

## Canadian Communication Association Panel, May 2012

### **Ageing (Communications) Media: interdisciplinary, transnational approaches Abstract for Panel at Canadian Communications Association, May 30-June 1, 2012.**

The proportion of people who are 60 and over is growing faster than any other age group, worldwide. In 2025, it is estimated that there will be a total of about 1.2 billion people over 60, with 80% living in developing countries. Ageing is far from a singular, un-variegated experience of biological changes. Yet, experientially, the older we get the more homogeneous we often become in the eyes of others who just see “an old person”. Statistically, we enter into the “grey zone” a territory of undifferentiated indifference that draws no distinctions between those who are fifty-five and those who are eighty-five (Sawchuk and Crow, 2010). Academically, within media and communications, the media practices of those who are sixty-five and older are rarely examined or reflected upon. In this panel, we ask: what does it mean to age communications and media studies? We address the issue through a set of inter-connected papers that address age and the ageing process from a transnational perspective, a perspective that pays attention to difference within the global mediascape, yet finds moments of intersection. In this way, the panel and panelists engage in a collaborative ‘ageing of the media,’ which brings into focus the lives of their research subjects and a questioning of the ontological ageist assumptions that may underpin the field. The panel includes contributions from researchers working in and across the contexts of Canada, Quebec-Morocco, Malaysia, and finally Catalunya-California as a part of an experimental research collaboration titled *Active Ageing, Mobile Technologies*.

#### **Panel Organizer:**

Kim Sawchuk, Concordia University, Montreal

#### **Participants:**

Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol, IN3, Open University, Barcelona

Chui Yin Wong, Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University, Selangor, Malaysia

Barbara Crow, Faculty of Liberal and Applied Studies, York University, Toronto

Line Grenier, Communications, University of Montreal, Montreal

#### **“Missed Calls: Barcelona and Los Angeles Compared”**

##### **Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol**

I discuss the phenomenon of missed calls and their intentional use by older mobile phone users in two different locations: Barcelona and Los Angeles. Deliberate missed calls (DMC) are made, with the intention that the receiver is not to answer them. They appeared as an innovative, low-cost communication practice. They constitute a limited form of communication, compared to voice calls, as there is no feedback from the receiver and, therefore, more uncertainty is involved. While youth, teenagers and children have been the main focus of scholarly attention in this field in developed countries, few studies have focused on elders. To address this absence, this paper explores the use of missed calls amongst senior individuals (60 years old and over). I describe the main purpose of this practice, the context in which it is used and the motivations for using it. The main conclusion is that elders communicate by means of missed calls if younger generations in their society do.

## **"Stories of Extraordinary Lives': living, working and ageing in Malaysia"**

**Chui Yin Wong**

It is projected that there will be a growth of 694 million or 223 percent growth of older adults, worldwide, between 1970 and 2025, with 80 percent of the elderly living in developing countries (WHO, 2002). While ageing is often viewed as a burden to nations, senior citizens have contributed and often continue to contribute to its 'wealth'. Older adults – particularly those living in developing nations– have invaluable life stories and experiences of what it means to age, many of them untold. *Extraordinary Lives* addresses the absence of the voices of seniors from public discourse and counters the myth of the unified ageing subject. Based on a series of short interviews with Malaysian seniors from all walks of life, the project captures many ways that they experience living, working, ageing and technologies in Malaysia. Through the use of vignettes, a glimpse of the ageing population in a multi-racial and diverse culture, like Malaysia, is given. The *Extraordinary Lives* project critically and creatively explores the potential of multimedia forms to depict the extraordinary diversity within the so-called ordinary lives of Malaysian seniors. Unique to the project is "the senior's grid", a template for incorporating photography, audio and video into an interactive format. From the kaleidoscopic intersection of many voices, a collective tale emerges from a combination of distinct narrative fragments. Rather than presenting single unified image of the ageing Malaysian subject, the many dimensions – and contradictions- of what it means to actively age in this context is presented to the viewers.

References:

World Health Organization. "Active Ageing: A Policy Framework." Internet: <http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/active/en/index.html>, 2002 [15th June 2008]

## **"The Concept of Mobility: Absent, Present and Alone Together"**

**Barbara Crow**

In our research project on Canadian seniors and mobile technologies, the seniors have provided a range of comments and reflections on how mobile technologies are changing communication practices. Interestingly, while the scholarly community and the telecommunications industry have begun to describe and articulate how mobile technologies are changing communication practices with concepts such as "always on," "absence/presences," "co-presence," "anywhere, any place, any time," "tethered self," and "alone together," these concepts do not wholly reflect the concerns and observations raised by seniors. In this presentation, we will review how seniors have been excluded from the research on mobile technologies, what research reveals when they are made subjects, and how their insights expose certain kinds of biases in communication research. It is our contention that their insights can provide for a more elastic/expansive consideration of the ways in which mobile technologies intersect with communication.

**“Questioning “Successful Ageing” in Senior Stars/*Étoile des aînés*”**  
**Line Grenier in collaboration Fannie Valois-Nadeau**

Seniors Stars is a national contest organized in Canada by Chartwell Reit Inc, a major corporation that owns and manages more than 200 seniors housing facilities in Canada. For the sixth year in a row in Canada and for the third consecutive year in Québec (under the name *Étoile des aînés*), Chartwell employees are organizing on a regional level, a competition amongst seniors who sing or play in front of a panel of judges made up local music and media personalities. Based on the turnout of the previous editions, organizers expect that eleven hundred or so seniors will register. Out of these participants ten will be selected to perform in the final held in front of an audience of proud friends and family members gathered to “celebrate the depth of talent of Canadian seniors who shatter traditional misconceptions about “slowing down” in one’s later years.” (Vic Johnson, 2010 winner).

Senior Stars/*Étoile des aînés* is a privileged terrain to explore the figures of “successful ageing” that it articulates, hence some of the ways in which normativities of ageing are produced and rendered visible in the cultural domain in Québec. The presentation will sketch out this line of questioning as it emerges from the first moments of a multisite ethnography of the contest recently undertaken. It will focus on interwoven issues raised by “successful ageing” as a distributed or shared action, as a public and publicized experience, and as a popular cultural practice.