

Abstract

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Doctoral thesis ‘A Future Archaeology of the Mobile Telecoms Industry’

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In 2000, five consortia spent twenty billion pounds on UK radio spectrum licences for 3rd Generation mobile telephony or ‘3G’. They were investing in a future, in a specific story of the future, a story of ubiquitous wireless telecommunications. The thesis addresses questions raised in social studies of science and technology as to how such a future is made in everyday practices inside the industry, and how this future might be made otherwise.

The research draws on Donna Haraway’s method of ‘interference’ into the making of technoscientific knowledge. Rather than simply critique the future of the mobile telecoms industry, the thesis develops two methods that enact two different interferences into the making of the future in the industry.

Both methods begin with a four month ethnography at a design studio of a major mobile phone manufacturer, extended interviews with key informants throughout the industry, and a substantial documentary archive. This forms a necessarily partial and fragmentary set of evidence from which multiple accounts may be reconstructed. The first method is ethnographic, and draws on the evidence to form an account of the industry and its futures situated close to London. The second method is archaeological, and draws on the evidence to form an account of the industry and its futures situated close to the ‘Heart of Neolithic Orkney’ World Heritage Site on the archipelago of Orkney, Scotland – a method of Future Archaeology.

Through these two methods the thesis explores and demonstrates the effect of location and landscape on the making of the future in the mobile telecoms industry. And it demonstrates the important role of writing-as-method within social studies of science and technology.

Keywords:

Science and Technology Studies; Mobile Telecommunications; Ethnography; Archaeology; Method.