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The Mobile Reel: Mobile Media as Art Form or Communication Medium

Convergence has become part of burgeoning mobile media. The mobile phone has come of age. As an 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 democratising 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 art form?

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 mediated. 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? One of the dominant features of mobile media is how it further fetishises the analogue by way of its obsession with modes of realism (or what Ilpo Koskinen dubs ‘the aesthetics of banality’ 2005). In this way, mobile media oscillates between the *real* and the *reel*. 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.

Larissa HJORTH is researcher and artist lecturing in *Media Cultures* and *Narrative & Communication* in the Games and Digital Art programs at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Hjorth is currently completing a monograph (entitled *The Art of Being Mobile*) on her ethnographic research on mobile phone cultures in the Asia-Pacific region (forthcoming Routledge). Over the last five years, Hjorth has been researching and publishing

on gendered customizing of mobile communication and virtual communities in the Asia–Pacific. Hjorth has published widely on the topic in journals such as *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *Convergence* journal, *Fibreculture Journal* and *Southern Review*. Hjorth has been the recipient of an Australia Council Tokyo studio, Asialink Seoul residency, Akiyoshidai International Village Residency as well as receiving grants for cross-cultural art projects from Besen Foundation, Australia Council new media fund, Asialink-Japan Foundation, Pola Foundation and Noruma Foundation. Recently she was awarded \$20,000 from the Australian Council Visual Arts Board to further pursue her research into new mobile technologies. Hjorth has been co-convening the International conference on Mobile media with Gerard Goggin in July 2007 (www.mobilemedia2007.net). E-mail: larissa.hjorth@rmit.edu.au.

