Chapter 6
Frames of Discontent: Social Media, Mobile Intimacy
and the Boundaries of Media Practice

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Introduction

The rise of user created content (UCC) and social media has also witnessed the growth in new media literacy emphasizing the ‘creative vernacular’ (Burgess 2008). In this phenomenon there have been a variety of situated creativity examples in which everyday media users have become producing users—that is, ‘produsers’ (Bruns 2005). Everyday users have filled the internet with an assortment of micro-narratives that engage in particular forms of visuality—specifically images of themselves within realistic, banal scenes.

With the rise of high quality camera phones, accompanied by the growth in in-phone editing applications and distribution services via social and locative media, we are witnessing new types of co-present visuality. In the first series of studies in camera phones by the likes of Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe (2003, 2005, 2006), they noted the pivotal role played by the three ‘s’—sharing, storing and saving—in informing the content of what was predominantly ‘banal’ everyday content (Koskinen 2007). As camera phones become more commonplace in the explosion of smartphones—along with new contexts for image distribution like microblogging and location-based services (LBS)—emergent types of intimate visualities are overlaid onto place as part of user’s personal journeys and forms of self-expression. These new cartographies are intimate and mobile as they are visual.

While these everyday users and new media artists have been quick to address social media such as YouTube and Facebook as both a frame and a medium with its own content and context, visual art practitioners have been less enthusiastic. For this breed of artists, YouTube is often a mere site for distribution and dissemination, not a medium with its own context and content creating new forms of art and visual culture. In short, in an age of UCC there is a divide between practising artist and creative produser in their understanding and usage of social media.
It is this divide that this chapter will explore. After outlining the media safari that is social media today, I focus upon a few visual and new media artists and their usage and definitions of both YouTube and social media more generally. I inquire about how social media informs (or doesn’t) their modes of art production (making and professionalism), consumption and communities of practice. I consider why are these divides occurring between new media and the visual arts. Are they echoing old traditional modernist high/low notions, or do they point to more complex definitions of creativity, content and context in an age of social media?

*Photoshopping: the Art Practice and Social Media Nexus*

With the growth in networked and localized visualities from iPhone applications such as hipstamatic—that deploy professional photography effects to fuse the digital with the analogue affect—to locative media like Google Goggles, Foursquare, and Jie Pang, we are witnessing erosion between simplistic amateur versus professional divisions. These applications highlight that the context for examining creative practice has dramatically altered in a number of ways that are intimate and vernacular, as they are socio-cultural and geographic, in nature. These intimate publics take the form of emergent cartographies that overlay the geographic and physical space onto an electronic position and relational presence, which is emotional and social. Writing before the onset of social media, Lauren Berlant observed that intimacy has taken on new geographies and forms of mobility, most notably as a kind of ‘publicness’ (1998). As intimacy gets negotiated within networked social media, the publicness—along with the continuous, multitasking full-timeness—of intimacy becomes increasingly tangible. They are now *intimate publics*. As social, locative and mobile media render the intimate public and the public intimate, how is this impacting upon art practice and politics? How are these new models for engagement, distribution and participation change the way art is practiced?

As social media becomes no longer avoidable in the literacies of everyday life it is increasingly important that practitioners grapple with such media whether they are media savvy or not. Despite this feature of contemporary life, there seems to be segregations within the artworld about the role and necessity of media like Facebook. The deployment of social media, that transfers the personal and intimate into social semi-publics, not only highlights the growing significance of the local in
informing the fabric of the internet but also creates new types of performativity that further erode work-leisure divisions or what Melissa Gregg defines as “presence bleed” (2011).

Some artists are productively using Facebook to send out invitations, others are using it to perform a type of public intimacy in which messages, photos and newsfeeds all catalogue and cultivate the image (and aura) of the artist. For this breed of social media literates, vehicles such as Facebook provide a centralized way to coordinate events, activities, identity, expression and networks. Within this oeuvre of twenty-first-century art ‘produsers’ there are also those who use Facebook as just another informational source that they harvest from but rarely contribute to. Then there are those that have perhaps channeled obsessive predilections—continuously updating, commenting and engaging with the plethora of newsfeed and media content everyday. One kind of user regularly changes their profile photo and update status to reflect their mood and experiences, the former rarely engages in such an activity (if at all!). And then there is an in between space… where most of the users actually reside. Or pretend to.

These cartographies of intimate publics are marked within the visual artworld as it grapples with its place in light of emergent networked or what Jean Burgess calls ‘situated creativity’ (2008). This leads us to ask: at what point is the content and context of intimacy also the site for creativity? What role does social media and its attendant performativity of the intimate play in the visual artworld? How is networked culture—from mobile phones and social networking sites (SNS)—affecting modes and mores of artistic production? And how has the shift of intimacy and the personal away from the private and towards a public (Berlant 1998; Shirky 2008), technologically-mediated activity impacted upon art production and practice? This paper suggests that it is these issues that are at the heart of the politics and practice of visual culture today.

One way to tackle these issues around intimacy, affect and creativity within the artworld is to view this phenomenon as part of the broader technocultural changes that are influencing and impacting how people share, make and distribute their work and ideas. Social media have become integral in the process of developing emerging ‘intimate publics’, in which once localized gestures and events are brought into a context in which communities of practice can form across geographies
and physical limitations. This is not to suggest, as some scholars have, that time and space is compressed such that all distance can be overcome or transcended. *Rather it is the opposite.* Distance matters just as much or more in the formations of these intimate publics. All the multimedia features of social media (photos, newsfeeds and messages) perpetually reinforce a sense of place and locality at the same time as providing links between.

For many artists, while exploiting the demise of privacy characteristic of social media by further merging their artistic self within the performance of lifestyle, this practice is just part of contemporary popular culture. However for some, social and networked media offers a site for exploring some of the often-problematic shifts in notions of intimacy and privacy. Undoubtedly social media is part of the wider shifts in media paradigms from twentieth-century ‘packaged’ media to twenty-first-century ‘conversational’ media (Jenkins 2006, 2006a). In these transformations the artworld is not immune—with the impact being felt upon both production and reception levels. Indeed, it is impossible to ignore the pervasive (and perhaps insidious) nature of social media upon modes of performativity and also basic communication channels and rituals.

In these transformations it would be, however, foolish to think that we are obtaining democracy of media—the more ubiquitous and porous networked media becomes, the more resistance to it grows (think of China’s Firewall). But unquestionably, notions of authorship, creativity and collaboration have become part of everyday culture, rather than in the hands of the elite. With the advent of media such as the camera phone, why, how and where we photograph—and how it gets contextualized and shared—has changed dramatically. Screens within screens, sites across screens are all shifting levels of engagement. Moreover, with the recent upsurge of iPhone and smartphone apps such as hipstamatic we see how the creativity of the digital is still haunted by the aura of the analogue (Manovich 2001, 2003). Whilst the discussion of new media in terms of its specters of older media has been clearly identified in the work of McLuhan and more recently, through the notion of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000), the significance of the intimate in this equation has been overlooked. Specifically, as new media often oscillates between communication and expression it is underscored by intimacy and affect. This can be seen in the ways in which new media reinforces
existing rituals, such as mobile media rehearsing older practices of co-present intimacy such as the postcard (Hjorth 2005). As I have noted elsewhere, mobile media personalization practices are deeply embedded by the local and reiterate older rituals of intimacy (Hjorth 2006, 2007, 2009).

I would suggest that rather than perpetuating a counter-productive and outdated discussion about artists versus non-artists that we can begin to understand the liminality of art practice in an age of UCC by investigating the intimacy and affect underlying their creative production. Given that the rise of social media also sees the prevalence of the vernacular and local, I have chosen a few artists from different socio-cultural contexts to demonstrate the ways in which agency, identity and participation take various shapes and forms. From the critical usage of DIY techniques by Australian artists Patrick Pound and Anastasia Klose to the playful critiques of new generation Chinese artist Cao Fei and the Web 1.0 Internet art of Candy Factory in Japan, we can see a plethora of ways in which artists are reflecting upon the relationship between intimacy and creative production through the often-murky waters of social media. Through a series of online interviews with the artists conducted around January 2010, this chapter attempts to sketch the ways in which creativity and intimacy is being deployed by contemporary artists. As we shall see, there are multiple intimate publics at play within the contemporary art world in which each participant reflects localized notions of intimate publics and its attendant visual economies. I will begin with sketching some of the new intimate, ambient and co-present visualities evolving around social and mobile media and then turn to my four case study artists.

New Visualities: Multiple Screens, Distracted Engagement, Contexts and Content

One of the early examples of networked social media came from the mobile phone as it graduated from extension of the landline to multimedia device par excellence. They are indeed one of the most intimate devices—storing both materially and symbolically a wealth about the user’s personal life. This personal life is as easily distributed as it is a-contextualized—think of how text messages can be misinterpreted or even mis-sent. Applications such as camera phone have both heralded a new type of user-lead journalism and media practice as well as being the tools for cyber bullying and youth narcissism. Camera phone practices amplify the local, highlighting the divergent ways in which public, private and the personal are being reconfigured.
On the one hand, the issues raised by camera phone practices echo earlier debates around the digital/analogue in which questions surrounding amateur and professional paradigms are questioned and challenged (Hjorth 2007, 2009). They suggest a democraticization of media, affording those who once couldn’t afford digital cameras cheap and convenient alternatives. In Seoul, this has seen a few women, once not interested in photography, developing a love that sometimes takes them down the road of wanting to become a professional photographer (Lee 2005). On the other hand, they present some new issues around reconceptualizing the ambivalent and transitory role of “context” in which the more important context becomes in informing the content, the more the potential for a-contextualizing increases. Context as content, once the mantra of minimalism, has taken on new dimensions within social media.

While much work has been conducted around the creativity of mobile media in terms of camera phone practices and emerging distribution avenues and online communities, it is the context in which they are shared (or not shared) that is pivotal in locating the meanings. This was aptly outlined by Ito and Okabe’s (2005) 3 ‘s’—sharing, storing and saving—of camera phone images. As camera phones become more commonplace in the rise of UCC technologies, the ways in which the personal are negotiated through the public and private spheres are being transformed. The politics of self-presentation, self-portraiture and self-expression all get a workout within the realm of camera phone practices. Far from mere narcissism, we see that these practices are part of broader media literacy and etiquette (Koskela 2004). So too, within online community spaces like Flickr (Mørk Petersen 2008), strangers and intimates are sharing images and comments (both aesthetic and technical) that suggest that new visualities are ordered by a ‘situated creativity’ (Burgess 2008). Moreover, with the rise of locative media like Foursquare and Facebook Places becoming an integral part of mobile and social media practice, how place and intimacy is narrated through camera phone images is changing.

*Patrick Pound*

The aesthetics and ethics of banality are pivotal to the usage of camera phones. Ask photographer Pound why he uses camera phones and it is not because of a love of new technology but rather for its role as a throwaway, familiar, always-on-hand technology. Here Koskinen’s poignant
synopsis of mobile multimedia, epitomized by camera phones, is highlighted. As feminist scholars such as Meaghan Morris (1988) have noted, banality involves the naturalization of power. Hence it is an important site to analyze. Within the all-pervasiveness of camera phones as an integrated part of mobile media ubiquity, we need to examine how older photographic genres and traditions are re-enacted (Gye 2006; Hjorth 2006) and, at the same time, how those “familiar” tropes are, through the lens of the banal, naturalized into emerging, networked power relations. This moving image is worth more than a thousand words.

For Pound, the camera phone is but another tool on offer. He draws on whatever is at hand—carrying a healthy skepticism about ‘new media’ as such. Rather, he is interested in the redundant and obsolescence of digital technologies. Pound’s photographic practice has deployed various types of lenses to comment upon the relationship between old and new media and the attendant forms of visuality. For example, his camera phone images are pictures of pictures—that is, he uses the new media (camera phones) to take images of older media (newspaper pictures). As Pound notes,

In terms of the artworks I make with digital cameras — I use recently redundant technologies. An old mobile phone for its black and white possibilities, which approach the low end technological look of surveillance footage, and Aget’s photographs all at once.

Pound’s work illustrates the remediated nature (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of new media. That is, new media is always the recombinant of older media and technologies. Continuity and disruption coexist in times of socio-technical change (that is, always), and new media such as SNS need to conceptualized within broader, historical processes of mediated intimacy. Indeed, today’s mobile media can be seen as an extension of 19th and 20th-century mobile media such as the wristwatch (Kopomaa 2000). Technologies such as mobile media also re-enact earlier co-present practices and interstitials of intimacy: for example SMS rehearses 19th-century letter writing traditions (Hjorth 2005). New forms of telepresence such as email can be linked to earlier practices of co-present intimacy such as visiting cards (Milne 2004). Against these developments, mapping the cartographies of personalisation require us to conceptualise intimacy beyond a Western, heteronormative and face-to-face (f2f) model (Jamieson 1999). Rather, the intimate co-presence enacted by mobile technologies
should be viewed as part of a lineage of technologies of propinquity in which intimacy has always involved the mediated (Milne 2004; Hjorth 2005).

Indeed, Pound emphasizes the fact that many forms of new media (such as games etc) are invented by ‘hobbyists’ and are susceptible to tinkering and reinvention at a rate that leaves them floundering in the rough sea of obsolescence. As he remarks,

It seems that Facebook and the artist’s website overlap yet perform very differently.
It all reminds me of the video war between VHS and Beta. Then everyone got themselves a DVD player not so long after. There might just be a battle of these and the emergence of something new and more versatile for artists just around the corner.
I have just bought a Blu Ray…

While his attitude embodies a type of DIY in which the vernacular and the local is emphasized, he is interested in how this speaks to photographic history and its foray into museums. The aforementioned ‘vernacular creativity’ identified by Jean Burgess (2008) within social media can be linked to earlier media practices as Pound’s exploration into the specters of photography illustrates. As Pound observes,

These new digital devices and platforms seem to progress what was already, and for most of its existence an especially available medium. The camera is to image making what the butterfly net was to natural history. The digital camera is the butterfly net made fool proof. Finally it is the perfect collecting machine. The digital camera, especially in phone form, can copy the world at will.

When asked how media practices such as social media influence or affect his work, Pound clearly notes the impact upon such practices on contemporary visual culture.

These platforms and the way people use them have an effect on visual culture. Perhaps they contribute at least, to the appearance of a more casual approach to compiling and composing images. Just as Lartigue as a teenager with a camera loosened the formal reigns of photography so too do the images made for social media outlets. If documentary style photography took on the detached look of the insurance assessor, maybe the Facebook snap takes on the appearance of the casual glimpse and the attitude of glamorous nonchalance or some other cunning fresh amalgam of the Narcissistic and the devil-may-care.
Moreover, when asked to discuss the affect social media has on artists’ modes of self-representation and media self-presentation such as websites, Pound aptly surmises that the internet can be viewed as a virtual ‘op-shop’. When asked to comment upon the obvious intimate role played by the camera phone as a ubiquitous object always with us, often held closely to the body, Pound explains,

This is funny for me. Most of my mobile phone photographs are of either 1. Inanimate, collected objects (often found on the street or bought on ebay or in an op-shop, or 2. Images retaken from the real estate pages of the suburban newspapers — that is the world delivered to my door. These are then, quite literally, highly mediated images. The mobile camera has the patina of intimacy. Collections are always personal. Collections of photographs are no exception.

**INSERT FIGURE 1**

**Figure 1:** Patrick Pound (2006) ‘Soft real estate model (chandelier)’, digital photograph

**Anastasia Klose**

Like Pound, Australian artist Klose holds social media at a distance. While Klose’s practice deploys a variety of media—photographs, video and installation—it is undoubtedly performative in nature. Viewing it as a time waster and noting that email ‘is enough’ she also can’t deny the impact it has had on people around her. While choosing not to use it, she remarks wryly that this choice may marginalize her—a position she doesn’t mind. When asked why she made a work in which a statement about Facebook ironically tattooed the fabric, she explains,

Yes I made a couple of t-shirts with comments about Facebook on them, but only because I thought it was funny, and something people could relate to. Facebook itself, as subject matter, as a tool for personal promotion, or as a medium, holds little interest for me these days.

**INSERT FIGURE 2**

**Figure 2:** Anastasia Klose *Facebook ruined my life* (2007), C type photograph

Klose’s practice, whilst evocative and provocative like Tracey Emin, is much more akin to performance pioneers like Marina Abromović. Both explore intimate gestures for their emotional and
affective repertoire, suturing the stitches of *un-distance*—that is, in an attempt to overcome closeness, we are met by distance (Arnold 2003). They both spearhead the paradox of *presence*—and thus *to present*—in an age of personal media.

Klose’s practice is about the arbitrary and contingent of performance; performance becomes about a perpetual distancing effect (and affect) of intimacy. Even when her work is a series of artifacts—diaries of confession and videos of public intervention—they are mediations *of* (and meditations *on*) the performance process. The artifacts are still raw with the emotions of contact, still pulsing from the moment of connection. They are like epithets for an age when connection takes primacy over contact. They encapsulate the very paradox of the ‘personal’ in an epoch engulfed by affective technologies.

As sociologist Amparo Lasén (2004) has identified, the increasing significance of personal technologies like mobile media is predicated around its role as an “affective” technology in which emotional and affective labor become the dominant currencies. Mobile media is a byproduct of the always-on phenomenon whereby work and leisure boundaries are blurred. We are always ready to respond to our mobile phone, always ready to perform particular “feeling rules” (Hochschild 1983). Lasén also suggests that mobility has always been at the heart of intimacy. This is demonstrated through the various forms of propinquity that have accompanied changing notions of “romance” and “intimacy”. Klose’s *My boyfriend dumped me on Facebook* highlights the changing nature of intimacy and etiquette around social media—a phenomenon that is, in turn, impacting upon the aesthetics and logic of contemporary visual cultures. However before we blame social media for a so-called decline in etiquette, it is important to remember that intimacy has always been mediated—if not by technologies, then by language, gestures and power.

**INSERT FIGURE 3**

**Figure 3: Anastasia Klose My boyfriend dumped me on Facebook (2007), C-type photograph**

While Klose’s work seems to both embrace and critique social media and new forms of public intimacy, this does not mean that she actually interested in such media. Even the fact that she is a
video artist does not mean that she entertains such video contexts and communities and YouTube. She noted,

YouTube, MySpace and the Internet in general is no substitute for a gallery. But it can offer a good resource for people wanting to research an artist... The gallery space is transformative, powerful and singular. Being able to physically experience an artwork (video or otherwise), i.e. ‘see it’ in all it’s non-compressed glory, is paramount. Seeing documentation, or video excerpts online, is no substitute.

When I inquired about how YouTube—which along with democraticized media like camera phones has provided more people with the access and tools to make videos etc—is, at all, changing the context (and thus content) for video art, Klose commented,

In a way, YouTube has raised the bar for video artists. The category of ‘artist’ as something unique and essential is challenged, as everyone can have a go at making videos and making animations etc. People produce wonderful videos on YouTube. Also, YouTube is accessible to everyone, in the privacy of their own home or office. Whether or not this poses a threat to artists producing video works for sale, I don’t think so. The art industry will continue to revolve around the authenticity, aka ‘the signature’ of the artist. Artist’s videos will more and more be sold in galleries. Galleries will remain a ‘sacred’ space, perhaps more so, because the internet is where we live everyday, at work and at home. It is boring, and sitting around on the internet gives you a stiff back. People will want to go to galleries, get out of their heads and experience something profound.

Klose’s performances act as a labour of love—illustrating that contemporary global labour practices exploit emotional and affective labour. Within the deployment of affective technologies, a particular sub-genre of emotional labour—“feeling rules”—can be found. In I thought that I was wrong but it turned out that I was wrong... Klose sits in a bed in a gallery all month and writes about her experiences with the audience. In this work, the line between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ intimacy is blurred, much like the often-involuntary participation in ‘feeling rules’ required everyday.

For Arlie Hochschild, who coined the term, we not only change our outward expression to perform particular duties and functions required of us—we also change our emotions. The type of “emotion work” that is required varies according to numerous, often unspoken factors such as
sensitivity towards cultural context (Hochschild 1983). In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild focuses upon the women within the service industry and the types of “right” emotional labour they must perform in order to fulfil their job (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). The pervasiveness of emotional labour as a major tenor in forces of globalisation can also be seen from within developed countries—especially in the case of affective technologies and their growing compulsion to exploit labour under the maintenance of social capital. Klose’s practice overtly deploys emotional work in which the ‘feeling rules’ are always up challenged and critiqued.

*Cao Fei*

While Pound and Klose are representative a certain attitude to technology and creativity in Australia, Beijing-based artist Cao Fei, presents a radically different position. Her stance is indeed informed by the way in which technologies and the Internet have functioned in China as it shifted from communism to capitalism. Indeed, the visual culture of the Internet in China is one informed by the particular politics of the local and governmental. For Cao Fei the internet is another space for popular cultures in which local and global images and ideologies are up for reappropriation. Her attitude to the Internet echoes that of the *ba ling hou* (born between 1980-89)—the first generation to grow up with the education policies and reality of the Internet within everyday life. For the *ba ling hou*, the Internet represents a particular version of a public space, infused with the intimate and private, in which various forms of participation take place.

China’s Great Fire Wall, or “Great Firewall”, for Internet Information control is escalating. It is due to China’s specific national conditions. What we can get is all “restricted”, limited, and incomplete. As Chinese, we are forced to accept the reality. Fortunately, we can use Second Life… Currently, the Internet provides a new public space for exchanging our feelings. The internet plays a good role in venting and consoling. Increasingly people hope this personal, intimate space can permeate the public life. The problem in the current Internet age is, it is a society under siege and every separated individual need sympathy in a broader level.

In China, the Internet is seen as a space for democracy and media such as blogs are viewed as deeply political. While the government has fostered the introduction and accessibility of the Internet through education policy reforms from the mid-1990s as part of China’s drive into the 21st-
century ‘superhighway’, it has still viewed the Internet as a wayward space in which revolutionaries can subvert and undermine whilst exposing the firewall to the world. In 2009, with the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre and the subsequent ethnic riots, ‘western’ media like Facebook and Twitter were banned.

Instead China has a site that looks and feels like Facebook called Renren (meaning ‘people people’). Instead of YouTube there is douban. There is even a Chinese version of Twitter. The oldest and most pervasive site—which is accessed via the mobile phone and PC—is called QQ. In this technoscape, media practice takes on a much more politically charged element, something that is highlighted by Cao Fei’s work on Second Life, RMB City. Within the context of Cao Fei’s practice that draws upon the various popular cultural references (hip hop, karaoke, cosplaying etc) from Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and Hollywood, it is RMB City that is perhaps her most overtly political work. In an Australian context Second Life is beginning to be viewed with suspicion—as a corporate playground for educational institutions to colonize—so artists working there do so at their reputational peril. In this context it seemed indicative of Mark Andrejevic’s critical view of social media as part of a social factory in which user’s social, emotional and creative labour is reappropriated into “user profiles” for corporate financial gain (2011). However within the technoscape of China, working in Second Life means something different indeed. When asked to describe this technoscape and how it functions in her work Cao Fei notes,

Unfortunately, all the popular international social networking sites, like Facebook, YouTube, vimeo, MySpace and Twitter, are prohibited in current China. I have accounts for all the above social networking sites, but I can’t use them now. They seem to be restricted areas which are abandoned and can’t been seen. They are close to me but not available. Now I continue to run my own blog and the RMB City project in the Second Life… The network is a very attractive popular platform. As a RMB City cultural art project based on the Internet community, Second Life 3D, it is a work not only for browsing or surfing in the Internet but also for operation. It will encourage and invite people to participate—raising questions and assumption in its systematic construction. It presents an ideal that the future will be more open.

**INSERT FIGURE 4**
Figure 4: Cao Fei / China Tracy,

*RMB CITY: A Second Life City Planning (2009) Internet Project*

Within *RMB City* Cao Fei (as her avatar China Tracy) presents us with a kaleidoscopic world of contemporary Chinese popular culture. Pandas are mixed with MTV references—a space that is imbued with Cao Fei’s own offline life and history. It is playful and performative, like much of her work. When asked to comment upon the relationship between the new media and her practice within the context of the ‘community’ present online she noted,

*The power for connection is not only infinite and creative, but also subversive and destructive. I think that is a paradox. When finishing an artistic creation, the artist hopes it to be independent and subjective. At the same time, they also hope to receive public attention and response. The Internet as a medium provides a good model for interaction. But it depends on how the artist understands and handles its so-called “open borders”.*

For Cao Fei, testing the liminality of the internet as both a vehicle for art context and content is pivotal. This reflects the way in which social media, as a network, echoes a traditional and yet omnipresent notion of *guanxi*. As Cara Wallis (2011) suggests, the ongoing significance of *guanxi* fuses social capital with social labour. It is this notion that affects the relationship to media, and hence one of the reasons why Klose and Cao Fei differ so dramatically in their philosophies. For Wallis, *guanxi* is a ‘widely used yet ambiguous’ term that can mean many things: relationships, personal connections, and social networks. The term closely encircles the terrain marked by Pierre Bourdieu’s (1979) notion of ‘social capital’ whereby knowledge is not rewarded in *what* you know but *who* you know.

The notion of *guanxi* is significant in the uptake of new media like Jie Pang (like Foursquare). An early adopter will often persuade friends to join the new media networked with the promise that it isn’t for everyone, but rather, just for them. Here we see that the *guanxi* fosters tightening amongst close social ties that often excludes other, less close contacts—a phenomenon Ichijo Habuchi
called ‘telecoooning’ (2005). With media like Second Life, users can play into existing notions of guanxi. Indeed, social media highlight the increasing significance of the local and socio-cultural in determining types of participation. As the smartphone evolution grows, questions about the locality of networked cultures (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011) will become increasingly salient. This is particularly the case in China where the cultural specificity of social capital, epitomized by the guanxi, is amplified. Here we see that social media overlays social capital with social labour in new ways.

For Cao Fei, the relationship between social capital and labour takes a particular form whereby the liminalities of cultural practice have been eroded by new media. She does not view a boundary between visual art and new media practice, rather, she views such a terrain as pivotal in exploring the palate of popular culture to comment upon identity today. Here we see that Cao Fei’s opinion differs vastly from Klose and Pound. In her attitude, Cao Fei views the internet as a site for sharing, creativity and community—a phenomenon that is important to her as an artist. The internet is both the context and content for her practice. As she observes,

The world is multiplying and becoming cheaper to access. It is impossible for one culture to dominate another anymore. This is an information age. During this period, art can be communicated, copied and connected immediately. So it is more important that art can maintain its openness and sharing. I have uploaded a lot of video on the YouTube while many artists still only agree to put their works in the gallery or keep their works in limited access and not easily reproduced. RMB is in the Flickr. You can find a lot of people to do some recording and sharing. I think this is the aesthetic characteristics of this era: “Communication, sharing, created by a lot of people.”

Candy Factory

For Japanese collaborative group, Candy Factory, their title of ‘Internet artists’ is not self-prescribed. Rather, they view themselves as artists who just happen to have used the online as one vehicle for dissemination and viewing context. Accordingly to Kogo Takuji, one the founding members, the online context is always in relationship to the offline environment. Whilst they might draw from
techniques and media made popular by the Internet (such as flash), their collaborative projects always have an offline context. As Kogo comments,

Since diverse collaborations online are related to the planning of offline activities like the direction of Kitakyushu Biennale (which was organized by Candy Factory), neither is especially more important than the other. However, the web is free by definition from geographical constraints and I can anticipate an audience that has a wider spectrum of interests in genres other than only art.

**INSERT FIGURE 5**

**Figure 5: Candy Factory Kitakyushu Biennale 2009**

For Kogo, the potential audiences afforded by the Internet allow for an expansion beyond the often-limited scope of art. Moreover, the various contexts, content and genres afforded by the Internet provide not only bigger audiences but also feedback into the collaborative nature of Candy Factory’s projects. The Internet is just another context for the groups’ projects. Through the aesthetics of repetition—often attributed to the visuality of the Internet—the Candy Factory both mirrors the composition of new media as well as adapting it back into the traditional context of art, the gallery. As Kogo explains,

More recently I often present images as looped and mirrored or still images animated through close-ups and pan shots. I see them as looped video sculptures that function both for the exhibition space and online. I have also been engaged in several collaborative projects working with different subject matter and material using the same techniques. I’ve been trying to utilize *CANDY FACTORY PROJECTS* as a sort of software which can be used as a platform of diverse collaborations.

The Candy Factory have been dubbed as one of the first generation of Internet and Digital artists. Like Web 2.0, they encapsulate the spirit of the media by deploying collaboration and the visual economy of repetition so often-associated with the Internet. While feeling uncomfortable with such titles as ‘internet artists’ the Candy Factory prefer to see themselves as just ‘artists’ despite the fact that both their imagery and collaborative praxis echoes the very aesthetics ascribed to the Internet. They
remind us that creativity and new media both borrows from older—as well as expanding into new—modes of visuality.

**It’s Complicated: Conclusion on Social Media and Art**

As noted earlier, feminist Berlant observed before the onslaught of social media that intimacy has taken on new geographies and forms of mobility, most notably as a kind of ‘publicness’ (1998). For some social media has simplified the realm of the social by commodifying friendship and intimacy (Lovink 2012; Andrejevic 2011). For others, social media provides new spaces for cross-generational intimacy to be explored (Hjorth 2012) As intimacy becomes increasingly public in the “presence bleed” (Gregg 2011) of contemporary networked media, we see intimate publics. This shift undoubtedly transforms how we think about the politics of the personal. Through the various practices discussed in this chapter we can see both new and remediates models of visuality that, in turn, reflect some of the challenges for art in an age of social media.

As smartphones with high quality camera phones become more pervasive, the emergence of social, locative and mobile media effects and affects the nature of contemporary visual economies. As I have suggested in this chapter, intimacy—especially amplified through social media—is impacting upon art practice in the 21st century. From the confessional performances of Klose to the camera phone images of newspapers by Pound we can see that visuality has shaped, and been shaped by, intimacy. These new forms of emotional and affective labour around creativity and new media practice are paradoxical to say the least—they set us free at the same time as further enslaving us (Arnold 2003). Just like the analogy of the mobile phone as ‘wireless leash’, new technologies are seeing the labours of love becoming public by the interior becoming external. As Sukhder Sandhi aptly noted, the interior is the new exterior (cited in Margaroni and Yiannopoulou 2002).

However, it is important to contextualize these intimate visualities in terms of broader media shifts in which globalization has been a far from even process. As Cao Fei’s work illustrates, the global mix of such media as the Internet is far from homogenous; rather, in each context, the content and genres are different. We also see that the cultural politics of agency and “online participation” differs dramatically—whilst lurking or listening in Western contexts is seen as derogatory (Crawford
2009), in locations such as China and Japan it is viewed as an active part of participation (Goggin and Hjorth 2009). Through the lens of social media we can begin to understand some of the ways in which creativity and agency are being reconceptualized. As I posited earlier, this is spearhead by the current gulf between creative produsers and visual artists. However, through the four case studies I have endeavoured to complicate such easy divisions as cartographies of intimacy burgeon.

By deploying social, creative, affective and emotional labour in one, practices such as those of Klose and Cao Fei question conventional sociological and psychological readings of emotions as something that comes from ‘within’ us. Echoing the work of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, they play with the boundaries and surfaces between herself, her ‘intimate’ space, and the audience. For Ahmed the ‘outside in’ model of emotions is problematic ‘because it assumes that emotions are something that “we have”. The crowd becomes like the individual, the one who “has feelings”. Feelings become like a form of social presence rather than self-presence.’

Rather than there being an inside or an outside, it is emotions, like affect, that creates surfaces and boundaries. As Ahmed notes, ‘emotions are not “in” either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow all kinds of objects to be delineated. The objects of emotion take shape as effects of circulation’ (Ahmed 2004: 10). In turn, ‘emotional’ language is about the process of what Ahmed (2004: 145) calls ‘stickiness’—that is a process whereby objects and relations become sticky or saturated with affect.

In order to understand the visual economies of contemporary media practice we need to grasp some of the emotional and affective labour deployed under the umbrella of intimacy. From intimate media such as camera phones (Pound) to familiar tactics like repetition (Candy Factory) and popular cultural mimicry (Cao Fei and Klose), new technologies are massaging, and being massaged by, the politics of intimate labour. These politics are, in turn, informing the visual economies. As Chris Chesher (2004) has noted in the case of mobile games, they create new forms of engagement centred around a type of intimacy in which the visual is no longer either defined through 20th-century paradigms like gaze (film) or the glance (TV), but rather through the glaze. The visual regime of the glaze involves other intimate and ‘sticky’ practices such as the haptic (touch) (Hjorth 2008).
In this chapter I have explored a few examples of artists investigating the politics of intimacy—whether through intimate media or gestures—to discuss some of the ways in which new technologies are producing new visualities that are intimate in texture and shape. The artists I have chosen each have a very different take on the topic and can provide some insight into the beast that is contemporary life today. But like the default relationship status button on Facebook—‘it’s complicated…’—seems to sum up the intimate politics of contemporary networked visual economies as they migrate through a variety of contexts, content, genres and communities.

References


