

## PROBOSCIS: Private Reveries, Public Spaces – Responses to the Brief

### Rachel Baker Platform

*1 – Brief description of the project.*

A series of SMS (simple messaging system) interventions on board train journeys on north-bound routes throughout the national rail network. This project uses the platform of the mobile phone within a very specific context – the train journey. A series of playful messaging scenarios will make the relation between mobile phone and train network as communication systems. This communication structure will take privatised, proprietary networks – the train and the mobile phone – and invert them into opportunities for public and group interaction. It offers moments for train culture and SMS culture to integrate, taking advantage of a journey's incidental nature (delays etc.) with unknown consequences. The primary narrative for these messaging scenarios will be dictated by the train network itself i.e the connections between cities across the UK, particularly London and its relation to Northern UK cities.

*2 – How does your proposal go 'beyond convergence'?*

Convergent media often refers to the integration of different media technologies such as mobile phone, TV and Internet.

The emphasis in this project is on the convergence of the train and the mobile phone as realms for public interaction. It situates

these technologies in a very specific context to unfold narratives about the rail routes between north and south. Evidence suggests that North and South is becoming increasingly divergent economically and technology sometimes encourages this rather than alleviating it.

*3 – How have you addressed the key relationship of public and private spaces?*

The main intention behind the proposal is to reveal the public nature of the train, not just within the space itself but in the policies that underpin it as a public transport network.

*4 – Is your proposal a critique of the technologies of convergence, if so in what way?*

Its a critique of the proprietary nature of technologies, whether convergent or not. It questions the privatisation of public transport and reveals the public interest and personal experience of using the train and the mobile phone. It investigates social 'divergences' between North and South which is sometimes alleviated by technology but also enables it.

*5 – How does your proposal relate to society and community?*

The project relates fairly directly to policies espoused by New Labour for Public Private Partnerships to improve public services. This includes Rail transport as well as education, health etc. I want to focus on the north/south rail routes as a way of narrating the so called north/south divide, particularly the migration patterns of workers and students flowing in either direction and the economic/cultural relationships between cities and towns from south to north.

*6 – What audience or public does the proposal address?*

Specifically the audience on the train journey which is made up of people travelling between north and south for a multitude of reasons, mostly related to work, but also study and personal connections with the cities on route.

*7a – Please indicate which of the issues, listed in the brief, your proposal responds to and,*

*7b – how it addresses them.*

Platform engages critically with the social impact of technologies. Train travel and mobile technologies enable people to work in displaced and migratory ways, but the effects of commuting often results in the disruption of community.

Platform engages with the relationship between the physical and the virtual in public spaces. I would describe the travelling train as a virtual space, also the communication space between two people talking via mobile phone. Another dimension is added with introduction of a web/SMS gateway that allows non-travelling members of the public to intervene in the space-time of the train journey.

Platform explores the relations of institutions and corporations to public space. The phone was not designed for group communication and the train is not a space in which the inhabitants are used to considering as a space for public address. Both are privately owned proprietary technological infrastructures. The project tries to consider how the potential for public communication on the train can be activated through the privacy and silence of the text message.

Platform address how technology changes our concept of community. The train traveller participates consensually in a project that invites a potential community on a temporary basis. The phone is the main medium through which they are invited to become aware of this potential community on board the train.

Platform address how technology changes our concept of sociability. As mentioned before the train is socialised in a way that tends towards privacy rather than public address. The experiment is to test how far SMS can maintain the privacy whilst generating volumes of communication around a particular theme.