Being mobile:
in between the real and the reel

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Abstract

Convergence has become part of burgeoning mobile media. The mobile phone has come of age. As a integral component of visual media cultures, camera phone practices are arguably both extending and creating emerging ways of seeing and representing. In media footage of late, camera phones have been heralded as providing everyday users with the possibility of self-expression and voice in the once one-way model of mass media. Building on discourses of analogue photographic practices and a so-called democraticising of photographic media, camera phones are affording users with the ability to document, re-present and perform the everyday. In particular, the "exchange" and gift-giving economy underpinning mobile phone practices (Taylor and Harper 2003) is further enunciated by the camera phones function to "share" moments between intimates (and strangers) through various contextual frameworks and archives from MMS, blogs, virtual community sites to actual face-to-face digital storytelling. But is mobile media a new emerging artform?

In the Philippines and South Korea the mobile phone has become symbolic of democracy – a medium for the voice of the everyday person. In cases such as the London terrorist bombings, the everyday camera phone user becomes the photojournalist. At gigs avid fans document their bands via the camera phone – editing, storing and sharing as they *historicize the present moment into the past* in a gesture called *fast-forwarding presence.* They know its real because it's meditated. And now the miniature camera phone has hit the BIG screens with the South African Aryan Kaganof's feature length movie *SMS Sugar Man*, shot entirely on the mobile phone, heralding a new form of avant-garde filmmaking.

Far from a mere form of communication the mobile phone has become a multimedia device par excellence. In particular, locations such as Seoul with the launch of DMB device TU mobile last year and the launch of Samsung's 10 mega-pixel camera phone in March this year, along with Tokyo's *i-mode* becoming more than just "*keitai* (mobile) with Internet", have gained the attention of global media and imagination. But beyond the hype of industry rhetoric and users being 'prosumers' (consumers plus producers) what is the reality for users? Just how creative is mobile media? This paper will explore some case studies of mobile media in the Asia-Pacific region (specifically South Korea) in order to address the realities for the 'third screen' of the mobile as a social medium beyond just another avenue for viral marketing.

PS Please note that the hand phone / cell phone is called mobile phone throughout the paper.

Introduction

Recently a friend of mine went to Ars Electronic. He informed me that there were some mobile media works there – but none *seemed* to be working. This scenario of 'new media' – being denoted by abject technologies that fail to behave in professional situations – is a familiar one. But, in

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particular, the specific visual economies of mobile media seem to work against any version of professionalism – the images are low resolution and miniaturised, the modes of storing are precarious and ephemeral, and the content is personal and immediate. Can mobile media extend beyond a communication media to become artful? Will mobile movie making, like its predecessor the webcam, revolutionalise cinematic conventions? Or will it lead to a plethora of badly-made, poorly resolved products that even a mother couldn't pretend to love? Whilst the "mobile" nature lends itself to pervasive (location aware) projects that once again remind us that in an information age of immediacy, delay is still very much the currency of the "fast-forwarding presence" of mobile media. Can these attributes make mobile media a compelling experience?

With most mobile phones coming with camera the implications on photographic and filmic practices are far reaching as it 'democratizes' the medium and hands it to the everyday person. But beyond the Pollyanna voices there is a dark side to this medium; it can also be the harbinger for clandestine behaviour whereby it becomes the portal for voyeurism and often-unauthorized images of unsuspecting prey whereby everyone can become anonymous "actors" in someone's film. The fact that mobile phones are mediums whose data is predominately for sharing and distribution, the possibilities of context and re-contextualization are numerous. Context is content. We can all become little sisters and big brothers.

The camera phone revolution parallels that of the camcorder in so far as providing a space for the voice of the everyday person. In this way, *the future of cinema is a vision permutated with the persistent vision of the past.* Current camera phone practices are about the possibility of more people falling in love with cinema, seduced by the weight of its importance in the poetics of everyday life. At the moment, camera phone production qualities and values are low – so they far from compete with the visuality of the analogue. However, it is the grainy, low-resolution quality of camera phone movies that alludes to another type of credibility that has its history in classic documentary modes (cinema vérité etc). Moreover, with its "poor" resolution, the types of images we take tend to be of the everyday and serendipitous rather than the purposeful occasions whereby we consciously take the stand-alone camera to "special events". The everyday can be deemed "special", the fleeting moments between intimates rendered "poetic". In a period marked by the hangover from the deluge of reality TV programs, the camera phone seems to provide an "authentic" recording of personal experiences and digital storytelling. It's grainy and gritty aesthetics, like a miniaturized "radio with pictures" medium anchored by the aural, make it *feel* real.

Over the last couple of years we have become customised to the global media informing us of the revolutionary and democratic possibilities of mobile media. Whether we like it or not the mobile phone (hand phone) has become a vehicle for multimedia par excellence, so much so that users who just want a mobile phone for voice call find it impossible to get such a device without all the 'extras'. In one way, the rise of mobile media parallels the rise of the webcam by affording everyday users with the ability to document and edit their stories, however, mobile media promises more – the portal to new arising forms of distribution such as MySpace, Cyworld minihompy, PandoraTV, freeca, YouTube etc. But is mobile media a medium or an art form? And just what types of new modes of digital storytelling are evolving? If audiences are making films, where does this leave the traditional filmmaker? And what are the specific visual and aural economies of mobile media and how do they translate into other contexts?

Is the recent release of the feature length movie shot entirely by mobile phones by South

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African Aryan Kaganof, *SMS Sugar Man*, a sign of things to come? Is there some type of realism and authenticity inflected by mobile media as democratic media? Will our cinemas be flooded with hand-held, blurry, low resolution films that make Dogma 95 films look like conventional Hollywood film? Or will the miniature and compressed aesthetics of mobiles lend themselves to new avant-garde forms of cinema that may not be presented in the normal cinema context? Will the TV-like 'radio with pictures' quality of mobile media lend itself to highly aural micro-narratives lasting not longer than 2 minutes? If the launch of the DMB technology TU mobile in Korea mid last year is anything to go by, part of the sluggish uptake (apart from competing companies) was due to the lack of consideration given to specific content. The channels that succeeded were those that were aware of the 'remediated' – that is, recombinations of older media and content – nature of TU mobile, namely, that it is 'radio with (miniaturised) pictures'. TU mobile most dominant archorage is the aural, highlighting not only TV's history but also the history of the phone as an aural medium. Now, with the rise of social software and user-generated content sites such as PandoraTv and freeca, it seems Korea could be providing a model for the future in convergent mobile media and the user-generated 'revolution'.

However, one must be mindful that despite the growth in distribution networks, the *context* for this content is that of the *social*. These technologies are sociotechnologies. Moreover, whilst the rise of mobile media has been concurrent with the rise in user agency one must be careful not to conflate the two historical phenomena and project as the future. One needs to ask, how much of the user-generated content is really about *agency* and how much of it is about the *performance* of participation? In a location such as Korea, that has a history of utilising media technologies such as mobile phones for democratic expression and social connection (Kim 2003), we must be aware of the two directions mobile media and connected social software are heading.
On the one hand, mobile media extends the rise of democracy and democratising technologies.

On the other hand, in the case of Cyworld's launch globally and PandoraTV's predominantly advertisement-underscored content, that the rise of convergent media could interpellate users not as 'citizens' but rather, as Chua Beng Huat notes in the case of transasian flows, 'communities of consumers' (2006).

Far from creating a 'global village' the rise in these content digital industries are further reinforcing the importance of place and sociality as a frame for interpreting content. Whilst cross-cultural flows of production and consumption maybe apparent as in the case of current Korean dramas and films in the Asia-Pacific region, these are often consumed by 'communities of consumers' in a manner that re-orientalises the 'imagined communities' (in an Anderson sense) of nation-state. These geo-political imaginaries (Kim 2006) seek to construct new forms of collective fantasy and nostalgia about the region and the intra-cultural histories. With the so-called democratisation of mobile media whereby the everyday user can become photojournalist, filmmaker etc, one wonders what types of geo-political imaginaries will appear. Will it be the case of reinforcing stereotypes and identities rather than questioning identification? How much will users be able to reinscribe their position as citizens having already succumbed to the 'communities of consumers'. In the case of mobile media, according Iipo Koskinen (2005), it is the aesthetics of 'banality' that makes mobile media so 'authentic' and compelling to share among users. Arguably, whilst the media scapes (in an Appadurai sense) may interwoven with corporate capitalisms' ideo scapes, we are still seeing what Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe dub the 3 's' – sharing, storing and saving – as pivotal in the contextualising of user-generated content.

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In this paper I will contextualise current mobile media in terms of remediation, that is, a reappropriation of older media styles and content (Bolter and Grusin 1999). Firstly I will discuss some of the specifics of mobile media in relation to remediated practices such as the camera phone and how this re-enacts earlier vernacular analogue photography. Then I will move to a case study of Art Center Nabi and then I will conclude with some thoughts about the 'participatory' role and future of mobile media.

Locating the mobile

In the Asia-Pacific region we can see a variety of penetration rates and modes of customising the device from the "texting god" phenomenon engulfing millions of Catholics in the Philippines to "3G (third generation, commonly known as mobile with broadband) centres" such as Seoul and Tokyo. In Seoul, mobile phones (*hand phones*) are used by the youth to document, edit and upload their lives onto minihompys in a practice of fast-forwarding present. In Tokyo, the mobile phone (*keitai*) ring tone industry is booming with yearly revenues surpassing that of karaoke sales. With the emergent genres and applications such as SMS (Short Messaging Service), MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service), camera phones and moblogs have seen producers, users and artists reconsider the role of mobile media in practices of space/ geography, sociality and mediations of intimacy.

The remediated (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and convergent nature of mobile media – that is, the combination of other media forms such as digital camera, PC, telephone, music player and games device as well as genres such as SMS being reconstitutions of earlier letter writing traditions – has made it become a site for experimentation and exploration by many artists and collectives. So what is the art of being mobile?

The mobile phone has been touted as a symbol of democracy as in the often-sited downfall of Estrada in the Philippines and its pivotal role in the Rise of democracy in South Korea (Kim 2003). As noted in the recent London bombings and the Korean "cetizen"(net citizen) website, the everyday mobile phone user has become a journalist or photo-journalist (Wilhelm 2003). Does the mobile phone really afford "voice" and self-expression/ representation for the everyday user? And what possible context for the mobile media present for artists? How do the key characteristics of mobile media – mobility, co-presence between the virtual and actual, intimacy, personalization, interactivity and miniaturization – inform its multimodality across textual, visual and most importantly aural discourses?

In March 2006, Samsung released a camera phone in Korea that would revolutionalise the "digital divide" surrounding quality, and thus content, between camera phones and stand-alone digital cameras. One of the dominant differences in the relationship between the two was that the former was always there, "on hand" (both literally and metaphorically) to capture the trivialities of everyday, unlike the stand-alone camera with high resolution that would be brought along purposely to events deemed "special". The second difference related to the context, the camera phone had "sharing" built into its logic with quick functions such as MMS, blue toothed or uploading to a blog almost instantly, whilst the digital camera would be taken to an often-stationary computer and then uploaded. But the launch of the 10-mega-pixel camera phone represented the meeting of both these worlds. No longer would the camera phone images just be trivial and "fun", they had the potential to be printed in high resolution, blurring the world between amateur and professional digital photography. Would this signal a change in the function and relationship to the camera phone? And how would this impact on the quality of DIY (do-it-yourself) mobile movies? The implication for everyday users is still far away with the costs of such high technologies being out of the reach of the average user. But, for the meantime, we can contemplate the fast approaching future of mobile media.

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As a burgeoning centre for innovative technologies and with a conspicuous usage of technologies in the everyday, South Korea's capital Seoul could be defined as a Techno-nation. With over 20,000 PC bangs gracing the first and second levels of most commercial buildings and with over one third (18 million) of South Korea's population (48 million) spending at least several hours online in the virtual community of minihompy, one could be mistaken for believing that online identity and relationships were surpassing the offline sociality. And whilst Koreans do, in general, have much trust in technological spaces such as the Internet as a site for honesty and democracy, the online is still no substitute for offline sociality.

As Kyongwon Yoon's ethnographic study of young people's use of mobile phones (hand phones) noted, the mobile phone helps to reinforce physical contact and exchange (2003). In Hjorth's and Heewon Kim's ethnographic study on youth using Cyworld's minihompy community, it was found that virtual connecting was always about the *need* and desires to be *connected* on various levels and *never* about *substituting* for the face-to-face contact; thus the co-presence between virtual and actual was inevitably about offline relations and connections (2005). Such functions as 'search people' allow users to reconnect with old friends they lost contact with. In Florence Chee's persuasive ethnography on PC bangs and the politics of online multiplayer games, she argues that these spaces are *social spaces* that are viewed as 'third spaces' between home and work (2005). For youth of Korea where most still live at home before getting married, these *third spaces* operate as spaces to connect with other people.

In these examples, we see that the underlining logic of technological uptake is about the practice of sociotechnologies (Ito 2005). With the technological innovations of mobile convergent media becoming increasingly more sophisticated, such devices as camera phones are no longer the 'poorer cousin' to the stand-alone digital camera. These new forms of mobile media – as a genre of new media – are marked by the context of remediation. In a period signified by convergent media and so-called interactive media, Bolter and Grusin (1999) utilize the notion of 'remediation' to make sense of the often non-causal genealogies of new and old media. Just as Lev Manovich dismantled binaries between old (analogue) and new (digital) technologies in the early 1990s, Bolter and Grusin repurpose Marshall McLuhan's (1964) claim that the content of one (often newer) medium will also be that of another (often older) medium in order to transgress the old versus new debate. [i]

This remediation can entail a state of perpetual *déja vu,* especially around camera phone practices. Only a decade ago, heated discussion surrounded the relationship between analogue and digital photography; now it seems that a similar dialectic is occurring between camera phone imagery and the 'stand alone' digital camera.   In 'The paradoxes of digital photography' written before the introduction of camera phones, Manovich argues that the "the logic of the digital image" is "paradoxical", that is, it "radically" breaks "with older modes of visual representation whilst at the same time reinforcing these modes" (2003).

As Manovich notes, digital photography is far from erasing the importance of analogue photography, rather it is further instilling its importance. The so-called digital revolution 'solidifies' the significance of photography in terms of the broader remediated genealogy of "modern visual culture" as interwoven with media such as film. The genres, programs, application, and aesthetics of digital

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photography continuously make reference to movie making and cinema, perpetually utilizing a cinema metaphor. This leads Manovich to assert that whilst film may disappear, cinema will far from vanish as it "acquires a truly fetishistic status".

For Manovich, one of the dominant modes that highlight the continuing importance of analogue photography is the emphasis of digital photography on modes of realism. For Manovich, the legacy of realism modes is the final paradox of digital photography, "Its images are not inferior to the visual realism of traditional photography. They are perfectly real – all too real" (2003, 248). This is particularly the case with camera phone practices and attendant genres.

Fast-forward to now and the current debates surrounding the rise of camera phone practices and we see remediated versions of paradoxes that Manovich identified in relation to the analogue/ digital photography divide. Now it is the divide between the digital camera and the camera phone. Up until the last two years, many mobile phone users didn't have camera phones, and those that did have camera phones spoke about the different relationship between the digital camera similar to the way in which analogue and digital camera were spoken about – the former was low resolution and ubiquitous, and thus used for 'fun' and everyday pictures. The latter was taken out for special occasions and, due to its higher resolution, often made into hard copies. But this has changed. With camera phones now having the capacity for such high resolution the fun and the serious, the trivial and the sublime are documented and collected by one (mobile) source. This creates a new set of paradoxes that draw from the ones outlined by Manovich over 10 years ago. Most notably, camera phone genres are bound to types of realism that are indicative of the dominant logic of paradoxes Manovich identifies in digital photography.

As a convergent communicative media premised on the logic of gift-giving, the various ways in which camera phone images can be 'stored' 'shared' and 'saved' is, as Ito and Okabe (2004) note, important to how the remediated sociotechnological images are read and contextualized. With the low resolution further giving 'authenticity' to the modes of realism ensured in the 'voice of the people' aesthetics, the camera phone signifies a glimpse into one's personal world; echoing the debates about new modes of stylized realism that can be witnessed in rise of reality TV programs and documentary genres that utilize the omnipresent god-like fly-the-wall method (Nichols 1992) whereby the 'unmediated' is actually, paradoxically, highly mediated. Parallels can be made between the rise of the webcam and "reality" aesthetics (i.e. hand held camera) in TV and film and the rise of the camera phone and sharing Internet communities such as Cyworld, MySpace and YouTube. In a period marked by a decline in compelling diegesis in favour for non-diegetic special effects as can be seen in the movie and gaming industries (O'Brien 2006), the rise of everyday user storytelling has flourished (BBC online, Korea's OnMyNews). But should audiences be making movies? Hasn't the rise in consumer testing lead to decline in innovative narrative? (Kermode 2006) Or could the rise of the prosumer (producer plus consumer) and online forms of distribution lead to the much-needed new forms of digital storytelling?

In the growth of virtual communities and sharing websites as new modes for distribution are representative of the role of social capital to inform the *context* of *content.* For anyone that has trolled through YouTube it is undeniable that the material is very patchy and much time can be wasted looking at meaningless ramblings. Murdoch's purchase of MySpace was demonstrative of the growing

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importance of co-present social capital in the form of virtual communities as *the* mode for getting content (and advertising) out there. Here we are reminded of the work by Finnish researcher Iipo Koskinen whereby he argues that mobile multimedia, unlike mobile telephony, 're-territorializes' experiences and communication (2006: 48-60; Scifo 2004; Koskinen 2004b). This emphasis on place underscores the motivations for documenting and sharing camera phone images through both online and offline means. However, for Koskinen, the implications of MMS are multiple and, situated around 'the mundane as a problem' (2006: 50).

As Koskinen observes, whilst there are three tropes for discourse around the mobile as multimedia device from the shifts in networks and modes for identification (Turkle 1994, Rheingold 2003), the role of digital storytelling and virtuality (Darley 2000) and the role of new political intensities (Kim 2003, Pertierra 2002). But underscoring these possibilities is that the reality is imbued by banality. Yet this leads me to question why camera phone images are "so" banal; is not the politics of the everyday a paradoxical blend of the banal and sublime? As Koskinen excludes, it is the demonstration of the banal that is important in defining the sender as "ordinary" and thus *reliable*. This can be seen as a furthering of the politics of the everyday and personal as legitimated by Kodak snapshots. Certain archetypical images of homes and family occasions were an important part of presenting a family as normal both to themselves and others (Gye 2005, Chalfen 1987, Bourdieu et al., 1990).

Camera phone practices, as an extension of photography and snapshots, are about performing normalcy. However, due to the distributive and networked logic of mobile phones one is now left to contextualise these 'banal' shots and render them 'newsworthy' and relevant to the receiver (2006: 51). In this way, contextualizing is central to the content of mobile media and in the case of MMS it is a process akin to that of the postcard. As with the postcard, there are archetypical "tourist" samples provided which then need to be contextualized in terms of the sender's experiences and voice otherwise the image just becomes a simulation part of the mediated mass of global images that constitute what Baudrillard would dub hyperreality. So whilst MMS images need to be contextualized to give them meaning beyond the banality of the everyday, postcards need to be contextualized from symbols of tourist clichés into the sender's "ordinary" interpretation and experience.

For Barbara Scifo notes (2004), camera phone practices operate on "two different levels of experience" – "on an individual level" and "on the socialization level" (2004, 365).

However I would like to add to this process a meta-social level, a concept whereby users become hyper-reflexive and hyperconscious to the ways in which strangers can possibility de-contextualise their mobile customization. For example, in the case of camera phone practices, female users often re-appropriate the depictions of female imagery seen in media (Lee 2005) in a sense of gender performativity (Butler 1990) that could be read without irony and parody by strangers. Hence, the important issue here to mobile media *content* is the user's choice of viewing/ sharing *context.* Customization is, whether "inside" or "outside" the phone, highly inflected by gender, age and locality.

In the case of seminal research on camera phone practices (in Japan), one can go no further than the work conducted by Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe. Having already documented some of the possibilities of camera phone practices – and its implications on image making processes and productions of identity – in Japan (2003, 2005), Ito and Okabe take up this discussion of the need to

consider context and content. For Ito and Okabe, the meaningful points of camera phones practices are interwoven with the politics of networks/ contexts, distribution and interactivity. This is best encapsulated as what they succinctly dub the three 's' – saving, sharing and storing; the 3 's' undoubtedly central in determining possible interpretations, audiences and ongoing exchange/ currency.   These 3 s's contextualise the visual and aural economies of mobile media; they take the 'banality' intrinsic to the everyday nature of mobile media and make it compelling.

Getting connected: a case study mobile media

If the wireless experience is basically a street culture thing, lived by youth expressing themselves and communicating by any means available, including changing language by merging visual and text messages, for example, should we – those who are in the art field – feel threatened or enlightened? Maybe what we are seeing is the beginning of a new epoch in which the conventional meanings of the terms "artist" and "audience" are losing significance, not in a theoretical sense, but based on real situations in an everyday context. The potential for wireless creativity and "art" being a critical and creative engagement with the intimate and the everyday context is here today. (Chung 2003)

As Eunhye Grace Chung (coordinator of the Art Center Nabi's *Resfest's Wireless Art Competition)* notes in her article on Korean wireless experience, the potentialities of mobile media to challenge conventional relationships between artist and audience, user and producer are endless. As one of the most ubiquitous and essential items in everyday contemporary culture, the mobile phone connects us on many levels – from *actual* communication between friends and family to *symbolic* in the form of operating as an extension of one's identity, signifying modes of lifestyle, cultural capital (knowledges) and emerging forms of individualization.

The mobile phone is not just a technology; rather it is a marker of tastes, values and status subject to local nuances; so much so that one could argue that the mobile phone is much more a *social* and *cultural* artifact than just an ICT (Information and Communication Technology).

If the history of mobile media is anything to go by, when the domestic and personal gets mobile it reinforces the cultural and social specificity of what "home" and "intimacy" entails. Whilst the mobile phone may be ubiquitous in many contemporary cultures, it is far from homogenous in its adaptation and appropriation. The history of the mobile phone is also the history of the rise of the empowered 'user'; much of the hand phones adaptation by users has subverted industry expectation (demonstrated by the high uptake of SMS). As the aforementioned ethnographic studies such as Ito's in Tokyo and Yoon in Seoul demonstrate, the mobile phone participates in traditional forms of co-presence and helps maintain – rather than substitute – actual social contact. This makes the mobile phone far from a humble symbol in current contestations about individualism, self-expression and social formation in the politics of everyday life.

The possibilities of the convergent multi-media mobile phone have not been lost on new media artists – with collectives such as UK's *The-phone-book Limited*, UK's *Blast Theory*, UK's *Proboscis*' 'urban tapestries' project, Korea's *Art Center Nabi,* Marc Davis and his *garage cinema group* (short movies made on the mobile) and Finland's *AWARE* – all utilising mobile media as a form for experimentation, innovation and social commentary. The importance (by way of its ubiquity and

accessibility) of mobile media has certainly taken off overseas as identified by the 2004 ISEA that focussed on wireless experiences and the South Korea's Art Center Nabi, conducting *the* Resfest's Wireless Art Competition (2004), *Urban Vibe* (2005) and *Mobile Asia* (2006).

Discourse on the possibilities for experimentation have seen many artists and theorists orientate themselves around the role of mobile media as not just a miniature and mobile version of the conventional gallery space. *The-phone-book Limited* have explored the emergent genres of SMS, MMS and ring tones to highlight the conventions and codes (compression, immediacy, intimacy) of these remediated and vernacular-driven discourses. For example, SMS poems being poems restricted to the formats of SMS compression (i.e. 160 characters). In *Proboscis'* 'urban tapestries' project, a section of London is navigated and reorientated through mobile location devices, making one recognise that mobile media helps reinforce place rather than destroy it. Here, we are confronted with this century's flâneur in the form of what Robert Luke calls the 'phoneur' (Morley, 2003); a figure wandering what is no longer distinctly public space with mobile phone attached like a prosthetic limb. One scan through the e-journal *receiver* (www.receiver.vodafone.com) reveals the richness of dialogue and practice through both the literal and metaphoric role of mobile media within everyday contemporary life.

Art Center Nabi has been pivotal in establishing mobile media projects that attempt to question the possibilities and potentiality of mobile media. In the *Resfest's Wireless Art Competition,* Nabi sought to get various International new media artists to make work for mobiles which resulted in little more than screen savers due to the current generation of phones at that time (2nd generation). In 2005, Nabi had a collaborative group INP (Interactive and Practice) – consisting of artists, engineers and media theorists – working to produce various mobile media projects such as *Urban vibe* in October 2005. In 2006, Nabi has conducted a mobile Asia competition to get mobile media (content made by or for the mobile) and pervasive projects.

If the 2005, INP project is anything to go by, participants will be reminded of the difference between the rhetoric and reality of mobile media as highlighted by Choi Taeyoon's simulation of a FPS (first person shooter) game in *Shoot me if you can* (by artist Choi Taeyoon). However, in this game the gun is replaced by the metaphoric gun of the camera phone (i.e. the snapshot as a hunting term) and participants need to take a photo – forwarding it via MMS to the Choi – of opponent team members. The winner is the first to get all photos of the opponents (hopefully not being "shot" by the opponents during the process) in the limited game-play time. As a player (and a *very* hopeless one… I still can't quite get a handle on my mobile phone that is obviously too advanced for me!) the game was fun; excuses to run around the streets of Myeong Dong (unfortunately whilst being conspicuously chased by the project's documenter) and behave like an awry avatar. Often there were frustrating moments as one grappled with the technology and its lack of instantaneity. In addition, the game also operated to connect strangers (i.e. other opponents) in interesting ways. It was just s a pity that this game didn't have more players, especially "non-art" related participants.

Shoot me if you can, like many of INP's projects, served to highlight the "mediated" and thus far from immediate mode of mobile media in the "face" of f2f contact. This point highlights one of the many ironies of technology – often technology can get in the way of actual contact; however, it is important to note that intimacy has always been mediated – by memories, gestures and language (Morse 1998). When we send a SMS, we expect the recipient to be "connected" 24/7 and thus delayed response can be taken personally. The mobile phone "sets" us free (to be "mobile") and yet it becomes a leash

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whereby people expect one to always be contactable, always "on call". This is just one example of why Michael Arnold (2003) called the mobile phone a harbinger for janus-faced (two forces simultaneously pushing and pulling). This pushing and pulling underscored much of the mobile media projects being officially and unofficially conducted – from the work of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer conducted at the Media Centre in Yamaguchi (Japan) and Franz Mayra (Finland) to the everyday user on the street. But can mobile media move beyond a study in the paradoxes of 'immediacy'? Or is the creative potential just a ploy on the behalf of the industry to make everyday users feel less upset about the increasing amount of time taken to participate in the aesthetics of the banal?

Conclusion: the banality of prosumers

For Daniel Palmer mobile media is less about reinforcing sociality and more about individualism by way of exhibitionist and narcissist camera phone imagery. As Palmer persuasively argues in his paper, 'Mobile Art', contemporary media culture can be "broadly" defined as "participatory"; in particular through the dominant "modes of address" that "function to blur the line between the production and consumption of imagery" (2005, 4). He notes, "that all forms of media participation need to be considered in relation to defining characteristics of contemporary capitalism – namely its user-focused, customized and individuated orientation" (2005, 4). Pointing to the work by Lauren Berlant on the (lack) of politics in modes of intimacy and hence the attraction of such hand phones giants as Nokia to cash in on further interiorizing and internalizing that Palmer sees as little more than performing exhibitionism and narcissism, Palmer makes some valid – and yet not completely relevant in the case of Seoul – points about camera phone practices and their fetishisation of individualism.

Palmer posits, "rather than fundamentally altering the nature of *public* and *private* visuality, mobile phone cameras appear to further privatize experience", so much so that "the Nokia moment is far more intimate than the Kodak moment, and the mobile phone a further material support for 'networked individualism', as Manuel Castells puts it" (2005, 4). But what is missed here is the importance of what Ito and Okabe outlined in their seminal study on camera phone practices – it is the way in which camera phone images are "stored, shared and saved" that makes them much more than mere exhibitionism and narcissism; further serving to remind us that in a period where the growth of intimate discourses is burgeoning, this does not equal with the apolitical. Whilst examples of exhibitionism and narcissism dominate much of camera phone imagery, Palmer neglects to entertain the role of mobile media in non-Western contexts especially in the case of the Philippines and South Korea where it has been used to forward democracy (Kim 2003). In the aforementioned locations, mobile media has a history not as a vehicle for mere individualism but, rather, more importantly used as a device for sociality. And yet, with this democratizing of media comes a price – the compulsion to document everything, everyday.

Devices such as camera phone can entice people who have never been interested in photography to take pictures, but they can also make users feel 'useless' unless they are continuously participating in mobile media. More and more one feels compelled to document an experience to render special or worthy of collective memories. But, as Gye notes, this desire to record has its history in the rise of vernacular photography (19th century) and the petite bourgeois rhetoric of writing (or imaging) oneself and one's family into history (2005). The conundrum of new mobile technologies is that they are supposed to free us up and yet, as a good existential crisis would have it, the freedom is a leash. Work becomes mobile, labour on a perpetual drip. We are supposed to available at all times, perpetually

connected.

Rather than free us, the 'immediacy' logic of mobile technologies makes us feel like we must be quicker and must achieve more. On the one hand, everyday users can become creators of images and explore modes of visual expression that are then shared with others, on the other hand, users can become trapped in the need to continuously record to legitimate experiences.

In this force of fast-forwarding present, *presence* becomes *co-presence* as mobile users attempt to record the present that can be savoured and experienced after the moment. This fast-forwarding present means that users are often documenting and sharing whilst experiencing; sometimes the documenting mediates the experience so much that users are only able to experience the moment *afterwards*. This was particularly the case with events such as music gigs where users were too busy trying to get the "right" shot that they could only experience it *after* the event. In this way, to be co-present jeopardizes a relationship to the present. Co-presence can often put the present on hold. Moreover, the need to document a shared moment between friends often results in users continuously taking photos, deleting and re-taking them – more often than not sabotaging the present "joy" of the moment. The compulsion to document and share has resulted in users discussing the fact that if they are deemed the photographer for their friends – and thus they are responsible for "capturing" the moment – they can spend much time customising the photographs for their friends to share via minihompy pages.

Rather than saving time, applications such as camera phone image making – and the attendant customising and sharing – mean users spend a lot of time sharing and editing the so-called immediate. The tyranny of immediacy as heralded by the ICTs industry (especially prevalent in the use of mobile media) becomes part of the users' legacy whereby users can spend much time and effort to create a feeling of immediacy and candor. Far from being immediate, these processes are about making time in order to monument a moment that, often for the user, is *less* about a participatory moment and more about a mediated observation. Here, the co-presence between participant and observer, especially with camera phone making and sharing, means users live between the moment and their role to memorize it; thus they experience the moment as both the present and past simultaneously. Connecting intimate gestures with place is the preoccupation of mobile media such as camera phones with the increasing need to document everyday gestures and events. It is, as Koskinen notes, a mode that re-territorializes place through partaking in the aesthetics of the banal.

What we can see is a growing emphasis on the user's choice of *context* to inform the *content* and the *distribution* of their images into a social network. Whilst the mobile phone globally may be seen as an example of growing 'individualization' (or what Wellman calls 'networked individualism') and a symbol of late capitalism, it is also very much inflected by the local and, in the case of Seoul, mobile media is still very much a vehicle for sociality and exchange rather than individual performativity.

As one of the most broadbanded and innovative locations in mobile technologies, South Korea presents a curious future for mobile media. Behind the hype around DMB technology, users are seeing the converging space as a *third space* for negotiating between work/school and home as identified by Chee in the context of PC bangs. It will remain to be seen whether mobile media matures from just a communication medium to an art form. However, this state of 'third-ness' is not without its cynics as industry players attempt to view this third space as a third screen for viral marketing. Let's hope, like the Ars electronic example, it doesn't work.

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I will conclude with a camera phone incident I witnessed the other day whereby two girls were happily sitting together on a park bench soaking in the amber rays on a warm autumn day. Obviously, the special moment had to be "captured" as a memento so out came the souvenir-collector, the camera phone. One friend held the camera phone above in the typical portrait framing mode and the two girls smiled. Then they looked at the photo. It was obviously not a good depiction of the moment. So they deleted and tried again. Once again, they looked – with growing dissatisfaction – at the image and tried again. With each failed attempted the smiles became more and more plastered until, on the tenth try, they unhappily decided to quit and walked off with disappointment as their guide. This is the "capturing" – or snapshot of "almost contact" – that many individuals practice today.

Gone are the days when the surprise of moments documented would be delayed and thus re-presented differently through analogue; now there is a demand for instantaneous perfection, no less. This incident of the two friends and their 'failed moment' (failed because it couldn't be documented "correctly") could be seen as a metaphor for the paradoxes that face the so-called immediacy of camera phone image making as a repository for how we make, delete, re-make, share and store meanings in contemporary everyday culture and how the very agency of the media that has afforded so many everyday users with authorship and creativity, could also be the vehicle for frustration and disappointment. This is the paradoxical politics of banality aesthetics. The camera phone only serves to remind us of the history of photographic practice and its attempt to immediately capture has always been obscured by longing desires. Welcome to the world of moments as sequences and memories as wallpapers between intimate strangers; that is, if the potential third space of mobile media becomes the third (viral) screen.

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www.aimia.com.au/mobile   - AIMIA Mobile Content Industry Development Group
www.anat.org.au - ANAT
www.receiver.vodafone.com - *receiver* magazine

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[i] Andres Fagerjord notes his detailed and eloquent discussion of Bolter and Grusin, properties of what constitutes media of 'immediacy' and 'hypermedia' are not intrinsic to specific media but rather negotiated by both the particular culture and reader. Moreover, with the rise in social distribution networks and contexts for viewing/ sharing mobile media the modes of engagement are becoming more polysemic and hence we are reminded of Joichi Ito's notion that 'presence' has shifted from a noun to a verb. In this reader/ media negotiation, we can make parallels between Bolter and Grusin's remediation and its consequences on the relationship between the media and its audience with the rise in the 1990s of what French theorist Nichols Bourriaud calls 'relational aesthetics' (2001). As a notion that sought to explain emerging models of art and spectatorship draw from earlier impromptu practices such as the Situationists' tactics of detourément and derive. These earlier performances (along with happenings) sought to unhinge the institutionalism of art and culture (and cultural capital) by opening up to the contingent and immediate.

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