may the go to a place in the game (Rikka’s inn) to consult their mutual profiles and interact further
A distributed game play

• The game world may expand or contract as new players near by get connected or disconnected.
  – Additional floors in Rikka’s inn
  – Possibilities of multi-play

• A strong incentive embedded in the proximity game design for players to assemble
2. ‘Timid encounters’: reshaping proximity and sociality in urban ‘hybrid ecologies’
• Proximity encounters interweaves three infrastructures of communicative involvement

• Urban mobilities: the embodied resources of multimodal co-present interaction

• Game encounters and transaction on the Nintendo DS terminal (DragonQuest) & game play on the mobile phone (Mogi)

• Text messaging on forums (use of mobile internet on the mobile phone)
• The proximity encounter situation is potentially ‘seamful’ (Chalmers & Galani, 2004)

• It involves evidential boundaries (Goffman, 1974)
  • e.g the screens of the mobile terminal are unavailable to nearby persons unless they get deliberately close

• Multi-layered encounters and participation statuses, giving rise to a whole zoology of encounters
Encounters at the Shizuoka station meeting
A « timid encounter » in the mall

1. RICK (4/9, 18:40): Tonight, I am going to Aeon Hamamatsu Ichino at 20:00. As I have many things to do we will interact via forum or text messaging.

2. BABA (4/9, 19:31): Rick-san, my pleasure. I will also go to Ichino around 20:30 or 21:00. It will be nice if we could do a surechigai. I think I will mostly stay in the food court. I hope it will work well.

3. RICK (4/9, 20:27): Baba-san, it’s OK! I am already having a drink in the food court (^-^)ノ

4. BABA: (4/9, 21:19): Rick-san, I have arrived. I am coming after walking around a little.

5. RICK (4/9, 23:30): Baba-san, hello. We have probably done surechigai.
A ‘regular member’ performing ‘timidly’

- Kato (18/10, 01:06): Thank you very much for the session at Shizuoka station.

  As it was just after I had my hair cut and just after the rain I was extremely cold (pale smiley). I took the liberty of performing surechigai by putting my DS on the window sill of McDonald’s (I am sorry not to have had enough courage). I was still able to do surechigai with 20 persons though (spark).
3. Proximity awareness and the interaction order of «urban hybrid ecologies»
CASE 1

BABA (6/9, 12:17): Rick-san, thank you very much for the other day. I think we probably did surechigai. I saw someone who seemed to me could be Rick-san, but I did not have the courage to talk to you. I would like to play again another time.

CASE 2

Kato (18/10, 01:06): Thank you very much for the session at Shizuoka station. As it was just after I had my hair cut and just after the rain I was extremely cold (pale smiley). I took the liberty of performing surechigai by putting my DS on the window sill of McDonald's (I am sorry not to have had enough courage). I was still able to do surechigai with 20 persons though (spark).
‘Discovering’ mutual proximity: the Mogi case
‘Onscreen co-presence’ as noticeable proximity event

1. N. (20:19:38): 今晚、近いね
   
   this evening, (surprised smiley) we are very close aren’t we?

   
   Wouah, (sweat) we are close (tired smiley)

   you ran away (3 disappointed smileys)

   no (sweat) it is because i got on the Marunouchi line (happy smiley)
As in proximity-based ‘timid encounters’ the interactions express a sense that some behaviors might express a form of elusiveness

Done through the uttering of ‘gentle’ complaints and justifications which mark a face to face encounter as expected and as ‘missing’

An underlying normative principle which could be stated as:

being close and knowing about it projects a face to face encounter as a relevant next action
A more general normative orientation

- Mobile phone conversations (Licoppe & Morel, 2011 in press)
- Other cultures (anthropological data) (Licoppe & Inada, 2009; 2010)

Both ‘context free’ and ‘context sensitive’

But which plays a particularly central role in the way locative media reshape our joint experience of proximity and sociality

Also relevant to their acceptability:
It provides a non trivial reason for close ‘real life’ friends to be part of the location aware community of members.
3. Disconnecting mediated proximities and embodied presence
Playing with ‘natural assumptions’ regarding the link between the mobile terminal and its owner

- Proximity awareness and location awareness are actually technical accomplishments

- Our ‘natural’ attitude is to consider it is relevant to the position of users but this relies on additional assumptions
  - Proximity-gaming: that the game terminal and the user are at the same place
  - Location aware game: that the mobile terminal and the user are physically present at the place figured on the digital map

- But in both kinds of games user invent playful practices that rely on breaking with such assumptions
The Dragonquest case
« Locker room distribution »

571. Kuma, 08 :24 : Today I will distribute (maps) with the help of an automatic locker

at the south exit of the Numazu station.

Place : one of the two locker rooms of the south exit of the Numazu station (I will say which later, according to availability)

Date and time : Saturday 28/11, 9h-17h (Hours may change)

Object : 9:00-13:00  The Desta-Moor map (Level 1)

13:00-17:00  The Zooma map

Please leave me a message after doing a surechigai (lol)

To yahushiro-san I hope you will be able to come

572. Kuma, 09 :16 : I have now installed everything in a locker room behind the chemist at the Numazu station. My character is called ta-xxx tribe

elite warrior thanks to write a message if you have done a
Players discovered an unintended functionality in the interface: the possibility to ‘freeze’ one’s icon in a given spot, even if one is not there.

Getting one’s own icon so close to that of another player that the icons are ‘in contact’ though the players’ actual bodies are distant: doing “cara-gattai”
Cara-gattai’ as a witnessable performance available for appreciation

A performance which is publicly appreciated

Sexual undertones
5. Conclusion
• Accomplishing urban public locales as ‘hybrid ecologies’

• The specific kind of sociality which develops there: multi-layered encounters and participation frames (e.g. timid encounters)

• A whole new zoology of ‘encounters’ which requires a new vocabulary of encounters

• But which also rests on a general normative orientation

• Shared knowledge about mutual proximity projects a face to face encounter as a relevant next action

• Which becomes a salient feature of the interaction order in hybrid ecologies
• Why are users in both settings so keen:
  • to exploit the looseness of the linkage of location and embodied presence?
  • to play at dissociating embodied presence and digital ‘presence’?

• Changes in our orientations towards co-presence?
Thank you !
Encounters at the Shizuoka station meeting

• A mix of mutually acquainted players, unknown players, non playing strangers

1) An unknown player who gets ‘into’ the group and addresses the organizer
  • Alignment of identification in the co-present encounter and in the game play
  • « Seamlessness » as an accomplishment
A ‘timid’ encounter at the Shizuoka station

2) A « timid encounter »
   - An orientation to do ‘surechigai tsushin’ in the game
   - An embodied mobility which displays an orientation towards avoiding being identified as a co-present player
   - ‘Seamfulness’ as an accomplishment