Storytelling and Mobile Media:
Narratives for the mobile phone.

An exegesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research (Animation and Interactive Media).

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Dean Keep

20th August 2008
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This exegesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my father Ross and my sister Martine whose stories I shall always treasure.
Abstract

The mobile phone epitomises the ability of media convergence to promote a synthesis of multiple digital technologies within the body of one portable device. In order to develop a methodology for the design and production of mobile narratives, it is necessary to examine and identify factors that may influence the creative possibilities for artists working in mobile media.

The mobile phone is a ubiquitous portable device capable of generating and displaying narrative content in the form of voice communications, text, images and video. It could be said that hybrid devices such as the mobile phone can create hybrid narratives. It is the aim of this exegesis to outline the theories, concepts and artistic practices that inform the design, production and display of narrative content that utilizes the potential of the mobile phone as a tool for storytelling.

Over the course of this exegesis I will examine examples of media projects that exploit the creative potential of portable networked media devices. I will also look to contemporary narrative theory, in particular Mieke Bal’s theories on reframing and narrative gaps as a reference point for the design of my mobile phone narratives. A critical reflection on each of my narrative experiments that accompany this exegesis will outline the key concepts and creative strategies employed in the planning and production of my narrative experiments.

This research is a contribution towards the existing body of research in the area of developing narratives for mobile media devices and will potentially act as a guide for future research.
Introduction

This exegesis explores the conditions of possibility for visual artists creating mobile phone narratives. It aims to identify some of the key factors that influence the design and creation of emergent and/or hybrid narrative forms. A convergence of media technology has extended the capabilities of mobile phones and portable handheld media devices, thus extending both the creative and technical possibilities afforded to the mobile phone. Young (2005, p.1) observes: “New media technologies are changing the way we work, the way we view the world, and thus the way we tell stories.…Narrative is fracturing and re-ordering as time, space and point-of-view are becoming increasingly modular and variable”.

Narrative is becoming more malleable and open to interpretation as new media forms continue to push the boundaries of storytelling by providing new ways to construct, view and interact with story content. Edwards (2005, p.6) observes that: “Human beings have a deeply rooted need to create and identify with narratives, an instinct linked with the tendency we have to see our lives as story”. In an environment in which technology is constantly fluxing and multiple media applications inhabit handheld devices, the visual artist requires a suitable roadmap to navigate these emergent narrative spaces.

Contemporary narrative theory presents artists with a plethora of narrative models that may be employed as a single concept, or refashioned to complement the unique parameters of portable handheld media devices. Ruston (2005, p.1) notes: “The rapidly increasing use of mobile communication technologies, especially within urban spaces, offers a new medium for telling stories, reading cities and personal authoring within these spaces”.

Mobile media, and in particular the mobile phone is changing the way we interact and communicate. Mobile media challenges traditional models of social engagement and provides new ways to capture, generate and share a wide
range of digital content that reflects our relationship with technology and the people who share our networks. The mobile phone is emerging as an ideal tool for the display and production of stories and artworks that explore our ongoing attachment with personal computing and the human condition.

Over the course of my Masters by Research there have been many significant developments in mobile media technology, and this has greatly influenced the development and outcome of both the practical work and the resulting research. The examination of media convergence and contemporary narrative theory has provided a framework to aid the production of the body of work that accompanies this exegesis. Rather than adhere to a particular production technique or aesthetic, this exegesis focuses on the factors that influence the design and development of my narrative experiments.

The mobile phone permeates the everyday experience, and the work presented in this exegesis aims to explore the technical and conceptual considerations that are particular to this mobile device. A critical reflection on each of the accompanying works will outline how the relationship between theory and practice has informed the creation of these mobile phone narratives. Edwards (2005, p.6) notes: “We look to narratives for insight into our past and present, and as crystal balls hinting at our future. Narratives represent our deepest fantasies and desires”. I believe that mobile media will play an important role in influencing future trends in the design and production of storytelling. Reflections of our social interactions, personal stories and intimate memories are resurrected in the form of mobile narratives that acknowledge aspects of our history whilst exploring the creative potential of the mobile phone.

In the first chapter I will examine the role of media convergence in extending the creative parameters of the mobile phone and provide examples of projects by artists working with mobile media. In the following chapter I will discuss the relevance of contemporary narrative theory as an aid for artists designing mobile phone content. Here I will introduce Mieke Bal’s concepts of reframing and narrative gaps which have proven to be highly influential in the making of my mobile phone projects which accompany this exegesis.
In the third and final section I will identify some of the narrative concepts that have influenced the design of my mobile phone narratives and provide an insight into the creation of each of my mobile phone experiments that accompany this exegesis.

**Research Questions.**

1. How does media convergence and mobile media extend our understanding of narrative?

2. How can contemporary narrative theory assist the design and production of mobile phone content?

3. How can mobile media be incorporated into visual arts practice as a tool for storytelling?
1. Media convergence: a catalyst for emergent narrative forms.

The advancements in mobile phone technology have promoted a convergence of media tools and software. This has greatly expanded the creative parameters for artists working in mobile media. Digital technologies such as the computer, camera, music player, internet and communication software can now be housed within one portable media device. The meshing of these media forms provides both the audience and artist with the necessary tools to produce, display and share mobile phone content across a variety of social networks and publication portals.

In this chapter I will refer to examples that I believe best demonstrate how media convergence is challenging our understanding of narrative and instigating new forms of storytelling that acknowledge the evolving parameters of the mobile phone. In order to identify how narrative conventions may be applied and/or adapted for the creation of stories designed specifically for the mobile phone, it is first necessary to examine how media convergence has altered the creative and technological landscape for creators of mobile media.

Over the past 3 years of developing content for the mobile phone I have witnessed the ongoing evolution of mobile media technology. It could be said that the early days of mobile media share similarities with the birth of the television or cinema industry which, like mobile media, also underwent a period of experimentation whilst producers, writers and artists looked for new strategies that would best exploit the unique and ever changing parameters of the medium.

In the beginning of my research in 2005, mobile phones in Australia with colour screens, cameras and playback functions were few and prohibitively expensive. For many mobile users at that time, poor audio and low screen resolution were standard and most people used old models that were restricted to small black and white screens, non-intuitive interfaces and limited memory capabilities. If that was not enough to limit the creative potential of mobile media, expensive
call rates and hardware costs further reduced the potential of the mobile phone as a platform for the creation and/or presentation of mobile narratives.

Early examples of mobile phone narratives were the result of artists acknowledging the creative potential whilst working within the constraints imposed by an industry still in its infancy. Bound by the technical limitations of the mobile phone, creative projects were often based around the SMS (Simple Messaging Service) application, which enables users to send and receive brief text messages.

Text messages provide a cheap and simple means of communication that negate the need for an expensive voice call. Even with the advent of the video call and cheaper call rates, SMS messaging continues to be the most successful and widely used mobile application in the world.

Artist Katie Lips was quick to seize upon the potential of the mobile phone as a means of extending her art practice. Lips' Project 160 its title referring to the 160 character limit of the SMS message, is an archive of 160 personal SMS messages sent to Lips and made available for public viewing via a dedicated website (http://www.s19.com/160/). Users can transfer Project 160 to their mobile phone and scroll through a selection of Lips' communications (figure 1) between family, friends and strangers.

![Figure 1: An example of SMS message from Lips' Project 160.](image)

Lips (2005, p.1) describes her project as a: “snapshot made available for anyone else to browse how they choose, to make their own judgements about me, my text life, and the people who send me messages”. Like a digital version of Exquisite Corpse, a surrealist writing technique used to assemble narratives from a collection of disjointed sentences, Lips' voyeuristic project invites the viewer to construct a narrative from the debris of her SMS communications.
Through her project, Lips acknowledges the influential role of the SMS phenomena in shaping both our human-to-computer and social interactions, as well as demonstrating the potential of the mobile phone to assist users in constructing innovative narrative forms.

The Phonebook Ltd, a creative partnership consisting of Fee Plumley and Ben Jones, were amongst the first to traverse the mobile frontier. The duo travelled the globe educating people with their seminars and mobile phone workshops. Their community based programs and workshops acknowledge the potential of mobile media to promote new forms of creative practice whilst extending public perceptions of narrative and new media technologies. These programs helped empower people by providing participants with the necessary skills to create personal narratives via the mobile phone.

In the beginning, many of the narratives produced in The Phonebook Ltd workshops took the form of prose and short stories that were restricted to the 160 character constraints of mobile phone’s SMS application. As mobile phones acquired the technology of the digital camera and wireless web access, later workshops by The Phonebook Ltd promoted the mixing of traditional media formats such as moving images and audio with web-based applications to create online interactive narrative forms that took advantage of a new breed of mobile phone that was part screen, part camera, part phone and part web browser.

The mobile phone now provides users with the means to capture content and send it to friends via Bluetooth and/or SMS/MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) applications. Mobile computing and social software developments have also provided artists and users alike with the necessary tools to upload content directly, via the mobile phone, to a dedicated blogging or social software website.

According to Onishi (2008, p.1) one such website is Maho no i-rando. In 2000, the website developed software to enable mobile phone users to upload story content from their mobile phone directly to the Maho no i-rando website, and thus the mobile phone (also known as the cellphone) novel was born. Visitors to
the website can read works in progress and leave comments for would be mobile phone novelists.

In search for a reason for why the mobile phone novel phenomena appears to be unique to Japan, Onishi (2008, p.1) in his article “Thumbs Race as Japan’s Best Sellers Go Cellular”, observes:

The affordability of cellphones coincided with the coming of age of a generation of Japanese for whom cellphones, more than personal computers, had been an integral part of their lives since junior high school. So they read the novels on their cellphones, even though the same Web sites were also accessible by computer. They punched out text messages with their thumbs with blinding speed, and used expressions and emoticons, like smilies and musical notes, whose nuances were lost on anyone over the age of 25. (Onishi, 2008, p.1)

Maho no i-rando currently has over one million mobile phone novels listed on their site, and it is worth noting that five of the top ten books on Japanese top sellers list in 2007 were originally mobile phone novels. Onishi (2008, p.1) notes that mobile phone novels are: “mostly love stories written in the short sentences characteristic of text messaging but containing little of the plotting or character development found in traditional novels.” Many of the mobile phone novelists had little or no prior experience in writing literature and it would appear that the decision to produce these emerging narrative forms was born from a desire to exploit the networking capabilities of mobile technologies rather than a burning desire to establish a career as a writer.

Mobile phone novels challenge conventional notions of authorship, whilst bypassing the traditional publishing house model, in favour of a more democratic mode of publication and distribution. They also fill a space in the market for narrative forms that acknowledge the desires of readers and writers who have grown up with the ubiquitous mobile phone.

Media convergence has also been a catalyst for collaboration amongst artists, writers and programmers keen to take advantage of the advancements in mobile media technology. Emerging narrative forms include sophisticated locative games that employ GPS (Global Positioning Software) and/or tagging software, providing mobile users with access to downloadable data and the means to
interact with players via the mobile network.

Exploring the notion of the city and exploiting the networked capabilities of the 3G (Third Generation) mobile phone, pervasive games such as ‘Blast Theory’s’ *I Like Frank* (2004) challenge our understanding of geography by transforming virtual and physical places into live story spaces. Unlike the fixed narrative structures of conventional modes of storytelling such as novels, films and television; *I Like Frank* promotes new levels of interaction, as players who are both online and physically present in the game location are able to share clues and game information across the mobile networks. The mobile phone becomes a conduit for multiple player interactions via multiple media formats such as video, photography and SMS messaging, thus extending the level of interactivity and the potential to create narrative forms and interactive experiences that exist outside of conventional modes of storytelling.

*I Like Frank* is a project that meshes game, performance and storytelling strategies to produce a unique interactive experience that acknowledges the potential of mobile media to generate hybrid narratives. Street participants are presented with a 3G mobile phone, which is used to receive game information and maintain a connection with online players, as they explore the cityscape in search of clues to reveal the identity of the project’s mysterious namesake Frank. Although the identity of Frank remains elusive to players, it is perhaps the game’s ability to transform the familiar city streets into a set for immersive storytelling that provides the stimulus for players to explore the geography and narratives of the everyday experience.

As digital technologies evolve, so does our definition of narrative. The synthesis of mobile media and personal computing is providing artists with the means to explore narrative in a networked environment. The mobile phone, according to Ruston is:

particularly well suited to employ its networked, portable, and computational capabilities to create a new kind of narrative experience. Whether entertainment orientated or education orientated, fiction or non-fiction, these new projects immerse the participant in the experience by blurring the boundaries between the real world of the reader/participant and the crafted world of the narrative. (Ruston 2006,
The mobile art project *Net_Dérive*, developed by Atau Tanaka and Petra Gemeinboeck with the assistance of Ali Momeni, adopts the mobile phone as an instrument for the production and collection of abstract narratives in the form of visual and audio artifacts. Using a combination of sophisticated imaging and GPS applications, gallery visitors are able to track the movements and locations of street participants on a 3D map situated within a dedicated gallery space. Images and sounds collected by the street participants are continually uploaded to the gallery server and displayed via a data projector on the gallery walls. Using this projected data to inform their decisions, gallery visitors are able to map player locations, as well as communicate verbal instructions to street participants via the mobile phone.

*Net_Dérive* merges the spatial dynamics of the gallery space with the streetscape to produce an interactive non-linear narrative that is playful, yet also demonstrates the potential of networked media technologies to alter our understanding of play, storytelling and our relationship with place. Projects such as *Net_Dérive* transform everyday environments:

> geographical spaces become the virtual canvas to be inscribed with the personal narratives, memories and sound. Hence deploying mobile phones enhanced with GPS tracking capabilities turns everyday communication devices into a narrative shaping instrument that operates in the tensinal space between communication, navigation and surveillance. (Tanaka, Gemeinboeck & Momeni, 2007, p.194)

Media convergence continues to extend the capabilities of the mobile phone and further extends the potential for artists to construct and tell stories in new and innovative ways. Sophisticated tagging software for mobile phones enables artists to construct narrative forms that exploit the mobile phone’s network capabilities, mobility and media tools to create interactive story spaces in physical locations. A tag containing networking instructions for the delivery of mobile phone content can be generated via a number of online computer applications. The tag is placed in a selected location (see Figure 2), and when photographed with a networked mobile phone (with tagging software installed)
story content is then wirelessly delivered from a server location to the users mobile phone. This content may comprise a single or a combination of media formats such as video, image, sound and text. The immediacy of this narrative form may be utilised by artists to promote increased levels of audience engagement and interaction with story content.

![User Experience: Tagging Spaces Discovery Trail](image)

*Figure 2: Person using mobile tagging application on a discovery trail.*

Media convergence continues to extend the capabilities of the mobile phone via an assimilation of software applications and audio/visual hardware. Multimedia applications are becoming a regular part of our daily interactions and provide users with an opportunity to capture and document a diverse range of information in a wide range of media formats. In their article *Building Social Discourse Around Mobile Phone Photos – A Systematic Perspective*, Sarvas, Oulasvirta & Jacucci (2005, p.1) observe that: “Mobile phones with integrated cameras have penetrated the market and are the most sold digital camera worldwide, and as the technology advances, it is perceived that 2-4 megapixel camera phones will replace digital cameras in everyday life.”
The introduction of sophisticated colour screen mobile phones, complete with video/ stills cameras, mp3 and video players, improved screen resolution and increased memory capability has altered public perceptions of the mobile phone. The mobile phone’s inclusion of digital cameras, both video and still image, has promoted a growing interest in user-generated content.

Popular social software websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Youtube and Flickr have profoundly changed the manner in which we interact, collect and share digital content. These websites often provide a free and convenient online location for users to upload and house personal narrative content in the form of photographs, videos and text messages. Many social software websites encourage users to invite both friends and strangers to critique, share, and in some case edit the media content of other users in order to create hybrid narratives. Mash-ups, Machinima and Fan-fictions, constructed from re-edited found footage and video game engines, are prime examples of emergent narrative forms which challenge conventional notions of storytelling, authorship and media production.

Narrative non-fiction and citizen journalism websites such as Now Public and Moblogs (mobile phone blogs) allow users to conveniently upload mobile content to the company servers via a user’s mobile phone. The aftermath from the bombing of London’s Underground railway system on 7th July 2005 was recorded and transmitted via mobile devices to friends and loved ones, websites and news services within minutes of the disaster. Perhaps, for the first time in modern history, it was the individual on the street (via the mobile phone) sharing his first hand accounts in the form of intimate messages, photographs, and video footage of the walking wounded, rather than traditional media sources. Across the digital network, we were able to witness the tears and the triumphs, as bystanders using mobile phones continued to publish their personal narratives in the form of live accounts that were disseminated across the globe.

Many of the videos displayed at Youtube.com have been captured using a mobile phone camera. One needs only to look at a handful of Youtube videos to get an idea of the types of narratives that populate the website. Apart from the usual celebrity fodder and movie trailers, it is interesting to note that incidents
and events recorded on mobile phones are attracting tens of thousands, and sometimes millions of viewers. Content viewed at Youtube.com can now be viewed on mobile phones using the 3G networks and the popularity of these narratives does provide evidence of a growing trend in adopting the mobile phone as a production tool for the creation of narrative content.

The mobile phone has become the technological flagship of ubiquitous computing in the 21st Century. No longer just a portable version of the humble telephone, the mobile phone has been completely transformed from a simple communication device to a sophisticated networked multimedia production tool.

Artists adopting the mobile phone as a presentation or production tool are now able to use a plethora of applications and audio/visual software to aid the production and/or presentation of hybrid and emergent narrative forms that challenge our understanding of narrative in a networked society. Just as innovation continues to transform our cinema and television industries, I believe that mobile content will also be shaped by advancements in mobile media technology.

In a world where constant technological change is altering the ways in which we create and interact with media content, it is highly likely that media convergence will continue to challenge our understanding of portable computing and mobile media. As media technology evolves, our understanding of storytelling also evolves to fit the parameters of new media forms, which in turn may create new narrative forms.

Media convergence has empowered both the author and the reader by providing the means to interact with narrative in ways not possible in conventional media forms such as theatre, cinema and the novel.

In the future, I believe that narrative will be increasingly influenced by our engagement with networked digital technologies and our definition of narrative will be defined by the individual, rather than existing as a homogenous static form.
2. Narrative models for mobile phone content.

The mobile phone presents artists with a unique opportunity to exploit the phone’s potential as a tool for the presentation and production of narrative based content. The types of stories that are best suited to the mobile phone remains a mystery and even if you did manage to develop a systematic approach to mobile content design, the technology is changing so rapidly that it’s virtually impossible to adopt a “one-size-fits-all approach to suit the countless number of mobile phone models currently on the market.

As artists, researchers and telecommunications companies search for the illusive Holy Grail (a methodology for the production of engaging mobile phone content), I believe that an engagement with contemporary narrative theory may assist the development of narratives tailored to the unique parameters and viewing conditions associated with the mobile phone.

The term narrative suggests a plethora of definitions and theoretical interpretations. Ryan (2004, p.337) defines a narrative text as: “one that brings a world to the mind (setting) and populates it with intelligent agents (characters). These agents participate in actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes in the narrative world.” Hardy (1968, p.3) offers a contrasting view to Ryan when she states: “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative”. Whereas Ryan may view narrative as a means of ordering story events and characters, Hardy suggests that narrative provides a method for making sense of our personal experience, as well as our relationships with the people who share our world. I believe that the function of narrative is to enable the organization of our thoughts and stories in a manner that makes sense to the storyteller, and the people who share our tales.
Contemporary narrative theory provides artists with an insight into the devices and structures employed in the production of oral, visual, text and performance based stories. It could be said that we structure our stories in order to make sense of our place in the world. If storytelling is the process by which individuals and communities are able to share tales of our humanity; it is narrative theory that provides us with a system for the ordering of events and characters that convey the drama of our personal experience.

In this chapter I will explore some of the narrative concepts that I believe may assist artists producing stories for mobile phones. It is not my intention to provide the reader with an in-depth analysis of narrative theory, nor is it my intention to impose upon the reader a formula for the design and production of narratives for the small screen, for that is outside of the scope of this exegesis.

Rather than present an historical overview of narrative theory I have narrowed my field of enquiry to a small selection of contemporary theorists and narrative concepts. In particular, I will refer to the cultural theorist Mieke Bal (2006), whose theories on reframing and narrative gaps have been influential in the production of my work that accompanies this exegesis. I believe that developing a basic understanding of narrative theory, and how it can be implemented into one’s creative practice, can assist artists in constructing dynamic stories that respond to the needs of the author and the viewer.

The mobile phone provides a means of producing / displaying a wide range of narrative content, but the clarity of the message is highly dependant on the audio/visual cues and signifiers that populate such a narrative. Concepts put forward by contemporary narrative theorists may provide artists with the necessary knowledge required to construct engaging stories for the small screen of the mobile phone.

Although it is impossible to control every viewer’s interpretation of the visual cues presented in a story, a basic knowledge of narrative theory may help the author to steer the viewer towards an implied meaning or intended interpretation of story events. A misinterpretation of visual cues may invite narrative gaps or semiotic disruptions that lead the reader towards an interpretation that diverges
from the meaning intended by the author of the narrative.

Whether or not such a disruption of narrative is necessarily a problem depends on the intended role of the signifier in translating a message. In the case of a sign placed on a beach featuring a graphic symbol representing a shark, a misinterpretation may prove fatal for a person who enters the water without understanding the danger. In the case of a creative work, such gaps may instigate new directions and unforseen interpretations of a narrative and therefore promote an engagement with stories and experiences that are particular to the reader.

Bordwell & Thompson (1989, p 83) observe that: “the spectator actively seeks to connect events by means of cause and effect. Given an incident, we tend to hypothesize what might have caused it, or what it might in turn cause”. I believe that the intentional disruption of causal, temporal and spatial narrative elements can sometimes provide a useful method of promoting a viewer interaction that engages imaginative interpretations of story content and thus acknowledges the role of the viewer as a part of the narrative process.

The Order of Magnitude images (see DVD enclosed) requires that the viewer take a less passive role when attempting to decode the distorted visual cues. These images are not intended to present a fixed meaning or rigid interpretation of the content, but aim to involve the viewer in the process of creating meaning from the collection of visual artifacts that are presented within the context of the photographic image.

Bal (2005, p.9) states: “that the impulse, or desire, for narrative, is so strong that precisely those gaps that destroy the potential story also generate the possibility of the story”. The intentional creation of gaps provides both the author and the viewer with an opportunity to extend the possibilities of visual narratives. In the case of my mobile images in the Order of Magnitude series, the erosion of the images via the enlargement process presents the viewer with a collection of distorted visual cues that invites multiple interpretations of the visual content.

In order to exploit Bal’s (2006) premise that gaps generate the potential for story, the video sequences in my video experiments Distillation of Memory and
Spatial Threshold (see DVD enclosed) have been randomly placed, rather than ordered in a particular sequence or linear montage. It is intended that this less formal approach to the sequencing of events portrayed in the videos will promote gaps in the narrative. These video grids rely on the viewer to form connections, create typologies and/or construct relationships between other video sequences in order to make sense of the random collection of videos that stand before them. It is precisely these narrative gaps that Bal talks about which provide the reader with an opportunity to look outside of the structure that has been created by the author, and therefore enables the reader to impose their own system of decoding the narrative content. I have translated this notion of gaps for implementation in the design and production of my own creative practice.

The disruption of the semiotic process affects an audience’s reading of the signs presented in a media text, but I believe that such a disruption can be employed by the author to promote an enhanced audience engagement with their imagination and invite the audience to take a far less passive role when interacting with narratives. It is worth noting that narrative disruption is not appropriate for all types of storytelling. In the case of a conventional linear narrative, such as a 2 minute mobile phone drama, clarity of causal, temporal and spatial elements play a key role in delivering meaning to the viewer. But for video projections, narrative disruptions can introduce unforeseen interpretations that invite viewers to interact and play with story content.

In the case of my project Velocity, the clear presence of a narrator provides structure to the story events and provides a simple means of conveying linear story content to the viewer. Point of view (P.O.V.) plays an important role in positioning the narrator within the framework of a narrative structure. The type of voice employed by the narrator can affect the reader’s relationship with the content and interpretation of the narrative elements. Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis (1992, p.84) state that: “the category of point-of-view is one of the most important means of structuring narrative discourse and one of the most powerful mechanisms for audience manipulation”.

Chatman proposes the existence of two types of narrator, the overt and the
covert. The voice of the overt narrator is clear to the reader whereas the covert narrator’s voice is invisible to the reader. The use of the covert or overt narrator is dependant on a writer’s decision to reveal or conceal the hand of the author in constructing the narrative framework of the story-world. Although a narrator may be perceived as invisible to the eye of the reader, I would argue that the narrator’s presence is visible via his/her positioning of the characters or framing of the story elements within the narrative framework. The editing and selection of story content suggests the presence of a narrator, and it is the viewer who must either accept or ignore such a slight of hand. I believe a decision to adopt an overt or covert narrative voice is highly dependant on the type of narrative structure and the medium that is being used to convey the content.

My video projections (see Drift, Distillation of Memory and Spatial Threshold) are perhaps notable for their absence of an overt narrator. Yet it is through a combination of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and images that these works imply a story, rather than overtly direct the viewer towards a fixed interpretation of the story elements. In my opinion, a successful video projection creates a space for both the artist and the viewer to project their emotions and personal histories in order to create new levels of meaning and understanding. It could be said that the viewer’s interpretations of narrative gaps create an additional meaning which lies outside of the original intentions imposed upon the work by the artist.

When establishing a dialogue with an audience, it is my view that an artist should take into account any preconceived ideas and cultural associations that a viewer may use in the reading of a media text. Visual mediums such as painting, photography and film are all capable of presenting narratives, yet these three mediums invite different levels of engagement and interpretation.

A painting may depict a particular subject or concept, yet it is difficult for the reader to ignore the presence of the brush strokes on the surface, or not be influenced by paintings “high art” status within the visual art hierarchy. These factors arguably contribute to a viewer’s reading of a media text, and this has proven to be an interesting area of investigation when producing mobile phone narratives.
Although mobile phone narratives may borrow design principles such as framing, composition and sequential montage from cinema and photography, the mobile phone is not restricted by the conventions associated with either of these two media formats. As noted by Hodge & Tripp (1986, p.17): “fundamental to all semiotic analysis is the fact that any system of signs (semiotic code) is carried by a material medium which has its own principles of structure”. Therefore, it is highly possible that a reader’s interpretation of a sign may be influenced by the associations, or preconceived notions that the reader may attach to a particular medium being used to convey a concept or idea. Gibbons (2007, p.43) observes: “Each form of viewing makes different demands on the viewer and evokes slightly different cultural practices which inevitably give a different ‘frame’ or register to the works”.

Images and video captured on the mobile phone are generally not afforded the same status or prestige so often attributed to visual mediums such as photography and cinema, but this may also be viewed as an advantage, as it frees both the artist and the viewer from the intellectual baggage associated with more traditional visual media forms.

As Lee (2007, p.24) observes: “Everyday moments and places that conventional photography has typically disregarded for their “everydayness”, triviality and banality; events that people experience accidentally or instantaneously on a site; and even the playful situations that are staged for photographic pleasure, can be captured on camera phones”.

Images taken on the mobile phone camera often convey a high level of immediacy, that is to say, that mobile phone images reflect a wide range of people, places and events that would perhaps go unnoticed if it were not for the ubiquitous nature of the mobile phone. The mobile phone camera enables users to connect, capture and share digital artifacts in the form of images that reflect the narratives of our everyday experience.

The absence of an historical tradition, or established methodology for the design and production of mobile phone narratives does not confirm a lack of intellectual rigour on the part of artists working in mobile media. I believe that it is precisely
the newness of mobile media that instigates the possibility for innovation in creative storytelling. Mobile media is never static, it is always evolving via technical advances, and this in itself provides artist with a dynamic and fluid media platform to extend our understanding of narrative, as well as our relationship with technology.

In conclusion, I believe that a basic understanding of contemporary narrative theory provides artists with the conceptual tools necessary to aid the development and production of story content for a wide range of mobile media, in particular the mobile phone. The re-purposing of content for the small screen, as well as the reframing of mobile phone images and videos for other media formats, creates new modes of storytelling and presents both artists and viewers with new ways to explore and extend our understanding of narrative. I believe that Bal’s (2006) theory of narrative gaps further challenges our notion of narrative and provides artists with a theoretical framework to assist in the construction of narratives that invite the viewer to actively employ their personal viewpoints and life experiences in the process of decoding and the interpretation of visual narratives.

In the previous chapter I briefly outlined some of the concepts put forward by contemporary narrative theorists and how these concepts have influenced the production of my mobile phone experiments. I have also investigated the role of media convergence and provided examples of works that exploit the unique qualities of the mobile phone. Many of these projects extend our understanding of narrative, and in turn, create new and/or hybrid narrative forms that challenge conventional notions of narrative.

According to Ryan (2004, p356), "The most urgent of the issues that faces developers of new media narrative is to find what themes and what kind of plots take proper advantage of the built in properties of the medium". In the following chapter I will unpack the concepts and narrative devices that I have employed in the production of my narrative experiments that accompany this exegesis.

One of my initial observations made whilst working with mobile media was a need to differentiate between micro-narratives (content produced for the small screen) and video or photomedia produced using the mobile phone’s built-in cameras. Projects made for the small screen must acknowledge the mobile phone’s limitations as a presentation form, whereas the unique aesthetic of videos and photomedia can be viewed as a direct result of the low-resolution camera built into the mobile phone.

Micro-narratives must take into account not only the small screen size, but also the nature of the viewing experience and social practices associated with mobile phone usage. For example, the portability of the mobile phone arguably creates a unique viewing experience. The viewer is not restricted to watching mobile content in a fixed location, such as watching a movie in the confines of a cinema. Mobile content is often viewed whilst in transit and therefore must compete with the existing ambience of a viewer’s immediate environment and unexpected distractions associated with public spaces. Therefore micro-narratives are best kept short, approximately 1-3 min, in order to promote
engagement with the story content. Compositions are often framed in close-up and/or mid-shots to aid visual recognition of content. Text may also be employed as a narrative device.

Firstly, I will examine the challenges associated with the development and creation of micro-narratives. Secondly, I will look at the challenges associated with adopting the mobile phone as a production tool for the creation of video and photomedia works.

3.1 Micro-narratives: Experiments for the mobile screen.

Micro-narratives (stories for the mobile phone screen) are evolving and taking form as artists explore the parameters of the mobile phone. My early mobile narrative experiments were designed and produced within the restrictions and narrow parameters of the mobile phone technology of 2005. One of the challenges I faced at the time was establishing which media forms could be adapted to fit the small screen of the mobile phone.

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Narratives designed for the mobile phone may borrow from a diverse range of mediums such as comic books, film, novels and animation. Over the course of this chapter I will outline some of the key factors that have influenced the research and processes behind the development and subsequent production of my narrative experiments.

In the early stages of my research, file size emerged as an inhibiting factor in the production and distribution of micro-narratives. The exorbitant cost of downloading networked content to a mobile phone placed enormous constraints on the design of mobile content. Therefore, in order to reduce download costs
and make mobile content a more viable option for consumers, my initial mobile phone projects were restricted to file sizes of under one megabyte.

My first experiments Globaleyes and Heartfelt were designed and produced to address the limitations associated with poor screen resolution, poor audio quality and limited memory and data capacity, which at the time I believe was hindering the development of narrative projects for the mobile phone. Like the silent screen era, which had formed the foundations of contemporary cinema, early examples of micro-narratives also relied on text to convey the narrative to the viewer. Unfortunately, the small screen of the mobile phone can make text difficult to read, thus rendering text a less than effective device on the small screen.

With the production Globaleyes and Heartfelt, my aim was to produce short narratives of small file sizes that would reduce download times and costs for the consumer. Keeping the file sizes small enabled mobile phone users to store the projects on their phones, and enable users to share content via the mobile networks or wireless Bluetooth applications.

Working with small file sizes can often lead to a compromise in the image quality of the finished product. In order to keep my projects under one megabyte, constant testing of the projects was required to find a suitable compression rate for the audio and visual content. Unlike the enlarged low-resolution images seen in my Order of Magnitude project, I believe that minor imperfections in image quality are far less noticeable when viewed on the mobile phone’s small screen. Globaleyes and Heartfelt have been created using a collection of digitised photographs, imported and assembled using time based media applications to create an animated effect. At the time of the production, video display was limited to a small range of expensive high end mobile phones, thus making the animation techniques employed in the production of these 2 projects an effective means of simulating the appearance of video whilst keeping file sizes small to maximise the range of mobile phones able to display these projects.

Ongoing changes in mobile technology have seen the introduction of mobile phones with greater screen resolution and improved audio quality. Instead of
text being used to drive narrative, I have opted for background music to set the mood for these works. These projects do not aim to immerse the viewer in a complex narrative structure, nor do they attempt to challenge the established hierarchy of the cinema viewing experience. These micro-narratives aim to entertain a mobile audience whilst in transit; waiting at a bus stop, or simply looking for a distraction from the everyday. With these considerations in mind, the moving image provides a means of promoting immediate engagement with the viewer.

The poor audio quality and low screen resolution of early mobile phone models imposed harsh limitations for the creation of visually sophisticated micro-narratives, but the portability of the mobile phone afforded the user the convenience of watching content whilst on the go. It is important to note that unlike the site-specific environment of the cinema or the television at home, the mobile viewer must compete with numerous distractions that challenge engagement with mobile content. The phone also provides distractions in the form of incoming calls and text messages, making the mobile phone a conduit for live narrative interactions as well as a portal for pre-produced narrative content.

In 2006, video capability became a common feature of the mobile phone. The ability to record and play video on the small screen gave birth to a wide range of moving image content, in particular the short film and episodic drama designed specifically to fit the parameters of the mobile phone. My project Velocity, a trailer for a proposed mobile episodic drama, adopts the cinematic conventions of montage, genre and shot composition as devices to aid the delivery of narrative content to a mobile audience.

The production of an episodic drama for the mobile phone seemed a natural progression in my pursuit of narrative forms to fit within the parameters of the mobile’s small screen. Mobile phone dramas, also known as mobisodes, borrow many of the aesthetic and narrative conventions from television drama. Although mobisodes are often short in duration (1-3 minutes), conventions such as framing of composition, montage and mise en scene are often combined with the so called “cliff-hanger” dramatic ending so often employed in many television
dramas to encourage viewers to watch the next episode. The constraints of the small screen mobisodes often have minimal characters, fewer plot points, and consist mostly of mid-shots and close-ups.

Early examples of commercial micro-narratives such as Fantesstic (2004) seem somewhat simplistic when compared to the sophistication of interactive networked dramas such as Forget the Rules which allows viewers to interact with the programs writers to determine the direction of the narrative. Fantesstic, an interactive MMS drama first launched in Spain in 2004 and produced by Dutch multimedia company Endemol employs a series of colour gif files and speech bubbles to map the adventures of Tess, a young female disk jockey, and her friends.

Fantesstic derives its aesthetic from a combination of cinematic shot construction and the comic book format. Interactivity was achieved by enabling viewers to interact with the story characters via a dedicated website and an MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) gateway that gave viewers the option of sending and receiving automated pictures and messages via their mobile phone. Although Fantesstic appears dated now, it must be acknowledged that video playback was not a common feature on mobile phones at the time of its production. Rather than adopt the static style of Fantesstic, I felt it more prudent to develop a video based drama that took advantage of the technological advancements in mobile media that loomed on the horizon. Video enabled mobile phones were just beginning to enter the Australian market in late 2005 and with this new mobile technology came the promise of extending the types of narratives that could be produced for the small screen. It is worth noting that video capability is now a common feature on the mobile phone.

The portable nature of the mobile phone requires viewers to compete with a host of distractions, therefore in order to maximise viewer attention, mobisodes require fewer characters and a less complex storyline than conventional television dramas. The framing of content must also take into account screen size and image resolution. Bold colours and tight cinematic framing (mid-shot, close-up) of screen content can further aid visibility of content on the mobile phone. At the time of Velocity's production, poor speaker quality on mobile
phones dictated that a mobisode use subtitles to assist viewer comprehension of the narrative in situations where crowd noise may disrupt the viewing experience.

Mobile technology is constantly changing and updating, and this factor has continued to play a role in the production of my mobile phone projects. The introduction of the iPod, complete with its iconic white earplugs, promoted the inclusion of mp3 players on new models of mobile phones. Finally, audio has improved dramatically, thanks to the iPod and portable mp3 players, and the public had grown accustomed to the idea of wearing earphones whilst in transit.

The mobile phone is still perceived by many companies as merely another marketing tool for the promotion of products. Bluetooth technology is currently used in major shopping malls and transport hubs to distribute movie trailers, advertising and light entertainment to mobile phone users within the vicinity. As the mobile phone continues to evolve via media convergence, it is highly likely that public expectations surrounding mobile content will also change. I believe that the mobile phone’s full potential as a tool for the display of a wide variety of entertainment forms is yet to be fully realised by the business community and the public. I think it is possible to produce mobile narratives that acknowledge the unique qualities of the mobile phone, but the audience may take some time to convince.

My micro-narrative projects will now be discussed in relation to the narrative concepts and production techniques that have influenced the creation of these experiments.
The mobile phone is often touted as an important tool in the globalisation of world cultures. The ubiquitous nature of the mobile phone suggests an adoption of mobile technology by stealth as we witness an increased proliferation of mobile devices across the globe. As noted by McGuigan (2005, p.238), “neoliberal globalization is not a phantasm to be wished away, but deeply embedded already in routine social practices and relationships”. Mobile phones provide users with a convenient and relatively inexpensive means of connecting with people, but mobile phones may also be adopted as a tool to erode cultural diversity.

Using a collection of sliding pictorial panels, this example of a matrix narrative instigates a disruption of formal narrative structure. Rather than repurpose large screen content for the small screen, I have used close-up shots to aid viewer recognition of the images when viewed on the mobile phone’s small screen. The idea behind Globaleyes (see DVD enclosed) was to produce an animated project that would promote viewer engagement with the small screen content.

Globaleyes explores issues surrounding identity and multi-culturalism in a globalised world. Sections of faces of people from various ethnic backgrounds move and merge on the screen of the mobile phone. The result is a blending of cultural appearances that highlight what I believe to be a shift towards a monocultural, rather than a multi-cultural identity.
*Globaleyes* experiments with movement within the small screen, utilizing the edges of the mobile screen in order to create a more dynamic viewer experience. It was intended that this project have a game-like quality, simple graphics, and a short duration of approximately one minute. To make *Globaleyes* more accessible to viewers who wish to transfer or download the project to their mobile phone, I decided that the finished film would not exceed a file size of over one megabyte.

As a response to what I perceive as a polished commercial aesthetic often associated with digital media, the low-tech aesthetic of *Globaleyes* adopts simple animation techniques in order to create the appearance of a handcrafted artifact. The old fashioned flip and pop-up books of the 1960’s that I read as a child provided a fertile starting point for my investigation. These books employed simple pop-up objects and paper flaps to transform a static page into a three dimensional space, thus creating matrix narratives that promoted multi-threaded interactive story content. The flipbook divided the page into multiple sections which enabled the reader to flip only part of the page. An example I recall was an animal flip book, which split the page into three sections, thus creating a series of three independent panels.

The result was an engaging experience for the reader, who was now able to combine the head of a goat, with the body of a dog, the legs of a crocodile, and so on. The mobile phone screen is a flat two dimensional surface, but the act of breaking up the screen space into a number of animated sections creates a dynamic effect that may promote greater viewer engagement with the content. Surrealist Cinema with its dream-inspired imagery and collage style also influenced the visual aesthetic of this project.

In the case of *Globaleyes*, the digital time based media software Adobe After Effects was used to create an animation which the movement of photographic segments which slide across the portrait-orientated screen. Using black and white photographs promotes a nostalgic quality that alludes to a pre-digital world. It is also easier to view high contrast black and white images, rather than colour, on the small screen of the mobile phone.
The iconic photo identikit used by police to assist in the identification of criminals is often employed as a narrative device in the crime thriller genre. *Globaleyes* employs the identikit as metaphor in order to suggest a darker narrative that lurks within its whimsical nature. I believe that since the 9/11 attack on The World Trade Centre there has been an increased level of xenophobia in the community. Government anti-terror campaigns have only exacerbated a “fear of the other”. Our faces are often searched by a paranoid public looking for traces of ethnicities deemed undesirable or potentially detrimental to the Australian way of life. I believe that *Globaleyes* enters into this post 9/11 discourses, inviting the viewer to search the ever changing facial features for traces of their own prejudice.

The use of close-up shots was a deliberate attempt to reference police mugshots, as well as allowing the viewer an opportunity to view the subtle facial features that may provide clues to the ethnic origins of the subjects. My decision to resize all the original image files down to 72 dpi (dots per inch) resulted in a low quality final product. This problem was exacerbated when further quality was lost whilst using an encoder (Quicktime Pro) to create a 3gp file (mobile phone format) of less than one megabyte. Although the file compression made little difference to the finished product when viewed on a mobile phone screen, it resulted in a project that could only be viewed on the mobile phone, thus severely limiting my screening options. A better process would be to work with the best quality files to achieve a high quality outcome that can be compressed to suit a wide variety of screen formats.

The sliding images created a stronger sense of the edges of the mobile screen and this helped deliver a more dynamic viewing experience. The flipbook aesthetic employed for this project promotes engagement with content, but I would argue that it also creates a strong reference point for the reader to revisit childhood narratives in the form of memories.
The idea behind the *Heartfelt* project (see DVD enclosed) was to create an autobiographical illness narrative related to my two month hospitalisation resulting from a severe blood infection and subsequent heart operation. Inviting association with the toys of childhood play, I have adopted the kaleidoscope as metaphor to illustrate the constant change in my appearance during my recovery period. Selecting from over 300 self-portraits captured on the mobile phone, the completed project alludes to notions of identity and wellbeing.

To reinforce the aesthetic of the kaleidoscope, a viewer may slowly turn the mobile phone 360° (see Figure 5) to obtain a similar optical effect. The constantly changing orientation of the content within the frame of the screen may promote greater viewer interaction by enabling the content to be viewed...
from various angles. Adopting the surrealist aesthetic of collage, Heartfelt uses filters found in the Apple Macintosh time based media software iMovie to create an effect that divides and flips the image. The narrative is fractured and disrupted, but the metaphor of the kaleidoscope suggests a set of conventions associated with the device. Borrowing from the cinematic convention of montage, cross dissolves are employed as a narrative device. The images are repeatedly superimposed to promote a morphing effect and temporal shift. Rather than employ a fixed narrative form or genre, the organic nature of this narrative exploits the gaps that occur between each image. These gaps become spaces for the insertion of interpretation based upon a viewer’s recognition and understanding of the content.

The digital images used in the production of Heartfelt were all taken with a mobile phone camera. To avoid the problems associated with poor image quality that had plagued the Globaleyes project, the Heartfelt images and resulting video were kept at optimum quality. The full quality project was later compressed into a 3gp file using the digital encoder Quicktime Pro. Working with high quality files provided greater flexibility for the project, as now it could be played on a wide variety of formats and platforms, rather than be restricted to the small screen. The soundtrack consists of an audio file of a heartbeat combined with a series of preset sound loops, then mixed using Apple Macintosh audio editing software Garageband.

The size and shape of the mobile phone was a key factor in restricting fluid movement of the device and therefore the kaleidoscope concept was not fully realised. However the decision to flip and divide the images seen in the video enabled more than one viewer to watch Heartfelt from different vantage points, thus promoting the sharing of content.

The random order of the sequenced images, combined with the filter effect may have made it difficult for viewers to decipher the intended narrative. The continual distortion of the human face in Heartfelt is employed as a visual device that alludes to the constant changes in my appearance during my recovery period. The resulting project is a micro-narrative that serves as a visual document and an artifact of my personal response to illness and recovery.
At the time of the production of *Heartfelt*, a great deal of mobile phone content consisted of soft porn images targeted at an adolescent male audience. In contrast to this, *Heartfelt* is an experimental project exploring personal thoughts on illness, wellbeing and the human condition. In hindsight, the narrative is too abstract to build a clear picture of the story behind the images. Chatman identifies *order and selection* as principal features of narrative. (1978, p.28) and I believe that the selection and re-ordering of images for this project based on key turning points in my illness and recovery is the best method of conveying the narrative to the viewer.

*Velocity* (2006)

Format: 3gp format for Mobile Phone

Size: 177 x 144 pixels

A stalker is on the loose, but what happens when the device that could save your life is also the same one that could end it? The mobile phone is employed as a metaphor of destruction and redemption in this homage to the thriller and horror films of the 1980’s. Mixing humour, mystery and voyeurism, *Velocity* (see DVD enclosed) is a mobile trailer for a proposed series of fictional mobisodes which explore the implications of a networked society. The narrative examines the socialisation of the camera phone and its impact on our understanding of public and private spaces, as well as the potential of mobile media to erode privacy and personal security.
Mobile phones infiltrate almost every aspect of daily life, they are rarely turned off by their owners, thus providing constant wireless access to family, friends and work colleagues. Mobile phones are also used to store personal information and share intimate relations in the form of voice calls, text, video and images. *Velocity* explores the implications of an unwanted connection with a stranger who is using the mobile phone as a tool for the harassment and torment of members of the public.

At the time of developing the *Velocity* project, mobile phone stalking and privacy issues associated with the misuse of mobile phone cameras in public spaces was generating a lot of interest from both the press and the public. An article on the ABC News website titled *Mobile phone stalking on the rise: police* (ABC, 2005, news items section) tells how two Australian men had used mobile phones to stalk and send lewd images and video footage to their unsuspecting victims. These stories are becoming more common as portable media devices continue to erode our privacy.

In *Velocity*, the unseen antagonist uses the mobile phone as a tool for stalking an unsuspecting young woman. As the protagonist Emma Kane receives messages and images from her less than friendly admirer, the viewer is having a similar experience as they read the same messages on their mobile phone. Suddenly the small screen of the mobile phone is a mirror that reflects the narrative content, inviting the viewer to inhabit the storyspace, thus promoting a higher level of viewer engagement. It is intended that the stalker will not be seen until the final episode when Emma Kane finally films the antagonist and sends the footage to the viewer.

A first person point of view (P.O.V.) is employed to help viewers identify the actions and movements of the antagonist in Velocity. The adoption of a first person P.O.V. provides an effective means of concealing the identity of the protagonist, as well as heightening the viewer’s level of suspense. The viewer is asked to share the view of the antagonist, we see through their eyes and are always present when he/she watches from afar, sneaks through corridors and executes an attack on the protagonist. According to Muir (2007, p.31), “the camera is simultaneously our “eye” and the character’s “eye,” we aren’t certain
who is doing the stalking”. The mobile phone provides users with the tools necessary to document, capture images and communicate with the people in our social circles, but it can also be used as tool to erode the privacy of others.

Bal (2006, p.12) proposes that: “the narrator is not a person; he is an agent”, by this statement Bal acknowledges the function of the narrator as a vehicle employed by the author to create a dialogue with the reader and drive the narrative towards its conclusion. In the case of Velocity, action scenes are punctuated with text that imitates the aesthetic of the text message. These text messages invite the viewer to read the personal communications between Velocity and her Stalker. Text also acts as a simple form of narration, providing a means of clearly illustrating turning points in the narrative as it unfolds on the small screen of the mobile phone.

Frame composition and text inserts are the key filmic devices used to relay the narrative to the viewer in this micro-narrative. Screenwriting techniques have also been employed to aid the creation of a narrative framework for the placement of story content. Velocity borrows heavily from the conventions of television drama and the visual language of cinema. The use of abrupt montage, a suspenseful soundtrack, and dramatic shock events make playful reference to the familiar codes and conventions of the 1980’s horror film genre (Jancovich, 2002). Genre studies provide a useful reference for the construction of mobile phone narratives. An understanding of genre studies may assist writers of micro-narratives by providing a solid framework based on the aesthetic and narrative conventions associated with classic film genres, but it may also assist viewers in following stories on the small screen, as many viewers are familiar with the cinematic conventions of film genres such as the “horror film”.

Although Velocity is presented as a short teaser or trailer for a fictional episodic drama, it was still necessary to follow a screenwriting process for the development of the storyworld and the characters that inhabit it. Vogler’s text A Writers Journey (1998), based on Joseph Campbell’s (1968) theories relating to the narrative structure in myth, provides a sound framework for the development and ordering of dramatic content for the screen. Vogler’s (1998, p.14) model of The Heroes Journey provides writers with a sequenced list of the 12 key
narrative components of the hero’s quest, but this information is not limited to tales of Arthurian myth and legend, this model can be applied to quests that exist in the everyday.

In order to instigate The Heroes Journey, Vogler (1998, p.100) states that: “The call to adventure may come in the form of a message or a messenger”. In the case of Velocity, the familiar beep that innocently announces the arrival of a text message is the inciting incident that triggers our hero’s journey.

Also useful in the development of this project was the 5 stage narrative model proposed by Kafalenos (Phelan, J & Rabiowitz, P.J) that aims the progression and function of events within a narrative structure. The 5 stages are as follows: “equilibrium, disruption, efforts by character (or actants) at alleviating the disruption, the success or failure of those efforts, and finally the establishment of a new equilibrium”. (Phelan, J & Rabiowitz, P.J 2005, p. 8)

In the case of Velocity, a disruption to the equilibrium comes in the form of a cryptic text message sent to lead character Emma Kane from a secret admirer. Attempts to alleviate the problem constantly result in failure. In this case it is a stalker who is watching and recording Emma’s every move with a mobile phone. After a terrifying final showdown with the stalker, Emma Kane succeeds in her quest to conquer her fears, here manifested in the form of the stalker, thus resulting in a personal transformation.

According to McKee (1999, p.189), “The INCITING INCIDENT radically upsets the balance of the forces in the protagonist’s life”. The first text message that Emma Kane receives from the stalker has a pivotal function within the narrative structure, it is the inciting incident that denotes a shift in the story and provides a reason for the protagonist’s journey outside of her everyday world experiences.

The television series and its associated narrative devices provided a useful model to assist in the production of Velocity. Although the television screen may be smaller than a cinema screen, it does not present the same constraints afforded the mobile phone screen. Long-shots and wide-angle shots, though clearly visible on the television screen, often loose their impact on the tiny mobile phone screen. Camera angles form the basis of a visual vocabulary that
is at the heart of cinematic language, but camera techniques such as panning and tilts may create unwanted blur or soft focus when watched on the mobile phone. Mise en scene must also be considered when designing for the small screen. I have experimented with the use of lighting, bold colour and set design in order to highlight the locations and actions taking place within the small screen.

At the time of production, poor speaker quality on mobile phones was still a major obstacle. The deconstruction of cinematic elements into video slices, still images, audio and text messages is necessitated by technical constraints that dictate small file sizes. These bite size narrative chunks form the basis of a unique narrative signature. To overcome these problems, I decided to use a combination of text and simple ambient sounds to support the video content. Slabs of text can often slow down the pace of narratives and leave mobile video projects looking like relics from the silent era. Therefore moving text was employed as narrative device, creating a dynamic contemporary aesthetic which increases the pace of the drama.

After exploring the potential of the mobisode as a narrative form I have noted down some of my observations based on what I perceive as some of the key challenges associated with producing video content for the mobile phone.

Writing a mobile drama consisting of twelve two minute episodes, which each have a beginning, middle and end may present many challenges for writers/artists. Genre presents great opportunities for the creation of narrative frameworks that aid the development of small screen content, but formulaic narrative structure also impose conditions that may lead to predictable storylines, limited character development and clichéd plotlines which may also deter engagement with the content. To best realise the interactive potential of the mobile phone, it is necessary that designers of micro-narratives exploit the networked capabilities of mobile media.

To extend viewer engagement with the story content in *Velocity*, it would be advantageous to employ an MMS gateway to enable viewers to receive and share story snippets in the form of text message and images sent from fictional
characters within the story space. Messages from the characters would be delivered to the viewer’s mobile phone inbox; sharing the space with everyday communications from friends, family and colleagues. Suddenly the small screen of the mobile phone is more than a communication tool; it is a story portal that promotes active engagement with narrative content. Viewers would be encouraged to reply to text messages, thus playing a role in the narrative as it unfolds on the small screen.

Micro-narratives have the potential to create new narrative forms that liberate both the story and the viewer. Unlike television or cinema, the portable nature of the mobile phone enables on-demand engagement with content in non-traditional viewing spaces. Ben Jones, creative director of The Phonebook Ltd observes that: “The fact that the viewer is being broadcast to on a one-to-one-basis (as opposed to the TV system of one to some, or the cinema system of one-to-many) changes how they view the work” (2005, p.1). A more intimate relationship with the small screen can aid engagement with mobile content, but it may also promote added viewer immersion and interaction with the narrative.

Mobile phones can enable viewers to interact with story content and influence the direction of the narrative. Mobile episodic dramas such as Australian productions Forget the Rules (2005) and Girl Friday (2005) invite viewers to interact with the characters via text messages. In the case of Forget the Rules, viewers are given the opportunity to influence the narrative by sending their suggestions to the production team via text messages. Mobile phones enable dynamic interaction with stories, and can promote a high level of engagement with narrative content.

The mobile phone is a storytelling device that acknowledges the journey of the user as well as the journey of the characters that populate the small screen of the mobile phone. As the mobile phone continues to evolve, it is likely that these changes will continue to influence and promote the creation of narrative forms that take advantage of the unique parameters of mobile media.
3.2 Video and Photomedia: Mobile phone as production tool

The mobile phone is a ubiquitous media tool that has become an extension of the self, its camera a third eye capturing the ephemera of the everyday. The following experiments explore the possibilities afforded by the mobile phone camera.

The convenience of the mobile phone camera provides the user with an unprecedented level of mobility; also it presents an opportunity to document selected moments in the life of the user and/or the lives of others. No longer burdened by the expensive and cumbersome technical processes associated with traditional filmmaking and photography, the camera phone presents an inexpensive and simple means of capturing video and images. Camera phones are often present in a wide variety of locations and situations in which it may not be convenient to carry a conventional camera. Thus the camera phone presents an ideal tool for capturing the unexpected and the immediacy of the moment.

For many people digital media often evokes a technical perfection, a heightened state of quality where every imperfection and blemish can be ironed out and polished to create a seamless representation that remains true to digital media’s binary origins. Klinger observes:

The value of films is often largely determined by the quality of the transfer, the aura of the digital reproduction of sound and image, and even the pristine surface of the laserdisc itself. These priorities in turn lead to a preference for certain kinds of films over others – that is, films that that have visual surfaces and technical features that appear to highlight and reinforce the capabilities of digital technology. (Klinger, 2006, p.76)

The adoption of the mobile phone camera for the production of these narrative experiments is based on a decision to create works, which are not subservient to a pervasive notion of digital completeness or perfection. These low-resolution images and videos celebrate the unique qualities of the mobile phone camera and the surface of these works, whether projected or printed form a part of the narrative process. Poor focus, colour shifts and heavy pixilation are like bruises
on the skin, they are the physical signs that allude to the imperfections and differences that are embodied by the lived experience. These works are often palpable, sometimes tactile, but always true in their aim to illustrate the imperfection of the form, rather than adhere to a doctrine of digital perfection.

### Recovery (2006)

Format: Digital prints in booklet.

Size: Approx 8 x 6 cm.

**Figure 7: Recovery Production Still.**

The objective of the Recovery project (see DVD enclosed) was to adopt the mobile phone camera as a device to record a series of narrative images that document my recovery after a heart operation in 2005. Van Alphern (1998, p.24) observes that the: “vision of the individual subject who had the experience becomes the bedrock of evidence”. In the case of the Recovery project, such evidence is born from my personal experience. These digital images provide a visual record of the changes in my appearance as my health slowly improved over a twelve-month period, but they also played a vital role in aiding my recovery by providing evidence of my journey to wellness. The portability of the mobile phone meant I was able to review these images at anytime. On days when I was feeling unwell, I would scroll through the images looking for evidence of my improvement in health.

The mobile phone presents a convenient method of capturing and storing a
series of self-portraits that can easily be reviewed on the screen of the mobile phone at the point of capture. Each day that I captured a self-portrait, I looked to the small screen of the mobile phone for evidence of any improvement in my health. Like a looking glass, the small screen of the mobile phone reflected back my face, and over a long period of time I watched and searched for any physical signs of the face of the person I was before the onset of the illness.

My decision to create a small booklet to house a selection of my self-portraits was based on a need to recreate the intimate nature of the viewing process on the mobile phone. I also wanted to give the viewer an opportunity to view and compare these tiny images in similar fashion to how I had interacted with these mobile phone self-portraits.

Images captured on a mobile phone camera are not afforded the same prestige as images created by photographers using conventional stills cameras. Sturken and Cartwright (2003, p.13) observe that: “a photograph is perceived to be an unmediated copy of the real world, a trace of reality skimmed off the very surface of life”. But in a post-photoshop era that has arguably eroded the truth-value and the social status of the photograph, the digital image stands as a malleable visual document, rather than a fixed media object. Instead of the truth belonging to the image, it is now the maker of the image who must be trusted by the viewer.

Employing the conventions of the documentary photograph to convey the story behind this collection of mobile phone images, these illness narratives are presented as a linear photo essay that recalls the key turning points associated with the various stages of my recovery period. Rather than adopt a highly stylised aesthetic for the self-portraits, I have opted for a less formal process. Each image is presented as a frontal portrait and is captured in a manner where no particular time, place or lighting conditions were imposed upon the production process. I believe that the frontal portrait can be adopted as a narrative device to reveal the subject of an image in a similar way that a reader would open a book and reveal the words for all to see. The frontal portrait opens up the subject to public scrutiny; the sitter has no place to hide and nowhere to run as s/he is forced to confront what cannot be hidden from the viewer. The
images include a wide variety of background information and frame compositions. Each image was taken at a time which was considered convenient, rather than adopting a systematic approach to the overall aesthetic and production phase.

Brison (1999, p.39) observes that: “survivors of trauma frequently remark that they are not the same people they were before they were traumatized”. The changes in my physical appearance provide the viewer with a series of visual and narrative cues surrounding a theme of transition. The intent for this series was not to pre-empt or drive the narrative in a set direction. This collection of self-portraits is best viewed as an exploration of a personal narrative that has been captured as it unfolds before the subject.

Challenges associated with this project include the limitations resulting from the cheap plastic lens and poor image quality of the 2.0 mega pixel camera embedded in the Nokia 6680 mobile phone. These technical limitations place restrictions on the print size of mobile phone images. In order to convey a temporal shift in the narrative, I have selected images that I believe best illustrate a continual change in my appearance over an extended period of time.

Van Alphern (1998, p.1) notes: “experience is something that people have, rather than do: experiences are direct, unmediated, subjectively lived accounts of reality. They are not traces of reality, but rather part of life itself”. The photographic self-portrait is a mirror, its reflection transforming its subject from self to the other. The sitter becomes the object of investigation, as he/she is both the viewer and the viewed. The captured moment stares back in silence waiting for a voice to fill the void, for the subject can no longer be heard and is now reliant on the witness to decipher the narrative codes and give voice to the story.

I can remember when I went to the doctor after being extremely ill for a week. The doctor asked that I submit a urine sample, and on seeing the deep cherry red result, I was immediately aware of the significance of that moment, and therefore captured an image of the sample using my mobile phone camera. The convenience of the mobile camera had provided an opportunity to document a
narrative that was slowly unfolding right in front of me. The doctor prescribed a course of antibiotics and I found myself improving a little over the next few days, yet I had no idea how the narrative was about to play out and significantly change my life. The following week I took a group of international students on a two-day trip to Halls Gap in rural Victoria. On the second day I felt ill again and used my phone to document the breakfast that I couldn’t eat that day. The next day I was in hospital waiting for a heart operation to save my life. When I was discharged from hospital after a two-month stay I decided that I would take a digital image of myself everyday so I could produce a visual record of my recovery.

The self-portraits by photographer Nan Goldin provided much inspiration for the Recovery project. As a photographer myself, I have always admired Goldin’s ability to disengage from her ego as she turns the camera lens onto herself, capturing pivotal moments in her life. Goldin presents the viewer with a series of turning points, as seen in her self-portrait Nan one month after being battered, that punctuate a narrative that sees Goldin playing the role of both artist and subject.

In her essay ‘In / Of Her Time: Nan Goldin’s Photographs’, Sussman (1996, p.37) observes that: “what is striking about these photos is her brutal self-examination.” Goldin uses the camera as a tool for the production of narrative images that build a bridge between herself and the viewer. The subject becomes story, and the story the subject. Goldin achieves this by creating narrative images that use limited picture elements to construct an intimate study of the human form. Her images enable the viewer to see under the veneer of the photograph and catch a glimpse of the fragility that is the human experience.

Brison (1997, p.21) notes: “In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them”. It is hoped that the viewer of this work will gain some insight into the journey I have undertaken, and a greater understanding of the narrative potential of the mobile phone and the self-portrait.
Initially I had considered combining a text message I had received during my recovery period with each self-portrait (Figure 8). These text messages may provide a sense of what was happening outside of my immediate environment and within my social circle at the time, but I believe including the text messages would place an emphasis on the written word rather than the image itself. When viewing these self-portraits, I want the viewer to see what I saw in the mirror each day. I want these self-portraits to reflect some sense of the physical and mental changes and challenges during this difficult period in my life.

The images in the booklet are highly personal and although they may provide the viewer with a sense of my physical changes during my recovery, they do not succinctly convey the anguish that kept me awake at night, as I lay in my bed afraid to fall asleep, in fear of my heart stopping and never waking up again.

The original intension behind producing the Recovery images was to produce a visual document to help reinforce my sense of place in the world. Sometimes I would believe that the more self-portraits I snapped on my phone, the more visible I would become to myself, as well as the people who shared my life. Like Goldin, who had faced the death of a family member, I too did not want to disappear like my sister who had tragically died from a sudden mystery illness during the time I was in hospital. Downing observes:

Our imaginative remembrance of things past creates our histories and actively shapes our present and future experience. The act of
remembrance is not simply a collection of past perceptual experience or nostalgic indulgence. Our ability to remember and to organize and reorganize past experience creates values, continually evolves to ensure survival, and produces individual identity as human culture. (Downing, 2000, p.71)

The mobile phone was both a tool to document the recovery process, and its images a means of confirming and aiding my recovery. But the mobile phone is also a portable shrine of remembrance, a device capable of storing personal narratives in the form of images, video, audio and text messages that can shape our understanding of the past, present and future.

Order of Magnitude (2007)
Format: Archival pigment prints.
Size: 60 X 40 cm

Figure 9: Arterial Blue from Order of Magnitude series.

Order of Magnitude (see DVD enclosed) explores the unique aesthetic and technical qualities of the mobile phone camera. Adopting Bal’s (2006) concept of narrative reframing, these images undergo a production process that promotes the erosion of visual information within the frame in order to promote new levels of meaning and interpretation.

Bal (2006, p.292) proposes that the placing of an image within a context outside of it’s original context, or what she refers to as a reframing, “brings out possible meanings in an image that one did not think of before it was reframed in this way”. The images in my series Order of Magnitude exploit Bal’s (2006) concept of reframing via the extreme enlargement, printing and subsequent exhibition of
these mobile phone images within a gallery space.

Rather than compose each image at the time of data capture, the still images in this series were selected from a collection of videos captured on the mobile phone. The mobile video was transferred to a computer and still images were extracted from the video as screen grabs, which produced low-resolution 72dpi digital images. The enlargement and printing of these images on an inkjet printer often produced unpredictable colour and focus shifts, as well as extreme pixilation, which sometimes rendered the content of the compositions difficult to identify.

The process of extracting still images from mobile video, combined with the subsequent extreme enlargement, further degrades the quality of these 72 dpi images, creating a visual effect reminiscent of the impressionist movement in painting. Images of highways and suburban streets, rendered on thick white card in pastel shades, now take on an almost nostalgic quality. Soft focus and pixilation create areas of mystery within the frame, distorting the original image, disrupting the narrative and creating a space for the viewer to project their own narrative interpretation.

I believe that the distortion of visual cues and signifiers can create gaps in the narrative, but instead of completely eroding meaning, I would suggest that these gaps invite new levels of viewer interpretation. Meaning is no longer fixed; rather it becomes more fluid. In my work ‘The Wait’ (Figure 10), an image of a car parked in a suburban street becomes less obvious to the viewer.

![Figure 10: The Wait, from Order of Magnitude series.](image)

The details of the mobile phone image have been eroded via the enlargement process, thus replacing clarity with ambiguity. The image of a car parked in a suburban street perhaps looks more like a derelict van dumped in a deserted war zone.
In making this series of images, there was no one-size-fits-all approach that could be applied to the production process. The suitability of each image could only be determined via a process of trial and error. These inkjet prints have been enlarged to exaggerate the digital artifacts and heavy pixilation inherent in these low-resolution mobile images. The Order of Magnitude images celebrate the visual anomalies afforded by the mobile phone and challenge notions of traditional photography and the fine art photographic print. These images demonstrate how an artist can use the mobile phone camera to construct visual images that produce unforseen narratives in the form of digital artifacts and random distortion within the frame.

The title, *Order of Magnitude* refers to these small low-resolution images being reproduced in ways not intended by the makers of the cameras. The extreme enlargement of these mobile phone photographs transforms these images of public spaces into an evocative and poetic memorialisation of place. The subject matter is recognisable, yet nothing is direct: all is devoid of artifice. Each photograph stands at times somnolent and evasive, a passing glance of memory and forgetting, a deceptive realism.

*Drift (2007)*

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.

Size: Approx: 2 x 2.5 metres.

![Figure 11: Drift Production Still.](image)

Using the highway as a metaphor for the journey of life, Drift (see DVD enclosed) explores the unique aesthetic qualities produced by the mobile phone
camera. In a country the size of Australia, the highway has become a familiar icon, providing travellers with the means to conquer the tyranny of distance.

Initial concerns centred around the image quality of the video shot on the mobile phone camera. Would the footage be of a suitable viewing quality after being enlarged using a data projector? What may look good on the small screen of the mobile phone may not translate quite as well when dramatically enlarged via a data projector.

*Drift* employs the cross-dissolve as an editing device to link three separate video pieces depicting a country highway at night. The first and second video pieces were captured just before my heart operation in 2005, whilst the third video piece was captured in 2006, not long after my discharge from hospital.

All videos are shot from the car passenger’s point of view, so that the viewer is placed within the moving car. Filmed in colour and framed in long-shot; *Drift* simulates the experience of driving through a physical landscape. The soft focus resulting from the extreme enlargement of the video footage imbues this piece with a dreamlike quality. The employment of the in-camera ‘night mode’ setting on the mobile phone, which enables the user to shoot video in low light, resulted in a noticeable increase in digital noise and colour de-saturation. Unlike the linear narratives used in much commercial cinema, Drift is a one-minute film loop with no set beginning, middle or end. Drift combines the immediacy of reality television programs with the fixed camera technique of Andy Warhol’s experimental films such as *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964).

The extreme enlargement of the mobile phone video footage via the use of a data projector transformed the small-scale mobile footage into a large-scale video installation of approx 2 x 2.5 metres. Although the enlarged project is less sharp to the viewer’s eye, the sheer scale of *Drift* placed the mobile footage into a cinematic context. No longer trapped behind the plastic sheath of the mobile phone’s small screen, *Drift*’s soft matt appearance combined with its increased scale enabled viewers to immerse themselves in the dreamlike quality made possible by the unique visual aesthetic of the mobile phone camera. The result is an atmospheric video that takes advantage of the visual characteristics of the
video footage produced using a mobile phone camera.

Jahn (2005, in Getting Started section) proposes that “all narratives present a story. A story is a sequence of events which involves characters. Hence a narrative is a form of communication which presents a sequence of events caused and experienced by characters”. Of course not all characters in a narrative are human, in some cases the character can be an inanimate object, such as the mountain which operates as the key dramatic force in Joan Lindsay’s novel *Picnic at hanging rock*, or the highway which functions as an agent for change in the road movie genre.

In his book *Driving Visions: Exploring the road movie*, Laderman (2002, p.2) observes: “The road provides an outlet for our excesses, enticing our desire for thrill and mystery. The horizon beckons both auspiciously and ominously. Exceeding the borders of the culture it makes possible, for better or worse, the road represents the unknown”.

Although a driver may chose the road on which to travel, the route may prove unpredictable and filled with unforseen challenges and detours. When I watch *Drift*, I see a passenger travelling into the darkness; the road recedes and gives way to a distorted limbo, which is later replaced by a return to the “ordinary world” (Vogler, 2002) and the familiar landmarks of the road.

The narrative that I construct for myself when viewing this piece is unlikely to be shared by many viewers, as this is an interpretation based on personal experiences and memories of a particular and specific event. Drift invites viewers to place themselves in the position of a car passenger; viewers may interpret the piece in a way that resonates with their own experiences and understanding of the projected mobile video depicting cars travelling down a road at night.

In *Drift*, life is a journey represented by the highway, not the superhighway that facilitates the dreams and desires of the digital age, but instead the dark bitumen that links people and places, connecting our hearts and minds. A place “stripped of everything but a road that approaches and recedes, both realities occurring at once”. (DeLillo 2001, p.39)
As we travel from birth (a beginning) to death (the end) the narrative turning points that punctuate our lives may be seen as simply stops along the road. Like a traveller passing through, these journeys are shaped by the geography of human experience. After all, aren’t we all merely visitors without a roadmap trying to make sense of our place in the world?

**Distillation of Memory (2007)**

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.

Size: Approx: 2 x 2.5 metres.

*Figure 12: Distillation of Memory Production Still.*

The familiar aesthetic of close circuit television (CCTV) and web cam footage provided a source of inspiration for both the style and selection of content for the *Distillation of Memory* project (see DVD enclosed). Resembling a bank of surveillance video, these narrative videos captured on the mobile phone invite the viewer to build bridges between each video portal in an effort to construct narrative relationships within the grid.

In many major cities, close circuit television has been so widely implemented that it has become a ubiquitous device that generates huge slabs of surveillance video. Gibbons (2007, p.22) observes:

> There is no doubt about the intrusions of the mass media into personal lives and the gratuitous use of electronic technologies of surveillance have turned the relationship of the private to the public into a highly contentious and sensitive issue in contemporary life. (Gibbons, 2007, p.22)
The mobile phone camera shares some similarities with CCTV, as users are often employing the portable device for the collection of random images and videos depicting everyday experiences and social interactions.

The mobile videos in this project act as a document of daily life as seen via the screen of the mobile camera. Influenced by the work of U.K. new media artist Chris Hales (Rieser & Zapp, 2002), and in particular his work Grandad (2002), Distillation of Memory aims to subvert the conventional linear montage via the random placement of related and unrelated events within a multi-screen matrix.

In his essay Towards a Transmedial Narratology, Herman (2004, p.64) observes that “making sense of a narrative involves building and updating “cognitive maps” of the storyworld it evokes”. Distillation of Memory provides visual cues and landmarks within the story space. Instead of adopting a highly structured narrative that attempts to coerce the viewer towards an implied interpretation of the events, the viewer is encouraged to construct narrative patterns based upon their own interpretation of the visual cues presented in the array of video portals.

In his article Multiple Narrative Structures in Contemporary Cinema, Hassler-Forest (2003, in Defining Multiple Narrative Structures section) notes: “when a film's structure includes more than three or four narrative lines, the viewer's activity will shift from following the individual stories and constructing several fabulas to examining the ways in which the narratives relate to each other.” The presentation of multiple video portals confronts viewers with multiple narrative possibilities. Viewers may also attempt to draw relationships between these randomly selected pieces of mobile video footage in order to construct a cohesive narrative.

According to Smith (2001, p.3) “Narrative may be investigated in terms of content and/or structure, thereby revealing concepts such as development of identity, power-struggles, or other realities”. Distillation of Memory asks that the viewer use their own fictions and realities in order to derive meaning from the numerous videos portals. The user is no longer simply a passive viewer, but a participant in the actual storytelling. I believe that the video portals in Distillation of Memory promote viewer engagement with their personal narratives via the act
of remembrance and associations made with the characters and events depicted in the grid of mobile phone video content.

The absence of an obvious narrative voice in these works presents viewers with the challenge to construct relationships between videos within the grid based upon personal associations with content and visually literacy. Bal (2007, p.6) states that: “the concept of narrative voice is constructed on the presupposition of spatial distance. By not matching the images in any obvious way, the voice seems to lose its body”.

The diegetic soundtrack accompanying these works has been mixed in a fashion that layers the original sound of each video piece to produce an intentional mismatch between what is seen, and what the viewer hears. This non-linear narrative project invites viewers to decipher and determine inter-relationships with each video piece based upon their own considerations, rather than that of the creator. It is perhaps impossible to conceal the hand of the author, but I have made every effort throughout the stages of production to open the narrative to wider interpretation.

On entering the gallery space, the viewer is presented with a video projection made up of a collection of embedded video images that sit within the framework of a matrix. I have captured, selected and framed the subject matter with a view to construct a narrative matrix that relays the events of the everyday urban experience. The title Distillation of Memory refers to the capturing and storing of past events within the heart of the mobile phone. Subject matter consists of a combination of selected naturalistic content and staged scenarios.

These hetrodeigetic narratives avoid the need for any overt narration and invite the viewer to assimilate with the narrative via a process of a personal interpretation and identification with the content. The grouping of individual narratives within the matrix by the viewer imposes a need for the viewer to cluster these media objects into a typology that promotes the creation of cohesive narratives within the matrix.

The split screen is a useful visual device for the presentation of multiple narratives within the one screen space. The viewer is omnipresent and able to
inhabit multiple location and timeframes. Examples of this technique can be seen in Greenaway’s film “The Pillowbook” (1996), Mike Figgis’ film “Timecode” (2000) and Jewison’s stylistically visionary film “The Thomas Crown Affair” (1968). The split screen can also be applied in the crime/horror genre to raise the level of suspense by providing the viewer with simultaneous multiple viewpoints not available to onscreen characters. Eg, one screen shows the killer hiding behind a door, whilst another screen shows a girl saying goodnight to friends as she fumbles for the door keys in her bag.

*Distillation of Memory* operates as a collection of individual narrative video portals, but it may also be viewed as a singular narrative body. This matrix narrative presents the viewer with a multitude of story threads. The random selection and placement of the video content within the grid has been done so to narrow the chances of setting up a visual hierarchy that may lead the viewer towards an implied meaning put forward by the author. In the true style of the surveillance camera, I simply turned on the mobile video camera and captured whatever content fell into the range of its field of focus.

Like the flâneur wondering throughout the city streets, I have collected these video pieces as I have moved through the physical spaces that make up the backdrop for everyday encounters with family, friends and strangers. The resulting video projection creates voyeuristic windows that present narratives taken from daily life, rather than scripted and overtly structured narrative forms such as television and cinema.

In an attempt to capture a more authentic representation of my immediate environment, I felt it important to record both the banal and the significant experiences of the everyday. The result is a project that reflects our relationship with the mobile phone and our social relationships. According to McQuillan (2000, p.2) “Narratives are the communal method by which knowledge is stored or exchanged”. McQuillan (2000, p.3) goes on to say that “Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also in stories”.

The people who populate these video portals are not celebrities, superstars or persons of note. They are simply people who are going about the business, of
living in a contemporary city, performing tasks that range from the significant through to the mundane. One video features my mother playing a poker machine on one of her days out of the nursing home, whilst another features an image of myself walking down a suburban street. Like an anthropological study, these mobile narratives are visual representations of the everyday human experience in all its glory and defeat.

*Spatial Threshold* (2008)

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.

Size: Approx 3 x 2.5 metres.

Stained glass windows have adorned churches for over a thousand years, providing a medium for the transference of stories surrounding issues of religious faith, miracles and morality. In the sixteenth century, the Reformation dictated a move from religious iconography towards the representation of imagery that promoted a secular lifestyle. According to Fitzgerald (1998, in Late Gothic section) this social change instigated “a rise in the production of glass panels for private contemplation”. With this in mind, *Spatial Threshold* (see DVD enclosed) adopts the aesthetic of the stained glass window as a pictorial narrative device for the presentation of video based story elements depicting everyday scenes captured on the mobile phone.

The geometric structure and spatial ordering of the content embedded within the
matrix takes advantage of what Hahn (2001 p.328) refers to as: “the visual possibilities of seeing all-at-once that are unique to pictorial narrative and stained glass”.

The geometric design for the stained glass window pattern employed in the production of Spatial Threshold is based upon the iconic Australian wrought iron fly screen door. I can recall such screen doors from my childhood. I remember visiting friends, standing on the front porch, eyes darting whilst trying to distinguish their facial features through the panels of bent metal and opaque flywire mesh. Like attending a church confessional, I would listen to the disembodied voice whilst I caught fleeting glimpses of the shapes and shadows that flashed within the grid of the fly screen door.

The arch shape used for this project was based on my memories of watching the ABC’s children’s program Playschool when I was a child. I can still recall sitting patiently on the floor in front of the television at home, whilst the sound of my mother washing the clothes could be heard in the background, awaiting the presenters to select a square, round or arch window. The camera would zoom into a life size model of the chosen window to reveal moving images of everyday people and places. The arch window was always special to me, and I believed at the time that the arch window brought good fortune to those who looked through it. Like Playschool’s windows, Spatial Threshold is also a portal onto the world we live in.

As with the previous embedded narrative experiment Distillation of Memory, Spatial Threshold explores Bal’s (2006) theory of reframing and montage disruption. From the banal through to the profound, these videos capture daily events as seen through the camera of the mobile phone. A woman eating her breakfast in a car sits alongside a prestigious fashion parade; whilst a 40th birthday party shares equal time with a man taking a shower.

Instead of adhering to a prescribed narrative system for the presentation of the moving image, Spatial Threshold aims to present the narratives of daily life in a manner that reflects the spontaneity of both the production techniques, and the actual events taking place.
Rather than establish a hierarchy that values one video over another, the random placement of images within the matrix aims to disrupt a structured view of narrative in favour of a narrative form that invites viewers to interpret story content based on their personal experiences and understanding of visual cues.

Manovich (2001, p.xx) states that: “due to its new mobility, glorified in such films as Man with a Movie Camera, the camera can be anywhere, and with its superhuman vision it can obtain a close-up of any object”. The ubiquitous nature of the mobile phone teamed with its high level of portability extends the potential of the camera by enabling users to easily penetrate private and public spaces to capture content. On my travels throughout the urbanscape, I have collected video footage consisting of a wide range of people, events and places. The result is a mix of stories, observations and documentation that form both singular and parallel narratives within the luminous panes of this digital stained glass experiment.

Instead of using the original sound that accompanied each mobile video, the non-diegetic soundscape for Spatial Threshold consists of birdcalls arranged to form a slow rhythmic pattern that mimics the sound of human breathing. These sounds are intended to build a bridge between the spiritual world and the constructed world, inviting a heightened level of engagement with the self, as well as the content projected onto a wall within a gallery space.

The intention of the project is to create a space for contemplation where the viewer is invited to immerse themselves within the visual matrix as they watch scenes that allude to the sacred in the everyday.
Future directions

I have been inspired through my research into the mobile phone as a platform for storytelling to create interactive structures where users can provide narrative content, as well as interact with the story content. Future directions incorporate the use of mobile media as the basis for developing sculptural installations that generate dialogue around the issues of intimacy, illness and grief.

Figure 14: Sketch of proposed Wishing Well project.

The "wishing well" (see Figure 14) project when completed will operate as an installation piece that invites the public to send text messages to a physical wishing well located in the foyer of a hospital. The text messages are then projected into a shallow body of water that can be viewed by patients and visitors. The notion that water has a memory is an influential factor in the practice of Homeopathy, and it is perceived that the water in the well will retain the positive energy of the well wishes, this positive energy can then be absorbed by the visitors who touch the water. A therapeutic holy water of sorts one might say.

Whereas most mobile narratives require participants to own a mobile phone, the
beauty of this project is that individuals have the option of sending SMS messages or simply reading the messages at the location. I believe that such a project can utilize the potential of mobile media to connect people across the networks and to strengthen our sense of family, community and personal identity.
Conclusion

The mobile phone continues to penetrate society and arguably alters the method in which we communicate, create and interact with narrative. Media convergence plays a key role in extending the technical parameters of the mobile phone, and in doing so presents mobile phone users and visual artists with a new means to present and interact with narrative forms. The mobile phone is now a powerful digital device capable of being a camera, a phone and a wireless internet connection. And it is for this reason alone, that the mobile phone is perhaps best described as a hybrid multimedia device.

Media convergence has extended the capability of the mobile phone via the integration of sophisticated media technologies that enable the user to penetrate virtual spaces, capture images, converse and distribute a wide variety of digital content. The mobile phone is now more like a portable production studio, as it presents a convenient and inexpensive means of producing video, images, sound and text. As an artist, I see mobile media as a tool for generating stories and new narrative forms that acknowledge the constraints and possibilities that are particular to mobile media.

Mobile narratives have the potential to liberate both the story and the author by providing the means to produce and generate narratives that defy existing aesthetic codes and conventions. The mobile phone has been assimilated into our society and offers users an opportunity to capture, display and generate a wide variety of media forms. Content such as locative games, mobisodes and moblogs extend our understanding of narrative and highlight the creative potential of the mobile phone in an increasingly networked society.

My initial decision to work with mobile media was driven by a desire to produce narratives that could be viewed in non-fixed locations and to explore the aesthetic of the small screen. The story content was of particular interest to me, as I wanted to address some of the social issues surrounding the use of the mobile phone in society. Personal security, privacy and community emerged as
key issues that influenced the production of the mobile phone narratives that accompany this exegesis.

Contemporary narrative theory provides a solid framework for the design and production of mobile phone narratives. Bal’s theory pertaining to the production of narrative gaps has proven instrumental in the production of my mobile experiments. Rather than coerce the viewer towards a fixed meaning, I believe the production of narrative gaps has created a third level of meaning that sits somewhere between the intentions of the author and the associations and interpretations made by the viewer. This third layer of meaning encapsulates the unforeseen narratives that are produced by the intentional erosion, or what I refer to as a semiotic disruption of the narrative content.

An example of this practice can be seen in the Order of Magnitude images that accompany this exegesis. The enlargement of these low-resolution images has created extreme pixilation and loss of image clarity. A viewer, when looking at an image in this series titled The Wait (Figure 10) was convinced that the image portrayed a car bomb in a deserted street located somewhere in the Middle East, whereas the image when viewed on the small screen of the mobile phone clearly depicts a car in a suburban street in Melbourne.

However, there are implications for artists and storytellers constructing narratives for the small screen of the mobile phone. An important discovery I have made during this research project is the emergence of 2 particular types of mobile narrative forms. The first type is mobile phone narratives (micro-narratives) intended for viewing on mobile screens and the second type consists of narratives created by mobile phones not intended for viewing on mobile screens. Each of these mobile narrative forms involve different production techniques, and therefore it is of benefit to the creators of mobile phone narratives to establish the point of publication before setting out to create mobile phone content.

Micro-narratives require that the viewer adopt a new means of interpreting narrative. Unlike cinema or television, the image looks out from within a tiny frame towards a physical world where meaning is constructed based upon the
viewer’s relationship with the mobile object and associations based on more conventional modes of narrative.

Content intended for display on the small screen of the mobile phone must take into account the parameters of the mobile’s small screen, as well as limitations that may be imposed by the viewing conditions and/or mobile phone variables. The aesthetic language of television and cinema provides a useful guide to aid shot composition. Close-ups and mid-shots are easily seen, whereas long shots and wide shots must be used sparingly as they are difficult to view on the small mobile phone screen. Duration of content must also be considered, as it is unlikely that viewers will engage in small screen content for longer than 3-5 minutes.

The mobile phone arguably creates a unique viewing experience. The viewer is not bound to watching the mobile drama in a fixed location. Mobile content competes with the existing ambience of a viewer’s immediate environment. The producer of the mobile drama is unaware of the viewing conditions, and must therefore take such limitations into account when creating a mobile-based drama.

The mobile episodic drama is perhaps best seen as a hybrid of existing cinema and television conventions, combined with an aesthetic that addresses the constraints of the mobile device and the needs of the mobile audience. Although it is difficult for writers and producers to tailor content for the plethora of mobile phones on the market, I believe that it is possible to devise a set of conventions that will assist in the production of narratives that explore and exploit the unique parameters of the mobile phone. I have formulated a step-by-step guide to producing mobile narratives for the small screen and this can be found in the appendices that accompany this exegesis.

The mobile phone may also be adopted as a production tool for the creation of a wide range of visual arts projects that exist outside of the small screen of the mobile phone. Using the mobile phone’s camera to produce a body of work required that I take into account the constraints afforded to the mobile phone. No longer restricted by the dialogue of digital perfection or superior quality that
often follows the hype surrounding digital media, I have found a creative liberation that comes with the adoption of the mobile phone camera.

Images and video captured on the mobile phone have an aesthetic that differs greatly from traditional image capturing devices such as the camera. The mobile phone’s poor memory capability and cheap plastic lens may be seen as restrictive, but I view these technological shortfalls as an opportunity to promote a dialogue with the viewer that challenges conventional modes of imaging and storytelling.

Visual mediums such as painting, photography and cinema are all capable of presenting narratives, yet these three mediums invite different levels of engagement and interpretation.

A painting may depict a concept, yet it is difficult for the reader to ignore the brush strokes on the surface, or not be influenced by paintings “high art” status within the visual art hierarchy. Preconceived notions and associations of media forms arguably contribute to the reading of a particular work, and this has proven to be an interesting area of investigation when producing mobile phone narratives.

As noted by Hodge & Tripp (1986, p.17) “fundamental to all semiotic analysis is the fact that any system of signs (semiotic code) is carried by a material medium which has its own principles of structure”. Therefore, it is highly possible that a readers’ interpretation of a sign may be influenced by the associations, or preconceived notions that the reader may attach to a particular medium that is being used to convey a concept or idea.

Although mobile narratives may borrow conventions such as frame composition and sequential montage from cinema and photography, the mobile phone is not restricted by the conventions associated with either of these two media formats. Images and video captured on the mobile phone are generally not afforded the same status attributed to visual mediums such as photography and cinema, but this may also be viewed as an advantage, as it frees both the artist and the viewer from the intellectual baggage associated with more traditional visual media forms.
An unforeseen use for the mobile phone came about when I decided to document the recovery period after my heart operation. I made a decision to use the mobile phone to take a self-portrait each day to document the changes in my appearance as my health improved over a one-year period. The mobile phone does not share the same association with conventional cameras and is therefore less confronting when capturing personal images. The small screen was like a portable mirror reflecting my image and providing positive reinforcement along the road to wellbeing. The mobile phone was ever close to hand and was a convenient and simple method of capturing the collection of over 300 self-portraits.

Due to the personal nature of the communications and images that live within the digital heart of the mobile phone, it is difficult to not imbue the device with a degree of intimacy. The “get well” text messages I received in hospital also contributed to my sense of feeling connected to a bigger world that lay outside of my solitary room in the hospital. Mobile media had played a role in my recovery process through the act of positive self-imaging, and assisted in the reduction of isolation by providing a means of maintaining a healthy connection to friends, family and colleagues.

Personal communications may still be the highest priority of the mobile phone user, but it is no longer the sole purpose of the device. Mobile phone narratives may take the form of user generated content created by using the mobile as a production tool, or content produced specifically for publication on screen of the mobile phone and/or other mobile media devices such as PDA’s, iPod’s, Mp3 Players, PSP (Play Station Portable).

The term “mobile phone” now appears to be an outmoded description for a portable media device that shares commonalities with the camera and personal computer. A convergence of digital technologies has instigated a radical transformation of the mobile phone, and this can be witnessed in the mobile phone’s evolution from a simple communication tool to that of a sophisticated multimedia device. Advancements in mobile phone technology provide opportunities to create, view and share a wide variety of digital media content.
This exegesis is a step toward an acknowledgement of the role of mobile media in extending our understanding of narrative and mobile media culture.
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Appendix 1: Guidelines for making mobile movies.

Making Mobile Movies is an innovative way to get creative and make the most of your mobile phone. You can use a mini dv camera, digital stills camera or the digital video function on your phone to make the movie.

Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Plan your mobile movie.
   • Brainstorm ideas and decide what your movie is about?

2. How long is a mobile movie?
   • Short and sweet is the name of the game. 1-3 minutes work best.

3. Create a script and storyboard.
   • Don’t write an epic! A simple story is all you need.
   • Remember: you are only making a short film.
   • Storyboard templates and tips can be found online.

4. Start filming.
   • Frame shots tightly.
   • Avoid long shots. Close-ups work best.
   • Excessive panning and movement can create blurry footage
   • Bold, strong colours stand out best on the small screen.
   • Lighting is very important, so choose well lit locations, or add additional light sources.

   Note: Poor lighting can result in poor quality footage that is difficult to view on the mobile phone screen.
5. Edit your movie.

- Transfer your footage to the computer and edit using digital editing software such as iMovie, Final cut pro, After effects, and Premiere.
- Save as you go and only use the footage that best illustrates your story.
- Remove poor quality footage and re-shoot where necessary.

6. Save your completed movie.

- When you are happy with your footage, it’s time to save your movie. I recommend exporting a full quality version to your desktop, this way you will always have a full quality original that you can play on a wide variety of formats.

7. Create a Mobile Movie file.

- Remember size is important. Aim for the smallest file size that allows the best quality audio and vision. Open your movie in Quicktime Pro then experiment with the export options to control the file size and quality of your movie.
- You may want to make multiple copies at different settings and compare them. Note down your Quicktime Pro settings so you can repeat the process if necessary. When you are happy with your movie, simply save it as a 3gp file. Many video editing applications can also export 3gp files that will be ready to play on your mobile phone.

8. Transfer your Movie to your Phone

- Use the bluetooth software on the computer, a card reader or a mobile phone connection lead to transfer the movie to your phone.

9. Play the movie on the phone

- Share the fruits of your labour with friends via MMS, email or web.
Appendix 2: *Order of Magnitude* exhibition details

The *Order of Magnitude* exhibition was held at the Queensland Centre for Photography (QCP) in February 2008. This group show featured images and video produced using mobile phone cameras. The participating artists included Marsha Berry, Karen Trist and Pauline Ananstasiou and myself.
My projects exhibited at *Order of Magnitude* exhibition at QCP are as follows:

**Mobile phone Photography**

*Order of Magnitude* series (2007)

Format: Archival pigment prints.

Size: 60 X 40 cm

*Arterial Blue, Soft Rocket, Turbine Road and Entropy.*

*The Towers, The Wait and Hitchcock Afternoon.*
Mobile video projections

*Drift (2007)*

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.
Size: Approx: 2 x 2.5 metres.
Duration: 1:00 min

*Distillation of Memory (2007)*

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.
Size: Approx: 2 x 2.5 metres.
Duration: 1:36 secs

*Spatial Threshold (2007)*

Format: Single channel video projection with soundtrack.
Size: Approx 3 x 2.5 metres.
Duration: 2:21 secs