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This paper discusses the historical development of wireless mobile technology, from the early radio spectrum disputes to the cell phone. Abrahamson particularly looks at why the mobile phone took so long to develop in the United States, considering that all the existing technology and understanding of radio waves existed long before it was ever put into use. The paper mirrors the discussion that we had in the last class. According to Abrahamson, mobile phones took a long time to develop because the US had a lot of landlines (controlled by the AT&T monopoly), there was an on going dispute over what spectrums could be used by Motorola, developers and RCCs, and most importantly, the bureaucracy surrounding how to allocate those wavelengths.

In another STS class I'm taking, we're reading Rulemaking (Kerwin, 2003) which basically analyzes the role of regulation in the development of technology.

Most discussion of the history of technology (written by engineers rather than historians) often glazes over the impact that regulatory agencies have in the invention and development of products. However, the FCC figures prominently in this history, and it is likely that they and other regulatory agencies will continue to do so and mobile tech continues to develop.

On a not-completely-unrelated note, here is an article on the BBC discussing new international laws aimed at preventing so-called signal theft.

Licoppe & Inada

This article talks about the social environment created by a localized mobile game called Mogi that involves people in a quest-like game and a new type of social interaction based on physical location, on-screen iconic representation of self and others on a map, and text-message conversation. According to Licoppe & Inada, the screen become a social space where people can interact; usually these interactions are governed by knowledge of another player's spatial proximity (by iconic or text notification on the screen) and the status of a player in the game (newbie or expert).

This mobile location-based game reminded me of Julian Dibbell's description of the LambdaMOO social environment as a map created by the social interactions of the users. In Mogi, the game turns a person's physical environment into a map focused on interaction with other players and collection of objects. Both online spaces create maps for the users, but in drastically different ways. In LambdaMOO, the map is the social experience, while in Logi, the social experience is created by the map. Another difference lies in the visual presentation of the map with an iconic representation of the player. The authors talk about players as "hybrid beings [who] perceive the world from their own bodies but also perceive themselves as icons on the map of the radar interface." This reminds me of the questions of online embodiment generated by online social spaces in which people generate online bodies either through text or a graphic representation. In Mogi, embodiment becomes split between the physical and the digital and cognitively, players conceive of one another in both senses. Also, the person plays a dual role that inhabits both a physical and digital location and creates social bonds that, while they generally stay digital, are also part of the physical world (because they are generally initiated due to spatial proximity).