

**Pockets in the Screen-scape:
movies on the move**

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[Please note that this is a draft of a chapter for a book on mobile phone films. The presentation at MiT6 will have a slightly different focus and deal with the aesthetics of mobile phone movies. This draft is intended to provide some background]

Pocket Movies: Movies made with and for the mobile phone?

The *pocket film* is the newest kid on the block in the already densely populated habitat of the moving image. As many other film genres and types, it goes under several, more or less synonymous names, such as *micromovie*, *portable film*, *cell phone movie*, *mobile movie*, *short*, *ciné pocket*, etc. As is also the case with genre names, these terms provide a quick and dirty way to conjure up a certain category of movies, but they do not always hold out against closer inspection. The most succinct definition of *pocket film* is “films made with and for the mobile phone” which seems clear enough. Since the mobile phone is at the same time a new instrument for making movies and a new platform for screening movies, it seems but natural for it to generate a film type of its own. In a relatively short period of time a great number of off line and on line film festivals have seen the day of light that are specially dedicated to the mobile phone movie, not surprisingly often sponsored by cell phone manufacturers and telecom providers.

However, a first glance at the website of some of these festivals already rises some questions. The French and German mobile phone film festivals *Mobile Film Festival* and *Festival Pocket Film* explicitly state that pocket films or mobile films are movies shot with mobile phone cameras (*films tournés avec téléphone mobile* and *Filme (...) die mit einem Mobiltelefon gedreht wurden*) whereas the Toronto *Mobifest* defines mobile movies as “made-for-mobile movies.” And indeed, the French *Festival Pocket Film* has a category of “Films pour Grand écran” and “Films pour Écran de poche,” whereas *Mobifest* presents a category “Animation” next to a category “Shot on Mobile” on its website.¹

To complicate matters, *Mobifest* allows mobile movies to be edited “either on or outside of the mobile phone” (*Die Filme können innerhalb oder außerhalb der Telefone geschnitten werden*) while the Brussels festival *Ciné Pocket* strongly advises its prospective submitters to edit their mobile films on their computers (*Mais il reste souhaitable de copier et de monter le film sur ton pc*).² This, of course, raises the question what the phrase “made with mobile phones” actually means, since filmmaking usually involves more than merely shooting images. Editing, and above all, image manipulation, the hallmark of digital processing, cannot be done on the mobile phone itself which begs the question to what extent a pocket movie is or should be made “with a mobile phone.”

Moreover, *Mobifest* and many other pocket film festivals offer selections of their films as streaming videos on their websites and almost all pocket film festivals screen at least a selection of their entries on a big cinema screen during the festival itself. The least one can say, then, is that pocket films are not exclusively made with, nor exclusively made for the mobile phone.

But then, what are they? And what justifies the existence of a global film festival circuit dedicated to pocket films and why would the directors of established film festivals like *Sundance*, *Raindance*, the *Edinburgh International Film Festival*, the *San Francisco International Film Festival*, the *Tribeca Film Festival* and even the *Festival de Cannes* make (or have made) room for special mobile phone film sections, often including contests that are open for professional as well as amateur film makers? The frenzy as well as the confusion around the pocket cinema is partly to be explained by the commercial forces behind the phenomenon. Now the market

for cell phones has almost reached a point of full saturation in Europe, the United States and the Far East, and since manufacturers and providers have invested huge amounts of money in the development and implementation of 3G networks, the mobile phone is increasingly being turned into a full-fledged multimedia device for professional but most of all for leisure time and entertainment purposes. As the histories of the video recorder, the DVD player, and the game console have shown, hardware needs software in order to seduce the consumer to purchase it.

The mobile phone-turned-into-camera-plus-screen, then, is a new platform desperately seeking for content and the pocket cinema or the micromovie is a solution to this need. Festivals and contests are heavily sponsored by the industry in order to not only encourage DIY filmmakers to test their talents and skills on mobile phone cameras but also to acquire through festivals and contests the dearly needed content: participants in these contests and festivals are usually requested to transfer copyrights to the organizers, which most of the times means to the sponsoring mobile phone producers or telecom providers who then distribute these movies through their own garden walled networks exclusively to their customers.³ The pocket film or micromovie is an invention 'before the fact': these terms do not refer to an emerging phenomenon that needs to be identified by a new name, but they are rather a call for objects to fill a void created by a new technology. In a way one could say that the phenomenon of the pocket movie has been quasi-magically called into being by the coinage of its very name. But is that really all there is to it?

In more than one sense, terms like "pocket film," "micromovie," or "mobile film" can be compared to the genre names from film history. These names were not theory-based categories either but were commercially driven and pragmatic shortcuts that helped film spectators to find their way in the vast supply of titles the film industry had to offer. Though these genre names were far from clear-cut and unequivocal, they were useful because they solicited expectations with regard to story, settings, mood or mode of a movie. Might not the same apply to pocket cinema? It is, after all, already about five years ago that pocket films and micromovies were introduced into the cultural landscape. How has the call for a new movie form been responded?

How cinematic is pocket cinema?

The very term 'pocket cinema' (or *ciné pocket* or 'pocket film') suggests an analogy with the pocket book: it evokes connotations of portability, mobility, and easy digestibility. In principle, of course, any book can be printed in the pocket book format, and many classical texts have indeed found a wide readership through this cheap format. However, since pocket books were designed to be carried around on the daily journey from home to work, on holidays, to the beach or wherever their owners wanted to go, they certainly encouraged the emergence of easily digestible – and often highly formulaic and forgettable – stories that could be consumed while waiting for the bus, train, or an appointment, or when commuting or travelling or in circumstances that are less favorable for a concentrated read. The pocket book is closely associated with genres like the detective story, the thriller, the adventure story, horror stories and romantic love stories. But these genres are, of course, not exclusive to the pocket book or paperback format: classical texts can be published in

paperback editions, and there is no reason why a thriller could not be printed in a hard cover edition. Although there is no specific and exclusive paperback or pocketbook genre, some genres are more suitable for the pocket book than others.

The same seems to apply to pocket cinema. In principle any type of digital moving image can be played back on mobile devices like 3G mobile phones, PDAs or MP3 players. Apple's (American) iTunes store offers movies, TV shows, music videos and games for downloading and playback on the iPod Touch or iPhone. But the movies on sale in the iTunes store are generally not classified as micromovies or pocket movies. Indeed, almost all titles were produced for a theatrical release, TV broadcast or for playback on the nowadays almost ubiquitous 'home cinema' with its large high-resolution screens that are said to be soon able to rival the quality of the cinema screens. This, however, makes those titles not very suitable for playback on mobile devices for reasons quite similar and also very different to those that make certain text types more suitable for the pocket book format than others. These reasons are technological as well as pragmatic.

Although mobile devices are usually considered – and advertized - as high tech appliances, the cameras and screens of mobile phones and MP3 players (still) seriously lag behind the quality of not only the cinema screen, but also to the quality of contemporary TV screens (and even some computer screens). The size of mobile phones screens (and other portable devices) is much smaller than those of the TV screen and the cinema screens, (the screen of the iPhone which is rather big for a mobile phone has a diagonal of only 3.5 inch), they have a relatively low resolution (640 x 480 pixels for the iPhone), and they have a relatively low frame rate (30 frames per second for the iPhone against the conventional 60 fps for LCD screens which has already been quadrupled to a 240Hz by the Sony Bravia). The display of the mobile phone is by all standards a "thumbnail cinema" with a frame rate that is comparable to that of pre-cinema devices like the Zootrope.⁴ The displays of mobile phones have, moreover, a limited color range compared to LCD and plasma TV screens or the silk screen of the cinema.

On the basis of these technological limitations some early attempts have been made to come up with more specific descriptions of the pocket film or micromovie than the mere stipulation that these are movies "fit for the mobile phone" (Wolf 2006). As Juliana Pierce observed in an early review of the phenomenon of the mobile phone film, "Wide shots, pans, surround sound, mood lighting and anything with too much detail is almost no go for mobile movies" (Pierce 2006). The small size of the mobile phone screen makes the use of close-ups and medium shots almost mandatory, the low frame rate is prohibitive for fast editing and speedy movements of both the camera and characters or objects in the frame, while the limited color range makes working with large and brightly colored surfaces recommendable.⁵ Moreover, since the sound capacities of mobile phones (and other devices) are modest as well, compared to the hi-fi dolby sensurround equipment of today's film theatres and home cinemas, micromovies should not rely on dialogue or intricate sound effects. Given the limited memory and storage capacity of mobile phones and the actual limitations of wireless Internet connections, but also given the circumstances in which pocket films are most likely to be watched – like pocket books during journeys, while waiting, in lost moments between two engagements,

on holidays or on the beach, etc, early critics of the pocket movie recommend that movies for the mobile phone be short. Because of the viewer's limited attention span and because the viewer will be easily distracted by other events in his or her immediate surroundings, pocket films should have a simple storyline with a clear, preferably surprising closure.⁶ As the Australian filmmaker Joe Miale points out, micromovies should be "caricature based" rather than character based.⁷

By these recommendations, Isabella Rosselini's mini-series GREEN PORNO (USA, 2008) fit the bill for the perfect micromovie. Although the eight very short movies that constitute the series are shot with professional cameras and screened at film festivals like *Sundance* and the *Berlin Film Festival*, they were produced with the 'fourth' screen of mobile devices in mind.⁸ Each film opens with Isabella Rosselini speaking to the camera "If I were a (firefly, bee, spider, dragonfly, etc.)." She then transforms (most often) into the male of the mentioned species and explains and executes the sexual act in the manner of that species. Rosselini wears simple and brightly colored costumes that make the insects look as if they are taken from children's drawings and give the films the appearance of a mixture of live action and animation. Each film ends with the fulfillment of the sexual act and (sometimes) its consequences, which provides each episode with a clear closure. In its playful dialectic between childish representation and adult content, ecological education and pornographic curiosity, GREEN PORNO seems to allegorize the tension between the new but technologically yet immature mobile screen and its adult counterparts, the cinema and the TV (at the turn of the century, the porn film industry seemed to have reached a turn-over that equals or even surpasses that of Hollywood).⁹

The GREEN PORNO series, however, also embodies the equivocal status of the micromovie: the series is neither shot with mobile phone cameras nor meant for exclusive screening on the "fourth screen." It actually gathered its fame in the film festival circuit and is only available in a streaming format at the *Sundance Film Festival* website (and meanwhile, as is unavoidable in this day and age, on YouTube).¹⁰ And as Isabella Rosselini is the daughter of Hollywood film star Ingrid Bergman and film director Roberto Rosselini, and famous herself from independent films such as David Lynch's BLUE VELVET (USA 1986) and WILD AT HEART (USA 1990), in GREEN PORNO as well as in the mobile film festival circuit, the micromovie is approached as an offspring of or an appendix to the cinema-as-we-know it. The properties of the micromovie as mentioned by critics like Juliana Peirce, Reinhard Wolf or Joe Miale are for instance all derived from a rather traditional film aesthetics: they basically select a small subset of the options available to feature filmmakers or documentary filmmakers.¹¹ Moreover, in a typically modernist vein, this micromovie aesthetics is derived from the technological properties of mobile devices, particularly from its limitations.

However, neither this aesthetics nor the quick-and-dirty definitions of the pocket film or the micromovie suffice to adequately describe what is actually being offered under this label nor does it capture the practices afforded by the unique and new combination of the mobile phone and the video camera. The pocket film is an offspring not of the cinema, but of the same new media technologies that have dramatically changed the contemporary mediascape. Rather than approaching the micromovie as one of the many examples of "remediation" of an old medium – film

– by new media technologies and looking at this new format as a “continuation of the old medium with other means,” it might be more fertile to approach the pocket film from the perspective of the new media of which it is part.

The moving image on the run

Juliana Pierce called the mobile phone display “the fourth screen,” whereas others ranked the same display as the “third screen” (Brown 2008). Whether one counts the mobile display as a third or fourth screen apparently depends on whether one classifies the screens along the lines of size (the large cinema screen, the medium sized TV-screen, the small computer screen and the “micro” display of mobile devices) or takes the technology on the basis of which images are screened as the criterion for categorization (the analogue cinema, the electronic TV set and the digital computer, cell phone and iPod). These ways of categorizing screens are not mutually exclusive. Alex Munt, for instance, takes size as the criterion for categorization and classifies the “theatrical 3D” screen, as in Imax cinemas, as “XL,” the “theatrical 2D” screen as used in most theaters as “L,” the wide-screen TV as “M,” and “mobile/computer” screens as “S.” (Munt 2008). Since, for instance, TV sets are already developing into displays of digitally transmitted information and theatrical screens are increasingly being used for the screening of digitally distributed or stored data (DVDs, satellite broadcasting, Internet) the latter categorization seems to make more sense than the former. But more importantly these different ways of categorizing show that size is a notoriously relative, context sensitive and volatile matter. Even only going by size, many other categorizations of screens are very well possible.

These proposals, for instance, do not take into account so-called “urban screens,” the huge dynamic electronic and digital billboards that increasingly pop up in the streets, squares, and public places of the urban environment and turn the walls of buildings into surfaces for the display of dynamic, constantly moving and changing information. Nor do they mention the huge video walls developed by research centers at NASA or Hiperspace at UC San Diego with a resolution of about 287 million pixels, or the use of wide-screen TVs in public and semi-public spaces or public transport to convey information, entertainment or advertisements, or the huge video walls used at rock concerts, major sports events or public events (e.g. the inauguration of the new president of the USA) to allow those who were not lucky enough to obtain a place near the event itself to see it anyway. There is a whole proliferation of screens from the mega size of a big building to the micro size of the mobile phone, and this variety is only very partially captured by the aforementioned attempts at classification.¹²

Although not explicitly stated, the reason for this selectiveness is rather obvious. The primary selection criterion was not size but content: the selected three or four screen types are all used – or rather described as being used – for the display of films of one sort or another. This, however, does neither justice to the wide variety of screens that nowadays surround and accompany the inhabitants of contemporary urban environments nor to the wide variety of uses those screens and the moving images displayed on them are nowadays being put to. It only confirms how narrow

one's perspective risks to become if one approaches new media developments from the perspective of already existing, to be "remediated" media.

Screens have become ubiquitous and so has the moving image. Wherever one goes, one is bound to encounter screens: at home, at the office and the working place, in schools and research centers, in public transport and private cars (that nowadays often come with built-in GPS navigation systems and DVD-players and game consoles to keep the kids quiet on the back seats), in the streets, along the roads and on the squares, in shops and shopping malls, in sports stadiums and conference centers, and in the increasingly rare situations that there is no screen around, one always still has their mobile phone or iPod to turn to. With this proliferation of screens, the moving image has left its familiar biotopes, the cinema theater and the living room, and started to move around wherever its potential viewers may go. Cinema and television, once the almost exclusive habitat of the moving image, have now become special residencies among many others. And as soon as it left its familiar cultural niche, the moving image acquired new forms and functions as well. In that sense too, the cinema and television became special cases of the ubiquitous and multi-functional moving image that has become the symbolic and communicative heart of contemporary "visual culture."

Ironically, in many circumstances outside the film theatre and living room, the moving image is subjected to practical, pragmatic and often technological constraints that are quite similar to those identified for pocket films by early critics like Juliana Pierce and Reinhard Wolf. Mega screens like the 'image skins' on buildings or so-called 'urban screen' often suffer from poor and uncontrollable light conditions, noise from the immediate surroundings, and are faced with competition for the attention of the passersby from events, incidents, activities, traffic, and not in the least from other screens, billboards, neon advertisements, etc. Relatively low resolution, low frame rate, and poor light conditions make detailed images, panoramic landscapes and long shots in general, subtle colors, fast camera movements and a high pace of editing as much a "no go" on these mega screens as they are on the very small screens of portable devices. For obvious reasons, these urban mega screens usually come without sound: imagine the cacophony that would come on top of the already heavy usual noise of the traffic in places like Time Square or Piccadilly Circus.¹³

Moreover, the attention span of the urban dweller is possibly even shorter than that of the user of the mobile phone display, since that dweller literally is a passerby "on the move," who has to divide his or her attention between traffic, arrival and departure of public transport vehicles, shop windows, vendors, other passersby, and possibly a host of other signs, signals and screens vying for a moment of his or her attention. For similar reasons, that make themselves even more pressingly felt on public mega screens than on private micro screens (after all, the owners of mobile devices choose themselves what they want to watch, whereas the images of urban mega screens are involuntarily "pushed" towards them), then, the content displayed on the latter had better be short, bright, and instantly intelligible. And again, animations, commercials, and very short movies seem to suit best the conditions of the mega screens for the same reasons that make them appropriate for the screens of portable devices. This already means that formats and genres that led an at best

very marginal existence in the heydays of “cinema-and-TV-as-we-know-it” have now gained prominence: on both mega and micro screens that in nowadays media usage together constitute the majority of displays – animations, music videos, (very) short movies, and, of course, commercials, have become mainstream.

More importantly, the rise to prominence of the (very) short movie goes hand in hand with a change of function of the moving image. In the cinema and on television, the main task of the moving image was to represent a fictional or historical world that functioned as a backdrop for stories. For decades, film theorists and television studies scholars could take it for granted that their respective media main tasks consisted of storytelling and the construction of identities. Outside the cinema and the living room, however, the moving image takes on other functions, the most important of those being to draw and possibly fix the attention of the viewer. In the urban environment, the medium has in a very literal sense become the message in as far as it has to communicate to the viewer that there is a message to be apprehended in the first place. Communication, then, for a long time disdained by film theorists and critics, presides over representation, and that communication had better be bold than subtle: the “lessons of Las Vegas” have by now become general wisdom (not to mention the lessons of Eisenstein who once wrote that a film image should be a “slap in the face” of the spectator).¹⁴

Besides drawing attention to itself, the moving image is being put to the tasks of informing and instructing, luring and persuading, performing and parading, surveying and summoning, and, of course, entertaining and amusing. The latter, usually seen on a par with storytelling and representation, traditionally the core business of the moving image, have now become special cases of the audiovisual communication just as narrative and declarative utterances are special cases of verbal communication. This shift from representation to communication is not a particular property of the mega screens that usually operate in highly commercial environments, but is a more general trend in the use of the moving image. Research into *keitai*, that is 3G mobile phone use in Japan and other South-East Asian countries like South Korea, where the use of MMS was introduced much earlier and became much more widespread than in the West, has shown, for instance, that users send photographs or videos to peers, family members or colleagues to ask for advice on choice of clothes, instructions for a task at hand, to bring an interesting event to their attention, or to simply let them know they are thinking of them. Especially in the latter case, the actual content of the picture or movie is less important than the sending of the message itself: communication presides over representation.¹⁵

Similar trends have been observed on video sharing websites like YouTube, where users respond to each other’s videos not only with text messages, but also with other videos that are often parodies, spoofs, ironic comments, often containing quotes of other videos or movies as well. In many a YouTube hype to participate is more important than the actual “message” around which a hype evolves, which is in most cases a nonsensical gesture or performance anyway. On social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook, photographs and videos are exchanged as tokens to initiate or maintain a conversation, or as tokens of friendship and appreciation in which, again, the act of sending or giving is more important than what the images or videos actually represent. Images, moving or static, are increasingly becoming

“media conversation” pieces, as Lev Manovich observes (Manovich 2008). And again, outside the film theater and the living room, once marginal practices and uses of the moving image gain more prominence. Or, to put it in other words, “out there,” in “the real world,” the moving image takes on a number of pragmatic functions that for a long time seemed to be reserved for non-fictional, everyday language. As literature and poetry are special usages of language, the fiction film and the art movie have become special cases of “everyday (media) life” (Manovich). And, one might add, the fictional and poetic micromovie has become a very special case of the moving images that circulate and are being screened on today’s mega and micro screens.

Mixing Images

The moving image has not only migrated towards other screens and other places than those in the film theaters and the living rooms, but it does not have (nearly) exclusive rights on those screens like it used to have in its familiar habitat. On the displays of computers, mobile phones, billboards, urban screens, screens in public transport or shopping malls, moving images appear together with, amidst of, or alternating with all sorts of other media messages like texts, photographs, graphics, and animations. Again, this is not a specific property of these new screens, but a consequence of the going digital of almost all media. The computer, after all, is a simulation machine that can be made to emulate almost any old medium, from typewriter to telephone, and it was bound to make those media interact with each other and to create new media configurations the properties of which are richer than those of any of the original media that contribute to the new hybrid mix. The mobile phone itself has become the paradigm example of such media convergence and hybridity.

The (photographic) moving image has become just one of the modules that can be used as a component of the content that gets displayed on a screen, whether simultaneously or alternating with other media modules. On YouTube, for instance, videos are “embedded” in a page that contains texts, thumbnails of related videos, links to channels and groups, and graphics, plus code that allows the user to “embed” the same video on other web pages at, for instance, MySpace or Facebook.

Moving images can also be embedded in other applications, such as, for instance PowerPoint presentations, word processing files, emails, web pages, and all sorts of game environments. This migration of the moving image from film and television towards other media and applications has largely contributed to its nowadays almost self-evident ubiquity, and has also enhanced the communicative and pragmatic functions of the moving image over its aesthetic and narrative functions. This goes not only for the images on the computer screen, but it also applies to the moving image on urban screens and mobile devices. On the mobile phone, the display is used to read, write and edit text messages (SMS or email) or simply to take notes, browse the Internet, play games, consult the address book, navigate a neighborhood with Google Maps, select music albums, make calculations, upload photos and videos to Flickr and YouTube, and whatever else the increasing number of “apps” for the mobile phone will allow the user to do.

At the same time the moving image lost its exclusive hold on (some) screens, it also lost its exclusive hold on dynamic representation to other media as well. With applications like Flash it became possible to animate all sorts of objects, such as captions, drawings, photographs, characters, or icons. Although this did not always yield aesthetically satisfying results, it promoted the generalization of the dynamics that used to be the privilege of the “moving” image: in principle every digitized object can now be made to move. The reverse is true as well: texts and static objects have become part of moving images as well, as for instance the YouTube logo in the bottom right corner of an embedded YouTube video, logos of broadcasting companies in the left upper corner of their programs, or – more dynamically – instant translations in the form of subtitles at the lower part of the image, the use of graphs, maps, statistical information, photographs, paintings, and drawings in documentaries and instruction films, that since All Gore’s *AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH* (Davis Guggenheim, USA 2006) some have started to call “PowerPoint cinema.” Examples of such PowerPoint-films are the anthropologist Michael Wesh’s educational YouTube movies *INFORMATION R/EVOLUTION* (USA 2007) and *AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO YOUTUBE* (USA 2008), but this genre can also be found among pocket films, as demonstrated by David Bakker’s entry for the Groningen mobile phone film festival *Viva La Focus, A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING* (NL 2008), which goes in four minutes time through Bill Bryson’s book of the same title.¹⁶ However, in pocket films as well as in most (ultra short) movies made for mega and micro screens, mixing of media – live action footage, animation, graphics, photos, texts, graphs, maps, paintings, etc. – is the rule rather than the exception as even a superficial exploration of the websites of pocket film festivals like the already mentioned *Viva La Focus*, *Ciné Pocket*, *Pocket Film Festival*, *Pocket Films Festival* and many others quickly learns.

PowerPoint films are instantiations of what Lev Manovich calls “deep remixability.” This sort of films do not as much remix already existing content from the same or other media – though they do quote from and refer to already existing documents from films, news papers, scientific research, books, etc. – but they remix the “fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression” of other media into what Manovich calls a “meta-medium” that combines “cinematography, animation, computer animation, special effects, graphic design, and typography” (Manovich 2007). One might argue that deep remixability has always been a characteristic of new media objects since the arrival of the Graphical User Interface (GUI) that transferred until then almost exclusively cinematographic techniques like framing, zooming, panning and scrolling, and cut-and-paste editing to other media like texts, graphic design, photography, drawings, etc., or the working methods of painting and drawing to the reworking of photographs in environments like Adobe Photoshop and others (the toolboxes of such applications and the names of the tools are testimony to this “deep remixability”).

Remixability is built in almost every consumer software application: iMovie allows to import music tracks from iTunes, photos from iPhoto, videos from already existing projects or downloaded from, say, YouTube, add titles and texts, etc. Other applications like word processing programs or presentation tools have always

already allowed users to integrate other media objects into their documents as a consequence of the going digital of almost all media. As Manovich observes, it was to be expected that “Once all types of media met within the same digital environment—and this was accomplished in the second part of the 1990s—they started interacting in ways that could never have been predicted or even imagined previously” (Manovich 2007).

One of the consequences of this interaction is that the moving image is no longer the same as it was in the era of the “cinema-as-we-knew-it.” Nowadays a film is as much made on a computer with editing software as it is with a camera during shooting. Post-production has, of course, always played a crucial role in filmmaking, but the core of postproduction consisted of the cutting and pasting of pieces of filmstrips that consisted of separate still photos. This practice of editing yielded the basic units of the “language of film”: the shot, shot-reverse shot, the scene, the sequence, parallel montage, crosscutting, etc., as it was most systematically though not non-controversially, formalized in Christian Metz’s famous *Grande Syntagmatique* (Metz 1983). The assumption of the idea of a film language is that its units represent identifiable slices of space and time, and that the boundaries between these units mark spatiotemporal breaks. The “frames” of a digital movie, however, do not correspond with the stills of a celluloid filmstrip: it is not possible to identify single, separate photographs in the strings of images that video editing applications like iMovie for reasons of convenience and familiarity represent as resembling those good old analog filmstrips. One would nowadays be hard pressed to apply Metz’s criteria for film segmentation even to a Hollywood blockbuster.

Moreover, the computer does not distinguish between lens-based photographic images or computer generated images, be they animations, drawings, letters, graphics or special effects: they can be all created, blended and mixed in the same digital editing environment. Frames of a digital video can easily be manipulated into mixtures of live action scenes, animations, graphics and special effects, and since the basic unit of a digital film is not a still photograph but rather the pixel, each part of whatever small or big size within a video image can be manipulated separately. Moreover, one image can easily be decomposed into or overlaid with several layers, that in turn can each be manipulated separately. The image consists of many variables that can all be changed constantly within and across seemingly boundary-less frames. The shot or the still photograph, then, does no longer play a particular role as a unit in digital image processing.¹⁷

In this respect, the computer is more welcoming to Eisenstein’s approach of montage, for whom montage was the arrangement of elements within as well between “montage cells,” those elements not being concrete objects or characters, but more abstract vectors, volumes, lines, colors and everything that could function as a part of an opposition, confrontation, or collision (or, for that matter, as part of a parallelism, comparison, or similarity). However, whereas Eisenstein saw the organization of collisions within and between film images as the main purpose of montage, the computer rather encourages filmmakers to approach images as continuously changing on many dimensions. This does not mean, of course, that spatiotemporal markers have become irrelevant as organizational and structural elements in digital filmmaking. Many feature films as well as most amateur DIY

videos on sites as YouTube work with lens-based imagery that is shot and edited (if at all) along the familiar lines of spatiotemporal divisions. However, in contemporary film culture, this traditional way of proceeding has become one option out of many other options afforded by even today's simplest consumer software.

Mobile devices are, moreover, already enriching the moving image with new and surprising properties. Apple's iPhone and iPod Touch are equipped with a so-called accelerometer, a gyroscope that registers the device's movements and their accelerations and keeps the image in an upright position. Pictures and web pages, for instance, can be viewed in portrait or landscape format. This feature has already found applications in many apps especially developed for the iPhone, in which the accelerometer is used to navigate through (game) environments on the screen or to tilt views on maps in Google Earth, for instance. In combination with the touch screen that affords a more direct, haptic, relationship to images, the mobile phone is bound to develop new uses, functions and practices that hitherto have never existed before (or only in sci-fi movies like *MINORITY REPORT* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 2002)) and which are also bound to affect the very idea of a mobile phone movie. Again, new media turn out to be really new because they do not only emulate old media or expand old media with new forms of storage, distribution and exhibition, but change their properties, make previously separate media interact, and create new forms and functions in the process.¹⁸

And since both mega screens and micro screens are most friendly to (very) short movies, that present brightly colored and easily identifiable, cartoonlike figures, it should come as no surprise that they provide fertile niches for experimentation with this new aesthetics of hybridity and continuous change. Rather than trying to define pocket films as "movies made with and for mobile phones" (which are not appropriate descriptions of the pocket film anyway), one had better focus on what lies between the shooting with and the screening on a mobile phone. Of course some of the entries of the several mobile phone film festivals explore the sometimes surprising and funny possibilities that are unique to the small, portable mobile phone camera, such as the award winning entry of the Paris Festival Pocket Film 2008, *THE CHAMPION* (Rui Avelans Coelho, Portugal, 2007), which is shot with a mobile phone camera attached to a hammer launched by an athlete, or *CAT CAM* (Jan-Pieter van IJzendoorn, NL, 2008), filmed through a mobile phone camera hanging on the collar of a cat.¹⁹ Other entries, like *WASSTRAAT* (Car Wash) play self-conscientiously (one hopes) with infamous mobile phone film genres like 'happy slapping' or with the opportunities and frustrations the mobile gives rise to for aspiring lovers, as happens in *JULIE ;_ (* (Wael Koudaih, France 2008) or satirize the use of the mobile phone for something different than its name suggests, as in *OBJETS A USAGES MULTIPLES* (Multiple Purpose Objects) (Delphine Marceau, France 2008). These, and quite a lot of other pocket films, explore the affordances offered by the mobile phone camera, the stories and situations they give rise to, or the absurdities and contradictions new media devices may instantiate when envisioned from the perspective of the good old fashioned analog world. This, however, is precisely what happens when pocket films or micromovies are thought of and theorized as an extension or appendix of the cinema-as-we-know it, for how would the majority of

entries for mobile phone film festivals that rather explore the possibilities of the aesthetics of hybridity and continuity afforded by the image processing software, fit this definition?

Moving Images on Mobile Devices

Mobile phone films should be seen in these contexts of the ubiquity of the moving image and the culture of hybridity and deep remixability. To define the pocket film as 'movies made with and for the mobile phone', or even to restrict the definition to one of its components, does not do justice to the great variety of forms these films assume, and the many channels and windows through which these films can virtually become available for screening. It is quite remarkable, for instance, that one hardly finds entries on the websites of pocket film festivals that are shot and edited in the DIY style one encounters on YouTube, and which meanwhile has become a sort of a new standard for "realist" filmmaking: the simple point-and-shoot approach without bothering too much about framing, focusing, composition, lighting or *mise en scène* and shot with the only concern to capture the subject of the movie (as was recommended by the Dogma95 movement of Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg).²⁰

On the contrary: most films submitted at these festivals – with the possible exception of the Groningen Viva La Focus festival which was aimed at the local and regional population of the city of Groningen and may therefore have attracted more "amateur" and DIY filmmakers than other European festivals (many participants were pupils of high schools, for instance) experimented with forms, styles, and techniques largely afforded by authoring and editing software. There are experiments with split screen and symmetrical images (e.g., *STORYBOARD WITHOUT STORY* by Rabier Beck, B 2008²¹), computer generated special effects (e.g. *S. HAMALLUK* by Laura Cuello & Esteban Azuela, Sp/Ca/Mx, 2008²²), movies and graphics on screens within screens (*AVENTURES URBAINES* by Jocelyne Rivière & Serge Rustin, Fr. 2008²³), images dissolving and being recomposed in smaller images as if a stack of cards (*MOVIECOLLAGE* by Katsuku Tanaka, Jp 2007²⁴), animations and mixtures of live action, animation, and collage techniques, as in *FREE RUN* by Henry Reichhold (UK, 2007)²⁵. The latter film opens with a shot of a mass of passengers of the London Subway leaving the elevator after its iron gate slides away and walking towards the camera, followed by a collage of moving and still images of London landmarks and traffic through which the protagonist finds his way on his skateboard. The film makes an allusion to the famous Lumière brothers' film *SORTIE DES USINES LUMIERE* (Fr. 1895) to "jump" straight ahead from the allegedly purely documentary style of early filmmaking to the contemporary styles of individual urban locomotion and meta-media aesthetics of hybridity and continuity as if it wants to make the jump from film as a mass-medium that imposes the same views on all its spectators towards the highly personal and idiosyncratic perspectives and views made possible by portable devices, personal computers and user-friendly editing software.

The practitioners of the pocket cinema seem to be more aware of the gap that separates the cinema-as-we-knew-it from contemporary digital visual culture – if

that is still an appropriate term – than the organizers of the by now numerous mobile phone film festivals, events and contests as well as those critics who mainly want to consider the pocket film as an extension of a film culture as it has developed over the last hundred years. It is actually more than likely that the notion of the ‘pocket film’ itself is the effect of an optical illusion inflicted by the prism of twentieth century modernism which assumed that each medium would generate its own medium specific forms, styles and techniques. New media have substituted medium specificity with medium hybridity and mixability: from this perspective there is no reason to assume why there would be content ‘especially’ for the mobile phone screen, or why movies made with mobile phones could only be “really” made for screening on mobile devices. Practices go into another direction: movies made with cell phones, for instance, have found their way to the Internet, and through the Internet quite often to mass media as television. And television not only shows YouTube movies (there is even a YouTube TV channel nowadays), but it also appropriates and incorporates the style of the DIY filmmaker to adorn their “reality” programs with a flavor of the raw, the direct, and the unpolished so dear to the champions of “transparency” and “immediacy.”

But more importantly, pocket films are not necessarily made with cell phone cameras or must not even consist of lens-based images: they are hybrids that freely and happily mix, blend, and combine whatever sorts of media objects computers and editing software make available to them. In that sense, they are like the music videos of the seventies and the eighties: they provided filmmakers and artists with the opportunity to experiment with new technologies, styles and work processes for image making. The pocket film might turn out to be the contemporary laboratory for the moving image of the future.

Notes.

¹ *Mobile Film Festival*: <http://de.mobilefilmfestival.com/teilnahmebedingungen.php>;
Festival Pocket Film:
http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=4&var_mode=recalc
ul; *Mobifest*: <http://www.mobifest.net/home/>.

² <http://cinepocket.lescorsaires.be/spip.php?article40>.

³ Reinhard W. Wolf. *Micromovies – Kurzfilme für die Westentasche*, Teil 1.
Shortfilm.de. Das Kurzfilmmagazin. January 2, 2006.
<http://www.shortfilm.de/index.php?id=414&L=0&0> = (accessed July 1, 2006).

⁴ Wolf, oc.

⁵ Wolf, o.c.

⁶ Pierce, o.c.; Wolf o.c.

⁷ Quoted in: Daniel Terdiman. . A Celebration of Cell-Phone film." *Wired News*,
August 30, 2004. <http://ww.wired.com/news/culture/0.1284.64698.00.html>.

⁸ <http://www.sundancechannel.com/greenporno/>.

⁹ <http://www.forbes.com/2001/05/25/0524porn.html>.

¹⁰ See note 9. Unfortunately it cannot be watched by those unfortunate enough to own an iPhone which does not (yet) support a flash plug-in in its Safari webbrowser.

¹¹ See David Bordwell. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 151.

¹² See Lev Manovich. *Scale Effects*. 2005, <http://www.manovich.net>. See also: *First Monday* Special Issue #4: Discovering the Potential of Outdoor Screens for Urban Society, 2006,
<http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/issue/view/217>.

¹³ There are exceptions, though. The traveler who steps outside the building of Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam onto Schiphol Plaza cannot miss the sounds emitted from a giant screen on which commercials, music videos and news flashes are being screened.

¹⁴ Roberto Venturi, Denise Scott Brown & Steven Izenour. *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. (Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 8-9.

¹⁵ Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe & Misa Matsuda (ed.). *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*. (Cambridge, Ma.: The MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁶ INFORMATION R/EVOLUTION: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4CV05HyAbM>; AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO YOUTUBE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU&feature=channel; A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING: <http://www.vivalafocus.nl/films.html?v=239>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Lev Manovich. *Software Takes Command*. <http://www.manovich.net>, Nov. 20, 2008.

¹⁹ THE CHAMPION: http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/article.php3?id_article=812; CAT CAM: <http://www.vivalafocus.nl/films.html?v=80&m=80>.

²⁰ See Jan Simons. *Playing The Waves: Lars von Trier's Game Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

²¹ http://cinepocket.lescorsaires.be/spip.php?page=public_document&id_document_auteur=113.

²² http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/article.php3?id_article=912.

²³ http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/article.php3?id_article=882.

²⁴ http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/article.php3?id_article=917.

²⁵ http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/article.php3?id_article=649.

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