

iSpace? Identity & Space – A Visual Ethnography with Young People and Mobile Phone Technologies

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Abstract

Mobile phone technologies are transforming how young people think, work, play and relate to each other. However, a central concern for the thesis is that education policy and practice far too often resembles an industrial model that is standardised, mechanistic and linear and that rarely reflects the informational, dynamic and creative lives of young people. In particular, the educational project fails to connect with the way young people use their mobile phone technologies to multi-task, connect, and create content at a precipitous rate. This thesis focuses on the ways in which mobile phone technology is now a significant influence in the way young people develop a sense of self, and a sense of identity and agency that permeates the way they engage with education. The specific research questions that follow from this are: how are young peoples' identities shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture? How is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined through mobile phone technology? And, taken together how might these processes of identity development influence the way the educational project develops in the future? This thesis addressed these aims by conducting a visual ethnographic study over three years, using participation observation in a sixth-form college in the UK that included video interviews with seven college students. The research has produced a conceptual framework that documents a number of key findings that include: (a) the mobile phone has an immediate symbolic value to young people providing signals about the user's identity, or presentation of the self; (b) the mobile phone also helps facilitate the performance of lived experiences and is actively part of assisting in various forms of agency. (c) The mobile phone enables a constant flow of (re)presentations of young people that reflects a fluidity of identity that characterises key aspects of contemporary social life. Finally, (d) the mobile phone also supports and enhances the maintenance of social space through the maintenance of social groups and also crucially, the feeling of being oneself. The main conclusion drawn from this research is that too often education systems overlook that fact that learning for young people is typically, and inevitably, personal and yet at the same time located in connected, information-driven environments that are predisposed to digital technologies. Therefore, this research argues for educational policy makers and practitioners to think creatively about how to develop education in ways that fundamentally support young people in their (re)construction of a personalised landscape for learning through their mobile phone technologies.

Keywords: Mobile phone; digital technology; identity; culture; space; education; personalised learning; visual ethnography; reflexivity; participant observation; video interviews

Declaration

I hereby swear that that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedication

To my brother, Matthew; our mum and dad, Carole and David; and to my husband, Joss. This thesis is for you. For all your many talents and for the laughter and love that we put into each other's lives. It's when I am with you all that I really am in my-space.

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1 Chapter One: Introduction

Tipping points involve three notions: that events and phenomena are contagious, that little causes can have big effects, and that changes can happen not in a gradual linear way but dramatically at a moment when the system switches, as with the consumption of fax machines or mobile phones or air journeys... Wealth derives here not from scarcity as in conventional economics but from abundance. Each fax machine, mobile, email address and airport, is so much more valuable if there are many others so enabling new connections to be formed and extended. Gladwell (in Urry, 2003: 162)

In 1995, 10 years into the history of mobile phones, penetration in the UK was just 7%. In 1998 it was about 25%, but by 1999 it was 46%, that was the 'tipping point'. In 1999 one mobile phone was sold in the UK every 4 seconds. Linge (in Wray, 2011)

By 2004, there were more mobile phones in the UK than people – a penetration level of more than 100%. (Wray, 2011)

1.1 Mobile futures

I began my career in teaching and subsequent research in education with the view that human potential was not predictable and that education was able to improve the lives of young people. And yet, this view still appears to be at odds with the prevailing spirit of the age, a time when as an educator I am expected to use the certainty of prediction as a reliable tool in the planning and organising of opportunities for learning. I work as a curriculum manager and teacher in a sixth form college where learning is frequently conceptualised in terms of, for example, levels, target grades, value added and learning outcomes, as if the students' potential is seemingly predictable and knowable in advance. Furthermore, this

quantifiable and measurable view of learning suggests that students themselves can be predicted, known, measured and quantified in terms of their ability – a matter of profound concern to me. Since, such determinist thinking about education by policy makers, then constrains educators in terms of how they might organise and structure learning for young people. Over the last fifteen years, I have continued to appreciate that learning is undoubtedly complex and that there are many interacting influences that underlie differences of attainment. But, I have always been curious as to what might happen if young peoples' learning was able to flourish and expand in all its rich variety. What might happen if predictions and certainty were replaced by opportunities for young people that promoted a sense of agency and even the motivation to influence their own learning futures?

This view resonates with a rights-based approach to education, one that is interested in the role of education in securing rights to education, rights in education and rights through education for young people in their personal, social, cultural, political and economic domains of life (Subrahmanian, 2002; Unterhalter, 2007). These rights include, for example, nurturing creativity and participation by students in democratic structures. Therefore, teaching approaches that are identified as learner-centred and democratic structures that are adopted in schools and colleges are promoted within the rights-based approach. The emphasis is on cultural and relational justice and is exemplified well by the work of Paul Smyth in Australia. Smyth examines education from the perspective of the lives,

experiences, interests, aspirations and communities from which young people come, and from which they are a part (Smyth, 2010). In addition, the work of Mandy Swann and colleagues suggests that the rights of individual students should not result in them being categorised as having fixed educational capabilities and that schools and teachers should seek to develop transformative learning environments "creating learning without limits" (Swann et al., 2012).

In contrast to this rights-based perspective to education is a human capital approach. This approach to education focuses on the development of academic capabilities and vocational skills that reflect the needs of society. Thus, quality is measured by the level and distribution of credentials produced by the education system, and the contribution that education can make to economic growth. In many respects the current education policy in England focuses on these measures, whereby their improvement, and therefore the focus for educational research, is defined in terms of the technical enhancement of the inputs, processes and outcomes of education (Creemers et al., 2007). Education certainly has a critical role to play in developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are essential for economic vitality and growth. Young people need the opportunities to develop 21st century skills that might include: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, and flexibility and adaptability. Yet, until recently, education systems have not even placed the building of these skills on an equal par with acquiring content knowledge in a variety of core

subjects. This has then given rise to what has become a serious skills gap, that is, the gulf between the high demand for, and low supply of many of these essential 21st century workforce skills (Trilling and Fadel, 2009).

Many of the challenges that I face as an educator are now being generated by the powerful interaction of these external forces. Furthermore, the pace of change is quickening every day. New technologies are transforming how young people think, work, play and relate to each other. But, the central problem is that many of our established ways of doing things in education are rooted in old ways of thinking – we face backwards, not forwards. This is because the rise of industrialism influenced not only the structure of mass education, but also its culture. They are based on the principles of standardisation and conformity. The education system also operates on the manufacturing principle of linearity, in that there are distinct sequential stages to the process. The idea is that if students progress in the prescribed way through the system, they will emerge at the end educated and prepared for work. This assumption, that there is a direct linear relationship between education and employment, puts schools and colleges under pressure to then prioritise those subjects that seem most relevant to the economy. Is the relationship between education and the economy a simple and straightforward process of supply and demand? While industrial systems may be standardised, mechanistic and linear, I would suggest that the lives of young people are not.

And, in spite of the inherent deficiencies in the industrial/academic system of education, many policymakers continue to argue about the need to raise traditional academic standards. In doing so, I believe that the creative and innovative capacities of a generation of young people are being sacrificed needlessly to an academic illusion. In my experience, young people multi-task, connect, and create content at a precipitous rate. There has been a significant generational shift particularly in the use of digital technologies, for example Mark Prensky (2001) highlights a generation gap between the “digital natives” and the “digital immigrants.” It is this pervasiveness of digital technologies, especially those that are mobile, such as smartphones that can change the whole equation for education, and for students and teachers.

Technology is a significant influence in developing a young person’s sense of self. There have been rapid developments in the use of technology in education, both in terms of skills development and as a medium for stimulating students’ learning, but one area that appears to be underdeveloped is that of mobile phone technologies. Mobile phone technologies appear to have become a core component of young peoples’ lives, influencing their identity formation and agency in the context of education. This will be the main focus of the research in this thesis. Since, in order to face these challenges we have to understand their nature; and then to meet them, we have to recognise that cultivating young peoples’

creativity and innovation with their technologies is not so much an option, as an urgent necessity.

These are a few ideas to evoke the background to my research, but ahead of the itinerary of this thesis, first a note on terminology. My main focus is upon 'mobile technologies' by this I principally mean the types of digital technology that are based on mobile phones, including smartphones, and their associated networks. I am also aware of a range of other potential 'mobile' technologies, from iPods/mp3 players, iPads/tablets, game handhelds, e-books, e-readers, and laptops. So, as the thesis proceeds, I may refer to these other kinds of mobile technology, but usually when they vie with, connect to, and form hybrids with their mobile phone counterparts. In addition, wireless networks (Wi-Fi) are very much involved in the process of convergence with mobile phones/smartphones as many young people use them to connect to the internet at home, college, or in public spaces. With all the array of technologies encountered in this thesis, I hope that as the reader you will bear with me, as I try not to dwell overly on the technical specifications – simply giving the defining characteristics as clearly and economically as I am able. The 'young people' that are also referred to in this thesis are studying at key stage five, typically between the ages of 17 and 18. However, neither 'young people' nor 'mobile phone technologies' are monolithic categories, but documenting how a specific group of young people at a sixth form college in Cheshire take up a particular technology such as the mobile phone is critical to this thesis as a whole.

1.2 A roadmap of mobile phone technologies

The time, and therefore the story, belongs to them (the characters in the story). Yet the meaning of the story, what makes it worthy of being told, is what we can see and what inspires us because we are beyond its time. Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story... (Berger, 2005: 31)

My aim was to design an in-depth study that covers the use of mobile phone technologies by young people, but one that could nevertheless be exploratory and fluid. The specific research questions that followed from this were: how are young peoples' identities shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture? How is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined? And, how can the ways in which young people interpret the culture of mobile phones be better understood? In this respect, I make reference to both the material and immaterial nature of this the culture, this technology, the phone, that is, the material artefact itself; but also the online and networked use of this object, that is, the immaterial, and intangible relationships that are enabled through its use. Kracauer (1995: 257) draws attention to Simmel's analysis of objects that are seemingly from different (im)material worlds by suggesting that, "he has no interest in grasping a phenomenon in terms of its obvious meaning, but instead wants to allow the entire plenitude of the world to

pour into it.” This reference then to Simmel’s attempts to explain experiential and emotional dimensions of cultural phenomena makes his approach to cultural analysis extremely relevant to exploring young peoples’ everyday use of mobile phone technologies in a college environment (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997).

This thesis falls into five chapters, including the first chapter, the introduction. Chapter two begins by reminding the reader of today’s dominant myth about the future of education, one that emerges out of an industrial/academic conception of education as being primarily concerned with serving the formal economy. I aim to unsettle the assumptions upon which young people are being asked to invest ever greater time and resources in formal education, and question the way in which we discuss the future of education, technology, and young people. This is so that young people, and those involved in working with young people, might begin to see them as active agents, rather than passive participants in a future having been designed for them elsewhere and by others. I then go on to propose that we need to consider how we would create educational institutions that enable young people to critically reflect upon the kinds of information and digital resources that they might use to augment their cognitive and social capacities, and the sorts of futures that these might then offer to them. I then proceed to present a critical and focused review of the literature that was used initially to guide my reflections on trying to better understand how young people were engaging with mobile phone technologies. However, I continue to (re)present a new network, or web of

literatures that enabled me to begin to offer an alternative paradigm for understanding young peoples' engagement with this kind of technology and therefore helped analyse the issues and questions that I found were actually emerging at the micro-level. I build on Gee's (2000) perspective of identity that gave me an initial 'take' on the relationships between the individual and digital technologies and (re)present the 'new' literatures as a conceptual framework for understanding how young people draw on their mobile phones in their construction of their identities and social spaces. The first area – a sign of identity – introduces socio-cultural theory and the concept of identity examining the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation. The second area – an agency of identity – details the commodification of mobile phone use, and its co-consumption and co-productive nature for user agency. In the third area – a liquid identity – I explore the efficiency of mobile phone technologies and the apparent significance of a "liquid" life for young people (Bauman, 2005). The final area – a space for identity – presents a reflection on how we might frame these emergent concepts within the context of young peoples' use of space and their construction of personalised landscapes, and in particular personalised educational landscapes, that this new technology affords.

In chapter three, I shift the focus to my research methodology – ethnography. The nature of my ethnographic research process is detailed, followed by an exploration of reflexivity with particular attention drawn to the use of art as a metaphor for the

reflexive turn. I then critically discuss the practicalities of my research and the methods engaged – participant observation and the nature of my photo-elicitation ‘interviews’ – this leads me to a discussion about how I might begin to analyse the research data. This goes on to open up a discussion about the nature of sampling and how I came to appreciate that the number of interviews can be dependent on the analytic level to which the researcher aspires. Furthermore, I look at how the inclusion of a small number of ‘interviews’ in my ethnographic research was invaluable when placed alongside participant observation. In the penultimate section, I turn to a discussion about the ethical dimensions of my research. This continues into where I discuss how I might theorise my findings and rather than seeking validation solely through reference to generalised knowledge, how phronesis might then offer me a way of proceeding based in exemplary knowledge.

The research findings are (re)presented and analysed in chapter four. The ‘discussion’ is also integral to this chapter, rather than being located separately. This is because both the findings and the discussion were interwoven into the ethnographic process and the ongoing, iterative dialogue between the data, my reflexive thoughts and experiences, and the literature. I begin this chapter by examining how I started to write as a social scientist, the significance of the “near-miss narrative” (Stronach, 2010) and then move on to a more detailed look at the data analysis process. The analysis of my findings then commences following the

conceptual framework of – a sign of identity, an agency of identity, and a liquid identity – the final area, a space for identity, is discussed and begins to develop the notion of personalised landscapes for young people within educational environments. Finally, by chapter five and the conclusion, I return to the initial argument of this thesis – that the paradigm for education needs to shift. This generation of young people are using their mobile phone technologies in ways that can support the development of the types of skills that might better support them for work in the 21st century. They are keen to learn these skills when conditions are right, and creating these conditions means customising education to each community of students and staff. But, thinking creatively about how to personalise education is what this thesis is really all about. Our need to understand the relationship between digital technologies and young people is urgent because of the scale and the speed of the changes that are afoot. The cultivation of young peoples' use of these technologies in education is also going to be an exciting and crucial opportunity. As we will see, young people live in an increasingly complex media culture, and one of my key challenges has been to match this empirical complexity with the requisite substantive and methodological complexity of a Doctorate. Fundamentally though, this thesis is based on ethnographic data. My primary goal, therefore, is simply to unravel some of ways in which young people now experience college life. This story begins in the next chapter.

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

Education is a site in which visions of the future proliferate. Visions of a future world – its demands, its threats, its opportunities – are constantly mobilised as warrants for rethinking education. (Facer, 2011: 1)

"Modern Times." A story of industry, of individual enterprise – humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness. (Dirks, 2012)

2.1 *Shifting the educational paradigm*

In recent years, digital technologies have become embedded in young peoples' everyday lives and are now a part of how they engage in communication, creative expression and knowledge production. Unlike the early years in the development of computers, digital technologies are now commonplace and pervasive. Although specific forms of technology uptake are highly diverse, a generation of young people are growing up in an era where digital technologies are part of the taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play, and social communication. Young people then are surely living in one of the most intensely stimulating periods in history. Throughout any day, their attention is called for from every information platform – from computers, television channels, and their personal mobile phone technologies. Yet, as teachers, we seem to penalise them for getting distracted. For many years now I have wondered about from what exactly? Well, it appears to be from the school's or college's pedagogy and curricula for the most

part. The problem is that our present system of education was designed, conceived and structured for a different age. It was conceived in the intellectual culture of enlightenment, to meet the economic needs of the industrial revolution. Though driven by this economic imperative, running right through this model was the enlightenment view of intelligence; that real intelligence consisted of a capacity for deductive reasoning, what we have come to think of as academic ability (Robinson, 2011).

As education became what economists would describe as a public good, namely possessing the characteristics of non-rivalry and being non-excludable, these prior assumptions about social structure and capacity were built into it. Public education was left to serve and replicate two types of individual, the academic and the non-academic. And so, the model of education we now have is this – a system of education initially developed in the interests of industrialism, and in the image of it. By way of example, schools and colleges still appear to be organised on factory lines; timed sessions, delineated spaces, separate subject specialisms. Furthermore, young people are educated in batches; processed through the system largely by age group – why exactly? Is this their date of manufacture? (Robinson, 2009, 2011; Toffler, 1971).

As an educator, I recognise that it seems to be about conformity, about standardisation; standardised testing, standardised curricula, and so on. Hence,

the persistent drive to reform public education by raising standards. Once again, this can be perceived as being for economic reasons in terms of how best to equip our young people for their role in our 21st century economy; the second, is perhaps for cultural, and how best to educate our young people so that they have a sense of cultural identity while being part of the processes of globalisation. And yet, it appears that we will still try to meet these future demands by doing what we did in the past, by continuing to use a model for learning largely based on a production line mentality. I believe that we have got to go in a different direction. We have to think differently about human capacity and get over this old conception and myth of the academic and the non-academic, the theoretical and the vocational. The young people I observed and spoke with who were immersed in these new digital technologies were engaged in an unprecedented exploration of communication, games, social interaction, problem solving, and self-directed activity that opened their potential to diverse forms of learning. These diverse forms of learning were reflected in expressions of identity, and how these young individuals expressed their independence, creativity, ability to learn, and to make decisions. And so, crucially this becomes about the culture of our educational institutions. To begin with this is what I mean by *shifting* the educational paradigm.

And so, today's dominant myth about the future of education emerges out of a conception of education as being primarily concerned with serving the formal

economy. Young people find themselves placed as the subjects in this educational discourse, facing a predetermined future in which others have defined the goals and the rules by which they should play. This relationship between education and the future is played out in the interactions between teachers and students in schools and colleges every day. For example, in the sixth-form college where I work, we encourage students to think about what they might want to do when they leave college, who they want to be, and how they might get there. Students themselves are also conscious of this process as comprising of a cost now (their time and effort) to be repaid against a future promise, that is not always, or for all young people necessarily fulfilled. They are captured within what Castells calls the "future time" of the corporate world (Castells, 2009: 51) in order to develop their skills for the 21st century to ensure both their personal and the nation's survival. In this narrative of a new knowledge economy, individual and national competitiveness are assumed to be ensured by investment in skills and education. And, it is on that basis that young people are being asked to spend even longer in further and higher education, and, increasingly, to take on a significant burden of debt to fund that investment. This dominant narrative suggests that this investment in education will then provide a secure economic future both for the individual and the country. But, the potential for young people to challenge, question, or reshape the futures that they are being offered appears to be invisible in contemporary discourses that attempt to link education to the(ir) future.

However, I think it is important to still recognise here that the future can be viewed as an emergent reality, it is not necessarily an empty space that exists 'out there' for us to shape with no constraints, since it is already being produced from the assumptions and ideas that we have about it. Simply put, the future does not have to continue to be viewed as pre-determined, since it can be shaped by the actions and aspirations of teachers and students. For example, my experiences of working and teaching in a sixth form college have indicated that this process of co-production in learning is particularly visible with mobile phone technologies, many of which are designed to be personalised, customised, and to fit into young peoples' lives. I observed young people developing symbiotic relationships with their mobile phone technologies in college, relationships that seemed to blur the boundaries between self and artefact. That is, these physical devices came to be understood as a representation of personal meanings and identities by young people. Furthermore, young people were managing a personal 'cloud' of information and resources, whereby they were able to wrap their information systems and social networks around themselves, rather than accessing them via college, or a particular institution, or place.

Therefore, it would seem that thinking about the future always involves thinking about it from somewhere and from a particular set of concerns. So, a different concept of education would require us to ask different questions, for example, of the implications of mobile phone technologies for the future of education.

Furthermore, if education is conceived of as a primary vehicle for shaping cognitive and social capabilities, then with this recognition of agency will be the concept of education that educators and especially young people create. Therefore, the relationship between education, technology and the future becomes a reciprocal dialogue of construction. As a consequence, the future should not be regarded as pre-determined, since education can begin to shape progressive futures. It is important then, that educators and researchers try to explore with young people how they experience education in order to eventually build their capacity to question the present colonising discourses of the future that they are being offered and to potentially examine the alternatives, rather than seeing young people as the educational subjects of policy makers and government being prepared for supposedly inevitable futures designed elsewhere.

Thus in this first section, I have wished to unsettle the assumptions upon which young people are being asked to invest ever greater time and resources in formal education. However, the trajectories that I present here and in the sections that follow, are also as subject to disruption as any of the assumptions about a knowledge economy. But, they are presented in this chapter in order to question the way in which we discuss the future of education, technology, and young people, so that they might begin to see themselves as active agents, rather than passive participants in a future having been designed for them elsewhere and by others. I feel that we need to consider how we would create educational

institutions that enable young people to critically reflect upon the kinds of information and digital resources that they might use to augment their cognitive and social capacities, and the sorts of futures that these might then offer to them.

This chapter will go on to consider the contribution of existing theory to the academic study of young people, education *and* mobile phone technologies. In the next section, it will discuss the shortcomings of the social and technologically deterministic views of technology and education that prevailed in the academic literature when I began my doctoral research. Against this background this chapter then begins to outline a number of different perspectives that, despite their popularity in other areas of philosophical and sociological study, have been rarely employed in analyses of mobile phone technologies and young people. In particular this chapter outlines the provenance of theoretical approaches such as socio-cultural theory, and the commodification and economics of technology. Drawing on all these theoretical traditions the scene is then set for exploring young peoples' use of mobile phone technologies in educational settings. The literature is presented in such a way as it attempts to reflect how the ideas were generated due to the nature of the ethnographic process itself; that involved an interwoven and ongoing iterative dialogue between the data, my experiences, and the literature. As Bryman and Burgess (1994) stress,

Qualitative research cannot be reduced to particular techniques nor to set stages, but rather that a dynamic process is involved which links together

problems, theories and methods. Here, the focus is upon the links between research design, research strategy and research techniques as well as the relationship between aspects of research design, data collection and data analysis... Indeed, research seldom involves the use of a straightforward set of procedures. Instead, the researcher has to move backwards and forwards between different sequences in the research process. (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 2-3)

But, I would hope that this chapter as a whole will begin to outline this emerging dialogue about a personalised learning landscape for young people and the role of mobile phone technologies in enabling and shaping this arena. But, as in all chapters, my desire throughout is to still continue to be playful with the concept of reflexivity, as Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, and Piper (2007: 186) remind me, "research accounts, then, in so far as they are narratives, demand 'novel selves'."

2.2 Educational futures, technology, and young people

ICT can improve the quality of teaching, learning and management in schools and so help raise standards. That's why ICT is at the heart of the DCSF's commitment to improving learning for all children. (ICT in Schools website, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010)

It's our ambition to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities enabling them to achieve their potential. (BECTA website, 2008)

I discovered early on in my Ed.D that the literature base from which educators, and researchers like myself could draw on to help explain my observations of learning and mobile phone technology was severely limited. So, in the chapter

ahead I firstly aim to present a critical and focused review of the literature that was used initially to guide my reflections on trying to better understand how young people were engaging with mobile phone technologies. However, I will then (re)present a new network, or web of literatures that has enabled me to begin to offer an alternative paradigm for understanding young peoples' engagement with this kind of technology and therefore will help analyse the issues and questions that I found were actually emerging at the micro-level. I wish to also remind the reader that in this chapter most of the emphasis will be placed on the substantive, rather than methodological areas of my research, but will also detail how the research questions were beginning to be shaped and developed throughout this stage of the ethnographic process. In the next chapter however, I will explain how I began to take forward my work in relation to these substantive, theoretical areas and my research questions, in terms of the actual design and methodology of this research.

2.2.1 Initial reflections on technology and education

There is no doubt that the present system of education regards young peoples' use of technologies as one that should bring potential benefits to society. In Britain (Becta, 2009a, b), there has been a steady embedding of technologies within the classroom with the widespread use of interactive whiteboards, virtual learning environments, networked classrooms and so on. In fact, in 2008/9, UK schools spent £880 million (or 3.2% of overall spend) on ICT, nearly one third of this from

the 'Harnessing Technology Grant' from the Government (Becta, 2009a). Clearly then, with government policies providing internet access for every child and every school, technology seems to be an important contributor to a better education and the development of the skills perceived to be necessary for the 21st century. However, educational policy regarding ICT has not primarily aimed to just teach young people how to use technologies (Hobbs, 2007). Rather, the ambition is that ICT use will improve educational outcomes across the curriculum, as evidenced in examination grades and other standardised measures of assessment. Nonetheless, the evaluations from research that has been conducted are equivocal in their conclusions.

For example, an early longitudinal British study, ImpaCT2 (Harrison et al., 2003) designed to evaluate the government's 'ICT in Schools Programme', reported that, "the outcomes of the initiatives are more evident in improvements in pupils' achievements in ICT capability than in their application of this learning in other subjects" (Ofsted, 2004: 4). It appears that simply increasing ICT provision does not guarantee improved educational performance after all. Hence, Cox and Marshall (2007: 63) posit that "the contribution of ICT to students' learning was very dependent upon the type of ICT resource and the subject in which it was being used." This suggests a far from generic or transferable effect, and one that also contradicts the assumption that just because young people like using

technology, this in and of itself gives them the motivation to enhance their learning.

The fundamental problem however, is that even ICT appears to be wedded to this 20th-century model of drill-and-skill education, with academic testing as the only legitimate outcome measure (for example, Smith and Curtin, 1998). Based on my readings and analysis of both the literature and research data, an alternative proposition is that digital technologies, and mobile smart phones in particular, can support a more fluid and flexible, learner-centred concept of education that facilitates the types of skills important to a young person's agency when faced with the demands of a 21st century information and knowledge economy. This conception of learning capitalises on the evident enthusiasm with which young people use mobile technologies for information resources, social networking, and entertainment in order to capture learner motivation, peer collaboration and constructive learning practices. Though as Trilling and Fadel (2012) caution,

Though the mobile, laptop and internet are the entry tickets for much of 21st century work, the right skills and expertise are the real playing cards. To qualify for membership in today's knowledge-focused workforce, young people need to develop 21st century skills. These include learning and innovation skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration; digital literacy skills that develop information, media and ICT competencies; and career and life skills such as flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural fluency, and leadership and responsibility. (Trilling and Fadel, 2012: 10)

Perhaps the failure to demonstrate clear benefits of the use of technology in educational environments has been due less to the limitations of the technology, than to the limited and reductionist expectations of policy makers and government in terms of the enduring perception of the relationship between education and the formal economy, and furthermore what the model of learning should be in the 21st century. Turkle (1995) would refer to this potential for a new trajectory though as a profound shift from an educational culture of calculation, where "the modernist computational aesthetic promised to explain and unpack, to reduce and clarify" to a culture of simulation based on tinkering and experimentation, "getting the lay of the land rather than figuring out the hierarchy of underlying structure and rules" (Turkle, 1995: 35).

More recently research has begun to be stimulated by these ideas (for example, Bekerman et al., 2009), but in government-funded studies that seek to evaluate the educational benefits of digital technologies, it still appears that examination grades remain the priority in terms of outcome measures. Hence, in unsettling or reframing the measures by which educational benefit might be evaluated I propose that different skills are advanced that might capitalise on the affordances of mobile phone technologies and the motivations for learning of young people. For example, the use of mobile phone technologies can help augment processes over outcomes; collaborative learning over individual achievement; peer-based over hierarchical relationships; and flexible methods of discovery over subject-specific knowledge.

However, I do still acknowledge that presently examination results continue to be crucial for young peoples' future successes (and failures) and that just as there is a tension between how digital technologies support these traditional learning outcomes, there is also a demonstrable absence and lack of research into how these technologies might enable an alternative model for learning. Significantly in this respect, my intention is to analyse mobile phone technologies within the established educational discourse, while recognising that, "there clearly exists a tension between teachers' desire to foster learners' creativity while at the same time striving for high attainment and effective classroom management" (European Commission, 2009: 24). Clearly then, the use of digital technologies within a school or college environment is a complex, compromised and often contradictory affair, but the aim of my research was to ask in essence, what's really going on with how young people are using their mobile phone technologies, how can this be better understood, and what might then be suggested for a future trajectory for a model of learning?

2.2.2 A critical review of the early literature

How can schools and colleges best prepare young people for the emerging challenges of working in a knowledge economy? As a teacher and researcher, I believe that it will depend on how well, and how quickly, the industrial-age model of education can be transformed with its emphasis on rote learning of content into an approach fit for the 21st century, effectively utilising the digital technologies we

now have to empower learners. Some critics have certainly doubted though whether more and better technology has meant more and better education.

For example, the researchers behind the longitudinal British study, ImpaCT2 were rather cautious, noting that, "in some subjects the effects were not statistically significant and they were not spread evenly across all subjects" (Harrison et al., 2003: 1). Even a few years on, a US report to Congress found that test scores in classrooms using reading and mathematics software for a year were little different from those obtained using traditional teaching methods (Dynarski et al., 2007). The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys 15-year-olds from industrialised countries every three years and assesses to what extent students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for participation in society. One recent analysis found that those who sometimes use computers or the internet at school performed better than those who never used them, but that those who used them often may actually perform worse. The authors again noted, "a positive correlation between student achievement and the availability of computers both at home and at schools. However, once we control extensively for family background and school characteristics, the relationship gets negative for home computers and insignificant for school computers. Thus, the mere availability of computers at home seems to distract students from effective learning" (Fuchs and Woessmann, 2004: 1).

Therefore, it seems that simply increasing technology provision does not guarantee even improved educational performance. In a 2007 American study of learning outcomes for 12-13 year-olds, improved grade point averages were only associated with subject-related technology uses – that is, when dedicated software was produced to support particular curricula elements of, for example, science, and these subjects tended to be the least popular and regarded as difficult (Lei and Zhao, 2007). Complex conclusions also emerged from a systematic meta-analysis of findings from over one thousand studies of online learning by the US Department of Education (Means et al., 2009). Focusing on the few studies that rigorously contrasted learning via an online versus a face-to-face condition, the meta-analysis did find a positive benefit for online over face-to-face instruction, though the effect was larger for blended learning (instruction that combined both online and face-to-face). "Studies in which analysts judged the curriculum and instruction to be identical or almost identical in online and face-to-face conditions had smaller effects than those studies where the two conditions varied" (Means et al., 2009: xvi). Nor did interactive elements such as videos or online quizzes add to the amount that students learned. However, digital "manipulations that trigger learning activity or learner reflection and self-monitoring of understanding are effective" (Means et al., 2009: xvi). But, most of these studies concerned adults (for example from medical training or higher education courses), and "when learners' age groups are considered separately, the mean effect size is significantly positive for undergraduate and older learners but not for K-12 students" (Means et

al., 2009: xvii). Equivocal findings such as these led a European literature review to conclude that technology impacts positively on educational performance in primary schools, particularly in English and less so in science and not in mathematics (Balanskat et al., 2006: 3). This review also showed that broadband access in classrooms results in significant improvement in pupils' performance in national tests taken at 16-years old; although interactive whiteboards were associated with an improvement in pupils' performance in national tests in English, mathematics and science.

Overall, these evaluations appear to have generated ad hoc findings, although some are more optimistic in drawing conclusions than others; as Underwood (2009: 5) states, "despite these caveats, there is growing evidence that learning benefits arise from the use of digital technologies"; albeit, she cites little evidence to support her claim. It would appear that positive findings do exist though, especially regarding improvements in children's motivation to learn rather than learning outcomes (Passey et al., 2004). And yet, it appears that the explanations are only ever partial in terms of why some learning outcomes are improved, for some young people, using some technologies, and in some subjects. "Most schools in most countries, however, are in the early phase of ICT adoption, characterised by patchy uncoordinated provision and use, some enhancement of the learning process, some development of e-learning, but no profound improvements in learning and teaching" (Balanskat et al., 2006: 2). Perhaps, as Wellington (2004)

suggests, there are "inherent difficulties in evaluating the effect of any learning intervention and attributing cause-effect relationships in education. These difficulties are here to stay" (Wellington, 2004: 33).

There are a number of significant problems with these literature reviews that are worth noting. The first is *conceptual* in that diverse types of technology are often brought together under umbrella terms such as 'ICT'. For example, a recent survey of European teachers' views on teaching creativity lists computers, educational software, videos, online collaborative tools, virtual learning environments, interactive whiteboards, online free material, online courses, music/photo/video content, blogs, social networking sites, podcasts, bookmarking and tagging, RSS feeds, digital games and mobile phones (European Commission, 2009). So, it seems that this term can include one-to-many technologies (that is, used by the teacher at the front of the classroom), peer-to-peer technologies, professionally produced content, and user-generated content. It may also include technologies specific to the school or college, for example, interactive whiteboards, or those used across formal and informal boundaries, such as mobile phones; they also include both stand alone, and online, networked technologies. Therefore, it becomes difficult to distinguish which aspects of technology, if any, are effective in any particular situation, and for learning.

The second problem is *policy-related*. There has been a failure in recognising that not only is getting technology into classrooms resource-intensive, but crucially that there are perhaps even greater demands on ensuring that it is then used effectively. This significant investment in hardware has yet to demonstrate notable benefits in educational practices and outcomes. For example, the ImpaCT2 research having recognised that pupils experience computers and the internet more positively at home than at school recommended that teachers needed to consider how to build on their pupils' experience, developing skills and enthusiasm in relation to networked ICT if they were to achieve the necessary changes in school culture and teaching practices to reap the benefits of the Government's investment (Somekh et al. 2002). Nonetheless, between 2005 and 2008 Ofsted (2009) qualified its broadly positive portrait of "the importance of ICT" in education by observing that primary school pupils are generally better at using ICT to communicate than to manipulate data and that "teachers tended to give more attention to those aspects of ICT where they themselves felt confident" (Ofsted, 2009: 4). Again, in secondary schools, pupils were better able to use ICT for presentational purposes and that "teachers gave too much emphasis to teaching students to use particular software applications rather than helping them to acquire genuinely transferable skills" (Ofsted, 2009: 4). Interestingly, Seiter (2008: 36) recognises that, "the hours of trial-and-error that many digital skills require and the freedom to develop a deep understanding of software that includes programming are nearly impossible to practise in a public school computer lab."

Although one benefit of technology is that it supposedly enables self-paced learning, it is precisely in the uses of ICT to support independent learning that Selwyn et al. (2008) find most variation in implementation across schools. There is a possibility here that social and economic factors might be moderating the educational benefits. Problematically, teacher surveys often find that "teachers mainly focus on the development of technical ICT skills" (Tondeur et al., 2007: 962), albeit more positively LeBaron and McDonough (2009) turn such common problems into policy recommendations, such as the provision of leadership training for school managers, the integration of technology into all levels of teacher education, the establishment of communities of practice among practitioners, and, unsurprisingly, the provision of adequate resources.

The third problem is intriguing because it points to an absence in the literature reviews on the decisions made by parents on whether to provide internet access for their children at home. Parental resourcing of the home has traditionally been regarded as a private matter, rather than as public policy, and initially perhaps the home posed less of a problem than an opportunity since the challenge for teachers was to build on any existing home use within the more structured context of the school (Grant, 2009). But, the opposite is now a problem when some children clearly lack access to technology at home and therefore impede any vision of a seamless learning environment between school and home. Furthermore, this is problematic not only for social equality, but also for educational policy, in that

domestic internet access is also uneven, with some parents lacking the necessary financial, technical, and social resources to get online (Livingstone, 2009). As the then Schools Minister Jim Knight said at the 2008 BETT conference, "we have to find a way to make access universal, or else it's not fair. More than a million children – and their families – have no access to a computer in the home. I want a home computer to be as important as having a calculator or pencil case is The so-called 'digital divide' cannot be allowed to reinforce social and academic divisions" (DCSF, 2008). However, it is still difficult to establish whether domestic internet use actually raises educational attainment. Chowdry et al. (2009) analysed a longitudinal study of young people in England, which assessed the educational attainment of 15,000 teenagers at Key Stage 3 (KS3, aged 14 years) and Key Stage 4 (KS4, aged 16 years). Controlling for socio-economic status, parental education, family background, parental school characteristics and neighbourhood characteristics, they found that home access to a computer and/or the internet was positively associated with levels of educational attainment at both KS3 and KS4. Further analysis by these researchers demonstrated that internet access played a greater role than computer access, although the analysis is correlational rather than causal, for example, it may be that parents just provide internet access for higher achieving children (Goodman and Gregg, 2010). In addition, the research does not report findings by subject such as mathematics, English, and science, despite the findings examined earlier that would suggest that differences would occur here also.

The fourth problem has already been referred to in section I but is perhaps the most fundamental in terms of *positioning* my research. The literature reviews and research that I have identified continue to locate digital technologies alongside an outdated conception of education as measured by a traditional set of examination results. If digital technologies are to be given the opportunities to support a more flexible, learner-centred idea of education, then young people need to be allowed to capitalise on the intrinsic properties of, for example, their mobile phone technologies in formal educational settings. This alternative conception of learning might then encompass not just technology-mediated formal, educational and information resources, but also, social media to encourage constructive learning practices and peer-collaboration, that is, the softer skills that might also happen to be vital for our 21st century knowledge economy.

Based on the four problems outlined above there are a number of critiques that I can also now summarise from this initial set of literatures. My first critique focuses on the way in which these existing literatures have *analysed* the pedagogic use of digital technologies. There is an apparently unlimited capacity with digital technologies in terms of their educational potential, although it is far from proven that even improved student achievement results. However, there are some tentative signs that some uses, under some conditions, are associated with improved examination performance. Nonetheless, even if technology is

unimaginatively used only to further traditional outcomes I would consider it to still be a worthwhile endeavour. For instance, digital technologies, especially those with access to the internet, can still potentially enable the widespread sharing of valuable resources, affording the means of collaborative learning. If used well, they are also really popular with young people, thus motivating their learning (Passey et al., 2004). But, there is often a lack of clarity in the literature over the type of technology being used and, more importantly, how it may then scaffold different stages in the learning process. It is also particularly difficult to assess the contribution that digital technologies make to educational outcomes, whether these outcomes are being conceived in a traditional or new way. So it is possible that even the "soft skills have yet to be adequately defined and their importance, relative to formal qualifications, for different groups of people and at different stages in the life cycle is unknown" (Sparkes, 1999: 7). Furthermore, comparisons of classrooms with, or without technology rest on the false premise that only the technology has changed while all else - student attitudes, teacher training, governmental expectations – are held constant.

My second key critique is about how these literatures *explain* the pedagogic use of technology. There is still confusion over the nature of digital technologies. Are they learning tools, in which case the task for teachers is to train young people in their use, and then to evaluate the benefits in terms of a range of learning outcomes? Or, do they represent a more fundamental change in the potential learning

infrastructure, in which case the task for educators is to rethink the relationships between teacher and student, knowledge and participation, and so on? As Nixon (2003) observes in terms of the latter, "educators and researchers have, by and large, judged such research about participation in the new media and online cultures to be of little relevance" (Nixon, 2003: 408). And so, the relationship between technology and education appears to be bluntly framed as either, how do technologies enhance the hierarchical delivery of a pre-determined curriculum by teachers, evaluated by standardised assessment? Or one whereby, how do technologies enable an alternative, student-centred, peer-based, collaborative way of knowing? While it is clearly possible to understand how the former has alienated young people, the latter also has the potential to alienate teachers (Beastall, 2006; Cartwright and Hammond 2007).

My third and final critique is more *ideological*, in terms of in whose interests are these technological changes? Are they really democratic and empowering, or do they in fact just reinforce existing corporate and state power? Jenkins (2006) would suggest that digital technologies are indeed empowering, challenging traditional forms of knowledge, teaching, and the school as an institution. Buckingham et al. (2001) however, would argue that digital technologies extend the reach of educational institutions into the home, "curricularising" leisure and producing "edutainment" with the promotion of informal learning products.

2.3 Starting to work *with* literature

As I have already intimated, academic discussions of young people, technology and education have always tended to concern themselves with questions of what *could* happen once learners engaged with technology. Within the literature the predominance of these concerns has led to a rather uniform view of technology, with a tendency for researchers to focus mainly on the potential of technology to enhance student achievement, with little concern for young peoples' cognitive development and the social nature of digital technology. So it has been against this background that I began to recognise a clear need for the research of young people, education, and technology to take a more considered and sophisticated approach towards thinking about the nature of technology. In addition, I went on to discover that the careful use of socio-cultural and economic theory was an essential component for developing a richer understanding of the structures, actions, processes and relationships that constituted the use of technology by young people in educational institutions. Of course, I still recognised that choosing any perspective, such as socio-cultural and economic theory, was still largely one of personal choice – since there will never be one, 'correct' reading of technology and education.

2.3.1 New literatures for understanding education and technology

So, in recognising the benefits that might be gained from adopting sociological approaches that focused on the socially constructed nature of technology and education, I had realised that I wanted the emphasis of my new literature search to be on the keywords of 'collaborative', 'technology' and 'learning', without the restriction of just an 'online' world, (since by implication, there was also an 'offline' world to investigate). I also began to question whether technology was being used collaboratively, in either context, with or without learning, and had wanted to think about new ways of exploring this. I had decided to "zoom out" (Wolcott in Silverman, 2005) in my literature searches to try to shape a substantive field that was more interdisciplinary in nature. Once more I conducted database searches for articles in BEI and ERIC, and had begun to source both substantive and methodological material from a range of disciplines, including sociology, economics, anthropology, cultural studies, communication studies, and human geography.

As the Ed.D course progressed, the technologically deterministic studies that had once been appealing, in as much as they had appeared to offer me straightforward accounts of an otherwise complex socio-technological environment, now felt crude and inadequate as my understanding of ontology and epistemology grew. I understood their cause and effect idealisations to be reductive in their analysis – obscuring or even ignoring any further social change – since if the relationship between young people, technology and education was only ever seen in terms of

impact, then the main task of any researcher would simply be to identify the barriers that were therefore opposing potential progress. This then left little room for manoeuvre in terms of recognising any other form of social agency in the use of technology. We would then be placed, as teachers and students, in a position of having to make the best use of any technology that we were ultimately presented with. Perhaps, even more importantly, this perspective served in silencing the many non-technological factors at play in the use of technology in educational settings. I therefore took great care in approaching questions of technology in a more nuanced way that sought to transcend these simple cause and effect agendas. Yet, I was still trying to be sensitive to the view persisting in many contemporary popular accounts of digital technologies. The belief that 'technology determines history' (Williams, 1994: 218) was difficult to shake. But, by ascribing any degree of agency to technological artefacts, rather than the non-technological processes which shape their development and implementation, the crucial contingencies which underlie technological change might be ignored – thereby vastly oversimplifying the complexity of any social, cultural, and economic processes of technological use. Simply put then, the research of young people, technology, and education required a more sophisticated understanding of the social, and the technological, to acknowledge, as Nye puts it, that "devices and machines are not things 'out there' that invade life" (Nye, 2007: ix). Albeit, I was also mindful that to ascribe complete interpretability to any technology could be seen as an equally constraining and reductionist form of social determinism where

only social factors are granted any importance! I therefore appreciated that in attempting to develop a more socially-nuanced understanding of technology I was faced with deciding how best "to introduce elements of the social into explanations of the technical rather than granting the social an all-important standing" (Rappert, 2003: 568).

2.3.2 Literatures for exploring the micro-practices of everyday life

On the basis of the discussion so far, I was becoming clearer that any research of young people, technology and education should strive to investigate the exchanges between everyday practices and their encompassing cultural and societal structures, that is, not losing track of the bigger picture entirely while allowing deeper explorations into the micro-practices of everyday life. Therefore, much of my literature was now being sourced from the micro sociological level and thus I was aware that it might not necessarily pertain to the large-scale trends affecting communities. However, from my day-to-day observations in a sixth form college, I appreciated that technological practices by young people needed to be understood in their details, since I regularly observed many students expending a great effort on their use of mobile phones as they worried about the fragility of their friendships, their families, their emotional partnerships. And, the young people in question that I spoke with understood that their technological activities and practices had meaning in their lives and those of others. So, whilst maintaining an

awareness of the literature, I was also mindful of Manuel Castells's advice to "wear one's theoretical clothes lightly" when approaching technology. Indeed, Castells (2000) talks of "disposable theory" recognising theory as an essential tool, but also acknowledging that it might be discarded when it outlives its substantive usefulness. It was in these terms that my understanding of young people, technology and education was being arranged, that is around a hybrid assemblage of literatures.

It was at this time that I also began to recognise the importance of the social and interactional circumstances in which students were using technology and mobile phone technologies in particular, within the college environment. There were, of course, already examples from the literature about technology and society. The important paradox then of these micro-sociologically-led studies was in their ability to allow me to develop my thinking again about how the technologies being used by young people fitted into wider socio-technical systems and networks, as well as the broader connections between technology and macro-level concerns such as globalisation and the knowledge economy. I did find at this time that it was possible to recognise the research in this broad field in terms of the grand theorists such as Castells (2000: 500) who reminded us that, "networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies", and that "this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of the specific social interests expressed through the networks: the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of

power.” For Castells, networks were superimposing themselves on other forms of human structure, such as government and business organisations; but, humans, let alone young people, scarcely appeared in his networks, and when they did, they seemed to be little more than information exchangers. A number of other critics commented on the changes brought about by communication enabled by the Internet, but again a vision was offered that described humans as little more than machines that produced, exchanged, and used information (Evans and Wurster, 1997, 2000; Lissak and Bailey, 2002; Benkler, 2006). Attempts to counter this distortion toward information and to bring a broader, more comprehensive view of the human aspect back into the discussion often seemed to be exaggerated by saying that organisations were about information exchange whereas communication between humans was about things such as emotion. Other researchers even went further to make a contrast between disembodied communication (via the Internet) and embodied communication (the kind done when people are together and distinctly human). The work of Hine (2000: 9) exemplified this when she described the relationship between the online and offline world suggesting that the Internet “represents a place, cyberspace, where culture is formed and reformed.” Other researchers at the macro level such as Humphreys (2005: 828) even concluded that mobile phones allowed for greater flexibility in communication between individuals and that this may lead to a collectivising function in society as a whole, “wireless technologies may privatise and publicise, atomise and collectivise.” While others suggested, that the idea of

neighbourhood, as we knew it, had changed. Sherry Turkle (1995) described a “life on the screen” that was no longer confined to even that of a desktop computer at home, but distributed across many miniaturised screens, networked into a web of parallel worlds. As a result, neighbourhoods, and communities, were dissolving, and re-organising; a situation that left young people to virtually roam about. Again, these views always seemed to exaggerate one aspect at the expense of another, and in so doing missed a whole range of potentially important dimensions and facets. Communication in organisations can be about information exchange, and emotion; personal communication is often about emotional matters, but also about information exchange. So what was inbetween also needed to be accounted for and reflected on to better understand what communication was about when young people were using mobile phone technologies in a college environment. I felt that it could not be encapsulated by these two opposites alone – information and emotion.

Some commentators did not seem to have come from any particular discipline, and hence did not appear as trapped in their disciplinary prism. Authors like Clay Shirky (2008) offered their own visions of the human that undertook acts of communication. In his first book, “Here Comes Everybody: The Power Of Organizing Without Organizations” he explained that people communicated for three basic reasons – to share their knowledge, to display their vanity, and to seek conviviality. I could not really doubt this simple ontology, but again it failed to

emcompass the richness of what being a young person might entail and how it might lead to various kinds of expressions (virtues, vanity, and conviviality notwithstanding) and practices with technology. Perhaps all of these visions seemed rather inadequate because the modern technological landscape of mobile smart phones was, and still is, so entrancing that researchers were neglecting to actually consider the human user of these technologies in any detail. Castells was entranced by what Internet-enabled networks could do for social structures, but less interested in why young people might have wanted to say “hello.” Shirky was entranced by the fact of networked sociality, but not by the complex nature of the young people who were doing the networking. The temptation to overlook the young people who were using this technology therefore was so powerful as to be almost ubiquitous. Nonetheless, and hence the paradox for me, these approaches were helpful to some degree as they offered me a broad ‘way in’ to unpacking the micro-level social processes that might actually be underpinning the use of mobile phone technologies by young people in educational settings. My research using the databases of BEI and ERIC, had begun with the key word searches of: ‘technology’, ‘collaboration’, and ‘learning’; a list that was eventually extended to include: ‘mobile phone’, ‘ethnography’, ‘observation’, ‘photography’, and ‘ethics’ to elicit supporting literature for my research plan, including my research methodology. Overall, this part of my research process significantly (re)positioned my thinking about new technologies. The interdisciplinary approach raised my awareness of the scope for understanding how (and why) technology was being

used in everyday experiences. I came to realise that mobile phone technologies could be viewed as a cultural construction, shaping identities that might interplay between the personal and the community. For the minority of researchers operating at the more interpretivist micro level, I discovered that significant attention was often given to the formation of online communities. For example, Oksman and Turtianen (2004: 335) argued that the central factor in mobile communication was, "to define who belongs to important social communities and how self-presentation is constructed on a social stage in relation to others." Valentine and Holloway (2002: 316) also commented that when technologies were used in different times and places, they constituted varying forms of "private" and "public" space. They suggested that on-line activities could be considered as "private" and an "escape" from everyday off-line interaction. Gotved (2006: 483) continued, "one could say that cyberspace is folded into urban culture as just another neighbourhood, and that the crossing of borders is an everyday activity, non-dramatic and pursued without awareness." Keleman and Smith (2001: 383) explained further that, "unpacking the 'virtual community' presupposes an understanding of the ways in which individuals experience one another and adjust to one another within each neo-tribe and across neo-tribes to ensure the continuity of social life." Finally, in terms of the actual physical location of mobile phone use, I was intrigued by Caronia (2005: 97) who noted the significance of "no-where-places" and "no-when times" – "it is fascinating to notice how some communication technologies have given sense to these unmeaningful times and

places.” At that point, it now seemed that exploring the culture of mobile phone technology would be a fruitful one, in terms of the social spaces and identities that were being created by young people. From an educational perspective I found that it would be interesting to note the learning applications being presented by the use of mobile phone space, and to what degree this was being engaged or not. Notions of power and inequality also became significant here, in terms of access and relations within these new spaces although these specific issues would not eventually be pursued in this particular thesis.

Ultimately, however, I saw the principal advantage of adopting a more socially-nuanced approach as the ability to eventually develop a more grounded understanding of the 'messy' realities of young peoples' use of mobile phone technologies in college 'as it happened'. The research questions, therefore, that ultimately formed the backbone of my research design began to be built on this latter tradition at the micro level, and yet (I admit) occasionally utilised the more positivistic work when necessary to provide a 'nudge' (that is, a gentle sense of direction) at that time (for example, the statistical findings from the groundbreaking Mobile Life Youth Report 2006 published by The Carphone Warehouse, in conjunction with The London School of Economics and Political Science). So, I began to realise that approaching young people, mobile phone technologies, and education as a site of intense social relationships, enabled me to move beyond just asking whether or not a particular technology 'worked' in a

pedagogic sense. Instead, this approach allowed me to address research questions about how young people were shaping the use of mobile technologies within a college environment. More specifically, how their identities might shape the meaning and use of their mobile phone technologies, and be shaped by their technologies; and how the relationship between identity and the use of social space was potentially being (re)defined. As the 2000s progressed, and the use of mobile phone technologies became ever more entwined with young peoples' social, economic, and educational experiences, I realised that the need for a research methodology that might better understand the ways in which young people interpret the culture of mobile phones had also never been greater. Again, although much research had focused on the use of technology within the classroom and its impact on teaching and learning, little research had actually provided the opportunity for young people to articulate their experiences, where the aim was to better understand how we as educators could interpret these issues, and therefore the potential that they might present for the creation of new learning environments. Given the importance of technology in New Labour educational policy throughout that era for bringing about improvement in education outcomes, it had seemed rather unusual to me that this was the case (for example, see DfES, 2004).

Clearly then, with the emergent development in mobile phone technologies throughout the 2000s, what the existing literatures failed to acknowledge about

the use of digital technologies in educational environments was the way in which individuals were personalising their own learning. In college, I observed young people increasingly networking in broader ways which appeared to go beyond our understanding as teachers, college managers, policy makers and the more traditional architects of the uses of technology in the classroom. There was a failure to appreciate how mobile phone technologies were mediating new forms of identity development and agency in young people, and in particular with young people in educational settings. So I wanted to better understand young peoples' engagement with their mobile phone technologies, and explore, for example, what their hardware signified about them, how it was emancipator, and how it was commodifying. In the next section, I will attempt to set out a critical review of the literature that eventually enabled me to better explore these messy relationships between young people, mobile phone technologies, identity formation, and social space.

2.4 (Re)presenting the literature review

City dwellers of tomorrow could have a small gadget of enormous benefit – a wristwatch radio-telephone. With a wristwatch radio, you could talk to anyone, wherever you happened to be. (Gatland and Jefferis, 1979: 44)

Digital devices developed a social life, linking up and weaving a global nervous system, communications network and giant memory bank for humankind. Nearly 85% of humanity – almost six out of seven billion people – now uses a mobile phone. (Trilling and Fadel, 2012: 10)

Modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by the standardizing effects of commodity capitalism. (Giddens, 1991: 196)

This section now aims to provide some substantive insights into the area based on my recent research. It will draw on existing philosophical, sociological and economic theories that I used to help better understand how young peoples' identities are shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture; and how the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space is being defined and mediated by mobile phone technologies.

To aid the reader, I aim to (re)present the literature as a conceptual framework for understanding how young people draw on their mobile phones in their construction of their identities and social spaces. This is because this literature base has been developed continually throughout the course of my ethnographic research, and particularly during the more detailed stages of data analysis. Hence, why I will use these conceptualisations of identity and space to help explain how I shaped the first two of my research questions, in order to better understand how mobile phones are being used by young people. These concepts have not presupposed the collection of the data, quite the opposite in fact. But, I have used them as a structuring device here according to how they are presented in the findings and discussion chapter (from the stage of the research in which they largely originated). I would hope that this retrospective approach of (re)structuring the literature helps in maintaining a degree of consistency for the reader. I also

recognise that particular narratives of technologies seemly predominate in the wider academic discourse, but I intend to highlight the more nuanced approaches that reflect localised practice at the micro-level, and that may begin to provide an alternative paradigm for understanding young peoples' engagement with this kind of technology. However, the chapter that does then follow, will address my third research question and present the literature that explores how a research methodology for the study of mobile phone technologies can be developed that better reflects young peoples' use of their mobile phone technologies.

As an educator and researcher, I have come to regard identity as an important tool for understanding how young people behave in college, and consequently for educational practice. "A focus on the contextually specific ways in which people act out and recognize identities allows a more dynamic approach than the sometimes overly general and static trio of race, class, and gender" (Gee, 2000: 99). Therefore, in this sense of the term, young people are capable of multiple identities that are specific to their performances in college, and society in general. Typically though, some kind of *interpretive system* underwrites the recognition of that identity (Taylor, 1994). But, essentially, individuals must see each other in certain ways and not others if there are to be identities of any sort.

The interpretive system may be people's historically and culturally different view of nature; it may be the norms, traditions, and rules of institutions; it may be the discourse and dialogue of others; or it may be the workings of affinity groups. What is important about identity is that almost any identity

trait can be understood in terms of any of these different interpretive systems. People can actively construe the same identity trait in different ways, and they can negotiate and contest how their traits are to be seen (by themselves and others) in terms of the different perspectives on identity. (Gee, 2000: 107-108).

Identity then, is one analytic lens through which to reflect on interactions in (and beyond) classrooms (Gee, 2000). It is meant to assist in illuminating some of the ideas about how young people are using their mobile phone technologies, how they are networking and sharing these experiences with others, in addition to how institutions such as schools and colleges, alongside businesses, attempt to position young people to meet the demands of the formal economy.

There are certainly many possible approaches to identity, and I will proceed to develop a number of these in the next section based on a selection from a vast literature. However, simply keeping pace with the range of young peoples' engagements with digital technologies, including their mobile phones is an increasingly daunting task. Perhaps, then, it is inevitable that there will be gaps in any account that seeks to analyse identity formation with young people and their digital technologies. In fact, to date, my research with young people has tended to focus on the 'early adopters', who are already likely to be privileged in other areas of their lives. Even so, the theme of identity does provide a useful lens through which to view particular aspects of young peoples' relations with mobile phone technologies more clearly. Identity is a very broad and ambiguous concept, yet it focused my attention on critical questions about personal development and social

relationships - questions that were crucial for understanding young peoples' trajectories into the formal (and informal economy) and the nature of their social and cultural experiences. Focusing on this theme, initially using Gee's (2000) perspective, gave me an initial 'take' on the relationships between the individual (and the group even) and digital technologies. Perhaps, most importantly, this focus on identity led me to paying close attention to the diverse ways in which digital media, and mobile phone technologies especially, were being used in everyday life, and the consequences both for individuals and groups of young people.

Both as a teacher and a researcher, I have tried to view young people as social actors in their own right, that is, as 'beings' (rather than perhaps as 'becomings' judged in terms of a projected future not of their own making). Therefore, I now consider that in order to better understand the role of mobile phone technologies in the formation of young peoples' identities an approach is required that will reflect that identity is becoming ever more fragmented and uncertain, and problematic, as young people struggle for self-determination within educational institutions. This does not mean that I believe that mobile phone technologies necessarily hold the key to empowerment, and I argue against such technological determinism. However, this research seeks to recognise the importance of our current moment within the context of the existing educational system and unfolding histories. In the first part of this section, I have discussed one key

approach to thinking about identity and briefly identify some of the implications for understanding young people, technology, and educational contexts. These issues will be dealt with more explicitly in the section that now follows.

2.4.1 Accounting for mobile identities

The focus of this part is on the meaning of mobile phone technologies in young peoples' lives, specifically in relation to questions of identity. My aim is to now take a closer look at the everyday uses of this medium by young people in relation to their identity and learning. Because of the status of the mobile phone – always there, always on – the pace of information exchange, and because it is the key personal communication device for so many young people, means that it is significant in establishing one's own position, and hence identity. Therefore, my first research question focuses on the culture of mobile phone use by young people, and how their identities shape the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture.

According to Buckingham (2008: 1), "identity is an ambiguous and slippery term", and it is clear that there exists a huge variety of discourses and practices of the self as sixty years of anthropologists and cultural researchers have provided many examples (LeVine, 1982; Shweder and Bourne, 1984; Maresella, DeVos, and Hsu, 1985; Harris, 1989; White, 1992). As we shall see, there are a number of assumptions about what identity is, and about its relevance to our understanding

of young peoples' engagements with digital technologies. But, the question for me is, what is the role of social and cultural phenomena in constituting the self? How, if at all, do they inform the self? And, if the self is perceived as their object, the ontological status of these discourses and practices is also really significant to this debate. Roughly three decades ago the universalist-culturalist debate was disrupted, for example, anthropologists began asking questions about their writing practices and representations of others (Fabian, 1983; Clifford, 1988). Anthropologists, along with some psychologists, also adopted Foucault's work, especially his view of power/knowledge as an impetus for critical reflection. Importantly, Foucault (1980) depicted the social sciences as constructing, rather than objectively studying, their subjects. A relationship between the 'science' and the 'institution' was therefore established, whereby categories such as 'at risk' student entered into the everyday discourse, and so was used in schools and colleges to determine the treatment that they then received. And so, people learn to treat one another and themselves according to these categories. Thus, local knowledge is disregarded and replaced by scientific categories imposed by those with power. Discourse theory, as Foucauldian understandings are sometimes called, provoked a new concept of the self – as socially constructed. Social constructivists go on to emphasise that our communications with one another not only convey messages, but also always make claims about who we are relative to one another and the nature of our relationships. Therefore, when we do speak, we afford subject positions to one another. The social constructivist position is

troubled by the terms of the universalist-culturalist debate, since discourses and practices are the tools that build the self in contexts of power, rather than as expressions of stable interpretations of values that have been imparted to a person through enculturation. These however, are not to be regarded as two exclusive categories, but rather a continuum between the essentialist view, which pays no attention to the social positioning power of discourses, and the constructivist view, which has no interest in any durable aspects of self. Nonetheless, one finds social constructivists, such as Hollway (1984) who, despite their emphasis on discursive positioning, use Lacanian concepts to delineate parts of the self that resist social positioning.

The intellectual climate within anthropology has certainly affected the research that I am now pursuing, informing and (re)forming the questions that I am now asking. Based on these critical debates there are a number of points that can be discerned about the relationship between culture and the self. First, differentiated by relations of economic power and educational institutional infrastructure, mobile phone technologies, for example, can be conceived of as living tools of the self – as artefacts that figure the self constitutively, in open-ended ways. Secondly, that the self is treated as always being embedded in social practice. Third, that the “sites of the self” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998: 28), that is the loci of self-production, can be recognised as plural. “In anthropology the demise of the privileged concept of bounded, discrete, coherent cultures has made room for the

recognition that people are exposed to competing and differentially powerful and authoritative discourses and practices of the self" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998: 29). This is particularly significant to my research, because if young people are not simply seen as living enactments of core cultural themes that already exist, then as a researcher, you are pushed to ask a broader range of questions about their experiences, and the role of cultural artefacts, such as the mobile phone, in the constitution of this experience. So, I have come to regard these discourses and practices as features of the cultures in which I work with young people, they are the themes around which socially positioned persons construct their subjectivities in practice. Therefore, this research explores how specific, often socially powerful, cultural discourses and practices, both position young people and provide them with the resources to respond to the problematic situations in which they find themselves. So, as an ethnographer, I find myself at an interface, side-stepping between social constructivist and essentialist views of the self, mediating a potential impasse by adopting a "self-in-practice" approach (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998: 32).

In the four sub-areas that follow, I intend to build on Gee's (2000) perspective that gave me an initial 'take' on the relationships between the individual and digital technologies and (re)present the 'new' literatures as a conceptual framework for understanding how young people draw on their mobile phones in their construction of their identities and social spaces. As I have explained earlier, these literatures

continued to emerge throughout my ethnographic research process, but particularly during the more intense stages of my data analysis. The first area – a sign of identity – introduces socio-cultural theory and the concept of identity examining the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation. The second area – an agency of identity – details the commodification of mobile phone use, and its co-consumption and co-productive nature for user agency. In the third area – a liquid identity – I explore the efficiency of mobile phone technologies and the apparent significance of a "liquid" life for young people (Bauman, 2005). The final area – a space for identity – presents a reflection on how we might frame these emergent concepts within the context of young peoples' use of space and their construction of personalised landscapes that this new technology affords. Overall, it is my hope that perhaps these conceptualisations with the literature could then help educators to better frame their own pedagogical practice with young people.

2.4.1.1 A sign of identity

A more nuanced understanding of young peoples' sense of self, and identity, from their use of mobile phone technologies within an educational setting can initially be drawn from the ideas of Bakhtin (1986) and Vygotsky (1978). This conceptual pathway knowingly diverges from the previous debates, but I would hope that it is still ultimately compatible with them in the field of cultural studies. Bakhtin (1986) and Vygotsky (1978) are particularly relevant here since their focus on the cultural and social dimensions of young peoples' identities are significant to their

interactions with digital technologies. They allow us to consider how these technologies provide young people with *symbolic* resources for constructing or expressing their own identities, and, in some instances, for evading or resisting adult authority.

From Bakhtin's (1986) perspective, young people therefore, develop through and around the cultural forms by which they are identified, and identify themselves, in the context of their affiliation, or disaffiliation, with those associated with those forms and practices. Vygotsky (1978) however, was primarily interested in the process of "semiotic mediation" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998: 35) and in the development of voluntary control over behaviour. For Vygotsky (1978), the key to human behaviour was the ability to escape entrapment from whatever stimuli they happened to encounter. The way that they did this was linguistic that is, through the active construction and use of symbols. So, just as humans might modify their physical environment, they might also modify their environment's stimulus value for themselves. By way of example then, a mediating device might be constructed by a student assigning meaning to an object, such as a mobile phone, or behaviour, such as texting. This symbolic object or behaviour is then placed in a college environment, to then create positive outcomes for that individual. Vygotsky (1978), however, saw these as more than individual acts, and rather as part of a collectively formed system of meaning; although individuals constantly construct and reconstruct their own mediating devices, most of their

constructions are not original. They have been appropriated in the course of social interaction with others who, in turn, have appropriated the devices from others.

One of the most convincing points about semiotic mediation is its capacity as a tool for agency, a tool for gaining control over one's behaviour. For instance, a student modifies their college environment through the use of their mobile phone, with the aim of affecting their own behaviour. Hence, Vygotsky's (1978) exposition of semiotic mediation as a means to agency gives me a good vantage on the social creation of identities as a means to self-practice. It directs attention away from the extremes of cultural determination of behaviour on the one hand and situational totalitarianism on the other, to the extent that this practice can become a tool of agency, or of self-control and change. As students develop a conception of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, these senses of themselves, these identities, to the degree that they are conscious, permit these individuals, through the semiotic mediation of Vygotsky (1978), an element of control, or agency over their own behaviour. This thesis therefore, offers a means to addressing this conundrum of personal agency and to conceptualise young people, mobile phone technology, and educational settings in practice. Inden (1990) defines this agency as,

The realised capacity of people to act upon their social world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake

the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view. (Inden, 1990: 23)

This conundrum is an interesting one though because of the seeming contradiction between individuals as social products, and as social producers. But, individuals do not always have to behave as agents they also have the capacity to act on behalf of other agents, or to be recipients to the acts of other agents. There is no doubting that culture is important to the working of identity, but it seems that cultural production and semiotic mediation are the keys to its analysis.

2.4.1.2 An agency of identity

A careful reading from postmodern writers such as Baudrillard (1994) and Lyotard (1984) also reveals certain shared features of digital consumption and production that can be useful to understanding young people as cultural consumers and producers, or “prosumers” (Toffler, 1981). One of the most salient characteristics of identity processes to emerge is the construction of an identity-in-action. I am referring here to the playful, yet deliberate construction (and deconstruction) of the self by young people when they engage with their digital technologies. This creative construction and consumption of the self then permits the manipulation of identities both online and offline. Young people seek out and consume materials to incorporate into their construction, often with (un)intended effects on others. Moreover the identities that then evolve through this production process of the self may retain trace elements of the original materials, like a collage, you might see

remnants of other images that have contributed to their manufactured identity. For example, bits of media material, personal messages, photographs of friends and family, applications, song choices, links to websites, essentially the social symbols that when combined add up to a unique image – a work-in-progress identity that can be constantly changed and (re)arranged. Therefore, digital technologies enable young people to present their identities to selected audiences and to (re)examine them in light of the comments and reactions from friends. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, are often accessed through their mobile phone technologies and can be regarded as montages of individual (and group) identities, and as a way of including others in this 'identity work', young people are then able to extend and link themselves to their significant others and become a part in a collaborative, participatory culture. Thus these identity constructions – a product of both their consumption and production – seem to evoke the wider collectives of peer group and family, and facilitate a dialectical relationship between personal and social identities, one that shifts and flows, and reacts to new information and situations.

But writers such as Baudrillard (1994) and Lyotard (1984) have also illustrated how these signs and simulations often detach themselves from the reality they signify or simulate and come to be the primary meaning themselves. Jean Baudrillard in *The System of Objects* (2005) suggests that consumption is not a passive process of absorption and appropriation, contrasted to the supposedly active mode of

production. "It has to be made clear from the outset that consumption is an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system" (Baudrillard, 2005: 217). He makes clear that objects and material goods are not in fact the object of consumption – they are the object merely of needs and of the satisfaction of needs. Consumption, therefore, is not a material practice, it is,

The virtual totality of all objects and messages ready-constituted as a more or less coherent discourse. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs... To become an object of consumption, an object must first become a sign. That is to say: it must become external, in a sense, to a relationship that it now merely signifies. It is thus arbitrary – and not inconsistent with that concrete relationship: it derives its consistency, and hence its meaning, from an abstract and systematic relationship to all other sign-objects. Only in this context can it be 'personalised', can it become part of a series, and so on; only thus can it be consumed, never in its materiality, but in its difference. (Baudrillard, 2005: 218)

This conversion of the object to the status of a sign therefore implies the simultaneous transformation of the human relationship into a relationship of consumption – of consuming and being consumed. So what is consummated and consumed is never the object but the relationship itself, signified yet absent, simultaneously included and excluded – it is the idea of the relationship that is consumed in the series of objects that displays it. The relationship is no longer directly experienced – it has become abstract, been abolished, been transformed into a sign object, and thus consumed. Thus, there are no limits to consumption, if

it were just a process of absorption or devouring, a saturation point would eventually be reached; if it were just tied to needs, again some sort of satisfaction would occur. But, individuals simply want to consume more and more, attributed neither to psychological determinism or the desire for prestige. The dynamism of consumption derives from the disappointment now implicit in the objects therefore consumption must keep surpassing and repeating itself in order to remain what it is – a reason for living. So,

The very will to live, fragmented, disappointed, signified, is condemned to repeat itself and repeatedly abolish itself in a succession of objects... The systematic and limitless process of consumption arises from the disappointed demand for totality that underlies the project of life... to make up for a reality that is absent. Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded on a *lack* [my emphasis]. (Baudrillard, 2005: 223-224)

Thus, Baudrillard (2005) offers a sophisticated analysis that clearly warns of the dangers of romanticising young peoples' use of digital technologies when he brings our attention to the banality of their consuming desires. It would appear then, that young people are certainly being 'empowered' as consumers and that ultimately, like other forms of marketing rhetoric, the discourse of a "digital generation" (Tapscott, 1998; Prensky, 2006) is precisely an attempt to construct the object of which it purports to speak. Perhaps, it represents not a description of what young people actually are, but a set of imperatives about what they should be, or what they need to become. So, on the one hand, I need to acknowledge how commercial forces both create opportunities and set limits on young peoples'

digital cultures; and I should also not forget that access to these technologies – and the ways in which they are used – is partly dependent upon differences to do with factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity. Yet, on the other hand, I need to consider how these technologies provide young people with resources for (de)constructing their own identities and their liberating potential. This debate provides a useful springboard for discussing the relationship between consumerism and identity, and it is important to recognise that young people do not consume, or purchase a new self-image 'straight off the shelf'. Young people appear to draw on a variety of sources, then piece them together, thus recontextualising, and transforming cultural items to (re)create a new self-image or identity. Lévi-Strauss's (1974) notion of "bricolage" could be employed here, to describe for example, how young people create a home page in Facebook made up of references and images from various sources which have been appropriated and recontextualised. Then, in omitting, adapting, and arranging these references, the "bricoleur" is also (re)constructing an identity. When consumption is viewed in these terms, young people can be perceived more as active agents, appropriating consumer culture for their own uses. And yet, critics of consumer culture would suggest that young people are subject to increasingly devious marketing strategies that are serving to exploit them and work against their best interests (for example, Barber, 2007).

As I have argued, young people are faced with a plethora of information and objects through which identities can be defined and performed. Appadurai (1995) highlights that a global cultural economy certainly needs to be understood in terms of “disjunctive flows,” for example, of people, images, and ideas and so on – the messy conditions of globalisation. He goes on to identify mediascapes in his exploration of global disjunctive flows that incorporate information and images created by the media, including advertising, and also their modes of delivery, for instance, the Internet. According to Appadurai, these mediascapes blend reality and fiction, “...more people throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by the mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice, it enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives... The biographies of ordinary people are constructions (or fabrications) in which the imagination plays an important role...” (Appadurai, 1996: 54). Therefore, the narrative, images, and ideas circulated by the media serve to promote a “desire for acquisition and movement” (Appadurai, 1995: 299) and promote feelings of longing and belonging, “... ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the given-ness of things, but by the possibilities that the media suggest are available” (Appadurai, 1996: 52). Therefore, consumers may feel that they exercise power and agency, but as Appadurai suggests consumer choice is also shaped and constructed through merchandising. He posits that,

... The consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign,

both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent; and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production... These images of agency (created by mediascapes) are increasingly distortions of the world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser. (Appadurai, 1995: 307)

Drawing on these ideas, Kenway and Bullen (2001) also interrogated these social constructions and how the experiences of young people are affected by global capitalism and the corporate domination of their culture. The key to their debate is a concern that young people are continually being shaped as consuming subjects within the global marketplace, possibly at the expense of more meaningful social relationships. They bring to our attention the multiple ways in which young people might negotiate the positions available to them by means of their participation in consumer culture. So, Kenway and Bullen (2001) argue that marketing creates possible lifestyle choices which position consumers in terms of desire and belonging, as well as separation and distinction. In other words, consumption can mark social status – defining oneself (or who one wishes to be) as well as defining those whom one is not (or wishes not to be). More recently, they comment,

Via the pleasurable intensities of the libidinal economy, the carnivalesque and jouissance, global consumer-media culture integrates and segregates young people. Further, it seeks to construct a self-gratifying but ultimately perpetually dissatisfied and superficial consumerist subjectivity among today's youth. It conceals beneath its seductive skin the insidious and exploitative processes of its production and consumption... it is at odds with critical and civic values. (Kenway and Bullen, 2008: 30)

These mediascapes are, therefore, fuelled by desire – from the consumer for satisfaction and pleasure, from capital and enterprise for profit – Lyotard (1984) terms this the “libidinal economy.” There can be no doubt that modern and mobile technology, changes young peoples' sense of the world. They want everyone, and everything to be on call, available, ready for use, when they want it, and for whatever purpose they want it. But as Kenway and Bullen (2008) recognise,

Desire persists only as long as it remains unsatisfied. As a product is assimilated into the market place, it eventually generates less profit as its novelty and, thus, desirability diminishes. The result is product senility and aesthetic obsolescence leading to the rapid turnover of style and fashion and the creation of an artificial sense of insufficiency. Satisfaction is anathema to the libidinal economy. (Kenway and Bullen, 2008: 20)

They suggest that consumer-media culture rarely offers young people an opportunity to understand how their identities are being produced and warn that, “the potential pleasures of becoming informed and active citizens within the politics of consumption are usually overridden by the pleasures of fantasy” (Kenway and Bullen, 2008: 21).

2.4.1.3 A liquid identity

According to Giddens (1991), who also stressed the agency of individuals, consumer cultures appear to offer therefore, diverse models of lifestyle and of the self. As a result, Giddens (1991) suggested that individuals have to be constantly “self-reflexive,” making decisions about what they should do, and who they should be. The self becomes a kind of “project” that individuals have to work on – they

have to create biographical “narratives” that will explain themselves to themselves. Thus, Giddens (1991) saw identity as fluid and malleable, rather than fixed. We do not adopt just one lifestyle, rather we construct a life story, or what Beck’s (1992) calls, a “choice biography,” by reflecting on choices and navigating through them. Zygmunt Bauman’s also focused on the allure of a consumer lifestyle and drew attention to the significance of marketing, advertising, and celebrity (Bauman, 2004). He identifies hedonism, self-centredness, novelty, pleasurable experiences, and superficiality as indicative of a postmodern lifestyle and depicts postmodernity as an era bringing instability and insecurity, with the distancing of the state, the dominance of the global marketplace, and the seductions of consumerism. Bauman (2005) describes a “liquid life” and one that is full of potentials, but with no criteria by which these might be judged to be achieved, and consequently dissatisfied at every level.

These ideas are part of a wider trend in modern liberal societies over the past fifty years or so, and young people continue to consume as a way of marking their identity and (re)forming their identities in relation to what is on offer, and (re)create new consumer cultures. These consumer cultures then act as both backdrop and the tools to young people, with both complex and contradictory possibilities, but young peoples’ agency is nevertheless being framed within these commodified spaces. Indeed, the young people that I observed and spoke with were also constantly searching to discover how to most efficiently rearrange things

and realign their technological practices – what appeared to matter to them was getting the greatest possible use out of everything, including their mobile phones. So, for mobile phones to be most usable by young people, they could not be 'fixed', as this would then constrain what young people chose to do with them. These ideas relate to the work of Heidegger (1977), who argued that technology "expedites in that it unlocks and exposes" (Heidegger, 1977: 15). For example, technology might facilitate young peoples' ability to learn in whatever way they want by unlocking, or removing their learning from conditions that might constrain their most efficient and flexible use of their mobile phone technologies in order to do so. Technology might then also facilitate, or expedite young peoples' most efficient way to learn in that it exposes, by placing things out into the 'open'. Technology, therefore, gives young people the power of transforming objects with fixed properties into resources which are flexible, with no determinate and necessary features, or properties. "What is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew" (Heidegger, 1977: 16). However, there is clearly a concern here, as young people become more and more addicted to the ease and flexibility of their technological devices they start to experience everything in terms of its ease and flexibility (or lack thereof). The result is that everything is seen, ultimately, as lacking any fixed character, determinate nature, or essence. Heidegger essentially views this as potentially disastrous, as resources, "no longer stand over against us as objects" (Heidegger, 1977: 17) and mobile

phones, for instance, are no longer experienced as having inherent properties to which young people need to accommodate themselves and therefore, and ironically, how far do young people actually lose the skills and capabilities that might have given them their own identities? Ultimately though, for Heidegger, technology did hold more of a threat than a promise. His preoccupation with technology as "a mode of revealing" (Heidegger, 1977: 13) was driven by the belief that if we come to experience everything as just a resource, our ability to lead worthwhile lives will be put at risk. So, when someone disposed to the world in a technological way encounters human beings they will generally regard them as just human resources. Consequently, the 'good' human becomes the one who is most flexibly able to deal with the market economy in which they inhabit; in addition to pluralities of culture, changing social norms, and so on. Therefore, human beings in a technological age, become to be valued in terms of their adaptability, and thus, *efficiency*.

2.4.1.4 A space for identity

And so, it would appear that young people who are growing up with digital technologies are in a position to explore the potentials, and limitations, of their media for various personal communication purposes, and this often entails developing a strong sense of usefulness that is practical as well as social. I regularly observed that when young people have a text-message conversation, or talk on the phone they are able to seemingly establish an intimate space for shared presence – the physical space is shut out, no matter if it is the classroom,

the corridor, or a busy refectory. However, there is also now a growing momentum for literature on the use of mobile technologies affirming that mobile phones are creating communities where the co-presence of day-to-day life are being replicated by a virtual presence elsewhere (Katz, 2006; Caron and Caronia, 2007; Urry, 2007; Ling, 2008; Baym, 2010; Elliott and Urry, 2010; Turkle, 2011). This, in turn, is affecting the spaces and places in which young people choose to show themselves. The mobile phone in particular, presents a new kind of stage where young peoples' social lives might be acted out. Using this technology as part of a performance in order to draw attention to oneself might even be described as a type of social *flânerie*, as mobile phones can easily be personalised and accessorised in order to display choice and uniqueness. Leopoldina Fortunati (2001) suggested that mobile phones are subject to this "pull of fashion" or even become fashionable in their own right. She argued that being connected and showing that one is connected by high levels of use ensured that mobile phones came to be seen as a fashion statement, enhancing the self-image of the user and increasing the user's identity within a group, that is, by making visible, the user's invisible community.

The use of mobile phone technologies by young people within an educational setting is often perceived as being new and fashionable in some way by educators as well, because I suspect that this newness is often conceived in relation to something that is actually very familiar and conventional – the classroom. To extend this idea further, assumptions are continually being made by educators

about what it means to be a student and therefore what environments they need to learn effectively in. However, in so doing we nearly always fail to recognise that students differ from educators in terms of their "ways of seeing." What goes on during the day of an average student is certainly different in rhythm, scale and content from that of a teacher. Therefore, the classroom became significant, not just as a physical location in which my research was partially located, but also as a conceived, or imagined, space.

In adopting a container-like perspective, 'space' is perceived of as a location in which activity occurs; however, Lefèbvre represents social space as produced through ongoing movements, "a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits" (Lefèbvre, 1991: 92-93). Massey (2005) also defines social space in this way as the "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005: 9). Importantly, Lave and Wenger (1991) in their model of learning in a "community of practice" criticise the association of a learning "situation" with a "simple location in space and time" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 32). They describe a multifaceted and relational perspective in which "agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute one another" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 33). Hence, the possible identities of students have often been cast in relation to the classroom – their possible and likely activities, their motivations, and their positions with respect to one another. Consequently these container-like visions of social spaces (of learning) that

emphasise located representations over the mobilities of practices are often recreated, despite attempts to disrupt them.

Nevertheless, messy geographies – complex mobilities of practice – have increasingly occupied my imagination. As an ethnographic researcher "interpreting beyond the appearance of solidity" (Lefèbvre, 1991: 92), 'space' enabled me to consider how a classroom, or college environment, is not just an isolated container, but positioned in a nexus of relations to other such locales. Therefore, the classroom for instance, can be seen perhaps as less of a 'parking space', and as more of an intersection. So, this interaction between young people at college and social space(s) can be read as a type of dialectic – they are both shaped by these spaces and use them to shape themselves. Because of the vigorous way that young people adopt mobile phone technologies, spaces are enabled to change, while they stay the same. For example, mobile phones might be used to mediate the creating and ending of emotional relationships, and sharing and showing what one has stored on one's mobile phone might be a new way to build a friendship. So, in perhaps small ways mobile phones can create communities, and assist these spaces, in achieving solidarity, no matter how temporary. The giving and receiving of text "gifts" is also a relatively new practice, but then it does hark back to over a century ago when the French anthropologist, Marcel Mauss wrote of the Melanesian economics of gift exchange (Mauss, 1997).

However, it is not my intention here to list all the ways in which mobile phone technologies might create social bonding, or communities, since I wish to finally introduce the intriguing work of Erving Goffman who offers really insightful observations about social interaction and these, in turn, relate to how young people are using their digital technologies, and especially their mobile phones. Goffman provided some astute analysis of social ritual at the interpersonal and micro-level – beginning to show us how to approach the analysis of the humdrum activities of daily life. Whilst a lot of recent technological research focuses on the group, as in social network analysis, Goffman's unit of analysis was the situation (Goffman, 1963: 197). Goffman examined how individuals entered into, carried on, and exited from situations, and challenged us to consider the minimal sense of ritual in this micro interaction. Indeed, Goffman believed the most minimum of all to be the glance, and how even a fleeting look can be accorded meaning and become a kind of focused interaction, "the gestures which we sometimes call empty are perhaps in fact the fullest of all" (Goffman, 1967: 91). These gestures are "the bindings of society" (Goffman, 1967: 91), and it is through these that we are able to construct and maintain social order. Though there are links between Goffman and Durkheim, Goffman argued that it is not necessarily in religious or large-scale events that ritual cohesion is developed – it is in everyday interpersonal interaction. For example, through shaking hands and waving goodbye, as both have functional and symbolic meanings. Therefore, if society is to be maintained, it must socialise individuals to be, "self regulating participants in social encounters"

(Goffman, 1967: 44) – it is through this attachment that the individual feels that he/she is a part of the whole. These are relatively straightforward to observe when we are greeting others, offering compliments, making invitations, and so on – essentially, in the performance of etiquette (Goffman, 1967: 72-73). In his analysis of embarrassment (Goffman, 1967: 97) he even outlines how when we are placed in a situation where our own sense of our façade and its actual state part from each other, we are embarrassed until we are able to deploy some strategy to restore the two divergent elements.

All of these ideas have the potential to resonate with how young people are utilising their mobile devices as they transgress through the corridors, classrooms, and canteens of a typical college day. However, it is in *Asylums* (1961), where Goffman discusses how artefacts can be invested with symbolic meaning when describing how inmates used an “identity kit” for the management of their personal facades (Goffman, 1961: 20) – this identity kit can be seen as a kind of personalised totem – it has a functional side, but it is also an assertion of personality in such a “total institution.” The notion of investing objects with symbolic value is also seen in Goffman’s (1961) view of the individual – he suggests that the individual can also be symbolically central, and through interpersonal interactions can fill the role of the totem. Thus, Goffman (1961) argues that ritual interactions are so thoroughly embedded in everyday activities, that we can be seen as continually recharging the symbolic value of our social

relationships. In terms of young peoples' mobile phone communication, text messaging can especially be regarded in this light, since these texts carry out the social task of integrating the sender and receiver, have a phatic content, and are typically positively reinforcing.

This approach to understanding young peoples' use of digital and mobile technologies is clearly significant. It is obviously appropriate for trying to make sense of online interactions, for example, in the case of text messaging, and social networking, where questions of rules and etiquette are crucial, not least because of the absence of other cues that we might conventionally use to make identity claims in everyday life. But, the issue of performance is also very relevant to the ways in which young people construct identities, for example, personal home pages in Facebook, or Twitter. And, the question of whether online identities are more, or less, truthful than offline ones is a recurrent concern in the literature, including in Goffman's earlier work (1959) when he suggested that when "on stage" individuals tend to conform to a standardised definition of the situation, and of their role within it – playing out a kind of ritual. Individuals therefore, seek to create impressions on others when "front-stage" that will enable them to achieve their goals – "impression management" – and they may join, or collude with others to create collaborative performances in doing so. But, they have the opportunity "back-stage" to be more honest. These kinds of issues will be explored in various ways in chapter four.

2.4.2 Reclaiming identities

To conclude, to further encapsulate my conceptualisation of identity, I draw on the concept of *bricolage*, a French term often used to refer to a construction or creation that is improvised (Lévi-Strauss, 1974). Like 'identity,' the word *bricolage* can be used to refer to a process as well as a product. This notion of a *bricolage* identity suggests a work-in-progress, an evolving, active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds others, one that changes throughout dialectical interactions with the digital and non-digital environments, and one involving physical, psychological, social, and cultural agents. Like *bricolage*, identity (re)construction involves experimenting, blending genres, and (re)creating meanings to suit the context and in response to the requirements and affordances of the situation. For young people, mobile phone technologies demonstrate possibilities that appear to be well suited to *bricolage*.

At the outset of this section, I identified four areas that are helping to frame my understanding of young peoples' use of mobile phone technologies so far. The first area introduces the literatures associated with the symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation, with the second area detailing the commodification of mobile phone use. In the third area I explored some of the literatures concerning the efficiency of mobile phone technologies, and in the final

area presented a reflection on young peoples' use of space and their construction of personalised landscapes that this new technology affords. The nature of the ethnographic research process creates a pathway for the literatures, but not necessarily only one, since parallel pathways have been mapped here, and some continue to be (re)mapped as they (re)emerge through the data and are (re)visited again (and again). Some of these may come together, converging at a later stage, others diverge, and some may even eventually dissipate. In many respects, some of these pathways already feel well trodden, others newly discovered. It was never my intention though to (re)present these literatures as such a neat and tidy system. I would hope that they assist the reader now in appreciating my movements across the ethnographic landscape that I am still exploring. How young people use their mobile phone technologies to construct a sense of self and to convey that to their family and friends potentially creates a fabric of human identity and connection. This fabric, this texture even, has many forms, and in that sense young people have the ability to fabricate themselves through their use of their mobile devices. In the next chapter, I shall present the kind of epistemology that can better help in discovering the ways in which young people use these mobile phone technologies. It is to that we now turn.

3 Chapter Three: Methodology

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973: 5)

3.1 Starting to work *with* research methods

In chapter two, I stressed how the literature was being presented in such a way as it attempted to reflect how the ideas were generated due to the nature of the ethnographic process itself. As I explained, this process involved an interwoven and ongoing iterative dialogue between the data, my experiences, and the literature. My aim had been to design an in-depth study within a broad area of research that covered the use of mobile phone technologies by young people, but one that could nevertheless be exploratory and fluid. The specific research questions that followed from this were: how are young peoples' identities shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture? How is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined? And, of particular relevance to this chapter, how can the ways in which young people interpret the culture of mobile phones be better understood? In order to do this important research I was sympathetic to an interpretivist ontology, referred to by Guba (1990) as constructivism, whereby social reality consists of socially constructed meanings; it is not some 'thing' that can be interpreted in

different ways, it *is* the interpretations. In its epistemology, knowledge is therefore derived from everyday meanings. Social reality is the product of its inhabitants, a world that is (re)produced as a part of their everyday activities together. Language can therefore be seen as the medium of social interaction and structures this social reality. Hence, my ontology was relativist, and epistemology subjectivist. Ethnography was my preferred methodology and I was committed to exploring my research questions on the basis of, though not exclusively by, participant observation. Participant observation is a characteristic feature of the ethnographic approach, but I intended my fieldwork to also include other research methods, such as conversations and video interviews, to provide insight into how social actors, that is sixth form college students, were representing themselves.

However, I also recognised that in the process of writing about mobile phone technologies, I might have ended up stripping away the fundamental non-verbal qualities of the objects I was researching through this very process. Consequently, I was committed to experimenting with other ways of 'telling', in particular visual media, and the use of images for the study of material objects "to reduce the puzzlement" (Geertz, 1973: 16). I believed that a visual methodology should not necessarily be confined to just producing visual data, and initially intended to use and work with photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) as 'the visual' and 'the conversational' are usually closely intertwined. Visual data, including photographs taken using a mobile phone, could therefore act as a medium of communication

between myself and the 'interviewee'. This data could then be used to contextualise any personal recollections as part of the photo-elicitation interview process as "the power of the photo lies in its ability to unlock the subjectivity of those who see the image differently from the researcher..." (Harper, 2003: 195). Hence, photo-elicitation interviewing had the potential to introduce a more reflexive way by which I might then develop questions, and also offered participants a potential means of communicating aspects of their lives (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Stanczak, 2004), supporting what Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 117) ultimately referred to as the "active interview."

In the chapter that now follows, I hope to signify the importance of the ethnographic process to developing the conceptual framework outlined in chapter two that aims to understand how young people draw on their mobile phones in their construction of their identities and social spaces. Therefore, I will begin by critically exploring the relevance of my methodological position, ethnography, to my research questions, and will also proceed to discuss the methods of research that I then engaged with as a direct result of this approach.

3.2 Ethnography

Participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives, for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is being said, asking questions, in fact, collecting whatever data is available to throw light

on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 21)

Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink, 2007: 22)

This section seeks to outline my ethnographic research with young people at a sixth form college in Cheshire, England. It draws on my experiences of working with, and teaching young people, in order to try to understand their daily experiences of using mobile phone technologies. This includes data collected over a three year period from participant observation and video-interviews and is presented in the first person as this reflects the accounts that I was developing via my research diary and field notes. I was sympathetic to adopting an ethnographic approach as a critical response to what I increasingly recognised as objectivist epistemological studies in mobile technology use by young people that failed to appreciate its central nuanced and contradictory importance as artifact, mediating technology in identity formation and as an end product of commodification that manifested itself in all sorts of ways in educational settings (for example, Harrison et al., 2003; Balanskat et al., 2006; Means et al., 2009). Furthermore, these studies rarely assumed an ontology based on purposive actors involved in the social construction of reality these studies frequently neutralised the researchers and the researched, and then used questionnaire surveys and experimentalism to determine causal factors for educational improvement. Thus, digital technologies

continued to be located with an outdated conception of education that was measured by traditional outcomes such as examination results. However, if an alternative conception of learning was to be explored, that might encompass a more flexible, learner-centred idea of education, then alternative methodologies need to be explored as well in order to envisage how young people might then be allowed to capitalise on the intrinsic properties of, for example, their mobile phone technologies in formal educational settings.

I feel that this research is still fundamentally about educational futures and that relates to one generation of young people and their perspectives about digital technology. But, young people do not remain static, and it would be naïve to think that life stands still for them while everything around them is changing – so there is an argument against an essentialist reading of this text. It is also an argument against pathologising schools and colleges and their current relationships with technology, especially mobile phone technologies. Each generation (re)defines its identity (or identities) and I might have chosen to observe them explicitly against the background of political and educational change throughout the last two decades. However, I intended the key focus to always remain clearly on the young people in question. This research was carried out, therefore, with a view to drawing as detailed a picture as possible of the day-to-day realities of some young peoples' mobile phone use and its implications for educational policy and practice.

The discussion in this chapter also seeks to consider some of the challenges and opportunities faced in the conduct of this research. Like Popoviciu, Haywood, and Mac an Ghail (2006: 399) I am interested in "the creative productiveness of exploring the intersection and cross-fertilisation between contemporary social cultural theory and reflexive methodology in doing social research." So, the discussion that follows builds on the previous chapter's analysis of identity and space, and how these now relate to mobile phone technologies and my search for a new research methodology as well. I had been teaching the young people 'interviewed' for the study for at least nine months and had a familiar working relationship with them, albeit one mainly defined by my teaching role. However, I began to develop a sense of the multiple versions of themselves that they were happy for me to access throughout the academic year. "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (Holland et al., 2003: 3).

Throughout my ethnographic research and now in writing a thesis about identity, I had also begun to reflect on my self-understandings – my own identity. Some important questions had arisen from knowingly adopting this reflexive approach: do I write this thesis as an educator, and a teacher, with an authoritative and privileged position and voice, expressing age and possibly a degree of wisdom? Do I write it as a composite of these young, perhaps subcultured identities that I spoke with – speaking a narrative from a position in solidarity with them? Do I

write it as a white female, from Europe, from the UK, from the city, or the suburbs – or do I act as something else: a postgraduate research student from a western university, and maybe one that might be perceived as a neutral academic space? Do I write it as a middle-aged woman, who was once a teenager, talking about their generation and comparing it to mine? Do I write it for readers that I know, or assume to know, or who I do not know, or perhaps think they know me? And really, what difference might any of these choices make if you read this before, or after reading these findings about identity, about space, and about the experiences of these young people? Ultimately, however, I realise that I am stuck in the modality of this page – in and by writing – and there is a necessary engagement with the self, with identity, that writing forces upon you, and certainly that the mobile phone forces upon young people. The narrative that follows, therefore, also describes a particular relationship of my-self to others, and identity formation, with an exposition that tries and strives to avoid epistemological neutrality. But then I also decided not to communicate these findings by texting, email, Facebook, or Twitter, so it is imperative to recognise that when you do choose to shift the media, things also begin to happen to selves. I am writing this on a laptop, whereby my keyboard skill also facilitates the relationship between what I think and what I can get on the page – but, it is still writing the self. If I had decided to upload these findings as a video to YouTube that would enable an entirely different set of selves to be selected and portrayed, and it would make a different kind of statement on this chapter, and eventual thesis. So, this is what I think this

chapter is really about, as I, and these young people, now work through the multiple relationships implicit in ethnographic research: of self, or selves, of reader, of identities, of modalities, of technologies, of spaces – all plural, all mixed up, all messy.

This chapter, then, also seeks to recognise the positions that all participants, myself included, adopted during the research process. But, in ethnographic research, however 'open' in its methodology, the work is still organised around key questions and themes, "letting the participants speak is typically a disingenuous construction of the role of the researcher, because of course researchers want people to speak of particular things" (Frankham and Edwards-Kerr, 2009: 415). My approach, then, required me to improvise during my conversations and interviews and often respond with questions to emerging themes and issues directed by the participants involved. I was also continually mindful of my ontological and epistemological concerns about the nature of 'truth'. As Geertz (1973: 13) explains, "we are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognised." Therefore, one of the difficulties of my ethnographic research was having to work in a way which was not necessarily about satisfying any formal requirements for a complete explanation but, "...such a notion of reflexivity opens up educational research to creative, nonarbitrary development: and takes us away from the current

obsessions (which are more extraprofessional than professional) with universalistic prescription and a priori methodological specification. They are a kind of educational death that educational research must resist" (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, and Piper, 2007: 197). In ethnographic terms, 'knowing' can only ever be worked towards, as Davies and Harré (1990: 46) suggest, "an individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate." The discursive practices themselves also need to be part of a reflexive consideration in relation to the truths that are generated, "importantly, post-structural research accounts identify the need to be reflexively aware of how epistemologies may implicitly produce versions of reality rather than being a mirror or device to access reality" (Popoviciu, Haywood, and Mac an Ghaill, 2006: 403). I therefore continued to heed the production of accounts through the research process rather than suggesting that my research uncovered any pre-existing reality. Therefore, the experience of ethnographic data is still possibly, as Strathern (2002: 309) posits, "a resource only from some vantage point in the future." Fortunately, I was able to 'interview' seven young people over two academic years, and had the time to try to engage seriously with them, and significantly with the complexities of carrying out this kind of research. As Geertz (1973: 10) reminds me, ethnography is, "like trying to read (in the sense of constructing a reading of) a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written

not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour."

Ethnography is undoubtedly a slow practice and requires patience. My lengthy fieldwork experiences and my understanding of what was going on around me were central to the analytic endeavour, and this started to take shape for me in the writing of field notes. Each day I recorded notes, describing what I had done, the classes that I had taught, and the students that I had met with, detailing the conversations that I had been party to and noting down anything that seemed relevant to my research. In my field notes I would detail the context of the conversation (classes, times, and locations), who else was there, suggestions of things that might not have been done or said, and the reactions of others. I recognised that these notes would form the basis of subsequent analytical accounts and in that sense they would replace and shape my memory. Therefore, to aid this process I always sought to type up my notes in OneNote (Microsoft Office) either during or straight after the noteworthy event. Furthermore, they began to direct my attention throughout this stage of the research process. Since, as you write you become aware of things that you feel unsure about, questions that you forgot to ask, details that you failed to notice, and so on. Therefore, these field notes were not simply a record of what happened, for as a reflexive ethnographer I always assumed that I was only aware of some of what was going on. These narratives therefore, shaped the trajectory of the research and they

constituted an ongoing analysis of a mass of small encounters and events that constituted daily life in the field. And so, if these field notes were to be analytical from the beginning, I did not draw such a sharp contrast between the data collection and data analysis stages of my research process.

In the next section, I will introduce the importance of reflexivity to my research process and how some of the practices typically associated with the interpretation of art work were used to methodologically support the adoption of reflexivity throughout my data gathering and data analysis. Simply, I had begun to find that reflecting on art, also provided me with the opportunity to reflect on reflexivity itself.

3.3 Towards reflexivity

One of the most significant properties of *trompe l'oeil* is that, precisely because it imitates the real so convincingly, it *draws attention to the artistry and the artifice* involved. Right at the point where it is most referential, then, art becomes *self-referential*... The double-take that it induces when we see the real and realise it is fake prompts the 'defamiliarisation of art', enabling (or forcing) us to reflect on the nature of representation itself... *Trompe l'oeil* forces us to try, and it is the impossibility of the task that creates the vertigo, or the nausea – the fascination at any rate – of oscillating back and forward between two impossible positions. We are caught in the 'space between' painting and the real. (Maclure, 2003: 151-152)

In recent years I have recognised that there has been a growing interest in the potential of visual methods in media research with much of the impetus coming

from qualitative researchers seeking to move beyond what are seen as the limitations of talk-based methods such as interviews. Such visual methods typically, although by no means exclusively, employ visual means of (re)presentation, such as photography and video, and enable participants in the research to express their views more directly, and usually with less interference from the researcher, thus being more 'empowering' for those involved. This apparent interest in visual methods has been growing across a range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and education; and has been particularly evident in research involving children or young people (for example, Clark and Moss, 2001; Facer, 2002; Facer et al., 2003; Kaplan and Howes, 2004; Niesyto, 2000). In addition, there has been the emergence of visual methodologies from various disciplinary perspectives (for example, Banks, 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Pink, 2006; Rose, 2006). Of course, sociological, historical and anthropological researchers have been using visual data (for example, drawings, paintings, photographs and film) and visual methods (for example, photography, film and video) for many years; yet more recently, there has been a growing emphasis on the potential for *collaborative* production, in which participants are themselves involved (to a greater or lesser degree) in creating (re)presentations of their own experiences. This approach is in turn representative of a broader move towards participatory research methods, particularly apparent in areas such as health care and education. Such methods have certainly been employed by businesses in the field of market research for many years, for example, companies

have been adopting ethnographic approaches, such as providing participants with disposable cameras, or the equipment to make video diaries. Here again, such methods have been seen as particularly appropriate for use with children and young people (for example, Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003). But, there are a number of important questions raised by these approaches. Is the data necessarily more truthful than data gathered using other methods? Whose 'voice' do they actually represent? And, ultimately, how do we interpret, or analyse them. These are some of the issues that I intend to address in the remainder of this chapter.

However, I would also like to challenge that these methods in themselves somehow provide more accurate or authentic representations of 'reality'. All research data needs to be analysed in terms of the context in which they are gathered, the social relationships among the participants, and the methods (whether linguistic or visual) that are employed. All research creates positions from which it is possible for participants to speak, to perform, or to (re)present themselves. I consider that the political and ethical dimensions of this process do not derive simply from the methods that are employed, but from the wider social contexts in which the research is conducted. Therefore, data analysis needs to address the affordances of different modes of representation (for example, photography, or video), but it should also address the social meanings that are attached to these modes, and the social expectations that surround them. Therefore, by way of contrast, I will argue that the use of visual methods – as with

any research method – needs to display a degree of reflexivity. It is important to understand how research itself establishes positions from which it becomes possible for participants to 'speak'. As Maclure (2003: 81) puts it, “the point is to interrupt, or disrupt, the processes by which research knowledge is customarily produced, and treated by those who read it as self-evident.”

I will begin then, with a relevant examination of Foucault’s approach, as it has radical implications not only for a theory of representation – it suggests that discourses themselves construct the subject-positions from which they become meaningful and have effects – but also for the methodological use of reflexivity in data analysis. In *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault uses the painting by Velázquez, *Las Meninas* (see Museo Nacional Del Prado, 2012) to raise questions about the nature of representation. His ultimate suggestion that the painting has *no* one, final meaning – one of his most powerful arguments – was explored in a particularly memorable Ed.D session. “We are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at us” says Foucault (1970: 4), to the left, looking forwards, is the painter himself, Velázquez. He is looking at his model, who is sitting in the place from which we are looking, but we cannot see who the model is because the canvas on which Velázquez is painting has its back to us. In the centre of the painting stands the little princess, the Infanta Margarita, she is the centre of the picture, but she is not, however, the subject of Velázquez’s canvas. The entourage of duennas, maids of honour, courtiers, dwarfs, and dog look out

towards the front of the picture at the sitters. So, who are the sitters? Initially I thought I could not see them, but the picture does tell me who they are because, behind the Infanta's head and to the left, is a mirror, and in the mirror are reflected the sitters, who are seated in the position from which I am looking – the King, Philip IV, and his wife, Mariana. To the right of the mirror, is another frame, a doorway leading backwards out of the room, a man is just entering, or perhaps leaving the room.

So, Foucault uses this painting to explain his theory of representation and specifically the role of the subject. But, clearly, representation here is not about a true reflection of reality, the discourse of the painting is doing more than simply trying to mirror what exists, so what it is about, its meaning, depends on how I choose to read it. Significantly, I began to realise that it is as much about what you *cannot* see as what you can. You cannot see what everyone is looking at, the sitters, until we notice their reflection in the mirror – they are not directly represented, though their 'absence' is represented. There is a complex inter-play between 'presence' and 'absence', what is shown, and what is not. A number of other displacements are also apparent, the centre of the painting seems to be the Infanta, or the King and Queen – whom the others are looking at – it all depends on where you are looking from. Foucault argues that there are two subjects and two centres in the painting, and the composition, its discourse, forces us to therefore oscillate between these two subjects. So, far from being resolved into

some absolute truth, the meaning of the picture, the discourse of this painting, deliberately keeps us in this oscillating process of looking.

One (re)reading of the painting might be where I position myself (the researcher) as Velázquez; my students as the Infanta; the college, comprised of teachers, support staff, and parents among others as the entourage; the university as the Sovereign (the sitters); and the figure in the doorway - well, perhaps that is my reflexive-self. Again, the focus of my research would appear to be the students, but perhaps it is also the university, it does really all depend on the position from which you are looking - two subjects, two centres (the students, and the university) – and the meaning, the discourse will oscillate between the two. Another reading might position the students as Velázquez; their peers as the Infanta; the college, again as the entourage; myself, the researcher, as the Sovereign; and the figure in the doorway – well perhaps a (re)presentation of the students' reflexive-selves. Therefore, you can begin to appreciate how I consider Foucault's point, that this painting only means something to the spectator looking at it, as a really significant one, not only for my research methodology chapter, but also the findings and discussion chapter.

And, the spectator always seems to be subjected to the discourse of the painting – looking from the outside, in front of, the picture, but also looking out of the scene, by identifying with the looking being done by the figures in the painting. Again, it

is important for Foucault that the painting does not have a completed meaning – it really only means something in relation to the spectator who is looking at it. Therefore, meaning is constructed in the dialogue *between* the painting and the spectator. Foucault argues that the way the discourse of representation works in the painting is that it must be looked at and understood from the one subject position in front of it from which (we) the spectators, are looking. One final and interesting point is that the perspective from which a camera would have to be positioned to film the scene – the position of The Sovereign – is now both the subject *of* the painting (what it is all about), and the subject *in* the painting (the one whom the discourse sets in place). I consider that Velázquez's 'presence' in his picture to ultimately bring together all kinds of perspectival differences that contrast, rather than collude, and aim to contradict productively. And, it is this reflexive bringing together that represents an *increase*, an exceeding of the real, since it seeks to avoid a modernist intolerance of contradiction – it intends to exemplify. As Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, and Piper (2007) point out,

It involves the risk of the new, not merely the promise of the incremental. It follows that a methodology determined in advance – the absolute convention of our times – is self-defeating for any research that wishes to chance this kind of radical educational move. Reflexivity *becomes* through the processes of performing, exemplifying, deconstructing, and so on... It can be an achievement, but not a prescription or an application. There is no possible model. It is a working out that contains a productive contradiction in that, working from the actual, exceeds the 'real' just as ... Velázquez... Reflexivity, then is the working out, and in, of a kind of superrepresentation of actuality(ies). (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, and Piper, 2007: 194)

This was valuable as it introduced to me the potential for an educational research that was more idiosyncratically motivated, and one that attempted to draw away from the more prescribed 'models' of reflexivity, for example, the kind of reflexive typology recommended by Peshkin (1988). As Benjamin (1997: 457) reminds me, "knowledge comes by way of thinking in images from 'lightning flashes' – the text is the long roll of thunder that follows." But, I am also aware of some dangers in the use of metaphors which Richardson comments are the "backbone of social science writing." The dangers are that metaphors can "prefigure the analysis with a 'truth-value' code belonging to another domain" (Richardson, 2000: 927) and that this can create mistaken or overblown claims. I am also conscious that I am using visual metaphors, when in fact my approach to research, and that of others whom I admire, encourages using a full sensory register (Pink, 2009). So, to avoid some of these dangers, I am trying to use these metaphors in a 'gentle' and 'suggestive' way. Thus, these visual metaphors have actually helped me focus on what I am trying to do with and say about knowledge and my approach to generating it, that is, they have allowed me to anchor myself, epistemologically and ontologically at various moments in the research.

Thus, I like Coffey and Atkinson's concept of the researcher as someone who is not only skilled and trained, but who is also a creative thinker who has and uses ideas (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Therefore, my approach to research has some parallels with Jennifer Mason's (2011) notion of a researcher as a "facet carver"

envisaging research as constructed through combinations and constellations of facets as we might see in a cut gemstone. Facet methodology (Mason, 2011) encourages social science researchers to try to gain flashes of insight into complexities and the entwinements rather than editing them out of view. Given that facet methodology involves a connective ontology and playing with epistemologies, she warns that the challenge is to use your imagination in ways that produce insights and knowledge that are meaningful and incisive, rather than fictitious and fanciful. But, the most important point to emphasise here is that, epistemology and ontology are intricately bound together.

My desire then, to find new ways of engaging with the processes by which young people constructed meaning, had already led to my introduction to ethnography – a “reaction to positivism and associated purely quantitative approaches to the study of life” (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005: 16) – as there was an assumption that social behaviour could not just be reduced to variables, rather there was an emphasis on understanding how people constructed and interpreted their social worlds. So, doing a visual ethnography now implied that, “conversation is filled with verbal references to images and icons... Sometimes informants refer to absent images (including photographs) or they might introduce material images or objects into a conversation” (Pink, 2007: 86) and seemed more consistent to me with investigating aspects of mobile phone use with young people. Thus, in relation to my ontological perspective, I had taken an epistemological position that suggested

that my observation fieldnotes and interview transcripts (taken from digital video recordings) could provide the data to support these ontological properties. Therefore, my research would incorporate a textual construction of visual observations and video interviews to explore social practices, in order to then try to 'read' these phenomena in a literal sense. However, through my engagement with Foucault, I now understood that these readings of visual data could not be treated as though they were direct representations of reality, as visual images, and visualisation were always constructed.

In chapter four I will move the discussion on to how I aimed to analyse and construct an interpretation of the qualitative data that I collected. Since, in order to develop this understanding I would need to continually think about and engage with those to whom the interpretation was being made. So, the type of analysis that I would eventually use would depend on what my research actually uncovered, that is, it would be emergent. This approach for analysing qualitative data whereby theory is discovered from data, rather than being imposed on it is called grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bryman and Burgess, 1994). Blaikie's (2007) "abductive research strategy" also resonated with my interpretivist perspective at that time that is, moving back and forth between my own data, experiences, and broader concepts. I hoped therefore, that this analytical approach would be consistent with my subjective epistemological position. I would be directing my efforts towards making arguments based on interpretations,

whereby I was continually thinking about and engaging with those to whom the argument was being made as well as, the grounds on which they thought the argument stood. Therefore, I understood the making of arguments to be a relational process, and there was a definite sense of engagement with others in terms of how I would do it. So, in terms of actually making my arguments convincing, I understood that I would need to analyse the claims that I was making as part of this process, and on what, or whose authority they were based. The intent, therefore, was to always create a reflexive text,

This text allows the reader to re-experience the events in question, coming to see the truth of the narrative that contains them. This truth is not based on mimesis, but rather is grounded in the process of self-formation and self-understanding... A performance-based, story-telling, listening, and hearing framework is privileged. Truth is fragile – a coproduction and an interactional experience lodged in the moment that connects the reader-as-audience-member and cop performer to a performance text. (Denzin, 1997: 267-268)

Making this process transparent should enable me to demonstrate to others how I had reached my arguments. But, as MacLure cautions, “texts cannot be reduced to singular meanings. But they can be unsettled – shaken up, breached, disturbed, torn – so that new questions and meanings are generated” (2003: 81). MacLure invites, “but what if the (ever-present) risk of mischief and paradox were to be engaged rather than evaded?” She points to some examples of historical artwork, including instances of *trompe l’oeil*, art that attempts to ‘fool the eye’ by passing itself off as the object that it depicts. She uses a painting by Cornelis Ghisbrechts

(see Statens Museum for Kunst, 2012) depicting the back of a painting to explain the challenges inherent in representation. "Right at the very point where the trompe l'oeil painting seems to accomplish the impossible task – of dissolving that divide between reality and representation – it flips (us) over and slams us with the reminder that there is nothing behind the painted surface" (Maclure, 2003: 151). I will now go on to detail the research methods specific to my visual ethnography in the section ahead.

3.4 The presence of the 'absent' researcher

Rather than ditching the methodological skills that ... had [been] so painfully accumulated, we should work through how we can imbue traditional research methodologies with a sense of the creative, the practical, and being with practice-ness.... Pushed in the appropriate direction there is no reason why these methods cannot be made to dance a little. (Latham, 2003: 2000)

In the section that now follows, I aim to critically reflect on the research methods used as a part of the ethnographic process. As a reflexive researcher, I had already begun to understand that my research questions and methods were, like myself, socially situated. This belief had given rise to my adoption of the method called participant observation, although arguably I understood that it was more than just a method. Indeed as Atkinson and Hammersley (in Silverman, 2001: 45) recognised, "in a sense, *all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it. From this point

of view, participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers.”

Throughout 2006-2007, I had practised taking and interpreting field notes at my sixth form college on the recommendation of my Ed.D supervisor. This was a surprisingly challenging endeavour and began to highlight some of the pragmatic considerations of field work. For example, my seated position outside in college grounds on a hot sunny July afternoon had attracted a lot of attention from other members of staff who wished to join me for an afternoon break whilst I tried to observe a group of students enjoying listening to their music via their mobile phones! (At this stage, I had not been aware that these ‘distractions’ were all a part of the ‘insiderness’ of participant observation). These early attempts at participant observation also raised a number of ethical questions about seeking permissions from senior staff, students, and potentially parents that were to guide my future research. So, as a participant observer, I began to map out potential observations throughout my college day, that is, a day that typically traversed classrooms, corridors, the refectory, library, and possibly IT suites. I hoped that observing in such a way, in such a busy college environment might illustrate aspects of spatial and temporal organisation, that is, where mobile phone technologies were being used by young people, with whom, in what sequences, and at what time. Therefore, it became apparent that observations such as these, that were to be made in the course of my everyday working college life, should

resolve the ethnographer's problem of 'access'. But, in that respect, issues regarding the location and timing of the research also became less significant than I first thought as well, since there was potentially an abundance of opportunity revealing itself from which I might observe young people engaging with their mobile phones throughout their daily college lives.

These early expeditions into the field also made me consider the practical uses of video recordings, from which I could then take transcriptions, since taking field notes and describing everything that I saw was proving more difficult than I had first anticipated. Furthermore, these observation and recording experiences then initiated my thinking about the ethics of reporting my research, for example, in terms of how to use pseudonyms in my findings if the participants saw this as desirable. (Ethical issues associated with my research will be discussed more fully in the final section). Finally, these pilot exercises continued to confirm my substantive interest in identity, and social spaces, in relation to the use of mobile (phone) technologies and young people. And so, these early stages of fieldwork were never totally unguided and became an informed platform, both methodologically and substantively, from which I was then able to proceed, echoing Silverman (2001),

Assuming ethnography consists of simply going out into the field and inducing observations is utterly mistaken. Indeed, this assumption can be an excuse for sloppy, unfocused research... So the ethnographer must get beyond the initial experience of fieldwork when every issue seems so

fascinating, each aspect seems interconnected and each piece of reading that you do only adds further ideas (and suggests further readings). (Silverman, 2001: 61)

I was beginning to appreciate then, that as a researcher (and ethnographer) my way of 'seeing' the world directly affected how I then understood the world. Sacks (1992) one of naturalism's critics (with naturalism demonstrating a preference to 'get out and observe the field') argued that the ethnographer needed to go beyond naturalism in order to analyse the details of interaction. For Sacks (1992: 115) how people 'see' particular activities, including ethnographers, is the key issue here, "in setting up what it is that seems to have happened, preparatory to solving the problem, do not let your notion of what could conceivably happen decide for you what must have happened." Sacks suggested that people actively constitute the activities that they are actually being observed in. My pilot field work challenged my view that as an ethnographer I needed to ask – how do these participants *see* things? Since this appeared to mean that in practice reality actually lay outside the words being spoken in a particular time and place by these participants. Instead, I started to consider the question – how do these participants *do* things? This suggested that by studying face-to-face behaviours and conversation I might better understand the micro-social situations that I also found myself both participating and observing in. But, Geertz (1973) reminds us what *doing* ethnography is,

This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle "thick description." (Geertz, 1973: 6)

I also intended to 'interview' a small number of participants in pairs, with the possibility of eliciting data – words and images (texts, emails, photographs, and pictures for example) – that might have been recorded on the participants' mobile phones, without my intervention, and which they might be willing to share and talk more about. As a visual method therefore, images and photographs might accompany the narratives (Rose, 2001) in order to evoke discussion on particular topics, such as the use of text messaging. I also hoped then that this type of 'documentary' data, such as text messages, for example, would provide me with a deeper vein of substantive information and raise further questions such as, how had they been written? Who had written them? Who had read them? For what purposes? On what occasions? What was recorded? What was omitted? And so on, the list could be extended readily, and I hoped that the exploration of such questions would lead me inexorably towards a better understanding of how young people were engaging with their mobile phone technologies whilst in college. In this instance, any images presented on screen certainly lost any claim of objectivity and presented the subjectivity of the participants (Harper, 2004). The participants often provided descriptions of their actions that would be very difficult to become aware of otherwise. However, in this respect, I still perceived these 'interviews' as

being actively constructed narratives which themselves demanded analysis, rather than giving direct access to experience, what Douglas (1985) termed, "creative interviewing" (also championed by Mason, 2002, 2006) to denote a process that responded to situational dynamics and was flexible, rather than following a predefined structure. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) recognised,

Thus, while it is true that the perspectives elicited interviews do not provide direct access to some cognitive and attitudinal base from which a person's behaviour in 'natural' settings is derived, they may still be capable of illuminating that behaviour... The differences between participant observation and interviewing are not as great as is sometimes suggested, then. In both cases we must take account of context and of the effects of the researcher. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 140)

It may well be the case then that the video and digital camera technologies also have to be considered not just as recording apparatus, but as part of the phenomena that is being studied. The participants therefore, played a major role in the presentation of the images and they were able to explicate in detail their own interpretations, thoughts, and reflections. This process of understanding their experiences of mobile phone technologies sometimes involved going back to talk to participants, asking specific questions, and provided a chance for deeper discussions on issues that had either been said previously, or observed. It was also a way of being reflexive, after taking some distance, of returning to discuss with them the things that struck me, for example, their use of iPhone applications. At this stage, there were often issues that the participants also brought up and

wanted to discuss with me, that is, reflections of their own lives that had come out of the 'interview' process.

So, in the context of my research and visual ethnography, 'visual data' refers to both the use of visual data sources (visual phenomena rather than just words or texts), and visual research methods (visual ways of researching). Again, this raises ontological and epistemological concerns regarding what I see as meaningful in the social world (ontology) and how I think I can know what I see as meaningful (epistemology). And, as I have previously mentioned these are related as, what I think exists, influences how I see it; and, how and where I look, influences what I see. Of course, the use of visual methods has often been closely tied to technological capability, rather than to epistemological considerations. Emmison and Smith (2004) argue that,

It has been the inability to see beyond the use of photography which has been the major impediment to the development of a vibrant tradition in visual research... The uncritical reliance on 'the photograph' as a form of data in its own right has prevented visual researchers from discovering a more fundamental level of analysis. What needs to be considered, we suggest, is the way in which the visible features of the social world which are readily available to the naked eye – not their representation in photographic images – constitute data for investigation... Visual data should be thought of not in terms of what the camera can record but of what the eye can see. (Emmison and Smith, 2004: 2-4)

Therefore, I believed that a visual methodology should not necessarily be confined to just producing visual data. I intended to use (photo-elicitation) 'interviews' (PEI)

as a method to better understand 'the visual', as 'the visual' and 'the conversational' were usually closely intertwined,

Conversation is filled with verbal references to images and icons. People use verbal description to visualise particular moralities, activities and versions of social order (or disorder). Sometimes informants refer to absent images (including photographs) or they might introduce material images or objects into a conversation." (Pink, 2007: 86)

Visual data, including any photographs taken using a mobile phone, could therefore act as a medium of communication between myself and the 'interviewee'. This data could then potentially be used to contextualise personal recollections as part of the photo-elicitation 'interview' process. Hence, photo-elicitation interviewing introduced a more reflexive way by which I could develop questions, and by participants to provide a means of communicating aspects of their lives. In fact, the photographs might not even contain any new information, but might trigger further meaning for the participant. As Clark-Ibáñez (2004), an advocate of (auto-driven) photo-elicitation interviewing rather humourously explains,

One of my first interviewees was with Janice, who took 38 photos of her kitten. I admit I dreaded this interview... The content of her photographs did not end up being as important. For Janice, moving to a new community and not yet knowing anyone were factors in her strong attachment to her kitten. What became more important (and interesting) was the conversation about how her parents let her have the kitten after moving from Watts to Oak Park: a mixture of being able to afford having pets and compensating for the loss of friends... Also, the images of the kitten sparked Janice's memory of the pets she had in México, eliciting a detailed discussion about her

immigrant journey from México to Los Angeles, California. (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004: 1513)

Visual data also offered then a potential means of gaining access to, for example, events that I could not observe because they had already occurred, or because they had taken place in 'private', without recourse to verbal (re)constructions, although I hasten to add that permissions were always sought when potentially viewing any such material. Therefore, using visual data in this way required epistemological consideration, since photography has been historically related to positivism, with the view that the truth could be discerned from the objective facts that were being documented. In relation to visual data, and the use of photographs in particular, Piper and Frankham (2007) caution,

We would argue that it is just as likely that a photograph acts as a "trap". In other words, the still image is made to mean something because it has been made significant through its fixing in photographic form. It could also be argued that photographs, because of their mimetic quality, encourage us to tell singular truths about them, in contrast to interview transcripts, where people move unconsciously between positions, writing and re-writing themselves as they talk... As a consequence, the truths that are elicited need to be interrogated in relation to the medium and method, and not accepted independently from them. (Piper and Frankham, 2007: 385)

However, Stanczak posits that, "eliciting responses through images brings the 'subject' into the research process as an interpreter or even an active collaborator rather than as a passive object of study" (Stanczak, 2004: 1473). Therefore, I anticipated that documentary, visual, and other methods of data generation such as PEI and observation might overlap in a range of ways. Albeit, I was increasingly

aware of being careful not to over-emphasise the inherent credibility of textual data, and underplay that of visual forms of data – I should not uncritically accept such a claim about any document, including observation fieldnotes and interview transcripts – and subject all documents to the same degree of critical scrutiny. These difficulties are not unique to photographic work; on the contrary, visual materials simply make obvious the difficulties I would have with every variety of data. I should worry that the photographic frame, puts a line around much that is of interest to me, and excludes everything else. But, I should also worry that an 'interview' finds out something about what it asks about, and tells me nothing about the rest. I should worry about the way the relation between the photographer and the people being photographed affects the material I get to see. And I should, just as I was trying to understand the effect of the relationship between the researcher and the researched in participant observation. Still, I considered that my interest in how young people were using mobile phone technologies was a part of an (im)material culture that might potentially involve the expression of something that was not solely based in language, or reducible to it. Tilley (2007) explains this well,

We know that things are not texts or words and that to attempt to communicate even the simplest sentence such as 'it is raining' with things would be a completely redundant exercise. Things communicate in a different way, such that if I could say it, why would I dance it, or paint it, or sculpt it? etc. Things often 'say' and communicate precisely that which cannot be communicated in words... Objects relate to far wider perceptual functions than words, they have multidimensional qualities relating to sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, enabling remarkably subtle distinctions to be

made... Such distinctions are rarely unidimensional, but relate to a thickly textured phenomenological experience of the thing with which we may engage with the full range of our senses: a synaesthetic interaction and knowledge. Things perform work in the world in a way that words cannot. (Tilley, 2007: 259-260)

However, the PEI did pose challenges to me as a researcher as it had the potential to create more sensitive situations than other research methods and explicitly raised issues of confidentiality and ethics. There was the possibility that 'inappropriate' photographs may have been taken by the 'interviewee' (although I never experienced this) and practical problems of limited photographic skill (or mobile phone and camera technical specification). I was concerned that any perceived sensitivity associated with the research might also have made it harder to recruit 'interviewees'. Although, again this proved not to be the case, students were typically flattered to be asked to participate, and if photographs were displayed, they actually deflected any discomfort from the process, and seemed to capture the participants' attention much more quickly and for long period of time. However, Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg (2005: 711) reassuringly suggest that, "...we must stay attuned to asymmetries, unexpected roles, and a degree of uncertainty during the interview. Viewing interviews as symbiotic events enables us to focus on sensitivity and flexibility and the ways in which both interviewer and interviewee 'feed off' each other as they co-construct data."

This discussion now leads me to consider some of the issues about how I would attempt to analyse data. One of the challenges of ethnography is establishing with

the reader that I was there in the field, and subsequently in order to trust my theory, they must also trust the description of what I saw, and the interpretations that I have then made from this. Geertz famously called this the challenge of "Being There" (Geertz, in Maclure, 2003: 84). Thus, conventional measures of reliability which are often more comfortably associated with quantitative research, is conceptualised in terms of how accurate the research methods are, and in turn by the consistency with which these same methods produce the same results. As a qualitative researcher however, I am still concerned with issues of accuracy in my research practice, albeit in a different way. This is expressed in terms of ensuring, and demonstrating to others, that my data generation and analysis are appropriate to my research questions, and that I have been careful not to misrepresent this data. Furthermore, judgements about validity are, in effect, judgements about whether I am explaining what I claim to be explaining. They are concerned with the clarity of my ontology and how I have translated this into a meaningful epistemology. I think therefore, that it is useful to consider issues of validity both in terms of the validity of my research methods and, also in terms of the validity of my data analysis, and interpretations. The first involves asking what it is that I think my research methods can potentially tell me, and how well they can do this. I have already engaged with a number of these questions in this chapter. But, I also realise that you can think about the validity of research methods in both broad and detailed ways. Broadly, I needed to continue to (re)visit the research design questions that I had been addressing with myself and others throughout my

preparations for assignments 1-3, and in my preparations for the Review Panel. These were about linking my research questions to my methodology and I was aware that I would have to demonstrate to others how I reached my decisions on these issues. In a detailed way, I would need to show how particular research methods did this. So, for example, if I was analysing documents, or conducting interviews, I would need to reflect not only on how these methods could illuminate the concepts in which I am interested, but also on the capacity of that particular document, or 'interviewee', to do so. I might regard data generated from some interviews as more valid in relation to my research questions than those generated from others. I would therefore, have to show others how I am able to make these kinds of judgements. For example, was I able to understand, or communicate better with a particular 'interviewee'? Did I think that one 'interviewee' was better placed than another to account for what I am interested in? Did I consider that the social dynamics of the interview interaction had a specific influence? Using a fluid and flexible approach with this method should also enhance validity, rather than adopting the rigidity of a more 'structured' interview.

I also needed to carefully consider the inclusion of multiple methods, or triangulation, in my research design. At its worse, triangulation suggests that you can use different research methods to investigate the same phenomena, and that in the process you can judge the validity of these different methods, thus obtaining an 'accurate' reading of it. However, this is problematic since different research

methods are likely to throw light on different social, or ontological phenomena, (or research questions). Furthermore, it implies a view of the social world that says that there is a single, objective social reality, and that all researchers have to do, is to work out which are the most appropriate triangulation positions to read it. Therefore, you are unlikely to be able to use the outcomes of different methods of research to corroborate each other, since each 'set' of data obtained may be positioned in a very different direction. Perhaps at its best, I think the concept of triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, helped me explore my research questions in a multi-faceted way. This therefore enhanced the validity of my research, in the sense that it suggested that social phenomena were multi-dimensional, and that my research was attempting to grasp more than one of those dimensions. But, I did not use it as a means of checking out one method against another, in order to provide an easy way of demonstrating the validity of my research methods. Richardson (in Blaikie, 2007) provides a postmodern critique of triangulation that rejects the assumptions on which its validating role is based,

I propose that the central image for "validity" for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous.

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization. In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles.

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity”... and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. (Richardson in Blaikie, 2007: 270)

The validity of my data analysis and interpretations was the second way to think about validity. It was dependent upon the validity of my research methods as my interpretations could not be valid unless the sources of my data had enabled me to get at the concepts I said that I was getting at. As an interpretivist, the challenge was to demonstrate that my interpretations were valid without resorting to claims to a universal objective ‘truth’. Therefore, perhaps I should be prepared to ‘trace’ the route by which I had arrived at my interpretations as reflecting my ontology. For example, on what basis have I been able to interpret observations from a particular setting, dialogue from an interview, and so on. I would then need to explain how I had ‘woven’ data together to produce interpretations of how specific instances in my data could be read together in order to say something about, for example, how mobile phone technologies were shaping the identities of young people. I think what I am essentially saying here is that I intended to continue to justify the process through which my interpretations would be made. This should then enable me to show that I have reflexively understood my own place, or analytical ‘lens’ in the research, and have also tried my best to ‘read’ the data from multiple socially constructed realities. But, just as I should not claim epistemological privilege simply because I occupy a specific social location, or belong to a specific social group, I cannot assume that my research participants

possess such a privilege either. This is not to suggest that I should not have shared my research with my participants, or for example, checked the accuracy of interview transcripts with 'interviewees'. Instead, I understand that you cannot expect this practice of simply asking participants to check my interpretations to quickly fix the matter of interpretive validity. Skeggs (2007) warns,

This means that the researched should control the outcome and analysis of the research. If the researched do not like the explanations given or do not want the researched to be published they should have the right to control it. It was after all their lives which formed the basis for the research. But what if they do not agree with something that the researcher thinks is important and can ultimately improve the quality of their lives? What if, as happened in my research, they deny ever having said what they did when they hear themselves on tape or read the transcript? What if the research is about exploring the contradictions that go into producing the murky waters of subjectivity, which when given back to the participants exposes the fragmentation of their lives that they have invested a great deal of time in covering over. I would argue, in this case, that it is about exercising discretion and responsibility. (Skeggs, 2007: 434)

Therefore, I aimed to take responsibility for carefully (re)constructing the path through which I eventually reached my interpretations, rather than relinquishing control of the argument.

3.5 How many interviews was enough?

One important question to answer in this chapter about my research methodology is that of, 'how many interviews was enough?' Of course the riposte to this question is 'it depends', but in considering what 'it depends upon' I needed to

embrace epistemological, methodological and practical issues about conducting my research. Wolcott (in Baker and Edwards, 2012: 3) boldly asserts “for many qualitative studies one respondent is all you need – your person of interest.” Certainly, when I think about research that has inspired me (for example, Facer, Furlong, Furlong, and Sutherland, 2003), the interview data appeared valuable because it had been written up with care for the respondents, and because the researchers had taken their time, in this sense the data ‘performed’. But, I recognise that it takes time to process what respondents are getting at, to find the most appropriate words to do justice to the (often) messy nature of an interview. And, it also takes time to process your own feelings as an interviewer and to find your own pathway through the doubts and enthusiasms that seem to pervade this type of social encounter.

In terms of any practical constraints, Adler and Adler (1987) suggest that to have any chance of getting through the research process in the time you have, you must choose a setting where you are already a member, know the people, and have a good familiarity with the scene, what they termed, “member-researcher.” What was clear to me, however, as a postgraduate researcher was that there was little definitive guidance even in the qualitative research community regarding how large a sample should be. I hasten to add that I now regard this as advantageous to the doctoral research process. There was the issue of saturation though to consider, as is well known, the idea of theoretical saturation derives from Glaser

and Strauss's (1967) influential account of grounded theory. There, theoretical saturation is described as a process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gleaned from the data. And as such, the answer to the question, 'how large should my sample be?' becomes unhelpful here, since it is 'whatever it takes (to saturate your theoretical categories)'. Nonetheless, in practice I found this approach to sampling as very demanding as it forced me to combine sampling, data collection, and data analysis, rather than treating them as separate stages in a linear research process.

So, I have also come to appreciate that the number of interviews can be dependent on the analytic level to which you, as the researcher, therefore aspire. Furthermore, this question of how many interviews, assumes that conducting interviews is the only method of gathering data. Observational research, as a part of a mixed qualitative method approach can clearly strengthen a study with only a small number of interviews. Jennifer Mason (2002) discusses how in qualitative work there is more of an idiographic approach whereby you build a broader argument from an understanding of particularity; rather than the nomothetic approach where you build a broader argument on the basis of the analysis of general patterns. She does point out that qualitative research, interview based and otherwise, and analysis are very time consuming, so that is usually better to have a smaller number of interviews, creatively and interpretively analysed, than a larger number where the researcher runs out of time to do them justice

analytically. Daniel Miller (in Baker and Edwards, 2012: 31) even suggests that when the primary method of ethnography is participant observation, "it is better to be immersed in people's everyday life and also listen in to the conversations they have with the people they live with, rather than carrying out the artificial procedure that we call an interview." However, how people legitimate their action is significant, which suggests that when placed alongside participant observation the interview has a role to play. And perhaps, given the constraints of time and money, the inclusion of a small number of 'interviews' in my ethnographic research was invaluable.

As I began the research, the pilot 'interviews' seemed so unique and special that I could not imagine being able to generalise from them. But after a while, certain patterns and repetitions arose, that gave me a better sense of being able to make claims about what these young people were saying. So, the quantitative criteria in practice was not an absolute number, but refers to the point at which I sensed that I had encountered the amount of repetition that gave me the confidence to write and make analytical generalisations. Ultimately, I found that 'magic' number to be seven students that I purposefully got to know and spent some time with, in order that I could then contextualise my research questions within my background knowledge of these individuals. But, however many interviews, and whatever the questions, I did not solely rely on the interview, or the belief that only an interview could tell me what these young people actually did with their mobile phones.

Perhaps then, my uncertainty about the number of interviews was also (in part) a product of the initial anxiety that I held about how to proceed with the analysis of what I already had. As a part of this non-linear, symbiotic data collection and analysis process I was possibly postponing the next stage (the 'write-up') for just 'one more interview'. But, rather than asking the question, 'how many interviews should I do', I would now ask, 'why do I feel that these are not enough?'. As Becker (in Baker and Edwards, 2012: 15) suggests, "every experienced researcher knows that this question has no reasonable answer, no magic number you can do and then you're out of danger. The only possible answer is to have enough interviews to say what you think is true and not to say things you don't have that number for." In the final section, I intend to discuss the ethical dimensions of my research.

3.6 Ethics

Ethics has to do with application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair. Politics has to do with the methods and strategies used to gain a position of power and control. Ethics and politics are intertwined in sensitive research, especially that performed in community settings. (Sieber, 1992: 14)

So, I had come to understand the nature of all research as being value-laden, value-driven even, since the values I held as a researcher would ultimately affect the conclusions that I developed. Furthermore, as I was researching young

peoples' behaviours, asking them questions, and possibly discussing photographic and visual data, I also had a clear responsibility to those who became involved in the research as well. In this final section therefore, I aim to discuss the ethical aspects of my research methodology.

As a framework for helping me think through these ethical issues Guillemin and Gillam (2004) distinguished between two different dimensions of ethics in research, which they termed "procedural ethics" and "ethics in practice." They suggested that "procedural ethics" could not resolve all the ethically important moments in qualitative research, and advocated the use of reflexivity as a means to understanding how "ethics in practice" could be achieved. However, they argued that although it appeared that "procedural ethics" might have been imposed on research(ers) from 'outside' it certainly did not mean that it was irrelevant to qualitative research.

First, research ethics committees satisfy an obvious need to protect the basic rights and safety of research participants from obvious forms of abuse... Second, it can at least be said that procedural ethics offer researchers an ethics 'checklist' by reminding the researcher to consider such issues as the potential risks to participants, the balancing of the benefits of the research against those risks, the steps needed to ensure confidentiality of data, and the inclusion of consent forms and plain language statements in the material provided to participants. This is a helpful aid in designing a research project that will be ethically acceptable in its broad methodology. Further, in fulfilling the procedural obligations of this ethics checklist, the researcher is also granted institutional credibility to carry out the research. (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 268-269)

This notion had made me aware therefore, to a potential gap in my own research between this prepared “checklist” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), and the realities of fieldwork and research in practice. By gaining approval from the university’s research ethics committee and the senior leadership team within college I would anticipate conducting my research in a more ethical way. But, ultimately, I also understood that the responsibility needed to lie with myself, as “procedural ethics” might not cover all eventual outcomes. As a postgraduate researcher I acknowledged that there were ethical issues in my research that I could consider in advance of conducting my research. In following the University of Manchester’s ethical protocols (please see the bibliography that references the latest edition of the School of Education’s Ethical Practice Policy and Guidance 2011-2012) I understood that I would need to obtain informed consent from potential participants that would provide information in a language they would understand about the research. I would need to outline what the research was about, who was undertaking and financing it, why it was being undertaken, and how it was to be promoted, and that the participant had the right to withdraw at any point, or to refuse to allow data to be used. The documents that I used with potential research participants are included in appendix two, three and four. I would request written consent that their involvement was voluntary, and for those under eighteen would also obtain consent by proxy from their parents. If I chose to make any video recordings, or wished to use any photographic or visual data produced by the participant, I would obtain further consent as to how this data might be used. This

might include activities such as, studying recordings for use in the thesis, and permitting the use of written transcripts or recordings by other researchers. In any use, names would not be identified if participants considered it desirable.

However, I also recognised that I might have to think through ethical issues as they arose throughout my research, and respond appropriately. An absolutely basic consideration was always to avoid causing 'harm' (including emotional and social 'harm') to participants in my research. For example, the potential for 'harm' in my research may potentially have stemmed from the nature of the interaction between myself and the participant during the 'interview' process. I might have been asking more questions than the participant felt comfortable answering, or not showing enough interest so that they feel ignored or disregarded. I was less certain that "procedural ethics" fully dealt with these very specific issues of potential 'harm', so I welcomed having the opportunities to reflect and think about the nature of these potential 'harms' in my research plan. This again highlighted the importance of reflexivity when I was in the field and how I might deal with difficult, unexpected ethical concerns as they immediately arose.

Since starting the Ed.D in September 2005, I had come to realise that reflexivity really was an ongoing process that had permeated every part of my research so far: my research interests, choice of epistemology, methodology, methods, participants even. "Reflexivity in research is thus a process of critical reflection

both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 274). As a reflexive researcher therefore, I should be able to take a critical 'step back' to examine my own role in the research process. (This is not to say I aimed to be looking inward as a way of avoiding ethical responsibility and taking action). In terms of my research ethics, this meant continuously examining the context of my research, not just in relation to the research methods and data, but also in terms of my contextual role and relationships as a researcher. Throughout the process of participant observation and interviewing I would need to respect the autonomy, dignity, and privacy of my research participants, and the risks of failing to do so, with the potential for then causing 'harm'. I felt that it was really through these interactions that my integrity as a researcher was 'on the line'.

As my understanding of research ethics developed throughout 2006-2007, I came to understand that my sympathies to social constructivism implied that my research would be undertaken in a particular way, and would therefore have an impact on my ethical position. For example, in making the research a joint endeavour with my students, they became 'participants' in the research, rather than 'subjects' (or 'interviewees' even). In practical terms this would be achieved in a number of ways, the first was by free and informed consent, rather than conscription; the second, as I have already mentioned above, would be through the nature of the interaction. This also involved encouraging the participants to

have a say in what questions were being asked. It also included placing them in control of whether they elicited their photographs as part of a photo elicitation interview. I felt that this was potentially a proactive way of respecting participants' autonomy, and complemented, yet went beyond, the minimal notion of informed consent. Although, as a reflexive researcher I would also be aware that not all participants would have wanted to adopt this kind of position but, I was mindful that my reflexivity should take note of this and also respond in an ethical way. This echoed Foucault who envisaged ethics as subjecting the taken for granted to questions, "freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection" (Cooper and Blair, 2002: 525). Reflexivity therefore, even had the potential to challenge my ontological and epistemological stance.

To summarise then, I have suggested that ethical considerations included both 'procedural' and 'practical' concerns in relation to the creation of knowledge and the research process. The use of "procedural ethics" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) was invaluable in terms of enabling me to reflect on the guiding principles that governed research integrity, and acted as an important reminder to protect my research participants from 'harm', respecting their autonomy. But, the notion of reflexivity was then expanded to illustrate how it helped to ensure that my research in practice was not only rigorous but also ethical. As a reflexive researcher, I hoped that I would be more sensitive to the day-to-day complexities

and richness of my research and, in doing so, would be more able to deal appropriately with ethical tensions as they then arose. As Liberman (1999) remarks,

The craft of field research rests, first, in keeping oneself open to these vital contingencies and, second, in responding to them skilfully with innovative methodological and ethical solutions. We would all like to guarantee success in advance – it is 'the positivist's unachievable hope'. But we are students of the '*real*' world. And perhaps our foremost obligation, intellectual as well as moral, must be to that world. (Liberman, 1999: 62)

To conclude, it became apparent that there was no 'safe space' for me as a researcher. I faced unavoidable choices about my commitments to the young people and professionals with whom I worked; and these choices would clearly shape my ethnographic practice. The 'do no harm' dictum was an invaluable guide for my field work; but ethical dilemmas were not just restricted to the field. For instance, I could also do 'harm' in the nature of my communication to the 'outside' world that might 'expose' these young people; but as Dimitriadis (2001: 595) remarks, "taking such commitments seriously means always and ever facing complex sets of dangers, the dangers of having others rearticulate your work in unpredictable ways among them." It appears then, that the ethnographic life is not separable from the self, it involves issues about negotiating my role and status – my "ethnographic self" (Coffey, 1999), and ultimately gaining the willing consent and co-operation of young people in the research.

3.7 The phronetic turn

My ethnographic research over the past three years, then, has been an ongoing attempt to capture and analyse some of the complex interactions that I have witnessed between young people and their mobile phone technologies. Furthermore, as MacLure explains (2010: 282) “so conceptual development is worked at the level of singularity and specificity. Yet because of their loose relationality with that which they ‘stand for’, examples provide productively unstable sites for the proliferation of connections.” Therefore, throughout this process, it has been my aim to exemplify some of the interactions between young people and their mobile phones, and that also includes an exploration of the economic relationship between the corporate producers and these young consumers. I hope that the analysis of this co-construction process between daily culture and mobile phone technologies may then reveal the extent to which these emerging technologies are being used by both parties to create a culture specific to young people and even further, to define their identities.

While I recognise the demands of writing up and potentially *theorising* my findings for a doctoral thesis, there still remains an atavistic tension over the nature of social science; this ultimately finds its origins back in Athens, and in Plato’s search for universal truths. My understanding is that while Aristototle emphasised the significance of case knowledge, Socrates and Plato dismissed the value of cases in the production of knowledge; however, Aristotle, Plato’s pupil, insisted that one

cannot be satisfied with universals and that knowledge is validly conceived of as *phronesis* – or, in today's terms, practical reasoning, craft knowledge, or tacit knowing: the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances. More recently, Hammersley (1992: 12-13) has also offered some useful insights on the persistence of *theory*. Drawing out the essentials of qualitative method, he notes that this method is about discovering the social world and producing, supposedly, theoretical descriptions. But, he suggests that this concept of theoretical description is always problematic in this context. This is because ethnography places emphasis on description, and descriptions cannot be theories, since, "descriptions are about particulars... whereas theories are about universals." He proceeds to unpack some of the features emerging from ethnographic research, but clearly concludes that "the goals of ethnographic analysis need rethinking." So where does this leave me? Well, I do aim to advance interpretations, rather than explanations, but assume that multiple interpretations will co-exist according to the viewpoint adopted; and like all ethnographic researchers, I hope to establish a contract of trust with you, the reader, as to the writing choices that originated from my approach. But, since "the construction of *generalised* and *generalisable* knowledge of a particular quality is the cynosure of the social scientist" (Thomas, 2011: 22) there still exists commonly a recourse to *theory*, almost as a proxy for generalisation. Theory really does become synonymic with generalisation in much social science discourse, even though there are clear distinctions to be made about the use of the word theory in different places. However, I am optimistic that

Berger and Luckmann (1979: 20) note that “the foundations of knowledge in everyday life” are constructed out of “subjective processes (and meanings) by which the intersubjective commonsense world is constructed” – meanings that provide these “multiple realities.” This process of phronesis also occurs in teaching whereby Fish (1989: 317) suggests that teachers as reflective practitioners develop and use phronesis “with the contextual circumstances of an ongoing practice; as those circumstances change, the very meaning of the rule (the instructions it is understood to give) changes too.” So, in practical terms, what is the consequence if I speak about phronesis, rather than theory? It is, perhaps, that rather than seeking validation solely through reference to a body of theory or generalised knowledge, phronesis can offer me a way of proceeding based in *exemplary knowledge*.

Deleuze (1989: 268) has described theory as a practice of concepts, rejecting the privileging of theory and its separation from its objects, “it is at the level of interference of many practices that things happen, beings, images, concepts, all kinds of events.” Therefore, theory offers validation for making connections between another’s experience and one’s own, seeing links, having insights. So, to seek generalisable knowledge is central in validating the offer of social science, yet this may well miss the point about what could be offered by certain kinds of inquiry, that is, exemplary knowledge. The articulation of that exemplary knowledge therefore rests in the phronesis of myself, the researcher, but also its

understanding in the phronesis of you, the reader. As Thomas (2011: 33) sums up, "this is the phronesis of the academic researcher's offer. Mine is different from yours, and always will be, and you may disagree profoundly with my interpretations and judgements." However, Massumi (2002: 17) goes on to support more of an "exemplary method" – that is, working theory *through* examples. As Massumi says "every example harbours terrible powers of deviation and digression" (2002: 18); exemplification opens concepts to new connections, albeit leaving you open to the possibilities of "silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity" (2002: 18). The strength of the example therefore always lies in its "creative contagion" (Massumi, 2002: 19). To conclude then, with MacLure (2010: 284), who remarks that the aim therefore becomes to leave others with the problem of, "what in the world to do with it all. That's their problem. That's when the experimentation begins. Then the openness of the system will spread. *If* they have found what they have read compelling". So, perhaps this should be the goal of social science then? Since MacLure (2010: 284) posits that "if you manage to make this happen, you will have achieved the ultimate and most sought-after offence of theory... the gift of a headache." In the chapter ahead I will now present my discussion and findings.

4 Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

If thought searches it is less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that of a dog that seems to make uncoordinated leaps. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 55)

Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible meet each other. (Derrida, 1997: 84)

... if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the 'with' that constitutes Being: the with is not simply an addition. (Nancy, 2000: 3, emphasis in original)

Nowhere is there a final word. (Lacan, in notes issued by J. Frankham in an Ed. D session on 26 June 2007)

4.1 Starting to write *with* data

The chapter ahead will begin by reminding the reader of how I have approached writing up my ethnographic findings; I will then proceed to discuss the ongoing process of data analysis. This section also introduces how the work of postmodern writers, such as Derrida (1998) and Foucault (1970) have helped me shape a conceptual framework around my research findings. Then, the first of my research questions is addressed – how are young peoples' identities shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within (im)material culture? – through the use of this framework. The final section goes on to answer the second of my research questions – how is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined? Due to the symbiotic nature of the data collection and

data analysis 'stages' of my research, the findings and discussion are presented as a joint chapter.

In preparing this chapter therefore, I started by thinking about how I continue to learn to write as a social scientist; a process which tentatively began at degree level when I studied Economics. But, moreover, a process that began in earnest when I took up postgraduate study with a Masters in Education at the University of Manchester. Simply put, the key components that I understand from my 'basic training' seem to be an ability to convey knowledge of a field, to structure an argument, and to arrive at a position based on a judgement of the material, that is, to adopt a defensible stance. This is a 'model' that I appreciate would be much less rigid than a more formal, scientific way of writing, but it does rely on a literary competence that is able to cover a sufficient volume of material, construct a convincing argument, and (ideally) do it in an engaging manner.

However, even this 'basic training' did not fully prepare me, as a researcher, for what was to come when I eventually started to accumulate my own, original data based on empirical fieldwork. I really did find myself on uncertain terrain, with my initial goals becoming less certain - the data appeared to be telling many different stories, and ones that certainly did not automatically shape themselves into answers that directly addressed my research questions. The data defied me to shape it into something more recognisable, in order that I could eventually bring

forth this written narrative. But, I have to accept that the endless challenge, inherent in adopting an ethnographic approach to research, is to resist the temptation to form the data into shape(s) that are independently anticipated before the fieldwork begins. This would, in my view, be incompatible to the ethics of ethnographic research, and besides, the data itself always seems to squeeze itself out of any pre-prescribed shape(s).

Thus, in doing this qualitative, empirical research, I found that any previous 'rules' for writing as a social scientist appeared less relevant, with little else that was initially obvious to replace them. Yet, I understood that my research needed to be situated in relation to the existing literature, that there needed to be, possibly a number of arguments woven through the body of the text, and ultimately a position from which the thesis could be written, so that the readers could understand the stance from which the knowledge flowed. I also began to realise that I was as much a researcher, as a storyteller, with my view to telling 'stories' about the social lives of young people living with mobile phone technologies.

4.1.1 Telling stories

I consider it important to stress the difference between telling stories, and telling fictions - I am not a writer of fiction, even if I do, on occasion, use artistic and literary representation of social life. There is a genuine responsibility to interpreting

the experiences and stories of young people, as my research is anchored much more in their ongoing lives, to which I am accountable, in a variety of ways. However, although I think that I do not have the same kind of 'freedom' as a novelist, I have still found it important to think reflexively about matters of writing style, language, metaphor, imagery, energy, and synthesis. It is not as simple as capturing a reality, condensing it, and (re)presenting it; different research questions, create different realities, and this needs to be reflected in how I go on to compose what I write.

This quandary certainly arose when I was required to write *with* the data for this 'findings and discussion' chapter. As a post-graduate research student, and writer, I am in a position where I have to adopt a kind of quasi-quantitative form of writing to meet the requirements of a Doctorate in Education thesis, but which may possibly become antithetical in my strive to write *differently*. My argument against an overly-determined disciplined form of writing is that it may squeeze out other ways of writing and of interpreting the social lives of these young people.

The Doctorate in Education has been such an iterative process, and although this chapter was not planned as a linear narrative - even though it may inevitably become one - it presents an opportunity to map the personal lives of young people and their mobile phone technologies into theoretical contexts. I therefore envisage this chapter as a means of reading their experiences through the concepts from

the theoretical and methodological context which currently prevails. I will not just be running away with their narratives, but trying to locate them in their situation, through their relationships, in the context of an economic discourse, of power(s) even, in a given time, and place, and so on – striving to go deeper into enquiry, but using a social scientist's imagination. If an example is ever taken 'beyond' the data, I will endeavour to make it clear that such a device is being employed. In consciously writing in this way, a much more reflexive relationship might develop with (you) the reader - and in doing so my doctoral approach for writing *with* data may emerge.

4.1.2 A postmodern story

Postmodernism can be hard to define with any clarity, often appearing as a series of impressionistic suggestions with a repeated emphasis on 'difference', 'discourse' and so on (even two of the students that I spoke with certainly agreed that they could not have a "normal phone" now). But, in a thesis such as this, I have introduced this audacious, albeit vexing idea of the postmodern – both methodologically and substantively – as writers such as Foucault (1970) have rejected the entire approach of those who endeavour to explain the present using the conventions of established social science. This somewhat philosophical point is important to my research as discovering how the ways in which young people

interpret the culture of mobile phones can be better understood is one of my research questions.

So, like Velázquez's 'presence' in his own painting of *Las Meninas*, that brings together all kinds of perspectival differences that contrast, rather than collude, but ultimately, that aim to contradict productively, I consider that this reflexive bringing together could even (re)present an increase, and an exceeding of the real that seeks to avoid a modernist intolerance of contradiction. My initial thoughts are that I would like (you) the reader to know certain things from my research findings, and to understand the different positions from which this knowledge is created. I would also like you to understand certain things from my research findings, and to possibly think about how your experiences relate to the stories told. I would hope that you enjoy reading this too, knowing that there is a certain kind of person writing this thesis, and that I would like you to understand that this is just one way of (re)presenting educational research data.

So, in starting to write with data, at several levels simultaneously, a different kind of relationship might also emerge with the data as a three way engagement is tentatively established between the young peoples' lives, myself the author, and you, the reader(s). I really do not intend this to sound calculated, or manipulative, but to aid you in appreciating the fullness, and depth, of the young peoples' experiences and stories that I will be discussing. I really do intend, however, that

the 'behind-the-scenes' becomes visible, and that the value of this research data is to be found as much between the lines, as in the literal interpretation. I have tried to avoid the 'my journey' thesis type of writing and would argue that as the author I am both a reflexive social science researcher, and a social construct made up from a specific personal, academic, and educational career – a web of other relationships, so to speak. However, I am not so important, but my interpretation of these young peoples' lives is, I would hope, certainly worth considering.

4.1.3 Writing a hybridizing narrative

I have always understood that qualitative approaches to research enable the researcher to take a more open-ended, exploratory approach where little is predefined or taken for granted. The hope is that the researcher will look at the field with a fresh eye, raise questions with regard to received wisdom, and introduce new ways of thinking. This, in turn, might suggest more creative ways of going forward, from which educators and young people might then eventually benefit.

However, ethnographers have struggled with the style of writing that they should adopt, ranging from realist, or authoritarian, to confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1988). Both fieldwork and writing has been riddled with tensions between experience and representation (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Throughout the 1980s

much ethnographic research moved away from realist conventions towards experimentation with form and voice – problems of description therefore, became problems of representation. Clifford and Marcus (1986) explore how ethnographic truths are always partial, committed and incomplete, and suggest that ethnographic writing can even be called fiction. So, as self-reflexive writing developed, a dialogical textual production also emerged, locating cultural interpretation in reciprocal contexts, so that culture became relational.

I have already discussed the importance of the authorial 'I' in the methodology chapter as I explicitly sought to integrate my own research practice into my methodology. Furthermore, I have aimed to be as aware as possible about my own analysis and interpretation – to be reflexive – but, not in order to privilege myself over other selves. However, Stronach (2010) also talks of,

A percussive epistemology, made up of word-crashes, semantic collisions, and hybridizing stories and theories. The latter task is to move thinking beyond the dialectic, beyond all fantasies of universality and certainty to new, singular and reflexive ways of making sense of the world. That is no doubt over-ambitious, and a certain failure is inevitable, but the hope is for a productive falling short that will encourage further 'leaps' and 'folds'... . (Stronach, 2010: 7)

It is in this spirit that I have written up this thesis, and in particular the findings from my ethnographic research. Throughout the chapter ahead, I intend to take a performative turn, by relating data to theories, phronetic examples, analogies and metaphors. What I have in mind is to consider what happens when these ideas are

juxtaposed and begin to interact. It is therefore important to see my writing-up strategy as one that seeks to contrast 'stories', as it were, in front of itself. Deleuze sees such adjacencies as prophetic of a new field of the possible, "where completely independent phenomena resonate with each other" (Deleuze, 2007: 233). Therefore, each (op)position essentialises the other, *making* rather than marking difference. Stronach suggests that, "a hidden meaning of *co-incidence*, and the miles-apart stories then become 'near-miss narratives' where each infects/deflects/infects the meaning of the other" (2010:179). I would hope then that positioning data in such a way – with/against each other – helps to create a dynamic nexus of understandings, whereby the ideas multiply, rather than add to each other.

'Near-misses', then are also 'indirect hits', capable no doubt of collateral damage. Their 'withness' and association, their 'co-ipseity', traces an epistemological strand of oppositions, sequences, and commonalities with an accompanying ontology of 'co-appearances'. (Stronach, 2010: 180)

Therefore, the data, concepts and stories that are assembled in the chapter ahead are linked as far as they are not always unified. Thus, it is the intention that each might read both into and out of the other. In the section that now follows, I will explain how I began to analyse my ethnographic data in depth.

4.2 Analysing ethnographic data

The starting-point is the social world of the social actors being investigated: their construction of reality, their way of conceptualising and giving meaning to their social world, their tacit knowledge. This can only be discovered from the accounts which social actors provide. Their reality, the way they have constructed and interpreted their activities together, is embedded in their language. Hence, the researcher has to enter their world in order to discover the motives and reasons that accompany social activities. The task then is to redescribe these motives and actions, and the situations in which they occur... (Blaikie, 2007: 25)

This section moves on to the level of knowing and knowledge production usually called data analysis, although this is not a straightforward task as apparently it is rare that ethnographers actually write in any detail about how they went about analysing their research data. However, this apparent lack of analytical explicitness, particularly in more recent work is insightful. As Pink (2009) suggests,

It implies that the analysis of experiential, imaginative, sensorial and emotional dimensions of ethnography is itself often an intuitive, messy and sometimes serendipitous task. Indeed, more generally, while ethnographers often write about their experiences of doing the research and their encounters with others, it is much less common for them to write about a stage of analysis. (Pink, 2009: 119)

In fact, the idea that there was a clear and rigid distinction between my fieldwork, and data analysis would be misleading, as arguably, my process of analytical thought germinated as I began the process of learning and knowing about young peoples' experiences of mobile phone technologies when the Doctorate in Education actually commenced. But, for the purposes of writing up this thesis, I have found a way of situating this analysis within my process of knowledge production that is, the analysis becomes my way of knowing and can therefore be

conceptualised as a point in the research where there is a relatively more intense and systematic handling of the research data – that is, of my observation field notes, interview transcripts, and video recordings. Thus, the intention of this stage in my research is to treat data analysis as a process of abstraction which serves to connect the phenomenology of experienced reality into my theoretical, academic debate. However, this activity is performed away (although not totally in isolation) from the location and relationships through which this data was initially created. But, data analysis remains wholly implicit to my research process. As Pink (2009: 121) concludes,

Analysis is both a way of knowing engaged in by the researcher during the research and it is part of the reflexivity of the sensory ethnographer who seeks to understand other people's ways of being in the world but is simultaneously aware that her or his involvement is part of a process that will eventually abstract these experiences to produce academic knowledge. This continuous analysis, which forms and informs the research process, also influences the systems ethnographers use for organising their materials during research, and can influence the themes identified when systematic desk-based analyses are conducted with the materials. (Pink, 2009: 121)

Notably, when I eventually began to research the data away from the context in which it was produced, I still explicitly sought to maintain the connections between the data and the ways of knowing associated with their production. Thus, the data analysis itself remains situated in relation to the phenomenological context of the production of the data.

So, it could be viewed that the analysis of the data that I collected was an iterative, continuous process, "consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 10). Initially, observation data from my field notes was selected, particularly where it illustrated aspects of mobile phone use - the what, where, when, why, and how of mobile phone use - these abstractions enabled me to identify, and then focus upon, specific, (re)emerging themes – for instance, functionality, symbolism, and social space - and explore them further in the video interviews. As the data collection got underway, further episodes of data reduction and analysis occurred. Thus, there was a symbiotic relationship between data collection and data analysis, as the data was being coded and themes were being developed concurrently with the collection process – the mobile phone as an object, a repository, a communicator, and as an engagement were consistently the (re)emerging themes. "Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 11). However, again it is important to note that I found that the process of data reduction and transformation continued long after the completion of my actual work in the 'field' as there is an ongoing involvement with the data that writing also creates and maintains. But, the primary outcome from this data reduction process was the identification of the (re)emerging concepts, that would eventually enable a thematic framework to be (re)presented in this chapter, these included: a sign of

identity; an agency of identity; a liquid identity; and a space for identity. Again, as Bryman and Burgess (1994) sympathetically explain,

After some data collection and reflection in relation to a general issue of concern, the research generates "categories" which fit the data. Further research is undertaken until the categories are "saturated", that is, the research feels assured about their meaning and importance. The researcher then attempts to formulate more general (and possibly more abstract) expressions of these categories, which will then be capable of embracing a wider range of objects. This stage may spur the researcher to further theoretical reflection and in particular he or she should by now be concerned with the interconnections among the categories involved and their generality. (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 4)

Miles and Huberman (1994: 11) describe the process of data display as the "organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action. ... Looking at displays helps us to understand what is happening and to do something – either analyse further or take action – based on that understanding." I also agree with their suggestion that organising the data into a more accessible, compact display can aid the analysis process, rather than retaining it in the form of extended prose. Indeed, I found that Microsoft Office OneNote effectively displayed the (re)emerging conceptual themes, in addition to facilitating an overlay of mind maps (Buzan, 1974) to further highlight interconnections between the data, such as that between identity, personalisation, and space. The final part of this data analysis process is conclusion drawing/verification, and Miles and Huberman (1994: 11) do stress that this may range from a "fleeting second thought" to "extensive efforts to replicate a finding

in another data set." In terms of the role of theory, Coffey and Atkinson also caution, "theories are not added only as a final gloss or justification; they are not thrown over the work as a final garnish. They are drawn on repeatedly as ideas are formulated, tried out, modified, rejected, or polished" (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 158).

When I began this research, I really entered the field with the view to remaining as open as possible to the participants' interpretations of their own experiences; however, this is not to claim that I had no presuppositions, or interests whatsoever. But, my detailed field notes based on observations, informal conversations, and interviews demonstrated again and again the difficulties of fitting together all the emerging evidence under any one all-embracing theoretical model. It is not easy (and may not even be possible) to find any model which takes account of the structural forces in society and successfully links that to a micro-analysis of young peoples' interaction with mobile phone technologies within a college. But, in trying to make sense of the field it was never the intention to 'fit' all of the data collected and then analysed, into a neat, non-conflicting pattern, otherwise it would, in my opinion, fail as an exploratory study, which aims to open the field to further investigation. Furthermore, a number of researchers and writers introduced me to the intriguing notion of reflexive engagement with 'absence' in data analysis.

For example, in early July 2007 I attended a Student Research Conference at the University of Manchester that included students from across the School of Education on counselling courses, the MSc. in Educational Research, and those similar to myself taking professional Doctorate courses, or PhDs. Interestingly, Maggie Maclure's keynote speech titled, 'Hannah's silence: the thrill of finding a good bit of data!' reminded me that there is no such thing as 'innocent' research. Maclure encouraged "practising your own estrangement", looking for scenes that shock or surprise yourself, those beyond your official agenda in the "unofficial spaces." Her own research in schools had raised an analytical tension between what she deemed the "relief of explanation" and the "paralysing silence" when she observed a young girl's seemingly verbal non-compliance and "resistance" to the teacher's requests in a lesson. Maclure relayed the story of "Bartleby the Scrivener" as providing a (partial) explanation,

The repetition compulsion, hyperbolic resistance of nonresistance, is in itself *analytic*... as in "Bartleby the Scrivener". To every demand, question, pressure, request, order, it responds without responding, neither active nor passive: "I would prefer not to." Those who have read this immense little work by Melville know that Bartleby is a figure of death, to be sure, but they also know how, without saying anything, he makes others speak, above all the narrator. (Derrida, 1998: 24)

Therefore, these "silences" or "resistances" should also be interpreted, as they seem to have as much meaning as what they apparently disguise. Rose (1999: 20) also summarises, "it is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode

that experience and making them stutter.” It is through such stuttering that theory opens, as Derrida (1987: 261) puts it, “deconstruction, if such a thing exists, should open up.” Piper and Frankham (2007) appear to hold a similar view,

We suggest that adults need to attempt to “unlearn their own privilege” in order to conduct a different sort of interpretation or analysis. This could usefully begin with a recognition of the complexities of understanding “difference”, an acknowledgement of *not* knowing or understanding, and a reflexive (and more ethical) engagement. This should include a consideration of what is not being said – a challenge to the transparency of the “gaze”... A new series of questions might then open up: What is it that I cannot know about because of who I am? How might I explore what I cannot know? What do the gaps in my understanding suggest in terms of the status of the things I think I *do* understand? The metaphor of the frame is useful here; what might be outside those photograph “frames” that would affect my readings of what is inside the “frames”? (Piper and Frankham, 2007: 384)

So, I have begun to realise the importance of interrupting my data in this manner, as it helps me to further interrogate how particular views are (re)presented. Postmodern approaches assist me in this process as they typically emphasise the subjective, or how things are experienced, rather than an objective reality. They tend to hold that the self is socially constructed, so for example, emphasising the dual process in the construction of young peoples’ identities, both through the market, as an aspect of consumerism, and through the agency of the young people themselves. This way of thinking about young people in relation to the market, is a socio-cultural construction based on the concept of lifestyle, what Foucault (1990) called the “aesthetics of existence”, and also influenced by Heidegger (1977) as he often spoke of making one’s life a work of art. But,

importantly for my research, postmodernism involves different ways of thinking, of considering discourses, cultural practices, and sites where new kinds of identities are constructed. But, I can still find Foucault's approach to representation to be both thrillingly bold, and yet disturbingly vague! However, the thinking of Foucault, among others, and the notion of postmodernism has an enduring appeal for me considering the technological focus of my research, not the least because the prefix 'post' evokes the idea of a break with the past and the emergence of a new era, as Chris, a student and one of my research participants suggests when he talks about his iPhone,

Chris: most kids nowadays are using their phones and they're getting younger, using phones at a younger age [??] but they're not using it like conventional, like when people just used to ring when they first came out, because the technology is getting so big, they're using it more for games, and that's involving people, and watching movies on their phones.

However, in undertaking this kind of analysis, I recognise that a singular, true meaning is never suddenly revealed from behind the text, but rather new puzzles and questions might be asked, or responded to. As Becker (1996: 70) asserts, there are ultimately no recipes for ways of doing social research; rather, one has to have "imagination and... smell a good problem and find a good way to study it." Therefore, in writing up this chapter the difficulties in working with multi-dimensional data from the young people, myself (the reflexive researcher) and the theoretical contexts have also emerged. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 34) say, "... one must remember that because *emergence* is the foundation of our approach to

theory building, a researcher cannot enter an investigation with a list of preconceived concepts, a guiding theoretical framework, or a well thought out design. Concepts and design must be allowed to emerge from the data.”

4.3 Developing a conceptual framework for identity and space

So, it is in my attempt to aid the reader that I have introduced theoretical concepts, or themes into this chapter that are best suited, in terms of covering the most, and discarding the least of my data. As Nadel (1957: 1) put it the role of theory is to provide tools “which serve to *map out* the problem area.” Thus, the grounded theory embedded within the main body of the data, and which subsequently emerged, is now (re)presented as a conceptual framework that captures most of the experiences of the participants involved, albeit including those contradictions and silences which also emerged throughout the study. So, I am not suggesting that I was ever looking for (analytical) solutions to my research questions, or puzzles, as though the answers were ‘out there’. Feyerabend (1993: 14) posits that thought actually moves forward by “a maze of interactions... by accidents and conjunctures and curious juxtaposition of events.” The analytical approach therefore, was consistent with my subjective epistemological position. Therefore, if this research succeeds in illustrating the complex nature and messiness of daily life for a small group of college students, (re)presenting the very words and images conjured by these participants, then I feel that it will have

succeeded in transmitting some thoughtful insights to the reader directly from the field. As Coffey and Atkinson propose, “what are needed are the generation and imaginative use of ideas that guide our exploration and interpretation of the social world” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 156). Of course, these ideas are already full of theory, and even in being reflexive about my epistemological assumptions I should probably never be absolutely confident that I have fully understood all of the processes in my own practice that produced them. As MacLure (2010: 277) interjects “the value of theory lies in its power to get in the way: to offend and interrupt. We need theory to block the reproduction of the bleeding obvious, and thereby, hopefully, open new possibilities for thinking and doing.”

In this section I have discussed the ways in which I have approached the analysis of data and tried to emphasise that this was not a neutral research activity. The next section moves the discussion on to how I have constructed valid arguments on the basis of my qualitative data. In doing so, I needed to return to what I saw as the central role of my research puzzles. I will be suggesting that instead of seeking solutions to these questions, as though the answers were objectively ‘out there’, I directed my efforts towards making arguments based on interpretations, whereby I continually thought about and engaged with those to whom the argument was being made as well as, the grounds on which they thought the argument stood. Therefore, thinking about these issues encouraged me to see the making of valid arguments as a relational process. As Gunter and Fitzgerald (2007:

5) call, “what we need is conceptually informed practice, where through postgraduate research we learn how to think through about evidence, much of it incomplete and/or contradictory, and from this build our own strategies.” In the motivational words of Bourdieu (1990: 16) “I think that enlightenment is on the side of those who turn their spotlight on our blinkers.” It is therefore my intention to address my first research question in the section that now follows.

4.4 The (re)construction of identity and space through mobile phone technologies

The eighties, when history began. (Harvey, college student)

4.4.1 A mobile identity

In terms of the choice of the technology for this research, the mobile phone warrants some justification, as the name itself – mobile – in my mind always appears to highlight the social dimensions of this technology, and thus the potential that it offers young people for perhaps new protean identities. The ‘mobile’ of the United Kingdom has therefore been initially defined by its liberation from any fixed location; in contrast perhaps to the ‘cellular phone’ of the United States that is seemingly defined by its technical infrastructure. However, the Japanese term ‘keitai’ (roughly translated as “something you carry with you”) refers to a different set of cultural and social dimensions. As Ito (2005: 1)

suggests, “a keitai is not so much about a new technical capability or freedom of motion but about a snug and intimate technosocial tethering, a personal device supporting communications that are a constant, lightweight, and mundane presence in everyday life.” The interesting point to me then, is that an otherwise innate object, the mobile phone, has such a significant force in a social situation. This technology can mediate, enable and constrain particular courses of action for young people, and in doing so, can therefore permeate and impact on the process of identity formation. As Richard Ling suggests,

In this process, individuals are in a more or less continuous process of trying to place the object into the context of their everyday lives. Where is it appropriate to use it, how should it be displayed, and when it should and should not be used are all issues of deliberation. As others in our social circle find out that we too are consumers of a particular artefact, their estimation of us changes. Their perceptions of the object and their perceptions of our display and use of the object, whatever it might be, become parts of their understanding of who we are. These insights affect their definition of us and influence the unfolding of the interaction. In the rubric being developed here, the artefact in some ways forms the interaction. (Ling, 2008: 63)

Young people have not only adopted this technology but, more importantly, have seemingly integrated it fully into their daily lives. This preferred relationship between young people and mobile phone technologies was confirmed by my initial quantitative research, the discourse of advertising, and by my general grasp of social phenomena that comes from my everyday teaching experience and understanding. So, in my view, the rich concentration of characteristics in a single technological object, the (re)presentations of this technology by young people, and

its role in their daily lives, makes the mobile phone a fine subject for this research. The choice of young people as research subjects also offers a crucial analytical advantage: like the exception that under certain analytical conditions makes the rule, extreme situations can reveal the nature of what they are, precisely paroxysmic expressions. Sometimes a critical look at the *excess* can be a convenient short cut that sheds light on what is usually less visible. As Chris who works part-time as a lifeguard for a local swimming baths, shockingly demonstrated to me,

Chris: Well, I shouldn't really say this but there was someone about a week ago, I had this the phone in my pocket as I don't like leaving it in the staffroom in case someone takes it and I couldn't get to my locker quick enough, so I was on reception where we're allowed to have our phones there and someone started drowning, so I ran down to the poolside to go and help and saw this woman in the middle of the pool and I was like I can't go in because of my phone and then I was like should I go in? Should I not? Should I not? Should I not? Should I go in? Should I not? And then in the end I just thought I can't jump in with my phone because it would just like smash it to pieces [*Chris laughs*] But like most of the time I just leave it in my locker, but like if it did get broke then I'd miss it so much that I'd have to go and spend three hundred and thirty quid to get a new one straight away, it's just a lot of money.

New technologies are frequently the subject of fascination and hyperbole onto which a broad array of hopes are projected affecting how these technologies are "marketed, used, made sense of and integrated into people's lives" (Sturken and Thomas, 2004: 3). I had already begun to note these (re)presentations because they had served as an important backdrop to my previous research for Ed.D Assignments 1-3. Given that I still held the assumption that systematic analysis of a well-defined portion of a larger reality may shed light on the characteristics and

less visible processes of the 'whole' of which it forms a part, as I entered this digital world my investigation cried out to be taken much further. So this was my starting place for my thesis, since as an A level teacher of Business Studies and Economics I had long been interested in young peoples' cultural consumption and production; and the possibility that young people might be at the forefront of both shaping, and being shaped by mobile technologies specifically, was a proposition that I had always wanted to explore further. Yet as I became increasingly interested in the intersections between young people and their use of mobile phone technologies I found that the physical environment of college, accompanied by its idealised narratives of a carefully managed and compliant use of social media in particular, did not adequately recognise, or harness, the complex forms of consumption and appropriation that I had observed throughout the daily routines of students' college lives.

I will now begin to present my findings here, focusing on the social microcosm of a small group of respondents, and their implications for how we might begin to conceptualise and teach in post-16 education environments. My analysis will then proceed in four areas this is fundamentally to help communicate these ideas to the reader. The first area introduces the theoretical concept of identity examining the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation. The second area details the commodification of mobile phone use, and its co-consumption and co-productive nature for user agency. In the third area, I

examine the efficiency of mobile phone technologies and the importance of a "liquid" life for young people (Bauman, 2005). The final area presents a reflection on how we might frame these emergent concepts within the context of young peoples' use of space and their construction of personalised landscapes that this new technology affords. Overall, it is my hope that perhaps these examples could then help educators to better frame their own pedagogical practice, particularly within post-16 education environments, and might also begin to complicate current views of (im)material culture, calling for a more "principled understanding of the complexity of contemporary cultural experience" (Willis, 2003: 411).

4.4.2 A sign of identity

So, I wish to begin the (re)presentation of some of my findings by introducing the concept of identity and then by examining the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation. This is because as an educator and researcher, I have come to regard identity as an important tool for understanding how young people behave in college, and consequently for educational practice. But, it has a significant implication for the construction of subjectivities and social relations, and therefore deserves to be considered with care. I suggest that identity should be analysed in context, but essentially though, young people must see themselves and each other in certain ways and not others if there are to be identities of any sort.

By way of example, Imogen, one of my year 2 Economics students, exclaimed that she was so excited to have received a “proper” invite to a party, she commented further that she was referring to a handwritten invitation, rather than a Facebook invite that was usually received via her mobile phone. Interestingly, this phenomenon is not new, that of a new technology replacing another and establishing a new standard for performing a given activity, with the previous technology acquiring a new value. For example, as email use has grown, we now give greater importance to traditional letters addressed personally and sent by mail. This is in stark contrast to the ideology of saving time that surrounds new mobile technologies, as a handwritten invitation intimates the opposite – it both hides and highlights the time spent by its author. The format, card, and envelope all have to be chosen. Time is then taken to write the card, buy stamps, and then go to a post box. So when the invite does actually arrive, it expresses time invested in someone, such as Imogen, and therefore their esteem. This is a persuasive ideology that *time* is the supreme capital incarnated specifically by new technologies and again, will be discussed later in relation to having a “liquid” life (Bauman, 2005). But, the young people that spoke to me increasingly live in a digital world, where a growing number of identities are possible, with the ability to send the same Facebook status update, or Twitter tweet to many different people, and where even writing as if one were someone else may be a new reality. It is unsurprising then, that in reaction to this depersonalisation of electronic writing, or even the standardisation of a virtual card, handwriting, and a handwritten

signature, re-establish the appearance of the author's 'authentic' identity, and the uniqueness of the person to whom it is sent. And so, Imogen's invitation is valued more highly by her, quite simply someone has taken the time to handwrite the invite, and consequently is perceived to be bothered about her, since she now clearly matters enough to have the time invested in her.

Another striking example that illustrates the status that technology affords young people is when I asked what they thought it said about them having an iPhone in college. Perhaps it was not surprising that Adam and Chris replied,

Adam: I think everybody knows what it is.

Chris: Rich.

Adam: It's quite renowned, rich, I think, got more money.

Chris: People stereotype you.

Me: In a bad way?

Chris: You're seen more as like, they've got money, and they've got money to waste, because they've got an iPhone, because the contracts are so much more, people with iPhones have got more money.

Adam: I've got a Nissan Micra though! [*Adam laughs*] [???

Chris: Quite a lot of people like, like I know stereotype me as I've got loads of money because I've got a 58 plate Peugeot, and like, and that [*Chris nods to the iPhone on the table*], and the watch [*Chris flicks his wrist over to indicate*] and then like.

Me: What's your watch? I did notice actually, I did catch it Chris, is it new?

Adam's phone rings.

Me: Take that if you need to [*I am uncertain as to whether Adam is waiting for my permission to answer the phone call*]. Oh, a 'Guess', ok [*Chris has taken off his watch to show me, and I nod approvingly*].

Chris: So, like, people stereotype you around college, depending on what you've got.

Adam: Err, sorry? No, no, I'm just with my Business tutor [*Adam is now speaking to his friend on his iPhone*].

Chris: Erm and quite a lot of people go, he's got money, money to waste, and stuff like that so [*Chris places the watch back on his wrist*].

Adam: Go to [REDACTED] Lane, right, see you, bye [*Adam finishes his phone call*] sorry [*Adam looks to me*].

[*Adam is then really keen to show me how the photograph of his friend was displayed on the screen of his phone when it rang earlier*].

Are mobile phones so much more than an inert background for young peoples' everyday lives, insofar as young people quite clearly establish meaningful interactions with these objects and artefacts, enabling them to exist in their social world, and involving them in a mutual co-construction process? Their uses of mobile phone technologies may even be considered as semiotic actions – both as a way of communicating, and as a means for constructing meanings and social realities. Adam's discussion provides a complementary, albeit conflicting juxtaposition to Chris's earlier perspective about the use of his mobile phone in the event of an emergency,

Adam: It's pretty much a lifeline, even if you can't phone someone, I've got apps, like a First Aid app on here [*shows his iPhone to me*] because I'm in the Army Cadets and I teach First Aid, so I need up-to-date First Aid stuff to teach the kids, so I can get lessons on here for teaching kids, and it's also

got a thing where if, if, you're in danger, and you've got a signal, but it can't, won't let you phone, if you use the app it sends your coordinates and an email to the ambulance service and they'll come and get you.

However, the cultural work of this technology as a 'lifeline' does not end there. One of my students Katie once arrived early to a Business Studies session, but in a real panic – she had lost her mobile phone – after some deliberation, she thought she had left it on the college bus. By the start of the lesson, 10.45, she tells me that she has sent a friend, "who she trusts" with her house keys to see if she has actually left it at home. Katie is really concerned about how the phone might be used if it has actually been found by someone; she says that they cannot access her texts because that menu has a PIN code, but she does not use a PIN for the SIM card so she is already aware that they might make illicit phone calls. I suggest that she might want to let her mobile phone, or contract company, know and begin preparing for the worse scenario of not seeing it again. Our Business Studies session gets underway, but Katie is clearly distracted. However, several hours later after the session has finished she returns to find me in room B36, I am with one of my tutees completing her Art Foundation application with her; Katie excitedly interrupts – her "lifesaver" friend found her Sony Ericsson at her house! After the lunchtime tutorial I leave B36, and observe Katie and her friend sitting in the hallway outside the classroom, both separately texting on their own mobile phones – I make a comment that I finally get to meet the "life saver" friend – they glance over and there is a look of great relief from both of them.

Thus the social context is (re)defined by these particular objects that introduce a new pattern of meaning – the ‘absence’ and then ‘silence’ of the human subject – as the two students return to their online, and off-world existence. This reminds me of the advertising airship in the film ‘Blade Runner’ (1982) that notifies, “new life awaits you in the Off-World colonies. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure, new climate, recreational facilities...”

As Kyle and Tom inform me when they discuss their rival phones and how they are beginning to use them in college,

Tom: iPhone can do everything that a Blackberry can do better, apart from it doesn't have BBM - which is instant chat between anyone else who has a Blackberry basically.

Kyle: But that's changed as well now, there's a thing now that's cross-platform and it's free, and so now BBM is sort of obsolete. I don't know, I think I'd probably do what that kid did and just sell my kidney for an iPhone...

Tom: ...Well for an iPad.

Kyle: Because they're all so interconnected like I bought, I bought a Mac a month go now [*looks to Tom to confirm the date*] and that was reasonably expensive, but it's so annoying to see, all over, the apps you can get on the Mac go 'and you can connect to your iPhone' but I don't have one [*Kyle says through gritted teeth*]. So the only thing that I can connect to really via my Mac is my iPod Touch which I've got with me as well [*Kyle points to down to his pocket*]. But, then, there's like things called open source technology, which is erm, the one I've got is called erm Evernote, and that can connect, that's on the Blackberry and I've got Dropbox and I've got...

Tom: ...It's essentially file sharing between your phone and your computer [*Tom nods his head left to right*]. But, makes it simple.

Kyle: Yes, so everything's synchronised.

Tom: Just drag and drop.

Kyle: Yes, it is drag and drop.

But, for an object that is seemingly so important to daily life, their reported loss is a common occurrence by my college students, from Jack, actually stopping his Clio on a main roundabout to rescue his iPhone after it had shot across his dashboard and through an open side window; to Jonny, now desperately looking for a replacement phone on eBay after driving off having left his iPhone on the roof of his Fiesta. So, I would like to suggest that mobile phones create identity and culture for young people because they are almost like 'texts' that talk, they speak through their technical specifications, design, and material aesthetics, and this allows them to function as objectual narratives. Mobile phones can then continue to contribute to the construction of meaning process when they enter a social situation. Since, as objects, they may close or open possible courses of action, suggest possible interpretations of social situations, and create new identities for individuals; they also literally create the wider contexts of social life for young people. As Chris prophesises,

Chris: It's the amount we rely on it, if, if something was to break like the mobile connection or something like that, then I think like people, everywhere, would just miss it, like if all of a sudden all mobile phones just blew up in our hands [*Chris rolls his iPhone over and over in the palm of his hand*] and we didn't have anything, then everyone would just miss something, it just wouldn't be there. And, you'd have people like not knowing what to do and especially when we are moving like to the future

where more and more kids are going to be using it, and we are more reliant on it and then when it does crash, well there is a big virus like the Millennium Bug, or when something like that does happen, well it's just going to cause mayhem. Society won't be able to cope with it.

By giving rise to new forms of interaction, this technology obliges young people to rethink their social encounters, and also prompts the (re)construction of social links, and interpersonal relations. The mobile phone is now characterised as *the* contemporary, crucial tool for young people – a 'lifeline' – while paradoxically allowing them independence. Yet, if young people manipulate mobile technologies they are equally manipulated by them. In the late eighteenth century the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed a building called the Panopticon. The concept of the design was to allow an observer to observe (*-opticon*) all (*pan-*) inmates of an institution without them being able to tell whether or not they are being watched. The design comprised of a circular structure with an 'inspection house' at its centre, from which the managers or staff of the institution were able to watch the inmates, who are stationed around the perimeter. Bentham devoted most of his efforts to developing the design for a Panopticon prison, but perceived his basic plan as being equally applicable to, for example, hospitals, and schools. Bentham himself described the Panopticon as "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example." However, this design has also been invoked by Michel Foucault (in *Discipline and Punish*, 1977) as a metaphor for modern "disciplinary" societies and their pervasive inclination to observe and then normalise. Foucault also proposes

that not only prisons but any hierarchical structure such as the army, schools, hospitals and factories have evolved through history to resemble Bentham's Panopticon. Thus, when Chris describes how his mobile phone allows him to be kept remotely informed and continually updated about social events his mobile technology appears to be functioning as a new panopticon.

Chris: The way it's moving at the moment, is like there's so much information on that [*Chris points to his iPhone*] that like, I lost my memory stick the other day and I was devastated because it had all my work on, but if I was to lose that [*Chris thrusts out his iPhone in his hand*] or for that to get robbed, then it's got, well it used to have all my information on, so when everything got deleted [*Chris had been experiencing some recent software problems with his iPhone*] for a few days I was sort of, I'm not using a phone, and then I missed it so much [*Chris laughs*] by not using it, because you get, well you don't feel attached to it as though it's mine, because it's in a contract and you can get one whenever, but you feel attached to it like if you don't use it for a couple of days then you miss it because it's not got, not got anything on because you're always, I'm always on it like checking, checking the football and stuff like that.

Kyle and Tom also illustrate the panopticon effect of their phones,

Tom: You can put like a hash tag up [*on Twitter*], which is a like a common theme basically and then anyone... You can then click on it, and anyone can use that same hash tag so all the posts will be displayed on the same page. So say if I was talking to Kyle about economics, and put a '#economics'...

Kyle: ...People who do economics could recognise it and then see.

Tom: See it's a common thing.

Kyle: After a while if like that hash tag, or like topic becomes popular it trends, so you've got these trending topics, and they can trend locally, nationally, and worldwide, so over, for about six months now and still about now, one of the UK ones was erm 'A levels' because everybody doing A

levels, everybody is talking about it, everybody is interconnected. I follow, you mean, you know that I follow like all the BBC ones that I can possibly find so that I'm constantly, constantly, constantly, constantly, up to date on everything.

Tom: Yeh, I've got the BBC news app [*Tom shrugs*] so that I can just see the news as well.

Kyle: You get all the information, I mean case in point economics the other day, I saw an article that was published 38 minutes erm before my economics exam and it was literally just saying Irish GDP figures, but because it was only 40 minutes old I know that nobody else really is going to have it, unless they like follow it, so it's just so much *easier* just to have that [*throws his arms into the air*] than having to, well it's not like you have to Google it, it's not like you have to go online [*Kyle yawns*] and search it and trawl through.

Tom: Well, that's it, you don't have to find it, you get given it.

Kyle: It's there.

Tom: Yeh, it's handed to you on a plate [*Tom's arm gestures forward*].

As I discussed earlier, if mobile phone technologies 'do' by building cultural contexts, they also 'make us do'. As Schegloff pointed out (1968: 1080-1081), the ring of a telephone usually obliges us to perform an action in return – typically that of answering the call. Mobile phones then, appear to have magnified this interactive nature of the telephone for young people, particularly as the 'off' position is seemingly not tenable. From a phenomenological viewpoint it simply does not exist, as young people invariably reply to their mobile phone 'summons' anywhere, anytime – such is the performative power of their objects. I consider this dependency, characterised by the relief of compulsive and repetitive use, to

border addictive behaviour, as Chris exemplifies when he explains to me how inconvenient the case that protects his iPhone is becoming,

Chris: I had a case on mine, and then it just gets annoying after a while, like it had a proper leather case for it, erm, and then it was just annoying, because you had to take it out, and then five minutes later take it out, take it out, take it out [*Chris laughs*], take it out.

I have also observed in the classroom, how it is common practice for students to place their mobile phones, in 'on' mode, on their desks in front of them, and between friends, until it is requested that they are switched off and put away by, for example, a teacher, or even myself, when I have to primarily perform as a teacher, rather than as a researcher. Sometimes students would find innovative and practical solutions to mobile phone use in the classroom environment. David, for example, would prop up his iPhone using the lever arch mechanism of his folder, by resting his phone against one of the metal arches so that the screen could face him alongside his class notes.

But I have noticed that the classroom environment and social scene is never the same as when the mobile phone was present; since the objects work as communicative cues, signalling their owners', the students', stances within the ongoing situation. That is, the students' mobile phones suggest that they are always ready to leave any face-to-face conversation to engage in some kind of 'external' communication, while remaining seated behind their desks. Hence, I

consider the social context of the classroom as being (re)defined by these mobile phone objects, once again through the potential 'absence' of the human subject. Mobile phone technologies have certainly been designed so that they can be turned off and on again by the user when needed, yet most young people I spoke with do not seem to consider that their mobile can actually be turned off. Although, when I requested to one student that he remove the ear-piece from his headphones that was still in his ear, plugged into his iPhone, he apologised by saying, "... oh, I'm sorry, but it's only an accessory."

Often, when asked when or where they might not *use* their mobile phones the only examples I was ever given by young people were when going to sleep in bed, or when taking an exam – but, they still did not consider the possibility of actually turning *off* their mobile phones. They had therefore decided that this would not be a choice – again, perhaps a striking example of a social actor's power *over* their mobile phone technology. That is, their mobile phone can manipulate them, only if they choose to be manipulated – except that in the case of the young people I spoke with, this is no longer a choice, but an automatic, habitual, behavioural response. This kind of use is consistent with another approach that governs this specific culture, namely that of being "liquid" (Bauman, 2005) – that is, being constantly connected – a characteristic that has willingly led young people to clearly adopt this type of technology, and will be discussed in a later section.

Chris's reasons for replacing his mobile phone also provided an extraordinary insight into the interpretive repertoire through which young people domesticate this technology. His mobile phone was ultimately an object that could be replaced since it was now insured for loss, damage, or theft, but once his contract had ended, the mobile phone was still not entirely disposed of, but rather, passed down to a younger sibling, functioning as a family 'hand-me-down' to help introduce a new generation of user to the technology. However, Chris and Adam also clarify,

Chris: Like a lot of the older people, have got the older phones, like my Dad's still got one of his old Nokias, and he uses that to, erm like as a proper phone, just to text and phone, and it's, it's a lot quicker than these are [*Chris refers to the iPhone in his hand*], so conventionally like the old phones are better, but with this [*Chris again indicates to his iPhone*] you've got the Internet on it and everything like that so it's more.

Adam: Easier.

Chris: Yeah, more useful, for like now, but if, if I wasn't going to use the Internet or something like that and had a PDA, I'd go back to my old phone.

Adam: Yeah, I think that's what they're practically coming into, mobile computers.

Chris: [*Chris whispers*] A mobile phone, and mobile computer.

Kyle and Tom are also impressed by the technical capability of their digital technologies,

Tom: It's the ease of it, I think that's what beats everything hands down, I could be out in Manchester with my phone.

Kyle: Yeah, it's the accessibility.

Tom: And, I could talk to any one of my friends via probably more than one way.

Kyle: Yeah, I think for me, for me at the minute on the Blackberry that I use, the Mac probably takes priority, in terms of computing ability for when I'm at home, but if I'm on the move yeah, the Blackberry because that's all I've got, but then if I had an iPhone, the iPhone and the Mac combined would [*Kyle sighs*]...

Tom: ...I tend not to turn on my lap-top, because I can do it on the phone and if my phone is in my pocket then I can't be bothered waiting for my lap-top to turn on, because that's [*nods to his the iPhone*] it's easier to use an iPhone.

Kyle: That's where the iPhone wins, because it's *so* easy to use, as a computer, rather than this [*Kyle holds up his Blackberry*] this is more of a phone first, whereas that [*Kyle points to Tom's iPhone*] is a computer first, and phone second, so you'd struggle to find a phone on that [*Kyle indicates to Tom's iPhone*].

In terms of examining the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation I have found the work of postmodern thinkers such as Roland Barthes (1967, 1972) and Jean Baudrillard (2005) to be both intriguing and helpful. Since they suggest that we can only know the world through language, that is, symbols and signs are the only reality we have; therefore, we do not see reality through language rather language *is* the reality that we see. Furthermore, Barthes commented that, "language is never innocent" (Barthes, 1967: 16), ultimately it is not transparent, it is not about looking through language to a phenomenon out there, but it is about the making of languages, first by the author, and then by the reader, or to use the favoured term of postmodernists,

'discourses'. This is pertinent to my research and its findings because if reality really is just a matter of language and discourse, then everything that young people experience, and know, about their mobile phone technologies is not just about having information, it is *informational*. Baudrillard (2005) also elaborated on the principles of Barthes in relation to the development of this informational realm. He views contemporary culture as one of signs – a ceaseless circulation of signs about, for example, the kinds of identity one wishes to project, about one's status, about one's aesthetic preferences and so on. An interesting example with regard to the circulation of signs, is given by Scollon (2008) when he considers the "geography of discourse" of Mt Ripinsk in Alaska, and recognises that the mountain is not merely a material location, but also, for instance, a brand image for bottled beer, which then circulates in new material and sign combinations, for example, through individuals wearing badges and tee-shirts that promote the beer. Therefore, the mountain becomes a powerful sign 'on the move' – a semiotic aggregate.

In college, I also recognised that the Apple brand appeared to be behaving in a similar manner with young people, as it flourished in the students' discourse via the proliferation of their iPods, consequently I believed that the acquisition of an iPhone might seem to be the next logical purchase for most college students. However, Kyle, a second year Business & Economics student and owner of a Blackberry explained to me that, in his mind, despite the iPhone being a far

superior phone, he and his friends have a Blackberry rather than an iPhone only because of the relative cost, since Blackberry Messenger offers a free communication service between like-for-like users. Jack and his fellow colleagues in Business Studies also commented to me that as they already owned iPods, having an iPhone would be an expensive and unnecessary duplication of service [as the iPod is provided as a standard function on the iPhone]. But for other students there is only one mobile phone, and that is the iPhone. In one A level Business Studies lesson, Abigail and Lottie having applied business theory to a company of their choosing – Apple – adamantly concluded that there were no substitutes (that is, competition) facing Apple, “once Apple, always Apple” said Lottie resoundingly to the class, while Abigail surreptitiously applied eyeliner using the screen of her iPhone as a mirror. Phil then asks rhetorically, “so just what did people do in the olden days *before* Apple?”

However, poignantly, Baudrillard does echo a strong constructivist view of signs – that is, if all phenomena are socially created, then they are all simulations with no ‘reality’ beyond themselves. By way of example he explains, “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation” (Baudrillard, 1994: 12). I was reminded of this simulated nature of ‘reality’ when a number of pupils visited the college in the Summer term from a local high school to participate in a ‘taster day’ of college

life. While taking this small group of about twenty fifteen year olds on a tour around campus I tried to arrange a meeting time with them as we were walking past the lecture theatre, so that they might return to the same place after lunch, "do you have a watch to check?" I asked before coordinating the exact time with them, and was subsequently intrigued when the vast majority of them held up their mobile phones in reply.

So perhaps when using a postmodern lens there appears to be less, or no apparent distinction between the 'real' and the 'unreal', the 'authentic' and the 'inauthentic', the 'truth' and 'falsehood' – since, when all is artifice, then certainties such as these have to go. There are only 'inauthentic' moments, the 'hyper-real', and that is why I am interested in how young people are experiencing these (postmodern) spectacles that characterise contemporary life – what was referred to as the "society of the spectacle" by Guy Debord (1995). As Sudjic (2009: 8) recently noted, "the world of objects has erupted so convulsively, spraying products unstoppably in every direction there is a quantitatively and qualitatively different story to tell from the conventional narrative of the emergence of modernism as the *deus ex* machine to make sense of the machine age." However, I am not concluding from this that young people are caught up in an incessant techno-media whirlpool, social actors in new scenarios, never knowing which way to turn. On the contrary, as you will see in the next section, young people are

constantly inventing new answers, in respect to their relationships to their mobile technologies, and each other.

So, in writing up this section about the signifying and symbolic nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation, I have become ever more cognizant about the presence of mobile phone technologies for young people, and their increasing inability to direct their lives without it. The students that I observed and spoke with indicated their 'addiction' to their phones – they 'craved' their mobile technology. As a teacher and educational researcher this is significant, since if mobile phone technologies have literally become an extension of young peoples' selves, the idea of going without it, or worst having lost it, or had it stolen, makes it seem like they have lost a part of themselves – it is *that* integral to their personal identities. When students' were without their mobile phone, for whatever reason, they not only had to confront their 'habit', but their sense of self – who were they, when they weren't connected? Furthermore, who were they, when they were?

I began this section by discussing the semantic of this type of technology - the 'mobile' of the United Kingdom – the potential liberation from any fixed location, and yet students constantly implicated how tethered they were in fact to their technology, 24/7, albeit to some degree self-imposed. I am left wondering about the nature of this 'habit', when the technology is seemingly so important to the

way that they construct and manage their social relationships. All the students I spoke with were “on Facebook” therefore, if you wanted to have a social life, you had to have ‘friends’ on this site, and having ‘friends’ on this site meant living your life on Facebook. Therefore, the mobile phone offered both comfort and connection – no matter what time of day, or the circumstances – students always seemed to feel the need to check their mobile phones. But, not only are mobile phones their main way to communicate with friends and family, they also signified how students planned and organised their lives – acting as both a security blanket and Swiss Army knife. And yet, at the very heart of everyday college life, young people are seemingly, above all, both the co-consumers *and* co-producers of their mobile phone technologies. Indeed, human agency is a daily occurrence and so the capacity for self-objectification, and through objectification, for self-direction, plays into both the domination of young people by social relations of economic power, but also, and more significantly, from the possibility of freedom from these forces. This will be the discussion point in the next section.

4.4.3 An agency of identity

Adam: ...Maybe I will start my own business.

Chris: And then make applications! [*Chris and Adam laugh*].

Adam: Hopefully make a lot of money, and maybe like go off to New Zealand or something.

Chris: My dream like is to make, to make, to go to uni, to get, to do my four years, get a job, come out, do a couple of years in a business, like learn how to do the stuff, and then create my own business with a friend, or my

girlfriend is an Accountant, so like me and her just get a business, then get my own business, make my money there, and then hopefully go and buy [redacted] [Chris laughs] and become, I want to be like my Great Granddad, be Chairman of [redacted] [Chris laughs].

Adam: I think the only way though to make money is to get your own business, you've got to take the risks haven't you? [Adam looks over to Chris].

Chris: Yeh, and hopefully it'll succeed.

Both Adam and Chris told me, with unsurprising optimism, how they envisaged their lives progressing once they had left university. I find their optimism unsurprising because as cultural production gravitates toward the higher end of the economic value chain, marketing today has assumed an importance that clearly affects young people and is now extending well beyond the commercial sphere. Michael de Certeau (2002) suggests that consumption is in itself a part of cultural production and that one's participation in this process reflects meanings about who one is, or who one might become. Therefore, since marketing is the means by which the whole of the cultural commons can be mined for valuable cultural meanings, these can then be transformed into commodified experiences, purchasable by young people in the economy. I believe that nowhere has this marketing reality been more evident than in the selling of designer brands to youngsters, whereby buying a label puts young people in a make-believe cultural world of shared values and meanings that the designers have created. A world in which one of my Business Studies students Rose, decided to match the colour of

her new Punto and its interior to the colour of her new white iPhone. As Rifkin (2000) clearly states,

The fact that this is all just a come-on, a sophisticated marketing device, is of little consequence. Millions of people have shown their willingness to suspend disbelief and buy their way into these stylized environments. The designer clothes, appliances, and whatnots become costumes and backdrops for living out imagined lifestyles and experiences. With everyone else playing the same game in the cultural marketplace, the substitute, by default, becomes the reality. (Rifkin, 2000: 172)

But how does their use of mobile phone technologies play into these futures? Well, the marketing function has significantly changed over the years, reflecting the shift in emphasis from selling a *product*, to selling an *experience*. Previously, in the industrial era, the focus was on selling the good, and marketing played an important, albeit ancillary role, by using cultural expressions to draw potential consumers to the product. Now the primary task of marketing is to select meaning from popular culture, and with the help of the arts – advertising, design, film, music, and so on – package products in such a way that they elicit an emotional response in the consumer that therefore reproduces a particular cultural segment. So selling the product becomes secondary to selling the experience, as Firat and Venkatesh (1993: 244) observe, “the image does not represent the product,” but rather, “the product represents the image.” So in this case, Apple doesn’t so much sell iPhones, but rather an image of what it is like to be, living in a technological era. Therefore, goods such as the iPhone, or any alternate smart phone even, increasingly take on the qualities of props for young people; they become mere

platforms or settings around which elaborate cultural meanings can then be acted out.

An episode (number 113) of the Showtime television series, "Mad Men" which is set in the 1960s, exemplifies this idea well. Don Draper the senior advertising accounts executive is to create an advertisement for Kodak's new slide projector that uses a circular tray that stores and loads slides automatically. Kodak's technical staff has already prosaically called it the Wheel, and the Donut. Duck Phillips, impressed, says it is "actually a hell of a gadget, continuous, and doesn't jam." He asks Don to "find some way of putting the Wheel into the future with some legs" ("The Wheel," episode 113). But, the Wheel is not going to have a future unless it is reinterpreted in a way that integrates it seamlessly into people's lives and opens up a world that they have never lived in before. Pointing to the projector on his office desk, Don asks Harry Crane what its purpose is, but Harry, not seeing anything beyond the commercial value, cynically says, "to sell projectors to people that already have them." Harry tells Don about how he once took "artsy" black-and-white pictures of handprints on glass that reminded him of the Lascaux cave paintings. The hands, he said, looked like they were reaching through the stone and saying "I was here." Harry leaves Don in silence, and then Don falls back to sleep. Don frequently emerges from sleep with subliminal insights, and in this case with pieces of conversation he had with Harry. In the presentation, Don transfigures the Wheel into the Carousel, comparing it to a

merry-go-round and associating it for his audience of Kodak executives with memories of childhood and important milestones in the life of a family – his family. Don speaks of the Carousel as reaching back into the past, as a time machine that takes us back to a place where we know we were loved. It is notable then, how this form of art, advertising, is not only able to produce wealth when properly positioned between buyers and sellers in the economy of exchange but how it also moves the object from what Duck called "a hell of a gadget" into a focal point of community and meaning.

As Chris exemplified when he excitedly explained to me how applications were made for his iPhone, an enterprise that he was keen to become involved in when he left college,

Chris: Most of them are made like, like by people that have just finished from uni and are the same age as you, they'll make the, make the games because they're like, they know what people want, they make the games and then they sell it to make, like some of them are at uni learning how to do games programming and while they're doing it, they just like want to make a small bit of money on the side to cover their uni fees, so they make it, and then sell they them on here [iTunes].

Mobile phone technologies therefore, begin to lose their material importance and gradually take on more of a symbolic importance, so that eventually they become less like objects, and more like tools to help facilitate the performance of lived experiences. So, for example, for Chris and Adam, the iPhone is not so much an end in itself, but a prop, an instrument, employed in the creation of a staged life

performance. As Nickolas Rose (1999) surmises, so far the economy has played a significant role in the production of us as social subjects, and that the relation between the economic and the social is a central organising feature of everyday life – consumption, therefore, is prominent in shaping individual identities and social relationships.

Consumption requires each individual to choose from among a variety of products in response to a repertoire of wants that may be shaped and legitimated by advertising and promotion but must be experienced and justified as personal desires... Every aspect of life, like every commodity, is imbued with a self-referential meaning; every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are, each casts a glow back, illuminating the self of he or she who consumes. (Rose, 1999: 231)

So for these ambitious young men it seems as if their identities, like their mobile phone use, are for wearing and showing; they are certainly consumers in a consumer society, and since this consumer society is a market society – they appear to be both in, and on, the market – simultaneously consumers, and commodities. So, the marketing function of business does now appear to have an expansive role in terms of cultural production. It supports the creation of fantasy and fiction, woven out of the bits and pieces of contemporary culture, and then sold back to these young people as lived experiences. Simply put, marketing manufactures the hyper-real. This is marked by an extraordinary ability to make the simulation appear more attractive than, and even a substitute for, the real. Cultural production then and the “techniques of the self” (Foucault, 1999: 162) are

perceived by young people and their lived experiences to be a breath of fresh air, and this is particularly significant to educators if young people now seemingly prefer the drama of this staged performance. As Slouka (1995: 75) succinctly puts it, "as more of the hours of our days are spent in synthetic environments... life itself is turned into a commodity. Someone makes it for us; we buy it from them. We become the consumers of our own lives." In the film, 'The Truman Show' (1998) a fictional character, Truman, grows up inside a totally simulated televised environment, and is, for a long time, unaware of his captive circumstances. When Truman finally finds out where he is, he desperately tries to escape back into the 'real world' outside the enclosed television stage set. But, the irony is that while Truman is running away from his artificial surroundings, most of the young people I observed, and spoke with, are journeying in the opposite direction.

What else might be learned about this economic discourse in relation to young peoples' consumer culture, and the performative practices associated with their consumption of mobile phone technologies? The young people I observed and spoke with certainly appeared to be moved by an unrelenting pressure to incorporate technological innovation into their lives, often to facilitate a growing and personal collection of applications – apps – particularly games and music, albeit they were willingly urged along by branded advertising that perhaps made them aware of some needs that did not exist before. An intriguing example of how brand advertising has even been embedded in a free gaming application for the

iPhone was the excitement that 'LogosQuiz' created earlier this year – a simple brand logo quiz. On route to a Business class one afternoon, one student, Martin walked alongside me in the corridor, asking me to guess a brand logo that he did not recognise (it turned out to be Nestlé), then as I entered the classroom I was faced with another small group of three boys, all huddled together around two iPhones placed on the desks between them, shouting out their guesses to brand logos that were being displayed by the application.

The habitual urge to consume applications, their – love of apps – is also well illustrated below.

Me: How about the functions, and the applications you've been buying? Do you generally get the free ones, or do you generally pay?

Adam: I think I've started off getting free ones, [*Adam checks on his iPhone, and laughs*].

Chris: [*Chris laughs*] You pay!

Adam: But I've gone to pay ones now.

Chris: I just find it, no, I find it easier to get free ones, because I don't, I use them for like two weeks, and then there's a new one out, and so you just think delete that one, and get that one.

Adam: I just keep getting into love of apps and just keep downloading them, I find something, and think ooh I like that, so download it.

Me: So you've both got different applications?

Adam: Yeh.

Chris: Yeh, cause it's, I get paid like monthly, erm just at the start of the month I buy a fifteen pound iTunes voucher, download the new songs and then whatever I've got left I like spend on a new app, application, or spend it on songs, or something like that, and then like I just get free ones for the rest, rest of the time.

Adam: It's also quite good I think with iTunes is that if you listen to iTunes the apps that you've got get saved onto the computer, so if you delete them off here [*Adam indicates to his iPhone*] and you don't keep them on your iPhone anymore, you can have them on your computer, and it's like a back catalogue, so you can put them back on again if you want them back.

In 2008, a global survey conducted by Synovate in conjunction with Microsoft revealed just this extent to which young adults were willing to interact and engage with brands as part of their daily online activities. The survey highlighted that when asked about their online brand engagement in the last month, almost a third (28%) had talked about a brand on a discussion forum; almost a quarter (23%) had added brand-related content to their instant messenger service; and almost one in five (19%) had added branded content to their homepage or social networking site. The "Young Adults Revealed" survey of 12,603 18-24 year olds from 26 countries around the world gave one kind of insight into some of their online behaviours – with young adults spending on average 2.5 hours of their daily leisure time online. These young people claimed that they were not only regularly clicking on banner or online adverts (47%) or accessing brand and product information via portals (18%) but also interacting in a more engaged way – almost a quarter of them (24%) had actively uploaded advertising or marketing clips to social networking or video sites in the last month. Julian Rolfe, Global Manager, Young Adults Revealed, Synovate then commented,

Young people today are totally comfortable with the idea of branded content and branded entertainment. For example, almost half (42%) have watched an advert before watching a video online. However, the results of this survey show that they are more than just 'comfortable' - they are openly willing and eager to engage with brands online. They clearly feel their opinions about brands are important. They want to associate themselves with brands they see as 'cool' and this is why we see them uploading clips to their social networking sites and IM services. (PressReleasePoint, 2008)

It appears that young people are accessible through a range of media – digital touch points – and engage in a variety of activities throughout the day. They regularly read emails (94%) and news or current affairs (80%). They also read about film, music or games (76%) and chat on IM (76%). Almost three quarters of respondents had watched video clips online (73%), and they are most likely to pass on comedy clips (62%), followed by music clips (40%) and clips featuring friends (27%). Almost one in ten respondents had also passed on viral advertising and marketing clips (9%). Perhaps of more pertinence was that mobile internet access also proved popular with over a third of respondents using their handset to browse while on the move (34%). The most common online activities from a mobile included: listening to the radio (15%), accessing games (13%), visiting social networking sites (11%), watching streamed video clips (10%), and reading about sport (9%). Beth Uyenco, Global Research Director, Microsoft Advertising concluded,

We know young adults are active users of the Internet but we can see that they are looking for an experience that is both relevant and customised to

their personal needs and interests. What this research shows is the extent of the opportunity for advertisers to capture the imaginations of the elusive young adult generation as they go about their daily digital lives – from gaming and IM through to video and mobile. By tapping into the trends and mindsets of young adults, brands can engage this active audience and create a dialogue knowing they are highly likely to continue discussing the brand with their peers. (PressReleasePoint, 2008)

A number of conversations below highlight the importance to some young people of playing games, listening to music, and watching television and films, in particular,

Me: Is that perhaps one of the most important applications for you, the games?

Adam: Yes.

Chris: Yeh, apart from the phone, yeh.

Adam: Yes, because if you bought a PSP and a phone you'd be looking at about six, or seven hundred quid [*Adam looks over to Chris*] something like that for a brand new one I suppose.

Chris: Yeh, it's got, well the PSP's got controls whereas this [*Chris holds his iPhone*] has got its motion sensors, so when you're moving it about, the car moves with you, or the ball [*Chris shakes his iPhone from side-to-side to demonstrate*].

Adam: It's like a Wii, isn't it? [*looks over to Chris*].

Chris: Yeh, yeh.

Adam: And then it's really good because you get like table tennis when you've really got to swing it [*Adam holds his iPhone like a bat, and demonstrates a swing*].

Chris: Yeh. You can even play golf on it?! [*Chris laughs*] and have a proper game of *bowling*! [*Chris laughs*].

Chris: I put music on it.

Adam: It's got iTunes on it, so you can download music on it.

Chris: Yeh, that's one of the new features, so that you can get music while you're moving around. If you're out and someone says oh I'd like to listen to this song, you just log onto iTunes, get the song, download it, then listen to it then.

Chris: ...Like when people just used it to ring when they first came out because the technology's getting so big they're using it more for games, and that's involving people.

Adam: And TV.

Chris: And watching movies, on their phones.

It was also interesting to notice, and as a Business Studies and Economics teacher, that young peoples' consumption of commodities could be quick and fast. But, if marketing's job has been to rifle through culture to find new ways of eliciting an emotional response, a less desirable reaction was implicated by one student. Alex highlighted the limitations of purchasing the latest piece of technology in an AS Economics class when he was seen sporting the new iShuffle digital watch from Apple and despondently remarked to a protagonist, "yeah, it's new, but it'll be out of date *so* soon." This is a striking example to me, as the latest product is seen to pull and tug on this individual's consciousness, almost resulting in a loss of self. Young peoples' identities seem caught up in the waves of competing and sometimes contradictory social discourses that flood over them, and they give bits and pieces of their consciousness over to each passing demand on their

consumption. Yet, in the process, they appear to risk slowly losing themselves in a labyrinth of short-lived, ever changing commodified relationships where they now find themselves culturally embedded. These young people literally witness their own identities imitating that of the product they have just purchased, that is, from being purchased, to being disposed of. This is demonstrated by a conversation with Kyle and Tom when they discuss the social problem that a friend faces having lost her Blackberry,

Kyle: I saw a mate in Tiger the other night and she pulled out, she used to have a Blackberry [*Kyle shakes his own Blackberry phone*] but she pulled out this phone and it was just an old Samsung, a flip phone and instantly you laugh at her. Yeah, because it's an old phone, even though...

Tom: How old?

Kyle: It was three years old, and that's nothing, it's only three years, but you still laugh at her, because you used to have a Blackberry [*Kyle's laughing*] and now with that you can only text and play snake.

Tom: You see [*Tom shrugs*], I can play whatever I can download onto that [*Tom holds out his iPhone*].

Kyle: But you can still break it! [*Kyle nods towards the phone*].

Tom: Which I have done!

Kenway and Bullen (2001) also draw attention to the multiple, and potentially negative ways in which young people negotiate the identities available to them by means of their participation in consumer culture.

In its current manifestations, consumer-media culture is multi-faceted in its politics, in the positions, identities and relationships it offers young consumers, and in the emotions it provokes... In terms of young peoples' identities and relationships, it mobilises feelings of connectedness, gratification, pleasure, excitement and passion. But it can also provoke a sense of inadequacy, anxiety, shame, yearning, envy and contempt for the self or the other. It empowers and disempowers, legitimates and delegitimates, reveals and conceals. (Kenway and Bullen, 2001: 152)

Another intriguing metaphor for this commodification and then disposal of the self is exemplified below, when Chris explains the use of photographs taken on his iPhone as an actual substitute for bothering to use his friends' names.

Adam: It's handy when someone calls you because their photo comes up on screen... you see his photo's in the background [*Adam points to the screen*] can you see that yeh? [*Adam has tapped a photograph on the screen*] I'm gonna have to hang up before he answers me, but yeh you add photos, and when they call you it pops up...

Chris: I try and like, get a picture of everyone when I get their number, when I get someone's new number, just take a picture of them, and then when it, when they do ring you don't have to look at their name.

Perhaps Chris's conjecture might be just another way in which the mobile phone is disrupting the perceived civility in human communication that of recognising and addressing each other by name? Since Chris is quite willing to divert his attention away from a written label toward a visual cue – the picture now taking precedence over the name. Is this the (de)valuation of one identifying human characteristic – your name – and yet the emergence of another – your image – as friends slowly become (re)presented to each other in this particular communication space? It seems that through communication, young people assign symbolic meanings to

their mobile phone technologies, so the messages that they communicate about their use of this technology become reflective, and reveal as much about those communicating as they do about the technology itself. As young people, such as Chris and Adam (re)present their technologies through their mobile phone conversations, as in this instance, they begin to negotiate what their social relationships are, and what they would like them to be. So, when young people talk about their use of mobile phone technology, they are sharing “the visions, both optimistic and anxious, through which modern societies cohere” (Sturken and Thomas, 2004: 1) and consequently, “the desires and concerns of a given social context and the preoccupations of particular moments in history” (Sturken and Thomas, 2004: 1).

Therefore, young peoples’ use of mobile phone technologies becomes co-productive, as they continue to generate new meanings, new uses, and a possible desire to eventually produce even new technologies, such as applications. There is a strong tendency in education, especially when technologies are new, to regard them as causal agents, entering a college environment such as mine, for example, as a driving force of change that students, and even teachers, have little power to resist. This kind of view is technologically deterministic, yet when students, and educators in particular, adopt more of an approach of co-consumption *and* co-production, influence appears to be flowing, though not necessarily equally, in both directions. Increasingly then, mobile phone technologies do have the

potential to become just taken-for-granted parts of everyday college life, and do not always need to be seen as such an *active* agency for change.

So, to conclude this section about the co-consumption and co-production of the mobile phone by young people and its use in their identity creation, I am again reminded of Michel Foucault (2000),

Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, of my relations with others, that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly a fragment of autobiography. (Foucault in Hughes, 2003: 115)

In doing so, I recall a late Friday afternoon lesson waiting for a number of students to arrive having just completed their exam. As they enter the classroom, they engage with those already present by seating themselves around several desks, four boys all playing the latest iPhone version of Grand Theft Auto, Anthony, Carl, and Mark sharing one phone, Jack playing independently on another, but all regularly checking the progress of each other. Another student, Greg arrives, and excitedly remarks, "this *is* great, are we having an iPhone lesson?" Kyle and Jason finally enter the room, and Jason having heard Greg in the corridor, comments almost in disbelief, "what? We're *really* having an iPhone lesson?!" At the end of the session, Lauren stays behind to enthusiastically tell me how the new iPads are being used to teach in schools in the United States and to show me her new

application, 'iTunes U'. She explains to me how students can play video or audio classes or lectures with 'iTunes U' and take notes alongside the lecture. The application also allows students to read books, view presentations, and see a list of all the assignments for a course and check them off as they are completed. It seems that students' documents, notes, highlights, and bookmarks are all kept up to date across multiple devices.

Perhaps then, this is the important lesson for educators such as myself, that students need to be 'taught' about the role of mobile phone technologies in their lives, and how to mindfully navigate the multiple platforms for their personal and professional purposes without becoming so toxically overwhelmed and distracted. But, furthermore, they perhaps need to be made more aware about their nature and how to distinguish between the fantasy and fiction, the credible and non-credible, the important and unimportant in order to better support their college lives. There is a hyper-real amusement park out there of pixels and advertisements designed to maximise the spending of these young people, knowingly met with minimal resistance to consumption. Students are sold their beliefs, hopes, and distractions and fed their very own pay-as-you-go fairytale – the ultimate refinement of capitalism. In this regard, teachers *also* need to develop a more sophisticated comprehension of how their students are finding, consuming, and experiencing their mobile phone technologies and what the technology can potentially offer them and their students.

When I sympathetically asked Adam and Chris about how they felt about being in a lesson, where theoretically, according to college regulations, they were not meant to be using their mobile phones, they replied,

Adam: It's a bit, it's like ridiculous, especially if like the college embraced it, it can be so much easier, like if you had all the documents and the pdf's, then you could just like send them out to peoples' phones, because err nobody ever forgets their phones, so you'd always know that they had their like handouts, and worksheets, and stuff like that.

Chris: Especially like, because like it's a tablet [*Chris positions his iPhone vertically*] so you can get stuff on there [*Chris indicates to the top of the screen*] and see it clearly, zoom into bits, and then just like quickly find pages [*Chris sweeps his finger across the screen, to simulate turning a page*] and it saves paper!

Adam: There's also a book app, there's a book app you know, and you can get like some books for free...

My research with young people also revealed an insight into how students are using their mobile phone technologies in lessons, both as consumers and producers. Zak's use provides such an example, whereby having not submitted a 'hard' copy of his homework at the beginning of a lesson he proceeded to instantaneously reveal his completed work via his Blackberry, as a word document, that he then emailed directly to me. He admitted that he had wanted some further advice from his friend Luke before he handed it in, and therefore had been unable to print off his written response quite in time for the lesson. So, another nuance for teachers to understand about mobile phone use is literally, the mobility factor, and particularly students' tendency to seamlessly integrate the completion of their

work while being mobile, and while moving about within a college environment, or while waiting to meet up with a friend as in Zak's instance.

As Kyle and Tom also explain,

Tom: I think it would be a lot worst without the technology, because I just can't be doing with like a massive textbook, I have to know where I'm going to kind of thing, if I've got my phone everything is given to me, I can type in a few words and it'll pop up, it's just easier.

Kyle: Yeah, so like if I saw something whilst I was out, and I might go, right I need to remember that, so I could either take a photo of it or write down what it is, and then that will instantly share on my Mac. So when I get home I go oh yeah, or I can then put that into Dropbox, and if I'm not taking my Mac somewhere, but going to a library as long as I've got an internet connection I can still get to that file.

An extension of this is the suggestion that perhaps teachers should also be using these platforms that are small and mobile, to more readily facilitate their educational resources, that can then be accessed, utilised, and updated by students while they are literally walk across a college campus, or, as is more often the case at the moment, as they surreptitiously use them in a classroom, under their desk. Tom, a year two economist, even reported to me how as soon as he wakes up, he immediately checks his mobile phone for Facebook, Twitter, and email updates while he is still lying in bed, and also before he falls asleep at night.

The young people I observed and spoke with, therefore, seemingly cared that their hardware, and applications, could connect them quickly to what they valued. They

certainly had distinct preferences about their favourite brands of mobile phone, typically, iPhone and Blackberry, and they quickly adopted applications, including the familiar social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, often simultaneously maintaining their connections to these. They also appear to (re)present different identities of themselves by using these different communication platforms to contact different types of people: they choose to text very close friends and members of their family, they Twitter and Facebook with their peers, and they email their teachers. Students appear to consider all of these combinations automatically, nonetheless, the implications are significant in terms of how they (re)construct their identities via text, Facebook, Twitter, and email for example. So, mobile phone technologies with their integral applications are not solely just a way for young people to communicate – they are shaping how they think about themselves, and how others, such as teachers like myself, think about them – and their new ‘branded’ identities. In the section that follows this apparent, seamless nature of these ‘connections’ will be discussed as young people no longer appear to need to search for information, it simply seems to be finding them. The next section seeks to explain this idea of fluidity that appears to be inherent in the use of mobile phone technologies by young people.

4.4.4 A liquid identity

Adam: If you’re lost in the city you just Google Maps and find out where you are, and if you want to go, it can give you directions, and it can tell you how long it's gonna walk, how long the walk is to get there!

Chris: When I went down to Watford on err bank holiday Sunday, and we were just, and we parked up, and we didn't know where the stadium was, we had a rough, rough idea of where it was so we dropped a pin where the car was parked on Google Maps, erm set where we wanted to go, then just asked it to take us, and it took us, erm then after the match it took us back, quite useful in that way, just wherever, wherever you are if you're lost or anything like that you can just say I'm lost and you'll find your way back.

What is apparent then is that communication for young people is now a *constant* flow, where social interaction and mobile phone use are intertwined in a sophisticated and complex way. An even more connected and networked society is emerging for young people to access a variety of sources of information through a variety of means of communication: at college, home, and their place of work. As Kyle illustrates in detail for us,

Kyle: Then there this thing I've mentioned called Evernote, which [*Kyle lowers his voice*] is just amazing [*Kyle spread out his arms*], I mean it's mainly for my Mac, but if I literally, I highlight a section of a website and click one button, it will go over to Evernote, and the little symbol's the elephant, and so it's like you never forget, and it's got all my notes. You can take photos [*Kyle pretends to hold a camera*] and it will save them, so I've got all my revision notes for geography on there, I've got erm job application references, erm order references, and then bits of web sites that I really like, erm and then on top of that there's this, erm I mean that's free, up to a certain limit, but that can literally be for any web site, anywhere, any link, and then you can just type into it as well, so that's connected, so that's just mine. And, I can get any file from there on my phone, so you see [*Kyle starts to operate his phone and shows me the screen with all the note references*], so those are all my notes, and those are the same notes that I've got on my Mac, and then I've got erm uploader files so that if I took a photo on here I could then send it to Evernote and it would be on my Mac when I get home, audio note, add new notes, snap shot, all those sort of work seamlessly.

Recent scholarship has also tried to make sense of these changes, for example, the grand theorist, Manuel Castells (1989) who advances “the space of flows” – that is, a shift in the importance of the meaning of a place to the patterns of the de-sequenced, networked interactions that occur in that place. I was also able to continue and extend this dialogue with my students based on their own interactions with their technology. Throughout our discussions, I came to understand the importance to them that their personal hardware ‘communicates’ with each other – that they can access their synchronised data from their mobile phone, lap-top, personal computer, and even their digital television box, in a *consistent* way. A one-to-one conversation with an A level Business Studies student, Dan, about his examination results and a potential resit this summer led us to my subject-based Moodle site to explore the revision resources available to help him. But, rather than just talking about printing out the materials, he spoke about downloading the pdf files onto his iPhone using Dropbox, thus linking his iPhone to his lap-top and enabling him to read and revise from the materials while he was travelling to and from college by bus. Kyle continues this discussion about the virtues of accessing data *anywhere*,

Kyle: I've got erm, geography revision that I wrote up at college, emailed it to my Mac, then put it from my Mac into Dropbox so now any, literally any computer in the world with an internet connection I can get that file which is pretty useful. And, I could send a link, so if Tom needed the same revision, I could send him the internet, the URL address and he [*Kyle indicates to Tom with his right hand*] could get it straight away as well, so that's pretty *huge*.

This notion of synchronicity was also explained further by both Chris and Adam in their narratives when they highlighted their expectation of seamless connectivity below.

Adam: I've got this one as well [*Adam shows me an application on his iPhone*] Shazam, and this one, when you like listen to like anything on the radio, you press tag [*Adam touches the screen*] and it tells you what song it is, so these are the ones that have been on the radio [*Adam shows me the screen*] and here it's telling me what they are. So, these are ones that are already tagged, because we've not got any music playing now.

Chris: Here I'll play one if you want [*Chris finds a song from his mobile phone*].

Adam: Yeh, erm then we'll start.

Me: Can you download them then?

Adam: Yeh, it gives you links to iTunes to get them.

Chris: Here you are [*Chris plays a song and places his mobile phone next to Adam's iPhone*].

Chris: There we go! It's found it [???] [*Chris and Adam, continue to position their phones and look expectantly at the iPhone screen*].

Me: So you've sent that to him?

Chris: No! I've just played it [*Chris holds and shakes his phone*].

Adam: Just played the song!

Chris: Just played the song.

Adam: And, it told me what song it is. I can buy it, I can watch it on YouTube, I can you know attach photos to it [*Adam scrolls across his screen*] I can buy it off iTunes, I can.

Chris: [*Laughing*] So you can, if you're like in the car or something and you hear a song that you like.

Adam: And you don't know what it is.

Chris: You just flick it on [*referring to the iPhone*].

Adam: You just flick it on!

Chris: And it just listens to it, then analyses it.

Adam: Yeh, that's Shazam!

As John Cunliffe (in Wray, 2012), chief technology officer at Ericsson in north west Europe firmly believes, the next wave of growth for mobile telephony will come not from persuading more people to get a phone – because many already have one – but *connecting* machines to wireless networks. Everything from vehicle fleets and smart electric and water meters to people's fridge freezers will one day be able to communicate. "What we have at the moment is 4.5 billion devices worldwide, what we at Ericsson see is that going to 50 billion devices by 2020," he reckons. "This is all about machine to machine communication, touching all aspects of our lives."

Chris: It is extremely useful, in err, like all the applications you get on it, so you can talk, talk to anyone where ever you are which err, that's what most of us use it for, erm, and then you get games on it and stuff like that, use it a lot for gaming, but then erm, you can get too stuck into it.

Adam: Yeh, there's loads of extra handy little things though isn't there? [*Adam looks over to Chris*] like erm, I like there's one called 'Bump' where you can literally bump together [*Adam knocks his closed fists together*] and it sends data, erm it's like, I think that's a lot better than trying to do Bluetooth, cause if you had an older phone and tried to do Bluetooth it can take, it can take a while.

Chris: A long time.

Adam: Yeh.

As a narrative, postmodernism certainly has value then with its emphasis on fluidity, instability, insecurity, scepticism, and irony that try to capture some of the distinguishing features being described to me by young people. The contribution of other postmodern thinkers on concepts such as: signs, symbols, simulation, authenticity, and performativity have already presented some important criteria with which I have begun to analyse the use of mobile phone technologies in the preceding sections. The focus of this section, however, is about the associations young people are making between their phones and about obtaining a seamless, mobile life, about the promises and realities of fluid flows of information, and how eventually becoming “liquid” (Bauman, 2005) might be placed in the wider, capitalist context of becoming an efficient individual, or even resource within our market society. As Chris succinctly puts it,

Chris: you can find out anything on them.

Although, this quest for efficiency can also be compromised by the imperfections of their hardware, as Chris also demonstrates,

Chris: [*It's*] Still not like perfect, because it crashes a lot, so when you're trying to do complicated tasks on it, then the processing speed and stuff like that isn't as quick as it possibly could be, so there's an area for improvement... I try to keep the memory low so it works faster.

Or possibly, by the hardware of their friends,

Chris: It takes me like about five minutes to text back, but it takes someone else about a quarter of an hour, and it's like why has it took so long?

It is certainly the case that the mobile phone has given young people a communication tool all of their own, rather than having to use the shared landline in a hallway as perhaps previous generations like my own had to do. It therefore offers them this freedom of a fluid access to their social network and a means of instant and constant communication. The young people that I spoke with readily admitted that the only times when they did not actively engage with their phones was when they were asleep, or in an examination. This constant and integral nature of mobile phone use was also summarised by the inaugural feedback from The Mobile Life Youth Report in 2006 commissioned by The Carphone Warehouse, "we see that people between the ages of 15 and 17 send and receive an average of 12.5 texts every day, in addition to holding an average of 4.7 mobile phone conversations. Overall, young people text three times more frequently as their parents, and make more calls. There is a constant pinging of messages."

The defining tool of the first part of the Internet boom in the mid-nineties was e-mail, then e-commerce, search, music, and video. It is presently social media. Young people in college – Generations Y and Z – find e-mail old-fashioned, possibly as it functions in a non-fluid manner, so they use it selectively, or simply

ignore it. Since conversations within social media have an easier flow to them and replicate what young people regard as a more normal conversation they are favoured, plus the content is typically broken down into more bite-sized chunks, and more specifically, the 140-character domain of Tweets. One of my A level Business Studies students Ben boldly announced one afternoon to the class that he was no longer using Facebook anymore, since everyone in the room had moved over to Twitter instead, he confirmed with the group that this was because their responses were quicker and less formal.

Hence, the appeal of texting using the iPhone, whereby the (re)presentation of asynchronous written communication as a *conversation* is clearly welcomed,

Adam: My cousin texted me, erm but as you can see, that's [*Adam searches through his texts on his iPhone*] he sent me this one [*Adam points to the screen*] and that's what I sent him [*Adam points to the screen again*].

Me: So you can see it as a conversation?

Adam: As a conversation, cause then when you're looking, if, I don't know if you ever have that problem when you text somebody, and you're looking at it and thinking what did I just text him? Erm, so it's a lot, it's a lot easier I think [*Adam scrolls up the page on his iPhone*].

Adam: ...So these are all the, you know, conversations so I can keep it, you know, so I can say look at, in fact if I looked at [*Adam tries to find a particular text*] and it's you know just [*Adam continues to scroll up and down the series of texts on screen*] just so handy, cause when I had my old phone I used to have to rummage like through my SMS box trying to find out what I'd been saying or something so I could remember what someone had text me for. It's got the dates on it as well so I know how long ago I sent it or whatever, and the time.

The young people that I observed and spoke with also seem to embrace one-to-many communication, whereby they can regularly update their status and stay connected with their friends and social groups. Subsequently, there appears to have been a considerable shift in the way that young people now exchange their contact information – from previously giving out a home phone number, to an e-mail address, then a mobile phone number, to now, their social media information. Just as young people began to use the word ‘Google’ as a verb, they are now to using ‘Facebook’ and ‘Twitter’ in the same way – that is, “Facebook me”, or “send me a Tweet”.

Chris: Phones are extremely antisocial! Especially the way they're moving into now, because of the amount of technology.

Adam: I, I don't think they're antisocial, I think if anything they [*iPhones*] make it more social, like if you're not seeing somebody for like err six months, then they like come up on Facebook chat or something and you start talking to them, or if they've like moved to like err, another country.

Chris: Australia.

Adam: Australia, like Sophie.

Chris: Yeh.

Adam: You can still talk to them, I think it's, I know, know there's a lot of stuff at the moment saying that it's like antisocial, but I think it's keeping bonds, that normally you wouldn't have been able to keep.

Chris: Yeh, keeping together [*Chris cradles his iPhone in his joined hands*].

While the example above points to some of the positive aspects of social media for young people, it would be misleading not to highlight some of the downsides of

this behaviour as well. One trend is the possibility that these Generation Y and Z's may now view face-to-face interactions as just simply more complicated, coupled with an erosion of their written skills from living in this 140-character, Twitter world. I also regularly observed in a classroom environment how they were less likely to understand boundaries – to them, things were becoming just more fluid, so for example, it could be seen as entirely appropriate by some students to write and send a text to a friend, or post an updated status to Facebook, typically under the desk, during a lesson. But, on a more positive note, students did feel able to contact figureheads of companies (or their representatives) directly using social media. Lottie used Twitter to contact the founder of the revision company 'tutor2u' – Jim Riley – requesting some mind map templates to help with her revision and was overjoyed with the 'personal' response from him, showing his support for her studies.

So, in such a technological world, young people may have developed an addiction to flexibility and ease, but does this increased availability of everything for use in increasingly flexible ways make their lives any more exciting, or fulfilling?

Me: Didn't you have some project work on there [*referring to his iPhone*]
Adam?

Adam: Yeh, and I could email it off, and send it to [*Adam shrugs*] where ever I wanted to; and like the other day I was showing it to my mate in Computing and we took a photo of him, and I emailed it to him in the lesson and it went straight to his email account and he got it up on the screen and it was the same photo, and I thought that's pretty good.

Chris: [*Chris holds and rolls his iPhone over in his hands*] More useful than it ever has been.

I am actually still a little puzzled by Chris's response to Adam's excitement over emailing the photograph to his friend; since there was a possible hint of cynicism, in that, Chris seems to be questioning just how useful the whole process of emailing a friend a picture really was. Is Chris perhaps reflecting upon Adam's actions here as mere novelty? Indeed, Heidegger considered that technological time-saving devices that were meant to free us for more worthwhile pursuits, actually lead to modern lives being lived in a mood of profound boredom. This boredom gave rise to an incessant appetite for constant busyness, saturated with amusement and entertainment, in an attempt to cover up the boredom in a world where nothing seemingly mattered. "For contemporary man, who no longer has time for anything, the time, if he has free time, becomes immediately too long. He must drive away the long time, in shortening it through a pastime. The amusing pastime is supposed to eliminate or at least cover up and let him forget the boredom" (Heidegger, 2000: 579). The boredom, Heidegger believed, was the symptom of a failure to feel at home within this technological world; the search for amusement betrayed an attempt to hide a dissatisfaction with existence, which in turn, attested to a longing *for* home. "Homesickness is alive there where man constantly flees into the strange, which entertains him, bewitches him, fills his time, supposedly to shorten the time, because it becomes incessantly too long for him" (Heidegger, 2000: 579).

Since the technological world reduces everything then to *resources*, it destroys the 'particular' in a drive towards maximal efficiency, flexibility, and inter-changeability. Thus, in an intriguing juxtaposition, it prevents any particular thing from playing a unique and irreplaceable role in our lives, and consequently, whether we are in Manchester, New York, or Tokyo, we find that we can all now buy the *same* brand of mobile phone. Heidegger (2000) purported that rather than increasing the universal and uniform availability of everything, we needed instead to learn how to let things *be* things, rather than resources, and develop practices attuned to the things that were peculiar to our own local world. This is a challenging supposition to consider, because it appears to highlight how young people are possibly using their mobile phone technologies, for instance in a college environment, to manage their malignant boredom of the situation, or even identities that they find themselves in.

So, in writing up this section about the fluid nature of the mobile phone and its use in identity creation by young people, I have come to learn that the amount of information coming to them via their mobile phone technologies and the Internet – via text message, Facebook, Twitter, chat, email and so on – is quite simply overwhelming, they are inundated 24/7. One of the most powerful uses has been that of text messaging – the mobile phone's short messaging service – developed by Friedhelm Hillebrand. The message's 160-character limitation was a curious

creation of Hillebrand, who experimented on his typewriter in 1985 to construct what he perceived to be the ideal message length and deemed 160 characters as “perfectly sufficient” (Milian, 2009). His legacy lives on via Twitter, since the micro-blogging service allows a 140-character limit for text messaging – 140 characters for the Tweet and 20 for the Twitter username.

Google, Facebook and Twitter are increasingly the main way in which my students are getting their information and it is apparent that the same social media platforms that carry their personal information, are also the ways in which they get the bulk of their traditional ‘news’ as well. As a result, students are less likely to go looking for information, relying instead on inhaling the ‘news’ that is served to them. A further consequence is that with this non-stop deluge of information coming via mobile phone technologies, young people have less time, or interest to follow up on the key stories, unless they are personally engaged. They are so accustomed to reading ‘headlines’ on Facebook and Twitter that they only learn more about a story when further updates are then posted or tweeted.

This is significant to me as an educator, in terms of determining how to best meet the information needs of my students. Potentially, information sent to social media sites, in particular those such as Facebook and Twitter can be seen as a Trojan horse for delivering educational ‘news’; and since students are also receiving information limited to 140 characters, or as posts, teachers really need to re-think

how curriculum content could be making its way to students. This flood of information is so continuous that there is also a need for some type of information curation, that is, software that both teachers and students can use to make sense of this 24/7 influx in the context of education and learning. This is important, as for instance, in Twitter, information is coming thin and fast from traditional news providers via Tweets, with Re-Tweets from “followers”, plus occasional viral messages, with some Tweets being first-hand, others, second, and third, and so on. This means that ‘news’ is folded in with personal messages and asides, therefore, the challenge for educators might be to try to help their students critically sort through it all. However, this also suggests that information curation should be taught to young people as a skill to accompany them throughout their personal, student, and professional lives, and that it could even be more comprehensively embedded in future software and application designs for mobile phone technologies. In fact, Zoe Fox (2012) commenting on the first Reuters Institute Digital Report (2012) found that 43 per cent of Britons aged between 16 and 24 are now much more likely to access news through social networks, such as Facebook, rather than search engines. However, the report, which is aiming to chart the consumption of news in the digital age, found that only 11 per cent of over 45s access news stories through social media while 33 per cent still favour search engines. In the final section of this chapter I aim to address my second research question, that is, how is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined?

4.5 A space for identity

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, colour or sound, etc. I never catch *myself*, distinct from some such perception. (Hume, 1739: 300)

Faced with moments alone in their cars, on the street or at the supermarket checkouts, more and more people do not collect their thoughts, but scan their mobile phone messages for shreds of evidence that someone, somewhere, may need or want them. (Hargreaves, 2003: 25)

My second research question seeks to explore how the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space is being defined. Initially, these questions were established as guiding themes, they could even be regarded as lights. The metaphor (Lakoff, 1987) of a lighthouse here is a useful one, since these questions marked points from which to go out and explore, to begin an adventure with research, but also from which to eventually steer myself back, back towards an anchor point, and a place of rest, possibly, however temporary that might be. So, the second research question has become more significant than I first envisaged, and is certainly not to be perceived as *secondary*, in fact quite the opposite. Throughout the analysis and write-up of my findings I have come to realise, and subsequently reposition, this *relationship* between space, and mobile phone technologies and young people. For the purposes of this research, I have viewed the term 'relationship' cautiously, but understand it as one that represents

an association between two or more ideas, that may range from being fleeting to enduring, with the potential for interaction between these ideas being formed in the context of social, cultural and other influences. For instance, in this educational setting, the context for young people was often regulated by the college's expectations and protocol. The term also suggests, therefore, a level of connectivity and possible interdependence, an engagement and probable impact. Significantly though, in this research, I have now come to appreciate 'space' as a *parabola*, an overarching frame, but one that fluidly wraps itself around these ideas of: identity, mobile phone technologies, and young people; a parabola that rotates around its central axis – the young person. And yet within this trilogy, 'identity' still remains the difficult concept to pin down, everyone seems to know more or less, what it more or less means. Or do they? Identities can be regarded as *relational* in the sense that they often rely on *not* being something else. As Stuart Hall (1996) explains,

Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected. Every identity has at its 'margin', an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks'... So the 'unities' which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, over-determined process of 'closure'. (Hall, 1996: 5, emphasis in original)

Films such as 'The Bourne Identity' (2002) which signal its absence have even implied that it only becomes important or problematic when it is actually missing. My research, however, has been about using mobile phone technologies as lenses through which to look at identity, and in doing so, viewing how I might consider identities as being *socially* produced, embedded, and worked out in everyday social lives. That is, considering how, and in what ways, young people can be said to achieve their identities. Nevertheless, these insights are only ever *partial* since I have not attempted to cover every perspective on identity, or to give a comprehensive overview of all of the theorists. Rather, I have aimed to consider the ways in which identity might be thought about in the context of some of the issues that young people face in their daily lives when using their mobile technology. In this respect, I hope I have tried to show within the preceding section how some themes can be 'good to think with'. I think it is also worth noting that this research is also partial in the sense that it is not impartial, since I would hope that it argues for the salience of identity, and for educational research that explores and problematises this difficult, yet important notion, in the context of young peoples' lives.

The proliferation of mobile phone technologies is already giving rise to important changes in how young people experience 'space'. Castells (1989) has suggested that new spatio-temporal forms – "the space of flows" – have marked a shift in the importance of the meaning of a *place* to the patterns of networked interactions

that occur within it. Since mobile phone technology now means that we call specific individuals, not general places; this has also changed then the way in which young people micro-coordinate activities, as they can now iteratively work out the most convenient time and place to meet. This new or changing form of movement was infamously described as a "networked society" by the grand theorist Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996) and this (re)creation of social spaces and places, with their new speeds and rhythms, signifies an important contrast between everyday social life for young people and that of just a decade ago. But, young people are also now connecting to others that are inside and outside of their own 'borders' (Gotved, 2006) – 'borders' that can be defined in a physical sense such as, home, school, college, place of work; but, also in a non-physical way, such as by peer, or social group. As Simon Mainwaring (2011: 32) observes,

Through the Internet, a remarkable thing is happening. Technology is reawakening our innate human sense that we are all connected. The most obvious proof of this is the enormous growth of social networks. According to Alexa's Global Traffic Rank, by December 2010 Facebook had over 550 million registered users (as distinct from unique and active users); MySpace, 91 million; Twitter, 90 million; LinkedIn, 50 million; and Ning, 42 million. Such numbers are also in addition to the enormous networks built through email and the many other messaging services, including Skype, with 590 million users, Windows Live Hotmail, with 360 million; Yahoo Mail, with 284 million; and Gmail with 173 million. (Mainwaring, 2011: 32)

These dynamics are growing more important as the Internet becomes more and more social, and how far these (young) people-driven networks are operating independently from the business world is an interesting question. These networks

already appear to be connecting to third-parties, for example, Facebook's Open Graph platform, launched in April 2010, connects Facebook users with other websites via "Like," "Unlike," and "Recommend" buttons. These networks are not the direct focus of this particular research however, but as they continue to evolve their developments are worth noting as they may have the potential to significantly change the relationship between young people, that is young consumers, and the corporations that they are identifying and connecting *with*. So, there is a potentially significant 'relationship' between identity and the formation and the use of social space, as mobile phone technologies are an important medium for social practice and consequently therefore, for young people to build and adopt new kinds of identities. And, in doing so, they may also begin to demonstrate the ways in which identity is implicated *in* these social processes. However, in terms of my conversations with young people for the purposes of this research, the use of social media through their mobile phones appeared to be just another way for them to connect with their peers in a way that felt seamless in their everyday lives. It was apparent that social media was not specifically used as a networking tool by the students I spoke with to make contact with *new* people rather it predominantly maintained existing relationships with friends known mostly from college. But, the affordances of networked social media via mobile phones did make it possible for social relations to be maintained *beyond* the constraints of physical space. Furthermore, the text message, Facebook post, or Twitter Tweet, was a form of communication that was able to overcome any constraints of time and space that

might otherwise inhibit their communication, and had a particular role in sustaining social relationships for these young people at all times. However, mobile phone technologies also have the potential to *disrupt* 'borders', or the physical and social spaces and our understanding of the relationship, for example, between a "private" and "public" space, as in the case of Valentine and Holloway (2002) or in terms of space and time, as Green (2002: 291) recognised, "on the one hand, social space and time are 'extended', and on the other, they remain locally continuous. Communities are being formed in highly contradictory ways, which reflect new disjunctures, as well as new continuities, in the relation between space, time, and location."

There are also emerging questions about the etiquette of mobile phone use in educational environments, as on the one hand their use is formally regulated, yet on the other students are faced with the constant temptation of access. The latest report released by UK telecommunications regulator Ofcom (The Communications Market 2011 Report), is sprinkled with nuggets of information about mobile data consumption among smart phone users. Unsurprisingly, teens' views on social etiquette differ from adults', with a greater willingness to use their phone in a public place and less concern about disturbing others; however, teen mobile phone users think it is not OK to use their phone when disturbing others or interrupting others. This was echoed by Chris and Adam in our conversation about using a mobile phone in a classroom environment.

Me: What's your view about actually using them in a lesson, and whether that's a polite thing to do?

Chris: It's rude, it's rude to use them, yeah.

Adam: I think it could be made not to be rude, like the way you could get them so, I don't know, erm, eventually you've got to where you do your work on them, I mean we're probably a long way off now, but I'm sure something like that will happen in the future.

Chris: It's like computers, when you're in the computer suite you can go on anything on the Internet, but the teacher tells you not to go on it, and the trusts there with you, the thing is it's the same with your phone, you're told not to use your phone and when you're like texting and stuff in lessons unless it's important, then you shouldn't really do it, as it is quite rude on the teacher.

Me: Is it the same as if you're having a face-to-face chat with someone?

Adam: I suppose, well more and more, like we've got Chat now.

Chris: Well, it's like if I was having a conversation with you, and then like just started talking to Adam, and ignored what you were saying, it's like that if you're using your phone. It's like if I was talking to James, and you came along, and I went [*Chris looks over to Adam*] 'oh shut up' and just starting talking to you. It's basically what you're doing to the teacher, but you're texting.

Adam: Yes, it is kinda rude.

Chris: I think some find like if there's a really boring lesson they find it's alright to do, but they shouldn't.

Typical to other personal objects then, the mobile phone provides us with an insight into the identity of those who use them – since the object itself is actively interpreted by those around it. Its use by young people in situations is symbolically invested and can be viewed in terms of its contribution to interaction. At a basic level, the phone as an object in itself can be a 'space' with its focus for interaction.

But, it is also possible to see the object of the mobile phone as a 'totem' as it offers an insight into young peoples' tastes, styles, and possible allegiances to certain peer groups. This notion of investing objects with symbolic value is seen in Erving Goffman's view of the individual, but he also suggests that the individual can be symbolically central, and through interpersonal interactions can fill the role of the totem (Goffman, 1961). Goffman argues that ritual interactions are so thoroughly embedded in everyday activities, that we can be seen as continually recharging the symbolic value of our social relationships.

In terms of mobile phone communication, text messaging can be regarded in this light, since they carry out the social task of integrating the sender and receiver, have a phatic content, and are typically positively reinforcing. As Ling (2008: 66-67) indicates, "these small rituals are so common and so omnipresent for some people that they replace, or at least drown out, the functions of the more traditional totem... it is the daily and all-encompassing Goffmanian ritual interactions that perpetually remind us of our position in society." The phone itself – its model – is also an easy source of conversation, and provides young people with an insight into the status and style of others.

The celebration of difference and the project of the self are now to the fore. In our quest for a stylistic edge over others, we – those of us who can afford to – become responsible consumers, in pursuit of this or that bought identity, an identity which can soon be jettisoned to make way for the next makeover. (Hartley, 2009: 426)

Early on in our conversations Chris explained that the iPhone's rarity in college in itself makes it an individual and unique object,

Chris: ...Not many people have got them, so you can't get them muddled up with people, whereas like in the future, in the future when people get more, you're going to have to define it by, because that's all you can get [*Chris shows me his iPhone – with a black rubber case on it*] just that colour, no other shapes, or models.

It is also a conduit for phatic interaction and a variety of communications between youngsters. I observed that it could be used strategically, for example, by students in a classroom, making the device the *primary* engagement to (re)establish their 'borders,' or even boundaries, and thus assist in diverting the course of a lesson. But, it could also perform as a 'prop', since glancing at a mobile phone, or checking text messages could also present a potential break from the activity in hand. In addition to being a symbolic object, the mobile phone has also evolved into a significant repository of personal information for young people. As Chris extols,

Chris: The way it's moving at the moment, there's so much information on that [*Chris holds up his iPhone*].

So, it can perform as a repository for information required only for a short period of time – that is, a replacement for a personal reminder; but it can also serve as a repository for more permanent digital artefacts. Adam made regular use of the office functions available on his iPhone: the notes, diary, calendar and so on – into

which he had downloaded his college timetable, to be repeated weekly. Adam's mobile phone therefore enabled him to take control of his college life, from which he took comfort, providing him with a sense of security. Erving Goffman echoes this sentiment when he states that,

The store is another factor. The doctor often comes to the pharmacist's store for medicine, for bits of information, for conversation. In these conversations the man behind the counter has approximately the same advantage that a standing speaker has over a sitting audience. One thing that contributes to this feeling of the independence of the pharmacist's medical practice is his store. The store is, in a sense, a part of the pharmacist. Just as Neptune is pictured as rising from the sea, while at the same time being the sea; so in the pharmaceutical ethos there is a vision of a dignified pharmacist towering above shelves and counters of bottles and equipment, while at the same time being part of their essence. (Goffman, 1959: 99)

The key idea here is that parts of Adam's college environment are clearly connected to his cognitive system they are in effect part of his daily thinking – a part of his mind. This perhaps suggests that taken to its logical conclusion Adam's iPhone is therefore a part of his mind, since he is able to remember the important aspects of his college life by virtue of this information being on his iPhone – it is a part of his memory. And so essentially, the iPhone becomes not just a tool for Adam's cognition, it actually becomes a *part* of his cognition. Photographs are also intriguing artefacts as they may capture something that is significant to the individual – for example, the picture of a new girlfriend – that can then be saved and stored, offering a regular reminder to the viewer(s) (in this instance, Chris). But, from my discussions in the classroom with young people, I also noticed how

photographs could then be woven into the narrative of the self and could be used to illustrate topics that may have already arisen in a conversation with others. Car incidents and accidents were a frequently catalogued event and series of photographs were often eagerly displayed in the classroom to interested parties. So, these photographs could confirm participation in an event that might then be related to a topic of conversation, thus helping to facilitate a discussion. This electronic storage of photographs also enabled a far greater number of images to be readily available to young people, thus increasing their potential to be included in a conversation, and everyday social interactions.

The mobile phone is certainly the key mediation technology for young people to communicate with others. One intriguing view of mobile phones is that they are what Erving Goffman would refer to as a *secondary* engagement (Goffman, 1963: 44) with respect to a *primary* involvement. In terms of mobile phone use by young people, which particular involvement is the primary, or dominant one, and which is the secondary, or subordinate one, can become ambiguous – for example, with the unexpected nature of incoming calls. However, these secondary involvements may provide a key function in terms of filling in the gaps between other arrangements – for example, waiting for an activity to begin, such as a lesson – but, this type of involvement is usually easily collapsible when individuals are eventually called upon to participate fully. As Adam explains that he typically uses the games,

Adam: When you're bored, if you're in a car journey, train journey or a bus, it's just something to do.

Chris adds that,

Chris: ...In between lessons, walking from lesson to lesson, you can go on it and just like check football scores.

I observed that secondary involvements for students might also include small talk with others who are also walking through a corridor, on a break, waiting outside a classroom for a lesson to start, standing in the lift, etc. However, there is the question as to whether lessons are actually perceived as the primary activity by young people, and to what degree an activity such as sending and receiving text messages is actually secondary – as text messaging, in particular can often take place without disturbing the class, as a *parallel* interaction. These messages, however, are often composed and sent with the recognition that the user, the student, may soon have to shift activities and end that particular involvement. So, the use of the mobile phone by young people can fit into the 'empty' moments of their lives, but it can, and may, also be the *main* act – this is usually more the case with actual voice calls, than with text messages, for instance. The use of the mobile phone as a secondary device and young peoples' willingness to put it away when the main event does start indicates the importance of the engagement. Interestingly, since text messaging in particular is asynchronous, young people do not have to answer an incoming message immediately, meaning that it can be

used in any unoccupied moments surrounding whatever the main event actually is – this is often under the classroom table. This was repeatedly demonstrated by two A level Economics students, Harry and James, who discretely sent texts to each other after being reprimanded for disrupting the lesson with their verbal communications.

Goffman certainly provides a valuable insight into the use of mobile telephones in co-present situations, but essentially he is interested in “face-to-face” situations, that is, “the sense that they [individuals] are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in their sensing of being perceived” (Goffman, 1963: 17). His focus on the co-present is also seen in his discussion of “social establishments” in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,

The social establishment is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place. I have suggested that any social establishment may be studied profitably from the point of view of impression management. Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present an audience a given definition of the situation. This will include the concepts of own team and of audience and assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by the rules of politeness and decorum. We often find a division into back region, where the performance of routine is prepared, and the front region where the performance is presented. Access to these regions is controlled in order to prevent the audience from seeing the back stage and to prevent outsiders coming into a performance that is not addressed to them. (Goffman, 1959: 238)

This intimate relationship between mobile technology and social life was continually evident across my ethnographic research as young people (re)constructed their physical and technological spaces. Young people were using technology in the daily lives to suit their own purposes and mobility, and in this way as I indicated in the previous section, their movement between places could be made more efficient.

Young people were also using personal artefacts, including their mobile phone, to *colonise* their personal space and help them through the various exigencies of everyday college life, as their basic kit of mobile phone, wallet, and keys are a constant with them throughout their day. Furthermore, objects such as the mobile phone enable young people to then willingly retreat into a provisional and personalised cocoon. As a teacher, this presents an interesting paradox, since a smart phone may be used by a student to shut out his/her environment, for example by listening to music, thus making it the primary engagement. However, students regularly requested the option to do so, with a view to completing their work in the classroom undisturbed; suggesting that music in particular made their college work more tolerable as it enabled them to 'silence' their physical environment and to actually take control of their 'space' for learning. Students were therefore using their mobile phone technologies to facilitate *learning* as the primary engagement, with music being clearly positioned as the secondary involvement.

In *Asylums*, however, Goffman's work begins to really resonate with my own observations, when he discusses how artefacts can be invested with symbolic meaning. He describes how inmates used an "identity kit" for the management of their personal facades (Goffman, 1961: 20) that might include soap, needles for repairing clothes, and combs. Significantly it is from this set of artefacts that the individual then constructed a sense of self, with the understanding that this society did not trust him/her with simple everyday items and a place where they could be kept. In this way, these items gained status as symbols of identity, and in so in the same way, a young person's mobile phone can also be viewed as a personal symbol, and the style, model, and the nature of the device can therefore be interpreted.

Inevitably, the mobile phone then does seem to have an impact when explored in terms of its use. It can be used as an object for status, a repository of personal information, and as a kind of secondary engagement. It has the capacity to influence and even enhance interaction, but it can also be a barrier and disrupt familiar forms of interaction – directing attention elsewhere. However, Licoppe (2004) also suggests that the mobile phone does provide the potential for a "connected presence" to young people that can be contrasted with the nature of more traditional interaction between friends, where there are relatively longer periods of no contact. According to Licoppe, connected presence, "consists of

short, frequent calls, the content of which is sometimes secondary to the fact of calling. The continuous nature of this flow of irregular interaction helps to maintain the feeling of a permanent connection, an impression that the link can be activated at any time and that one can thus experience the other's engagement in the relationship at any time" (Licoppe, 2004: 141). Since participants are all updated more frequently due to this background traffic of information the mobile phone serves a purpose of really extending any original bonds – of friends and parents – into the folds of everyday life. The mobile phone, therefore, has the potential to develop stronger group bonds, even group ideology – as a result of this perpetual contact. It effectively becomes the mediation tool for young peoples' most intimate sphere, that is, their closest friends, and thus provides the elixir of communication for them. A sentiment that is also echoed by Kyle and Tom,

Kyle: I don't watch the news anymore because I can get it all on my phone.

Tom: If anything major happens in the world, like that Bin Laden, I heard about that through Facebook.

Kyle: Like the Japanese tsunami as well, because I was literally, what I was doing was my geography, at quarter past nine, read through Twitter and the seismol hit had gone '8.9 earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan', and I scrolled up and everybody was talking about it. So that was trending, so I literally, I ran downstairs, switched on the tv, started making all my notes, and someone else from class asked about it because they were out shopping or something, asked what was going on, so then I could take a photo of the tv and some of the images from Japan and then use, wow it's scary how much I use it actually [*Kyle looks to Tom holding his Blackberry*] I used Blackberry Messenger to send the photos to her so she could obviously see what's going on, and then you could retweet stuff. And you know, as cheesy as it sounds, one of the trending topics for about two months was 'pray for Japan', but what good that'll do, I don't know.

So, mobile communication does appear to be enhancing the interaction within small groups, but it is not necessarily the case that this is at the expense of interaction within the broader social and political sphere. This complex web of communication was illustrated last summer (2011), as the riots in London look set to spread to other parts of the UK, details were starting to emerge on how the rioters had been organising themselves. The medium of choice appeared to be the BlackBerry Messenger (BBM). The riots began as a protest at the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a resident of the Tottenham area of north London, a Facebook group quickly sprung up to commemorate Duggan; police and media attention were drawn to a particular post on the Facebook page which appeared to fan the flames, as well as the occasional tweet from rioters describing their deeds and where they were headed next. Some posted pictures of looting and burning police cars. But it soon became clear that BBM was by far the most popular means for rioters to communicate. BlackBerry devices were cheaper and more widespread than iOS or Android smart phones, and were owned by more than a third of British teens, according to the recent Ofcom study (2011). BBM — an instant message service for BlackBerry owners — was free, instantly available, one-to-many, and the authorities could not immediately trace it. BBM users also had to exchange PIN numbers, which kept their conversations private from the police. However, after a week of riots supporters also took to social networks to help reclaim the streets of London and other major cities throughout the country. By contrast, while rioters

took to the underground paths of BlackBerry Messenger to organise themselves, the highly spreadable mediums of Twitter and Facebook demonstrated that they were the perfect platforms for mobilising cleanup organisers and followers in the early aftermath of the rioting.

So, what does it mean for education researchers to unsettle their vision of the classroom from a container for learning, to a more dynamic space-in-the-making? What if we consider the classroom as just a point along a complex trajectory for learning, just another node in the network, or just one more potential parabolic framing device? Unsettling assumptions about how, when, and where young people learn begins to call for the development of a 'theory' of learning, or an educational practice based on phronesis, that is also expansive enough to fill the actual mobilities and spaces of young peoples' lives. It is a push to move the discourse from where educators *expect* learning to occur to the gaps – the spaces – of where it does actually happen. This should push educational ideas and potentially research in a number of compelling directions and to reconsider fundamental assumptions about spaces for engagement and affect. Although I have attempted to traverse literatures across a range of disciplines: education, media, sociology, and geography, the perspective on mobile phone technologies is obviously incomplete and shaped by my present investment - the struggle with my own limitations to corral a very broad and diverse discourse with an eye toward ultimately (re)presenting issues of mobile technologies, identity, and young people.

In this sense, I have favoured a consideration of the 'how' of mobile phone technologies, more than the 'what' - I have questioned how young people move, how these movements are changing, and how they might begin to be studied, with a view to their education and learning. Indeed, implicit in my analysis is the notion that mobile phone technologies reveal the particular types of powerful gaps, or spaces *for* learning.

However, while young people are experiencing new opportunities to reshape evolve and develop new social arenas of development, particularly those that relate to learning, they are not simply caught up in some idealised version of global life that includes a continual instantaneity with technology. Their lives are still being located and positioned in relation to an economic discourse of power; however, the spaces they occupy, and through which they learn, are no longer simplistic containers, are not bounded, and do not remain static. In the final chapter, I will conclude by drawing together these ideas of how we might think about and do research on mobile phones and young people.

5 Chapter Five: Conclusion

As people continue to microblog, and update their status via social media, it soon becomes a competition of who's doing the coolest thing... Over time, each of these posts contributes to *your* individual brand. (Qualman, 2009: 43)

In chapter two, I outlined how today's dominant system of education is still rooted in the values and methods of industrialism, and in that sense we needed to shift the paradigm for education. Industrial systems of education are essentially impersonal. They emphasise conformity in the curriculum and in teaching methods, and standardisation of assessment. And, simply put, national systems of accountability treat students as the raw materials and examination results as the outcomes, or products. But, what these impersonal systems overlook is that education is typically, and inevitably, personal. As an educator, I have found that students, not surprisingly, learn best if they are engaged, interested, and motivated personally, otherwise they tune out, and eventually turn off. I think that it is important to understand this. This generation of young people is living in a connected, information-driven environment and their facility with digital technologies and their appetite for networking point to learning opportunities if the conditions are right. Creating these conditions means customising education to each community of students and staff. Thinking creatively about how to personalise and customise education is what this thesis is really all about. Each college is different, and every student is unique. Consequently, there is not a single model of this new paradigm of education that will work everywhere. But,

then that is the whole point of this thesis. The task is for educators to think about these stories in relation to their own communities, and to consider what works best with their own students.

The four areas that I discussed in chapter four illustrate just some of the potential implications of mobile phone technologies for the formation of young peoples' identities. The mobile has an immediate symbolic value to young users, not least through the technological possibilities and through the appearance of the phone itself. Through its basic appearance, decorative adaptations, the choice of ringtones, alerts, backgrounds, and downloaded applications, the mobile itself provides signals about the user's identity, or presentation of the self. Furthermore, the use of language, spelling, their actual way of interacting in dialogues, and the use of social media begin to reveal things about the user's 'personal settings'. However, mobile phone technologies also have the potential to gradually take on even more importance, so that eventually they become less like objects, and more like tools to help facilitate the performance of lived experiences, that is, they are actively part of assisting in agency. Part of the identities of young people, like their mobile phone use, is about wearing and showing, as young consumers (and producers) in a modern consumer society. But, there is always the threat that these changing, commodified relationships, where they now find themselves culturally embedded can be short lived. So, young people literally witness their objectified identities imitating that of the product they have just purchased (or

created), that is, from being purchased (or created), to being disposed of (or destroyed). However, more positively mobile phone technologies can be the glue that holds together various nodes in a young person's personal network. The technology becomes the predominant tool for the coordination of everyday life, for updating oneself via particular forms of social relations, and for the collective sharing of experiences. It is therefore the mediator of meanings that may be extremely important in the ongoing formation of young peoples' identities. This constant flow of (re)presentations and the need to identify with others result in a fluidity of identity, but this also goes beyond the ongoing process of identity formation, to encompass the increasingly intense pace of communication – a seamless liquidity – that is characteristic of contemporary social life. Once again, I am reminded of one of my student's remarks,

Tom: I think it's just the speed of communication. That, if technology means that you can communicate quicker than speaking it, pressing a button is obviously quicker than saying a sentence, so it'll literally come down to pressing a screen [*Tom simulates touching a screen*] and that'll send something to somewhere.

Finally, the mobile phone also supports and enhances the maintenance of social space. Young people live in a period of time – historically, as well as in terms of age – which is characterised by both a personal and collective perceived sense of fragmentation and uncertainty. One Economics student explains how reassuring social media has been throughout his revision and study leave,

Tom: It's quite good sometimes, because you get a sense of how everyone else is panicking about their A levels as well and it's quite nice.

They also have to deal with the sometimes conflicting expectations of friends, parents, and college. The mobile phone offers the possibility for testing oneself in light of shared values, norms, and codes, for negotiating personal and collective identity, and for establishing a sense of belonging. It can support and enhance the maintenance of social groups and the feeling of belonging to a group, but also crucially, the feeling of being oneself.

All of these areas have significant implications for us as educators, particularly in terms of the traditional structures of classrooms, schools and colleges, and learning. Most schools and colleges were built on the idea that knowledge and teachers are scarce. Therefore, when there is limited access to information and you need to deliver what you do have to every young person with little information and communication technology, you build what schools and colleges are today: grouped by age, separated by discipline, with classrooms run by a subject specialist and expert, who can manage the successful completion of a curriculum with a batch of a hundred or so students at a time. Teachers deliver knowledge in discrete parts, monitoring students' progress through one-size-fits-all assessments, deeming them 'educated' when they have answered to the required level. For over fifteen years I have known this type of system intimately and performed within it with each annual cohort of students. But, what happens when knowledge and

teachers are not as scarce? What happens when it is easier for students to connect electronically to resources that help them learn? What happens, over the next few years or so, when more and more young people gain access to learning spaces through the mobile phone technologies that they carry with them in their pockets? What happens when young people can get knowledge on their own, anytime they need it, from anywhere they are connected, from anyone who might be connected with them? Based on my research so far, things are already changing. When young people use their mobile phone technologies there appears to be the potential for meaningful, experiential, constructivist learning to occur. That is not to say that face-to-face learning is no longer important. It is, but it is the melding of the two that will begin to shape educational environments over the next decade and to augment young peoples' cognitive and social capacities for the sorts of futures that these might then offer them. As one Business and Economics student optimistically asserts,

Kyle: It's all so connected, I think having that in the workplace, but already knowing about the same sort of technology from the classroom would set you up so much nicer for a business.

Now, at the end of this thesis, I see this research as really the beginning of a process of connecting ideas and concepts in order to create an imaginative, multi-dimensional field of study. In this conclusion I have already revisited some of the themes explored previously, drawing them together to support this new departure

into how we might think about and do research on mobile phones and young people. I will also now reflect on the nature of this thesis and the way in which it has been written, since it is my view that both content and style can be important in developing 'new' ways of thinking. I also hope that the way in which I have put these ideas together will contribute to fresh ways of developing and eventually deepening this particular field. One of my core aims in this thesis has been to foreground the areas of young peoples' technological lives that had often been ignored or left absent from the discipline of education and pedagogy. To this end, I have focused particularly on mobile phone technologies, identity, and certain aspects of space; and I have explored how some young peoples' identities may seem less comprehensible without embracing these dimensions. My work therefore seeks to bring together these 'hidden' issues and quite deliberately does not dwell too much on some of the more familiar terrain such as recent trends in social media.

Other important aims have been more methodological and epistemological than substantive, namely finding out how the ways in which young people interpret the culture of mobile phones can be better understood, and then linking this research data with theorising in a new way. In terms of this second point, I refer to the process of *phronesis* that offered me a way of proceeding based on exemplary knowledge, rather than seeking validation solely through reference to a body of theory or generalised knowledge. By this I mean that I have taken a view across

the research with which I have been closely involved, and have identified themes that are pertinent to educators such as myself regarding contemporary questions about young peoples' mobile phone use. I have revisited many of the observations and interviews that I have carried out in order to interrogate the accounts that I collected in different ways. This has been possible only because, for example, my knowledge of the full range of interview data available has enabled me to recognise issues across the interviews and not just within them. This in turn means that I am in a position to occupy a particular intellectual space by returning to these narratives and my educational practice that I know well, rather than solely relying on the reported outcomes from work created by other researchers. I have also tried to avoid a narrowing of focus, which might have been the result of interviewing such a small sample of young people. This has allowed for a kind of freedom to make links and connections, and to delve deep into the data from the young people and my own educational practice.

In the previous chapters I have also relied on different methods of creating meaning. In places this has consisted of outlining and criticising, or developing existing ideas and arguments; but I have also followed less familiar routes in seeking to deploy the data evocatively and with imagination, rather than simply as evidence. Therefore, some of the ideas that arise in this way may still be suggestive, rather than entirely conclusive. However, I accept that in re-reading transcripts of interviews it is always possible to find new insights and, with

different conceptual frameworks, it might be equally possible to use those ideas to then open up new avenues for thinking and research. I also sought to quote verbatim from these interviews to deepen my understanding, since as Corden and Sainsbury (2006) put it,

There was some belief that peoples' own spoken words sometimes made more impact than the researcher's narrative in conveying life experiences to readers. [...] For some researchers this belief was reinforced by response to their articles from readers, and their experiences at conferences when they had observed the impact of verbatim quotations presented as overheads during presentations. (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006: 13)

This reflects my own purpose in drawing extensively on participant observation and interview data – I want to allow personal meanings to enter the text (no matter how imperfectly) as a means of reflecting young peoples' lives. But I also recognise that such quoted passages can introduce ambiguity and may even then disrupt the text. This presence of speech also reveals how my researcher's narrative might then seek out how to smooth out any possible contradictions and untidiness. Ultimately it might seem that in the interviews young people were allowed to reflect their personal and social worlds as messy and confusing, while it was my task to impose some kind of order on this bewildering array of data in my analysis. The quotations therefore, can create a tension with the clarity of an argument that I might give, but rather than this being a negative thing, it reminds me of the difficulties of weaving together such complex data of young peoples' lives, with any clear explanations of such data. On occasion, I have also ventured

into an autobiographical approach which I have seen as important to introduce, where appropriate, more depth to certain accounts in order to allow the reader greater access to the my mode of expression, feelings and recollections. My use of the autobiographical voice is to some extent experimental, but is a crucial part of my aim to acknowledge the interplay between the lives of those being researched, and the person carrying out the research. I thus bring together in one place, a different way of knowing and understanding (again, no matter how imperfectly), which you might feel sometimes creates rather more the effect of a collage, or bricolage even (Lévi-Strauss, 1974), rather than perhaps a more conventional, linear argument. I am also aware that as a result, my chapters do not all have the same shape or form; perhaps then, some sections might work for some readers more than others. The challenge always inherent in researching the lives of young people is the ability to reflect the complexity and ambiguity of their lives, without being too confusing and incomprehensible. I now believe that this can be achieved by thinking of data analysis in terms of threads, or layers of meaning which, when finally woven together can capture – whether descriptively, or evocatively – a reality from young peoples’ lives. These threads and themes themselves are not necessarily uniform, so the sections and chapters that follow are not necessarily uniform either, and are deliberately intended to make a cumulative argument and final picture.

In this thesis, I have also aimed to provide ways of thinking about young people and mobile phone technologies, in ways that do not automatically fall into the discrete debates on identity and space. Although I have had to engage with these debates in order to establish my starting point, I have paid more attention to mapping new ways of thinking, or of combining ideas, within a fresh conceptual framework. I have now spent more than seven years researching this field, and the overlapping conceptual fields of signs, agency, liquidity, with young peoples' identities and spaces suggest to me an exciting, interdisciplinary, and intellectually flexible way forward. These can, of course, be combined with the more traditional sociological concepts of class, ethnicity, gender and so on, but the main aim should, in my view, remain attentive to what matters to young people in the (re)construction of their everyday lives.

Throughout this thesis, I have alluded to threads, and weaving, images that are deliberately evocative to try and assist in capturing, in writing, the complexities of young peoples' lives. I have wondered whether my borrowing of visual terms from the creative arts perhaps reflects the lack of terminology in the social sciences to evoke the textures of such lives. However, it may also be that it is important to develop a language for researching mobile phone technologies to become even better equipped at encapsulating the lives of young people. These imaginative and creative terminologies might then nudge existing understandings and meanings into different shapes and directions. In the same way I have taken insights from

anthropology, economics, education, and sociology to stretch the boundaries of my research in different ways. The point here is that it sets the analysis of my research data in particular off on an intellectual trajectory that encourages enquiry through an awareness of connection, and relationship, no matter how untidy and messy these may be. But I would hope that this does not come across as whimsical, since it is closely related to my understanding of young peoples' lives as derived both from my work as a teacher and a researcher in a college environment and the significance of developing an exemplary knowledge. In other words, it is grounded epistemologically speaking to promote a new direction for research and intellectual thought in this field.

In this final thread of my conclusion, I return to my ethical commitment of (re)presenting the everyday lives of young people. As Johnson posits, "most importantly, we need to do justice to the real lives of the individuals we study" (2005: 18). And, arguably, the recent spell of grand theorising of technology has merely positioned individuals as just the subjects and nodes in the network. So, it is with this in mind that I have conducted my research, in an attempt to connect ideas, concepts, themes, reflections and practice; and in doing so to give space to the tensions and the contradictions, the messiness and the ambiguities, that make up this field. Ultimately, I have striven to do this in a way that begins to map out a new field of educational enquiry for young people, namely that of iSpace. This term begins to set the scene for describing the personal landscapes that are being

(re)created by young people in educational environments using their mobile technologies. But, as one student finally cautions to any educator regarding the use of mobile technology in the classroom,

Tom: What is relevant? When is it not relevant? How can you define all that stuff? You can't put limits on it."

I suggest that we now need to seize upon this pivotal moment to imagine and design this vital area of contemporary digital culture with young people. There is an interplay of commercial and non-commercial forces and spaces that we need to map and work with to make our mobile phone technologies and identities the rich, fertile places that we want them to be. Perhaps then, this is the culminating argument of this thesis. The development of these visions, about the possibilities of mobile phone technologies, deserves much more centrality in the educational debates, on a par with those concerning the internet, than the subject currently enjoys. This is important, not just for those of us concerned with technology and education – but indeed for all of us who care about the future of young people generally. As Tom asserts, we need to develop an unconstrained idea of open, mobile, networked, cultures for learning. Digital technologies are important for identity formation and cultural expression, and it would appear that the mobile phone/smartphone (especially the iPhone) has galvanized young people to articulate their concerns and desires regarding their educational experiences. It would seem appropriate then, to elaborate a research agenda and usher in an

urgent debate about educational futures with mobile phone technologies – their affordances, conditions, models, users, audiences, and implications. This is one attempt to initiate this, of course. There are also other debates to consider about access, connectivity, representation, and resourcing in mobile phone cultures. The interplay of economic forces, facilities and spaces for culture on mobile phone platforms also needs to be understood and tended to further. Thus, we need a detailed set of understandings, frameworks and debates on how mobile phone technologies, and other mobile media, might continue to unfold, what their cultural discourses are, as well as exploring the utopian imaginings of what kinds of educational futures might be possible with these mobile phone technologies, and how we all could bring this about.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

THE REVIEW PANEL 2008

RESEARCH PLAN:

My title: iSpace? Identity & Space – A Visual Ethnography with Young People and Mobile Phone Technologies.

Introduction

The focus of this research is on how young people in Cheshire, England use their mobile phone technologies. The overarching research question is concerned with the relationship between identity construction and the spaces that young people develop in respect of these. Many young people today are spending more and more time not in a specific location, but on the move from one place to another; they are *on the go* in a physical, virtual, and digital landscape. So, how is mobile phone technology influencing the ways in which young people live and learn, see themselves, relate to others, fall for particular technologies, and use space? According to Tilley (2007) one influential aspect of a material, disposable culture is commodification and it plays “a fundamental part in the creation and establishment of forms of sociality” (Tilley, 2007). This research will explore how our social and technological networks are overlapping; as Keleman and Smith (2001) recognise, young people are organising themselves into neo-tribes and creating digital neighbourhoods such as those in MySpace, Bebo, and Facebook. Exploring this *conspicuous* consumption and viewing the use of mobile phone technologies as a *social* process, rather than simply as an *economic* exchange, could lead to new ways of understanding the significance of these commodities and their possible contribution to the construction of social identities. In recent years in schools and colleges we have witnessed the proliferation of mobile technologies, from phones to laptops, from PDAs to iPods, and their use spreads rapidly among young people, who carry them along, become attached to them, and *go places* with them. It could be argued that one of the reasons why mobile phones have inspired such unprecedented adoption is because they can more quickly and easily increase young peoples’ capacity to make connections to “content, context and community – all of which can result in more extended and powerful learning experiences” (Edwards and Usher, 2008). Distinctively this research will provide an opportunity for young people to articulate their experiences, where the aim is to better understand how we as educators can interpret these issues, and the potential they may present for the creation of new learning environments. Importantly, therefore, what this research recognises is, is that it is through technologies such as these that young people now appear to (re)define themselves, (re)create their identities, and (re)produce patterns of socialability; and consequently these new, emerging spatial arrangements have a direct bearing on the types of social interactions deemed as desirable, or possible. An integral part of this research, therefore, is also the search for alternative methodologies that would be more beneficial for investigating this new digital media landscape, and hence this study also uniquely aims to help overcome the present absence of a visual ethnography in this particular field of educational research.

The research questions & background literature

The evidence base from which educators, researchers and policy makers can presently draw is particularly limited. It is, however, possible to theme the current research in the field of learning and mobile phone technology in terms of the *grand theorists* such as Castells (2000) who reminds us that, “networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies”, and that “this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of the specific social interests expressed through the networks: the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power.” The work of Hine (2000) also examines the relationship between the online and offline world suggesting that the Internet “represents a place, cyberspace, where culture is formed and reformed.” Other

researchers at the macro level such as Humphreys (2005) also conclude that mobile phones allow for greater flexibility in communication between individuals and that this may lead to a collectivising function in society as a whole, “wireless technologies may privatise and publicise, atomise and collectivise.” But some suggest that the idea of neighbourhood, as we know it, has changed. Sherry Turkle (2001) describes a “life on the screen” that is no longer confined to even that of a desktop computer at home, but distributed across many miniaturised screens, networked into a web of parallel worlds. As a result, neighbourhoods, and communities, are dissolving, and re-organising; a situation that leaves young people to virtually roam about. Clay Shirky (2008) aptly puts it in the title of his latest book, “Here Comes Everybody: The Power Of Organizing Without Organizations.”

However, it has become increasingly apparent to me since I began the Doctorate in Education in 2005, that there also exists a number of studies in this field which are mostly (post)positivistic with a core ontological assumption that ‘reality’ is an independent, concrete entity, rather than a social construction. Researchers might be using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, but their articles rarely assume an ontology based on purposive actors involved in the social construction of ‘reality’. These studies frequently ‘neutralise’ the researchers and the researched, and then use experiments, questionnaire surveys, and observations to determine causal factors for educational improvement. However, in producing performative, often oversimplified, universalistic ‘truths’ they are ultimately constructing findings that are not as helpful as they might be to Post-16 educators and students (Salovaara, 2005; Stahl, 2005; Hummel, Burgos, Tattersall, Brouns, Kurvers and Koper, 2005; Soller, 2004).

For the minority operating at a more Interpretivist micro level, attention is occasionally given to identity formation. For example, Oksman and Turtianen (2004) argue that the central factor in mobile communication is, “to define who belongs to important social communities and how self-presentation is constructed on a social stage in relation to others.” Valentine and Holloway (2002) also comment that when technologies are used in different times and places, they constitute varying forms of “private” and “public” space. They suggest that on-line activities can be considered as “private” and an “escape” from everyday off-line interaction. Gotved (2006) continues, “one could say that cyberspace is folded into urban culture as just another neighbourhood, and that the crossing of borders is an everyday activity, non-dramatic and pursued without awareness.” Keleman and Smith (2001) explain further that, “unpacking the ‘virtual community’ presupposes an understanding of the ways in which individuals experience one another and adjust to one another within each neo-tribe and across neo-tribes to ensure the continuity of social life.” Finally, in terms of the actual physical location of mobile phone use, Caronia (2005) notes the significance of “no-where-places” and “no-when times” – “it is fascinating to notice how some communication technologies have given sense to these unmeaningful times and places.” The research questions, therefore, that I would like to form the backbone of this research design particularly build on this latter tradition at the micro level, yet still aim to utilise the more positivistic work when necessary to provide direction (for example, the recent statistical findings from the Mobile Life Youth Report 2006 published by The Carphone Warehouse, in conjunction with The London School of Economics and Political Science¹).

My aim is to design an in-depth study within this broad area of research that covers the use of mobile phone technologies by young people, but one that can nevertheless be exploratory and fluid. The specific research questions that now follow from this are:

¹ The Mobile Life Youth Report, 2006 – www.mobilelife2006.co.uk

1. How are young peoples' identities shaping the meaning and use of mobile phones within material culture?
2. How is the relationship between identity and the creation and use of social space being defined?
3. How can the ways in which young people interpret the culture of mobile phones be better understood?

My first research question focuses on the culture of mobile phone use by young people, and how their identities shape the meaning and use of mobile phones within material culture. Kenway and Bullen (2001) describe a continuing hybridisation of forms of entertainment, education and consumption, and call "the cultural form, which arises from this blend of consumption and information and communication media, consumer-media culture." Their core argument rests on the proposition that an understanding of generational identities and relations must recognise the powerful role of this cultural form. However, I intend to go further and propose a unique deconstructive approach whereby young people need to be offered ways of understanding how they use mobile phone culture as a commodity and medium in identity building and how, at the same time, they are used *by* material culture. Mobile phone technology is potentially, therefore, a part of a dynamic process of young people (re)constructing their social identities. Secondly, mobile phone technologies have the potential to *disrupt* physical and social spaces and our understanding of the relationship, for example, between a 'private' and 'public space'. Green (2002) suggests that, "on the one hand, social space and time are 'extended', and on the other, they remain locally continuous. Communities are being formed in highly contradictory ways, which reflect new disjunctures, as well as new continuities, in the relation between space, time, and location." So, there is a potentially significant relationship between identity and the formation and use of social space, as mobile phone technologies are an important medium for social practice and consequently therefore, for young people to build and adopt new kinds of identities. In doing so, they may also begin to demonstrate the ways in which identity is implicated *in* these social processes. Finally, this study aims to extend my search for alternative research methodologies that would be more beneficial for investigating this new digital media landscape as the field is currently lacking in this respect. Keri Facer's (2002; 2003) catalytic work made me realise that meaning can be produced not only in words and language, but also through photography, moving image, gesture, and sound, and that in adopting this type of multi-modal research, or aspects of it, I had the potential to raise some very different questions about how technology might be being used by young people in, or out of a college context. As Maclure (2003) puts it, "the point is to interrupt, or disrupt, the processes by which research knowledge is customarily produced, and treated by those who read it as self-evident." My desire to find new ways of engaging with the processes by which young people construct meaning has led to my introduction to ethnography. Ethnography can be regarded as a "reaction to positivism and associated purely quantitative approaches to the study of life" (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005) as there is an assumption that social behaviour cannot be reduced to 'variables' and instead there is an emphasis on understanding how people construct and interpret their social worlds. This approach to my research encouraged me to *doing visual ethnography* as "conversation is filled with verbal references to images and icons... Sometimes informants refer to absent images (including photographs) or they might introduce material images or objects into a conversation" (Pink, 2007) and seemed more consistent with investigating aspects of a material culture. Ethnographic research also emphasises the discovery of theory, rather than the positivist focus on the testing of theory and its verification or falsification.

Proposed methodology / analyses

In order to enable me to do this important research I recognise the need to become an Interpretivist, referred to by Guba (1990) as Constructivism, that entails an ontology whereby social 'reality'

consists of socially constructed meanings; it is not some ‘thing’ that can be interpreted in different ways, it *is* the interpretations. In its epistemology, knowledge is therefore derived from everyday meanings. Social ‘reality’ is the product of its inhabitants, a world that is (re)produced as a part of their everyday activities together. Language can therefore be seen as the medium of social interaction and structures social ‘reality’. Hence, my ontology is relativist, and epistemology subjectivist. Ethnography is my preferred methodology and I am committed to exploring my research questions on the basis of, though not exclusively by, participant observation. Participant observation is a characteristic feature of the ethnographic approach, but I intend my fieldwork to also include other research methods, such as conversations and video interviews, to provide insight into how social actors are representing themselves. However, I recognise that in the process of writing about mobile phone technologies, I may end up stripping away the fundamental non-verbal qualities of the objects I am researching through this very process. Consequently, I am committed to experimenting with other ways of ‘telling’, in particular visual media, and the use of images for the study of material objects “to reduce the puzzlement” (Geertz, 1973). I believe that a visual methodology should not necessarily be confined to just *producing* visual data, and intend to use photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) as ‘the visual’ and ‘the conversational’ are usually closely intertwined. Visual data, including photographs taken using a mobile phone, could therefore act as a medium of communication between myself and the ‘interviewee’. This data could be used to contextualise personal recollections as part of the photo-elicitation interview process as “the power of the photo lies in its ability to unlock the subjectivity of those who see the image differently from the researcher...” (Harper, 2003). Hence, photo-elicitation interviewing introduces a more ‘reflexive’ way by which I can develop questions, and by participants to provide a means of communicating aspects of their lives (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Stanczak, 2004), and supports what Holstein and Gubrium (1997) refer to as the “active interview”.

In relation to my ontological perspective, I therefore have an epistemological position that suggests that observation fieldnotes, and interview transcripts (taken from digital video recordings) can provide data to support these ontological properties. So, my research will incorporate a textual ‘construction’ of visual observations, and interviews to explore social practices, in order to then try to ‘read’ these phenomena in a literal sense. However, these ‘readings’ of visual data will not be treated as though they are direct representations of ‘reality’, as visual images, and visualisation are always ‘constructed’. Therefore, I also intend to continue reflexively ‘reading’ the visual data, and actively using and understanding my own experiences through the use of a research diary in exploring what they mean. I will now move the discussion on to how I aim to *analyse* and construct an interpretation of the qualitative data that I collect. In order to develop this understanding I will need to continually think about and engage with those to whom the interpretation is being made. So, the type of analysis that I will use will depend on what my research actually uncovers, that is, it will be *emergent*. The approach for analysing qualitative data whereby theory is discovered from data, rather than being imposed on it is called grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bryman and Burgess, 1994). Blaikie’s (2007) “abductive research strategy” is perhaps closest to my Interpretivist perspective that is, moving back and forth between my own data, experiences, and broader concepts. This analytical approach, therefore, should be consistent with my subjective epistemological position. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) also provides a way of closely analysing text as it shows how language figures in social processes and is critical in the sense that it aims to show the non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations, particularly in terms of power and domination. I am reminded that there is no such thing as ‘innocent’ research and that I should also practise my own estrangement, interpreting the ‘silences’, or ‘resistances’, as “the repetition compulsion, hyperbolic resistance of non-resistance, is in itself *analytic*...” (Derrida, 1998). I realise the importance of reflexively ‘interrupting’ my data and challenging “the transparency of the gaze” (Piper and Frankham, 2007) to help me to ‘interrogate’ how particular views are (re)presented. However, in undertaking this kind of analysis, I recognise that a singular,

‘true’ meaning is not then suddenly revealed from behind the text, but rather new questions might be asked, or responded to. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest, “theories are not added only as a final gloss or justification; they are not thrown over the work as a final garnish. They are drawn on repeatedly as ideas are formulated, tried out, modified, rejected, or polished.” I will be directing my efforts towards *making* arguments based on *interpretations*, whereby I am continually thinking about and engaging with those to whom the argument is being made as well as, the grounds on which they think the argument stands. Therefore, the making of arguments is a *relational* process, and there is a sense of engagement with others in terms of how I will do it. So, in terms of actually making my arguments *convincing*, I will need to analyse the claims that I am making as part of this process, and on what, or whose authority they are based. The intent, is to create a *reflexive* text, “this truth is not based on mimesis, but rather is grounded in the process of self-formulation and self-understanding...” (Denzin, 1997). Making this process ‘transparent’ should enable me to demonstrate to others how I reached my arguments that is, how I got there. I think that it is useful to consider issues of validity both in terms of the validity of my research methods and, also, in terms of the validity of my data analysis, and interpretations. The use of multiple research methods should help me explore my research questions in a multi-faceted way. This should enhance the validity of my research, in the sense that it suggests that social phenomena are multi-dimensional and that my research is attempting to grasp more than one of those dimensions; but, I will *not* be using it as a means of checking out one method against another. The validity of my data analysis and interpretations is dependent upon the validity of my research methods as my interpretations cannot be valid unless the sources of my data have enabled me to get at the concepts I say that I am getting at. As an Interpretivist, the challenge is to demonstrate that my interpretations are valid without resorting to claims to a universal objective ‘truth’. Therefore, I should be prepared to ‘trace’ the route by which I have arrived at my interpretations as reflecting my ontology. I think that what I am essentially saying here is that I intend to continue to justify the process through which my interpretations will be made. This should then enable me to show that I have reflexively understood my own ‘place’, or analytical ‘lens’ in the research, and have responsibly tried to ‘read’ the data from multiple socially constructed realities, what Spencer (2007) referred to as adopting a “strong reflexivity.”

Progress to date and future timetable

September 2005 – September 2007	<i>Completed Assignments 1 – 3.</i>
October 2007 – March 2008	<i>Updated substantive research / literature review. Visual methodologies / ethnography research. Pilot work – conducted a video interview.</i>
April – June 2008	<i>Review Panel preparation.</i>
July – August 2008	<i>Further pilot work, including data analysis (40hrs.).</i>
September – December 2008	<i>Literature review research (16hrs.). Begin research diary and participant observation (16hrs.).</i>
January – April 2009	<i>Conduct video interviews – 3 (3 hrs. per interview, including 2 hrs. preparation/organisation; 9 hrs. total). Analyse research data (20 hrs. per interview; 60 hrs. total)</i>
May – July 2009	<i>Follow-up interview(s) – 3 (3 hrs. per interview, including 2 hrs. preparation/organisation; 9 hrs. total).</i>
August 2009	<i>Analyse research data (20 hrs. per interview; 60 hrs. total).</i>
September 2009 -	<i>Write-up thesis.</i>

Any access and ethical issues (also see attached Ethical Statement)

As I am researching people's behaviours, asking them questions, and potentially discussing visual data, I have a responsibility to those who become involved in the research. As a framework for thinking through these ethical issues Guillemin and Gillam (2004) distinguish between two different dimensions of ethics in research, which they term "procedural ethics" and "ethics in practice". They suggest that "procedural ethics" cannot resolve all the ethically important moments in qualitative research, and advocate the use of reflexivity as a means to understanding how "ethics in practice" can be achieved. Ultimately, the responsibility needs to lie with myself, as "procedural ethics" may not cover all possible outcomes. As a research student I acknowledge that there are ethical issues in my research that I can consider in advance of conducting my research. I will need to obtain 'informed consent' from potential participants that will provide information in a language they understand about the research. This will include what the research is about, who is undertaking, and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted. I will request written consent that their involvement is voluntary, and for those under eighteen would also obtain consent by proxy from their parents. If I choose to make any digital audio or video recordings, or wish to use any photographic data produced by the participant, I will also obtain consent as to how this data might be used. This may include activities such as, studying recordings for use in the thesis, and permitting the use of written transcripts or recordings by other researchers. In any use, names will not be identified if participants consider it desirable. However, I also recognise that I will have to think through ethical issues as they arise throughout my research, and respond appropriately. An absolutely basic consideration is avoiding causing 'harm' (including emotional, and social 'harm') to participants in my research. For example, the potential for 'harm' in my research may stem from the nature of the interaction between myself, and the participant during the 'interview' process. I therefore need to respect the autonomy, dignity, and privacy of research participants, and the risks of failing to do so, and that the participant has the right to withdraw at any point, or to refuse to allow data to be used. I feel that it is through these interactions that my integrity as a researcher is really on the line. I am not certain that "procedural ethics" fully deals with all these specific issues of potential 'harm'; however, it does enable me to reflect and think about the potential 'harms' in my research in advance. Therefore there does seem to be an important role for reflexivity when I am in the 'field' and dealing with difficult, unexpected ethical concerns as they immediately arise. In terms of my research ethics, this means continuously examining the context of my research, not just in relation to the research methods and data, but also in terms of my role as a researcher, and the roles of the participants. Being a reflexive researcher also includes scrutiny of the interpersonal aspects of my research, particularly the interactions between myself and the participants as I have already suggested.

As an Interpretivist there is already the assumption that my research will be undertaken in a particular way, and this impacts on my ethical position. For example, in making the research a joint endeavour with my students, they can become 'participants' in the research, rather than 'subjects' (or 'interviewees' even). In practical terms this can be achieved in a number of ways, the first is by free and informed consent, rather than conscription; the second, as I have already mentioned above, can be through the nature of the interaction. This might also involve encouraging the participants to have a say in what questions are being asked. It might also include placing them in control of whether they elicit their photographs as part of a photo elicitation interview. I feel that this potentially is a proactive way of respecting participants' autonomy, and complements, yet goes beyond, the 'minimal' notion of the informed consent that also governs research integrity.

The expected contribution to knowledge

Substantively I am very interested in qualitatively researching how the concepts of *identity* and *space* relate to the use of mobile technologies by young people, as part of my desire to now do a *visual ethnography* that is consistent with my *Interpretivist* ontology and *subjectivist* epistemology. The major outcomes of the research therefore, will be recommendations and strategies for young

people, educators, and policy makers, which brings added value to how research might impact on developing equitable educational practice. Secondly, this research should pose significant questions for institutional education as it offers a more nuanced understanding and potential resource for educational practitioners and researchers for justifying change in what constitutes knowledge, the way it is presented and disseminated (textbook), delivered (pedagogy), the time of learning (the course), and space of learning (the classroom). Thirdly, the study will provide a contribution to research methodology for a field that is largely dominated by (post)positivistic practice; consequently researchers and educators that are more qualitatively sensitive to the ways in which young people are using mobile phone technologies, and hence more critically aware of the learning issues and pedagogical challenges, would emerge. To put it boldly, mobile phone technologies can be viewed as a cultural construction shaping identities that may interplay between the 'personal' and the 'community'. This exchange between a 'private' and 'public space' is a fascinating one, what Gotved (2006) referred to as "border crossing" between "neighbourhoods". To accompany this (re)definition of 'space', is also the (re)construction of 'time', as both appear to become extended. It is apparent, therefore, that the expected impacts from this research proposal are: firstly, on short and medium term local policymaking and the experiences of young people; secondly, on national policymaking regarding contributing to the quality of the evidence base; thirdly, on the research community through the contribution of developing a visual research methodology. By working collaboratively with young people, and developing context specific understandings of young people and the culture of mobile phone technologies, important evidence in terms of the relationships between 'identity' and social 'space' that are being created by, and that are shaping young people should emerge.

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Ethical Statement

My research thesis is about discovering how mobile phone technologies influence the ways in which young people live and learn, see themselves, relate to others, fall for particular technologies, and use space. Furthermore, how we as educators can better understand these issues, and the potential they present for the creation of new learning environments. It is a qualitative study that aims to investigate how the concepts of identity and space relate to the use of mobile technologies by young people, involving a visual ethnography that is consistent with an Interpretivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology.

Permission to conduct research for my thesis between September 2008 and September 2009 will be again be sought from my employer – a local sixth-form college – through the senior managers for the college. Students will be invited from the college to take part in the research, in terms of volunteering to participate in interviews to discuss how they use their mobile phones. It will be up to them to decide whether or not they wish to take part, their refusal will attract no sanction, and they will not have to give any reasons for refusal. If they do decide to take part they will be given an information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. They will still be free however, to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to themselves. Participants will not be offered any payment for their involvement, although a small discretionary compensation may be made for any inconvenience and travel expenses incurred.

Sufficient time will be provided between the request to take part, and the signing of the consent form, in order to ensure that the participant has understood the information sheet and had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. The participant will be given a copy of both the information sheet and the consent form to keep. The information sheet will explain the purpose of the research and what is involved in appropriate language. It will outline my commitment in terms of anonymity and confidentiality and the negotiation of accounts before publication. It will provide my contact details and explain that they may withdraw at any time. Should any of the information included on the sheet change during the course of the research, new consent will be sought. Appropriate measures will be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Where practical, methods for preserving anonymity will be used, including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link between data and identifiable individuals. All data storage and disposal will comply with the Data Protection Act. Interviews will take place in a semi-public space and participants will be able to reject the use of a video camera, or other recording equipment if they choose. Data and results obtained from the research will only be used in the ways for which the consent was given. Where possible, participants will be offered feedback on the research findings.

The researcher has been CRB checked.

APPENDIX 2

ETHICAL DOCUMENT: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a Doctoral thesis for the University of Manchester. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Victoria Jotham

Title of the Research

iSpace? Identity & Space – A Visual Ethnography with Young People and Mobile Phone Technologies.

What is the aim of the research?

The focus of my research is on how young people use their mobile phone technologies – how is mobile phone technology influencing the ways in which young people live and learn, see themselves, relate to others, fall for particular technologies, and use space? An integral part of my research is also the search for ways to better understand this new digital media landscape.

Why have I been chosen?

This research will provide you with a unique opportunity to discuss your experiences of mobile phone technologies, where the aim is to gain a better understanding of how teachers can interpret these issues, and the potential they may present for the creation of new learning environments.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

In the first instance, as part of the ongoing process of my research, you would be invited to participate in an informal interview to discuss, in particular, how you use mobile phone technology.

What happens to the data collected?

You will be asked to consent to a video recording of the interview. These recordings will be studied and written transcripts taken for use in the thesis. All the research data will be securely stored and disposed of by the researcher in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

How is confidentiality maintained?

In any use, names will not be identified if you consider it desirable. In the event that I wish to use any photographic data that has been produced by you, further consent will be obtained from you as to how this data might be used.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will not be offered any payment for your involvement.

What is the duration of the research?

Approximately one, 1 hour interview, although, where appropriate, an additional interview may also be requested. Further contact via phone, or email, may also be sought at a later stage.

Where will the research be conducted?

██████ Lane, ██████ Campus – room tbc.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Yes, in a Doctoral thesis for the University of Manchester and further possible uses and outcomes of the research data (electronic and print) include presentations and publications for academics and use in the training of other researchers.

Contact for further information

victoria.jotham@eamsfc.ac.uk

0161 ██████

ETHICAL DOCUMENT: CONSENT FORM A

APPENDIX 4

ETHICAL DOCUMENT: CONSENT FORM B



Mobile Technologies Research 2007-2008, University of Manchester

Interviewed By

Interviewee Name

I consent to the video and/or audio recording of my interview(s).

I understand that this data may be used for the purpose of postgraduate academic research by the University of Manchester.

I understand that any data subsequently transcribed from said recordings will anonymise the interviewee and may be published.

I understand that direct quotation can be reported without further consent and that I shall receive no payment for my involvement.

Signed

Date

APPENDIX 5

THE DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS: AN EXAMPLE

Analysis 1

16 February 2009
15:08

BUS-A3-M21AA

1.05 - waiting for an afternoon group to arrive, back row filling up, (Sony Ericsson) and (top right corner) play with s MP (discreetly).
Introducing Unit 5C/Coursework - business start-up project (USP, questionnaires...)

2.25 - class finishing; any student not seen individually yet needs to write down their business idea and market - and both play with their MPs whilst the piece of paper circulates. As the group leaves I ask to wait (he has just put a '?' as his business idea - we begin to discuss what he might focus on - he suggests a franchise such as a Subway on the grass outside the reception area, I infer that this is too ambitious for a 7 week assignment! I ask him what he is really interested in - "computers and gadgets" - so we explore retailing used-MPs, accessories etc, but it is still difficult to find a suitable niche together. I digress... "it looks like now has an Apple as well?", we both laugh, explains how really disliked the iPhone, but has succumbed eventually. says he is no longer that impressed by it though, and complains about the "operating software", "being crap" - he comes over to my desk (I'm seated) and shows me how the phone still seems to work, even when the PIN is entered incorrectly 3 times - he is keen to show me the phone's display screen (and also the wallpaper/photo of him with his arm around the shoulder of a young and attractive female?). I notice that he also seems to have a new protective leather+ plastic cover for his phone, alongside the usual wallet (closes like a typical envelope). I ask him why he has an Apple, when his uncle works for Nokia (he later mentions, as a marketing manager) - says his uncle has to test a lot of phones and would love to give them to a group of young people to "evaluate", but is not allowed to by the company - any "evaluation", apparently, has to be done in-house - explains that they test aspects such as the length and noise of the vibration function. His uncle and a designer developed a phone that is now used by "footballers" (Verso??), according to it costs £25000 per year, "but with no games", but you can press a button, that calls a personal assistant for you to, for example (s), "order a limo, where ever you are in the world." It seems a suitable moment to ask about whether he would like

'Starts'
Brands
Play
Discretion

'Finishes'
Together
Gadgets
iPhone
Showing
Protection
Games
Functionality/Use + Power

Analysis 3c

19 February 2009
11:15

SOME INITIAL OBSERVATION IDEAS :

'Starts'
Brands
Play
Discretion
'Finishes'
Together
Gadgets
iPhone
Showing
Protection
Games
Functionality/Use + Power
'Arrivals'/Waiting
Possession/Holding
Texting
Discretion + Texting
Making contact/Connecting
Listening to music/Private 'spaces'
Female (+) Fashion
Female (+) Accessorising
Persistence + Use/Texting + Novelty
Information seeking/Confirmation
Sharing a text/Conversation
Functionality - Ease of use/Convenience
'Private' spaces
Identity
Memory
Pre-occupied
Safety/Concern
'Ends'
Purpose
Carrying/iPhone/Status
Sharing + Display
Display + Access + Functionality
Constraints
Concern/Safety/Confirmation
Isolation/Private 'space' + Texting
Friendship/Concern + Confirmation/Reassurance
Possession + Valuable + Importance
iPhone + Status + Display

RESEARCH Q's

- IDENTITY + MEANING + USE of MP
ENTERTAINMENT/EDUCATION/CONSUMPTION
- IDENTITY + CREATION + USE of SOCIAL SPACE
SOCIAL SPACE/TIME

RO's + METHODOLOGY

- UNDERSTANDING HOW YP INTERPRET the CULTURE of MP's
IMAGES

Use of MP's...

Play
Games
Music
Showing/Display
Status
Value
Brand Love
Possession
Waiting
Texting
Connecting/Being Together
Friendship
Information (Seeking)

Use of Social Space...

Starts
Finishes
Arriving
Endings
Waiting
Discrete
Value
Privacy
Isolation
Together/Sharing
Networks

Part 1

22 December 2009
08:17

Some notes for part 1 :

- Extremely **useful**, all the **applications**, **talk** to **anyone**, **wherever** you are
- Use it a lot for **gaming**
- Bump better than blue tooth - bump handsets together to send data - if you have an older phone, **using bluetooth can take a while**
- Not using phones in **conventional** ways, when people used to use them **just to ring**, the technology is getting so big, people are using them for games, watching **movies**
- Storing** a business **project**, then **emailing**... a photograph to a friend straight to his account
- It's still **not perfect**, it **crashes** a lot when trying to do complicated tasks on it the processing **speed isn't as quick as it could be**, there are still areas for improvement
- Connect** it with other phones, lap-tops, pcs, *iTunes*
- Listening to **music** when you are out, you can **download a tune** from iTunes, then **listen to it there and then**
- Photographs (remember **'s** car accident and the photo montage / record)
- Only a 2 mega pixel camera**, but the **quality** of the way it handles the photos... you can **zoom in**... until it crashes, then after 6/7 times it goes into hibernation mode, then it starts to delete your stuff and everything on it, so I've stopped using it to take pictures as much as I used to and now **back it up every couple of nights**
- Unique?** - getting a bigger hit now - **more and more popular** - but with the improvements they've suggested **staying with it**, plus **because of the games**
- PSP AND a phone is too expensive, plus this has a **motion sensor**, it's like a Wii
- Table tennis, golf, bowling
- Applications? Would like **more realistic stuff**, like TopGun, better graphics and more realistic; **need a TV**, friend with a Nokia has Sky and it's only a second slower
- You Tube** in a 3G connection / zone
- Other phones?** Samsung G500? **Used in a traditional sense** as **my business phone**

Further thoughts :

Functionality ; access
Games

Connectivity ; speed
Conventional = speaking / calling someone
Movies
College work - storing ; emailing

Imperfection / crashing
Speed / slow
Connections
Music ; immediacy

Picture quality

Failing ; backing-up
Popularity
Loyalty ; games + motion sensor

Improvements : realistic games ; TV

Other phones - used traditionally

Part 1 Analysis (1)

22 December 2009
17:01

Further thoughts [Part 1] :

Functionality ; access
Games
Connectivity ; speed
Conventional = speaking / calling someone
Movies
College work - storing ; emailing
Imperfection / crashing
Speed / slow
Connections
Music ; immediacy
Picture quality
Failing ; backing-up
Popularity
Loyalty ; games + motion sensor
Improvements : realistic games ; TV
Other phones - used traditionally
Apps ; QWERTY
Other phones = normal
Functionality - transferring E
Old people = old phones = proper phones = conventional
Useful = internet
Functionality - help & assistance, e.g. # LOST
College - easier with iPhone - not forgotten
Support - learning (I was dyslexic?)
No paper
Etiquette of use - trust
Antisocial vs. social
Bonding / contact / communication
A consumable??
Used repeatedly
Replaceable
Loyalty
Disseminating the brand
Apps - customisation
Free vs. pay
Love

FUNCTIONALITY
Immediacy / Access
Connectivity / Speed
Quality - Pictures
Internet
Apps
QWERTY
Boredom (in lessons)
Used Repeatedly / Heavy
Users / Habitual Use (as)
Non-Use
Reliance (but not reliable?)
Entertainment -
Games
Motion sensor
Movies
Music
College Work -
Storing
Emailing / Sharing
Easier (always with you)
(Learning) Support
Paperless
Failure -
Imperfect
Crashing
Backing-up
Realism
TV
Incompatibility (of Macs)
Texting / Calling -

ANALYSIS 3C THEMES :

FUNCTIONALITY + SYMBOLISM

FUNCTIONALITY:

Immediacy
Convenience
Waiting / Boredom
Privacy
Confidence
Entertainment -
Play
Games
Music
Texting / Calling -
Information (Seeking)
Confirming
Purpose
Safety
Concern
Cheating
Sharing / Display -
Experience
Record Keeping / Memory
Photographs

SYMBOLISM:

Showing / Display
Status
Value
Brand Love
Possession
Novelty
Gadgets / Technology
Up-to-Date / Latest

Use of Social Space...

Starts
Finishes
Arriving
Endings
Waiting
Discrete
Etiquette
Privacy
Isolation
Together / Sharing
Networks

Part 1 (4) (6) SIGN

22 December 2009
08:17

Some notes for part 1 :

- Extremely useful, all the applications talk to anyone, wherever you are
- Use it a lot for gaming
- Bump better than blue tooth - bump handsets together to send data - if you have an older phone, using bluetooth can take a while
- Not using phones in conventional ways, when people used to use them just to ring, the technology is getting so big, people are using them for games, watching movies
- Storing a business project, then emailing a photograph to a friend straight to his account
- It's still not perfect, it crashes a lot when trying to do complicated tasks on it the processing speed isn't as quick as it could be, there are still areas for improvement
- Connected it with other phones, lap-tops, pcs, iTunes*
- Listening to music when you are out, you can download a tune from iTunes, then listen to it there and then
- Photographs (remember car accident and the photo montage / record)
- Only a 2 mega pixel camera, but the quality of the way it handles the photos... you can zoom in... until it crashes, then after 6/7 times it goes into hibernation mode, then it starts to delete your stuff and everything on it, so I've stopped using it to take pictures as much as I used to and now back it up every couple of nights
- Unique? - getting a bigger hit now - more and more popular-but with the improvements they've suggested staying with it, plus because of the games
- PSP AND a phone is too expensive, plus this has a motion sensor, it's like a Wii
- Table tennis, golf, bowling
- Applications? Would like more realistic stuff, like TopGun, better graphics and more realistic, need a TV, friend with a Nokia has Sky and it's only a second slower
- You Tube in a 3G connection / zone
- Other phones? Samsung G500? Used in a traditional sense, as my business phone, for refereeing, doesn't have many applications, not touch screen, and smaller, which means the keyboard is smaller, unlike the iPhone which has a QWERTY keyboard
- Couldn't have a normal phone now
- In college? Example give - transferring money + Trafford Centre
- Older people have older phones, my cousin has an old Nokia and he uses it as a proper phone to phone and text and it's a lot quicker than these are, so conventionally the old phones are better, but this is more useful, but if I wasn't going to use the internet I'd go back to an old phone
- Use differently in different places? If you're lost in the city you just use Google maps to find out where you are and it can give you directions and how long it takes to walk there

Further thoughts :

Functionality; access
Games

Connectivity; speed
Conventional = speaking / calling someone
Movies
College work - storing; emailing

Imperfection / crashing
Speed / slow
Connections
Music; immediacy

Picture quality

Falling; backing-up
Popularity
Loyalty; games + motion sensor

Improvements: realistic games, TV

Other phones - used traditionally

Apps; QWERTY

Other phones = normal
Functionality - transferring £
Old people = old phones = proper phones = conventional

Useful = internet

Functionality - help & assistance, e.g. if LOST

iPhone as an OBJECT

Part 1 :
Unconventional
Flawed
Quality
Innovative
Modern
Abnormal
Youth
Improper
Useful
Essential
Repetitive
Unattached
Replaceable
Personal
Custom
Power
Informative
Lifeline
Addictive

iPhone as a REPOSITORY

Part 1 :
Applications
Games
Movies
Projects
Emails
Photographs
Music
TV
Banking
Maps/Directions
Lessons - Documents, PDFs, Handouts, Work...
Books

Stage (4) - ALL, INCL. P.O. DATA

27 October 2010
10:25

Identity & (Re)Presentation [Interesting one... a question of object vs. subject perhaps?]

Identity, Signs & Symbols [Object]
Identity & Efficiency - Speed & Liquidity [Communicator]
Identity, Co(Production) & Co(Consumption) [Object/Repository]
Identity & Social Space [Communicator/Engagement]
Identity, Personalisation & Space [Repository/Engagement]

Object BLACK
Repository BLUE
Communicator GREEN
Engagement RED

☒ REVIEW DATA, FURTHER EVIDENCE REQ'D

iPhone as an OBJECT

Part 1 :
Unconventional
Flawed
Quality
Innovative
Modern
Abnormal
Youth
Improper
Useful
Essential
Repetitive
Unattached

iPhone as a REPOSITORY

Part 1 :
Applications
Games
Movies
Projects
Emails
Photographs
Music
(TV)
Banking
Maps/Directions
Lessons - Documents, PDFs, Handouts, Work...
Books

iPhone as a COMMUNICATOR

Part 1 :
Talk
Anyone
Anywhere
Data
Physical
Photographs
Friends
Connections
Hardware
iTunes
QWERTY
Google

iPhone as an ENGAGEMENT

Part 1 :
Network
Unconventional Uses
Out
Listen There & Then
Recording (Car Accident)
Backing-Up
Financial
Shopping
Lost
City
Not In College
Boring Lessons
Addictive

Power	<i>Lesson Planning</i>	Emergency	Unresponsive
Informative		In(Compatibility)*	Desire
Lifeline	Part 2 :		Non-Use (Sleep, Exams)
Addictive	BBC iPlayer, Sky+	Part 2 :	Emergency (Unusual EG)
Heirloom*	News	Discovery	Dependency
Tablet*	(Radio)	Recognition	Society
	Podcasts	Answers	
Part 2 (repetition from Part 1 not included) :	iPod	Live	Part 2 :
Physical	Albums/Covers	Transfer	Boredom
Current	(World) Clocks	Backing-Up	Fun/Entertainment
Relevant	Notes	Conversation	Journeys
Freedom	Diary	Identity/Visual	Moments/Gaps
Streamline	Calendar		Enterprise
Wealth	FedEx		
Rare	SMS Texts/Conversations		
Status	Friends (Pictures)		

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION DATA - THEMED

iPhone as an OBJECT

Play
Games
Music
Showing/Display
Status
Value
Brand Love
Possession
Novelty
Gadgets/Technology
Up-to-Date/Latest
Fashion
Accessorising

iPhone as a REPOSITORY

Experience
Record Keeping/Memory
Photographs
Personalising

iPhone as a COMMUNICATOR

Information Seeking
Confirming
Purpose
Safety
Concern
Cheating
Connecting/Being Together
Friendship

Together/Sharing
Networks

iPhone as an ENGAGEMENT

Immediacy
Convenience
Waiting/Boredom
Privacy
Confidence

Starts
Finishes
Arriving
Endings
Waiting
Discrete
Etiquette
Privacy
Isolation

Stage (5)

27 October 2010
10:25

Identity & (Re)Presentation [interesting one ... a question of object vs. subject perhaps?]

Identity, Signs & Symbols [Object]
Identity, Co(Production) & Co(Consumption) [Object/Repository]
Identity & Efficiency - Speed & Liquidity [Communicator]
Identity & Social Space [Communicator/Engagement]
Identity, Personalisation & Space [Repository/Engagement]

iPhone as an OBJECT

Part 1 :
Unconventional
Flawed
Quality
Innovative
Modern
Abnormal
Youth
Improper
Useful
Essential
Repetitive
Unattached
Replaceable
Personal
Custom
Power
Informative
Lifeline
Addictive
Heirloom*

iPhone as a REPOSITORY

Part 1 :
Applications
Games
Movies
Projects
Emails
Photographs
Music
(TV)
Banking
Maps/Directions
Lessons - Documents, PDFs, Handouts, Work...
Books
Social Life
Facebook
All My Information
Lesson Planning

Part 2 :
BBC iPlayer, Sky+
News

iPhone as a COMMUNICATOR

Part 1 :
Talk
Anyone
Anywhere
Data
Physical
Photographs
Friends
Connections
Hardware
iTunes
QWERTY
Google
Help
Etiquette
Anti(Social)
Emergency
In(Compatibility)*

Part 2 :
Discovery

iPhone as an ENGAGEMENT

Part 1 :
Network
Unconventional Uses
Out
Listen There & Then
Recording (Car Accident)
Backing-Up
Financial
Shopping
Lost
City
Not In College
Boring Lessons
Addictive
Checking
Unattached
Disposable
Desire
Non-Use (Sleep, Exams)
Emergency (Unusual EG)
Dependency
.....

APPENDIX 6

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

[xxx]	Italicized text in brackets indicates transcriber's descriptors.
[???	Question marks in brackets indicate unintelligible words.
<u>xxx</u>	Underlined text indicates emphasis.

