

able resource for all who want to understand Poincaré, so embedded within his times and yet so far ahead of them.

References

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TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

The Lost Phone

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The mobile phone is missing from Rich Ling's *Taken for Grantedness: The Embedding of Mobile Communication into Society*. This is not to say the book is not about mobile communication. The mobile phone is missing because we are no longer aware of its presence. Mobile communication is now simply communication. To make this argument about the changing nature of our social structure, Ling (a sociologist at IT University of Copenhagen) advances a novel framework for understanding the transition from innovation to integration.

The book is Ling's third solo undertaking on the role of mobile communication in everyday life. In its predecessor, he illustrated the power of mobile communication technology to strengthen close ties among people (*I*). His current foray is bolder and more sprawling. The level of analysis verges on macrosociology, as he moves away from the academic microsociology that characterized much of his earlier work. Although he still uses interviews and focus-group data to map out phenomena, the scope of the work no longer centers on personal relationships. Rather, the concept of taken for grantedness presumes a societal scale.

Ling begins by arguing that three seemingly unrelated innovations—the clock, the car, and the cell phone—each represent what he terms social mediation technologies. These

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tools “enable, but also set conditions for, the maintenance of our social sphere.” In framing the contrast with the more established developments of mechanical timekeeping and the automobile, the book aptly underscores the prominence of the mobile device. Ling does not claim these three innovations are the only social mediation technologies (for example, he also notes online calendar systems), but his case-study approach does elicit questions of theoretical purview. Ultimately, Ling sways between developing a theory of mobile communication as a distinct taken-for-granted technology and a wider theory on the nature of taken for grantedness across these particular social technologies.

An amalgam of perspectives—including recent theories on domestication and mobility and not-so-recent theories from a number of sociological greats (e.g., Emile Durkheim, Max Weber)—informs Ling's framework. This diverse collection of ideas works well overall, although it was surprising to find Pierre Bourdieu's highly germane concept of habitus absent from the discussion. For each social mediation technology, Ling divides the process of reaching taken for grantedness into the stages of diffusion, legitimation, social ecology, and reciprocal expectations. This format can be repetitive, but his sociological style of brief subsections and participant excerpts reads smoothly. It is clear that some of the interviews are a bit dated, and at times Ling relies on teen data while making generalizations across generations. However, these concerns do not detract from his core argument. The global approach serves to stress the effects of mobile communication on social structure more broadly.

The first three stages of the theory establish how these tools have rewired human communication and interaction. The crux of Ling's argument, though, is rooted in how this rewiring affects our reciprocal expectations as members of society. We now take it as a given that others abide by a standard system of time, drive a car in the suburbs, and carry a mobile phone. And as Ling reminds us, if we do not commit to these rules, we become a problem for others. Hence, the effects of reciprocal expectations expose an unconscious architecture of interactional rules—flowing through technological middlemen such as the mobile phone.



The book effectively documents the integration of these technologies into the fundamental structure of society, yet the author could have further developed the theoretical implications of this broader process. Ling demonstrates that interpersonal communication no longer equals meeting at a specific space and time; it is flexibly instinctive. In turn, one wonders whether it is the mobile phone that has become embedded or the underlying access to information in the present. His conclusion, however, is more a commentary on the state of social capital than a full realization of the concept of taken for grantedness. In general, Ling's emphasis appears to be on how we got here as opposed to where we are going. At the same time, the book raises important questions about voids that exist, or will exist, in our social ecology. What other social mediation technologies could alter the basic arrangement of communication and reach the state of taken for granted?

With *Taken for Grantedness*, Ling shows that the mobile phone is missing from our stream of consciousness—that is, until it is missing from our pockets. The book articulates how contemporary society depends on the seamless synthesis of mobile communication, timekeeping, and transportation. Thus, by demonstrating how ordinary mobile communication has become, Ling unveils how integral it is to the collective human psyche. Whereas many facets of new media are dynamic, the core elements of mobile communication, such as expectations of accessibility, are immobile. In a sense, the book represents a declaration of the permanence of mobile communication, as forecast by the author in 2004 (2). The mobile phone, once a harbinger of the changing world, is now lost in the ebb and flow of the quotidian.

References

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