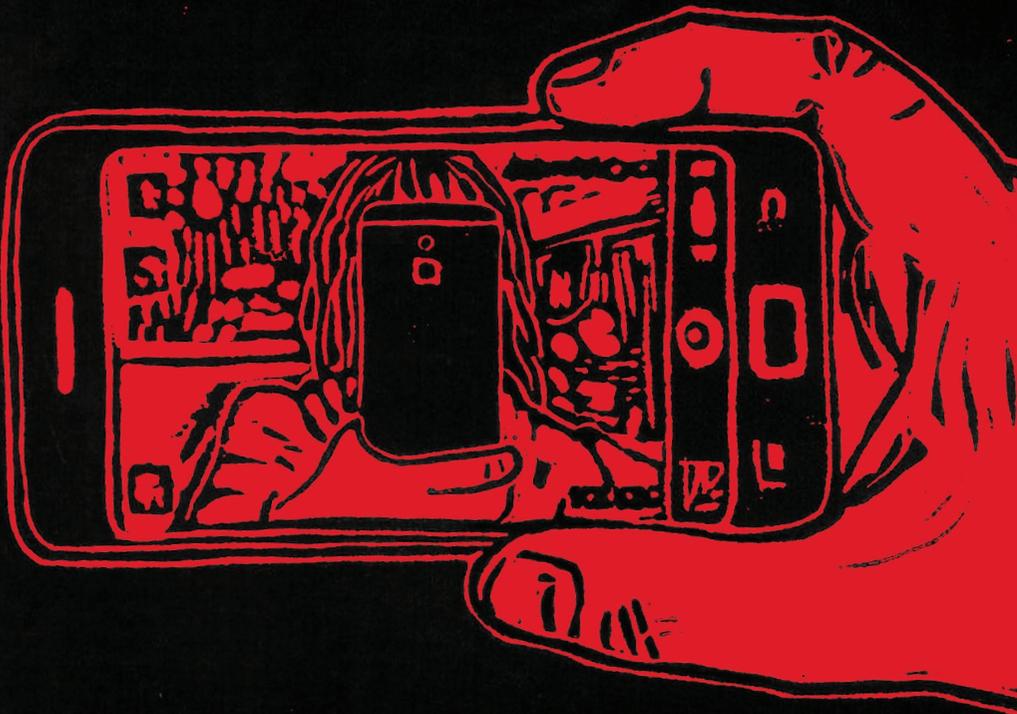# What's a Cellphilm?

Integrating Mobile Phone Technology into Participatory Visual Research and Activism

Katie MacEntee, Casey Burkholder and
Joshua Schwab-Cartas (Eds.)

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WHAT'S A CELLPHILM? AN INTRODUCTION

Dockney and Tomaselli (2009) coined the term cellphilm by combining two words—cellphone[1] and film—to describe the combination of multiple communication technologies in one device. However, they admit that the ways in which individuals and communities have taken up the practice of making cellphilms has made it difficult to formulate a fixed definition of what constitutes a cellphilm. By the end of their article, we are still left wondering if everything filmed on a cellphone counts as a cellphilm. Our own diverse cellphilm experiences focus on cellphone video production with research participants as a participatory visual research method. The first author has explored cellphilms in relation to gender-based violence and HIV education with learners and teachers in rural South Africa. The second uses cellphilms to explore issues of identity and civic engagement with Hong Kong youth who are also ethnic minorities, and as a pedagogical tool with pre-service social studies teachers in Canada. The third author's research in his community on Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico explores cellphilms as an indigenous technology and as a means of intergenerational language revitalization. While we all agree that the use of cellphones is significantly central to our research, our methods vary considerably.

While recognizing that cellphilm research is still evolving, we present *What's a Cellphilm?* as an exploration of cellphilm-production as a research methodology. We focus on the consideration of a series of interrelated questions. What is the significance of variations in cellphilm method and in the visual representation of community-based knowledges? What theories exist or can be developed to inform the analysis of cellphilms? How do we account for the frequently occurring changes to the cellphone device given technological development, and how does this affect our work? How do our relationships with cellphone technology inform and constrain our cellphilm practices? What are the ethical dynamics of cellphilm use, dissemination, and archiving?

In this introductory chapter, we outline our role in a cellphilm festival that motivated the writing of this book. We refer to two cellphilms from the festival to help illuminate how converging movements in cellphone video production have influenced our understandings of the cellphilm as an aesthetic practice, a symbol of community activism, and as an educational tool. Looking specifically at the role

of cellphilms in research and as a methodological approach to community-based research, we argue that an explanation of cellphilm research must account for the opportunities presented by mobile technologies and must fit into a framework of what Schratz and Walker (1995) call research for social change, that is, in turn, located within an overarching framework of participatory visual methodologies. We conclude this chapter with an outline of the book's organization and how the chapters come together to answer the question: *What's a Cellphilm?*

BUT FIRST, WHAT IS A CELLPHONE?

The global availability of cellphones has increased exponentially over the last three decades. MacDonald (1979), who coined the term *cellphone* to reference the networking aspects of cellular biology, modelled the mobile telecommunication system after the configuration of the cellular system in an animate body. He argued for the development of a mobile system that was affordable, accessible, portable, efficient, and able to adapt to user demands. MacDonald's foresight is reflected in the 2013 estimate that 96% of the global population is covered by the mobile network (World Bank, 2015) and that 97% of people—that is, over 7 billion—have a mobile device subscription (ICT, 2015). While access remains disproportionately distributed according to the location and socio-economic status of users, cellphone use and the mobile broadband network continue to experience steady market growth (Mobithinking, 2014; ICT, 2015). This growing accessibility has influenced our daily lives, behaviours, relationships, and social structures (Goggin, 2013).

   Odin (2012) argues that cellphones are personal tools that allow for immediate visual communication. Differences in brand, model, colour, ringtone, graphics, and accessories can be read as expressions of individuality (Plant, 2001). An everyday technology, the devices have become an intimate part of people's lives. Cellphones have been described as an extension of the body and conceptualized as a handheld prosthesis that extends and improves an individual's sight and hearing (Pertierra, 2005; Odin, 2009). The term *nomophobia*—the fear of having no cellphone signal or otherwise being unable to make or receive calls—is used to refer to a kind of separation anxiety or feeling of dismemberment (Elmore, 2014). The cellphone's intelligibility, multifunctionality—we can talk, text, take a video, take pictures, access the internet, etc.—and affordability have also helped establish the device's centrality in our lives. However, it is important to note that we are not arguing in support of a technological determinist standpoint. We agree with Ito who argued that "the relationship between society, culture, and technology is not one of a foreign object of technology 'impacting' and 'transforming' social life and cultural patterns but is, rather, something more organic and co-constitutive" (2004, p. 2). We, too, do not believe that there is something inherent in a cellphone that makes it socially or culturally transformative.

COMING TOGETHER: THE INTERNATIONAL CELLPHILM FESTIVAL

The idea for this collection came to us in 2014 when our shared interest in cellphilms brought us together to organize the International Cellphilm Festival,[2] an annual one-minute cellphilm competition that is hosted by the Institute for Human Development and Well-Being, and the Faculty of Education's Participatory Cultures Lab at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Cellphilm festivals, of which ours is an example, have had a central role in establishing cellphilming as an aesthetic form of communication. *Wired* magazine's Daniel Terdiman described a similar festival in 2004 when cellphone video technology was developed only enough to allow for a 2-inch screen on which to view the video clips. These days, there are countless other events, such as France's Mobile Film Festival (now in its 11th year), the iPhone Film Festival, which has representation only online, and Spain's Cinephone: International Short Films Festival. We see these festivals contributing to what Nelson (2015) has described as an inclusive media production and dissemination process. Dockney, Tomaselli and Hart (2010) have referred to this process as an example of Tapscott and Williams's (2007) concept of prosumer culture in which consumers independently add value, adapt, and re-invent products for their own use (see also Bruns, 2009). At a fundamental level, cellphilm festivals are a celebration of the ways in which cellphones allow ordinary individuals to produce, mix, watch, and share media content using mobile technology.

In 2014, the theme for the International Cellphilm Festival was *Our Spaces/ Our Selves*, and we asked people to consider what it means to create safe spaces, to see for ourselves, and to take collective action. We received 26 entries from Canada, as well as from farther afield, including Mexico, South Africa, and Sweden. As the festival organisers, we viewed and discussed the submissions many times amongst ourselves. We talked about their different aesthetic qualities, how cellphone technology had been manipulated, and the ways in which many of the submissions carried educational and advocacy messages. Even within the one-minute time limit imposed by the festival rules, we heard distinct voices that told, usually, personal stories of identity, discovery, or cultural heritage in each of the cellphilms. The cellphilm festival and its individual entries demonstrated the range of possibilities that cellphilming offers to interpret a prompt or address community challenges.

CELLPHILM AS AN AESTHETIC PRACTICE

Beyond the niche community of cellphilm festivals, cellphone movies are gaining acceptance in mainstream cinema. Of particular note is Malik Bendjelloul's acclaimed 2012 short biopic, *Searching for Sugar Man*, about Mexican American musician Sixto Rodriguez, which was filmed using Bendjelloul's iPhone and a mobile app called 8 mm Vintage Camera. Another example is Sean Baker's (2014)

Tangerine, a feature length film about sex work and revenge that was also filmed entirely on an iPhone. *Tangerine* has been screened at a large number of independent film festivals alongside movies that were made using more traditional techniques. Both examples have garnered considerable attention including *Searching for Sugar Man's* 2013 Oscar win for best documentary and *Tangerine's* nomination for best film at the 2015 London Film Festival. Growing popularity and recognition of cellphone videos as a legitimate media production process is also reflected in websites such as *Filmmaking & Stuff* that distribute easy to follow, how-to articles on apps and techniques for producing more professional looking cellphone videos (Haddock, 2014). For our International Cellphilm Festival, the second author uploaded a cellphilm as a DIY guide on cellphilm production. For this reason, we see our work in relation to a larger community interested in exploring the implications of cellphone video production and consumption.

Prior to the incorporation of High Definition (HD) cameras into cellphones, cellphilms could be distinguished by their low-resolution video and a distinct blurry, choppy aesthetic. Schleser (2010) described the emergence of a mobile film aesthetic in feature length mobile-documentary filmmaking as the *Ketai Aesthetic*.[3] He noted, further, how mobile phone corporations began producing higher quality technologies to encourage consumers to adopt filmmaking practices. One example of the corporate impact on cellphone consumer behaviour is Nokia's employment of the filmmaking collective 'Sumo Science' to create *Dot*, the smallest stop motion animation film using their Nokia N8 phone. The video's popularity drove the partnership to create a second film in the same manner, only this time instead of going for small the collective went big. *Gulp*, a large-scale stop motion animation project, has had over two million views on YouTube. Without seeking to diminish the innovative and aesthetic appeal of these productions, we also recognize that these developments are primarily motivated by economic gain. Together, *Dot* and *Gulp* have won over 15 advertising awards (Sumo Science, n.d.) and have generated big media buzz for the Nokia company and their line of handsets. Still, as Lorenzo (2012) argued, developments in cellphone technology continue to influence the development of a cellphilm aesthetic. Whereas early descriptions of cellphilms often referred to pixelated images, today it is no longer possible to identify a cellphone video based on its image quality unless a director makes an aesthetic decision to do so.

LOOKING AT CELLPHILMS

To illustrate the ways in which cellphilm producers can play with the aesthetics we present an analysis of Nwabisa Amanda Holby's (2014) *Cold Nights*—one of the submissions to our International Cellphilm Festival. *Cold Nights* was produced by university students at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and takes up the experiences of young women who are involved in transactional sex in order to pay for their university education. The cellphilm's

aesthetic quality references the grainy, low resolution of cellphone videos described by Schleser (2010). Through a variety of aesthetic choices, Holby expresses the passage of time and evokes an emotional response from the audience. Increasing the video's playback speed gives the audience the sense that the events of a long evening are being shown in fast forward. The result is a cellphilm that tells a story about a young woman working the same small stretch of a poorly lit street for long hours. The woman is sometimes shown standing alone, and sometimes pacing, perhaps to stay warm or to attract the attention of potential clients. The women's movements and the dark, low-resolution video is overlaid with a soundtrack of Evanescence's song, *My Immortal*, [4] and the voices of men as they comment, laugh, or approach the young woman. The overall effect is a haunting depiction of the ways in which young women in this context, in their pursuit of higher education, may be objectified and made vulnerable. *Cold Nights* is an evocative piece, one that mixes a traditional cellphilm aesthetic with cinematic options offered by more advanced digital technologies to demonstrate an evolving cellphilm aesthetic. These aesthetic developments, as Lorenzo posits, suggests the need to theorize a new "ontology of the images made with mobile devices as a reflection of our 'mobile' existence" (2012, p. 85).

The use of cellphone videos in the media has also become a tool for awareness-building and organizing by activist movements. Capturing cellphone footage and disseminating it in order to raise awareness of community issues and challenges was central to the Black Lives Matter movements in the US (Bylander, 2015), as well as during the Arab Spring (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012), and this illustrates the increasing centrality of cellphone video as a tool for civic engagement (Dougherty, 2011). This activist practice of cellphone filmmaking for the expression of dissent and in response to current events has been popularly referred to as citizen journalism.

Using cellphones to document systemic oppression has been taken up and repackaged by mainstream media. With increasing regularity news channels are scouring social media sites for what is known as raw footage to include in their reporting. Bivens has argued that the increasing use of cellphone videos in the news has led to a scrutiny of traditional media making, and "increased calls by the public for 'immediacy'" (2008, p. 113). As we witnessed in the coverage of the November 2015 Paris attacks, many news organizations rely on a large web presence that is capable of hosting up-to-the-second videos captured by citizens on the ground and in the middle of the events as they unfold (see, for example, David's 2009 description of the London Subway bombings). This media is often presented immediately and is sometimes considered to be more trustworthy than traditional, edited media (Bock, 2011). However, as Gordon (2007) cautions, this sense of authenticity that often surrounds cellphone imagery in the news is still open to manipulation by mainstream media agendas.

Sophie Saragosti's (2014) *Turtle Island: A Legacy of Institutional Racism*—another submission to our International Cellphilm Festival—reflects how activism and citizen journalism might influence a cellphilm production and its overarching

message. *Turtle Island* presents a series of photographs showing the faces of eight missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. A soundtrack of Inuit throat singers together with a voiceover by two young women contributes to the cellphilm's Indigenous feminist critique of Canada's legacy of institutional racism and colonial violence. The disembodied voices of the female narrators help to focus the attention of the viewer on the faces of these eight women, otherwise overlooked or erased by society. This voiceover also provides anonymity to the women speaking. The anonymity exhibited in this cellphilm highlights what Wilson and Serisier describe as the "safety and publicity" (2010, p. 166) afforded to activists using cellphone video to speak out, in their example, about police brutality. The cellphilm concludes with a call to the audience to educate themselves about colonialism and Canada's Idle No More movement.

Saragosti's (2014) *Turtle Island* also demonstrates the educational potential of cellphilms. We draw attention to the educational field's increasing interest in how cellphone videos have been employed in a variety of learning contexts. Studies on new media literacies, such as Buckingham, Willett and Pini's (2011) discussion of serious amateurs, as well as Jenkins's (2006) ideas about participatory cultures, are based on viewing cellphilming as an educational practice that taps into young people's existing digital and media activities. Enthusiasts like Prensky have argued that you can learn "almost anything" (2005, p. 1) from a cellphone. However, other scholars have come down on the other side of the debate. Lim (2013) discussed the ways in which some scholars and the media have labelled young people's cellphone use as deviant, especially when it has been used for bullying, or when text messages contain sexual content. Lepp, Barkley and Karpinsky (2015) reported that cellphones are a distraction to learning. Countering these views, Sharples, Taylor, and Vavoula (2010) argued that mobile video creation is a new and desirable literacy practice for young people in classrooms (see also, Miller, 2007). Maniar, Bennett, Hand, and Allan (2008) suggested that the mobile screen provides an opportunity for learning with video. However, they also note that learners can become disengaged when teachers rely heavily on the mobile screen, and they add that the large screen format is helpful. According to Aubusson, Schuck, and Burden, collaboration between students and teachers is promoted by cellphone video-making since these productions "enable the sharing, analysis, and synthesis" of "authentic artefacts and anecdotes" (2009, p. 233). In Burkholder's cellphilm research with pre-service social studies teachers in Prince Edward Island, Canada, she argues that collaboration, reflexivity and ethical engagement can be brought forth within a participant-managed archive on YouTube. Managing the cellphilms over time prompted the pre-service teachers to think reflexively about their professional, personal and civic identities (Burkholder & MacEntee, forthcoming). MacEntee's work in South Africa suggests that screening teachers' cellphilms can encourage collaborative learning about context specific and potentially contentious issues (MacEntee & Mandrona, 2015). Lieberman (2003) notes that Indigenous peoples around the world are turning to a variety of technologies and, perhaps

most notably, cellphone video, as a means of expressing identity, and preserving Indigenous cultures and languages.

SITUATING CELLPHILM METHOD IN RELATION TO PARTICIPATORY VIDEO

Our own cellphilm work is greatly influenced by the mentorship of Claudia Mitchell and her colleagues Naydene de Lange and Relebohile Moletsane, who have explored cellphilming as a research method with teachers in South Africa (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2014; De Lange, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2015; Mitchell & De Lange, 2013). Working within a framework of participatory visual methodologies in general (Mitchell, 2008, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2009) and following their participatory video method in particular (Mitchell & De Lange, 2011) has contributed significantly to our thinking about the ways in which participant engagement in video-making is a form of community-based knowledge production. As Braden (1999) has also found, the value of participatory video research is exemplified in having marginalized communities use video equipment to identify challenges and explore potential solutions. The videos themselves are then used to promote community dialogue and engage decision-makers in pursuing actionable change with the community's perspectives and experiences in mind (De Lange, 2012). Milne, Mitchell, and De Lange identify how, as a set of practices, participatory video method has received an increasing amount of attention "among research councils, researchers, policy makers, professionals, and activists in using methods that encourage deeper engagement with communities, offer greater agency in research and decision-making processes, and bring about social change" (2012, p. 2). However, participatory video research has relied on camcorders and digital cameras in the representation of participants' knowledges. Mitchell and colleagues recognized that the increasing use of cellphones in local contexts offered new inroads into participatory video and suggested that the use of cellphilms would shift how participatory visual methodologies engage marginalized communities, and, in so doing, democratize the research process (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2014). These claims, which many of the chapters in this book take up in their own way, mark a distinct departure from previous research that used participatory video methods, and suggest a new way forward for participatory visual research.

We mark the departure of cellphilm method from that of participatory video by comparing video cameras to cellphones. Cellphones are familiar tools and easier to manipulate for basic as well as complex video production; video cameras are expensive and have a single purpose, are not intuitive to use and require practice and specialized knowledge about how to affect the picture as well as the sound quality. Participatory video research in the Global South, in particular, often relies on a privileged (most often white) researcher bringing his or her technology (video camera, sound equipment, computer, editing software etc.) to share with participants of historically oppressed communities to address a specific concern or to bring about some type of social justice (see for example, Lunch & Lunch, 2006). When the

project ends, so might the community's access to the technology. Furthermore, as Mitchell et al. (2015) and Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell (2014) have asserted, the challenges of negotiating equipment ownership could—perhaps unbeknown to the research team—contribute to new power dynamics in the community. Access to technology can also be interpreted as a way of justifying the necessity of the researcher's presence in these marginalized communities to solve problems, give communities a voice or engender some sort of social justice. Moreover, Shannon Walsh observed that

> in participatory video the researcher/practitioner almost always assumes a role of powerful interlocutor since they inherently situate themselves as knowing more about the visual and the media tools, even when they may have no formal artistic or film training. In fact, when this asymmetry is not present, we probably would not consider it participatory video. (2014, p. 5)

As she points out, access to and knowledge of technology can actually reinforce the hierarchical power dynamics that participatory visual research aims to change.

Incorporating cellphones, given their accessibility, in research practice across different contexts could be seen as a way of taking advantage of local technology. This idea can be framed by Dyson's (2015) concept of domestication and the particular ways in which cultural groups not only make a technology their own by adapting it to their needs and agendas, but also adapt their behaviours to the technology. As Baron notes, the practices surrounding mobile phones are determined partly by the devices themselves and partly by the "cultural norms—or pragmatic necessities—of the society in which they are embedded" (2008, p. 131). Therefore, and in congruence with Ginsburg's (1993) discussion of indigenous media, cellphilms must be understood within the social and cultural systems in which they are produced. The role of the researcher who incorporates cellphilming changes from that suggested by the participatory video model based on having to rescue or give a voice to the marginalized communities. We see cellphilming as a tool that can combat the assumption that marginalized individuals need an intermediary to tell their stories or to help them do so. We argue that cellphilming is a means through which researchers might act as allies and in support of creative production by community members that speak to their own ways of knowing. Thus, cellphilm research can influence a move away from a mindset of somehow rescuing a community towards a mindset of learning from the community. Given this, we are interested in how cellphilm methodology might operationalize the founding tenets of participatory visual research, such as the necessity to establish equality and to conduct research for social change. In particular, we are inspired by the words of the Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldua, who wrote,

> It is not just about one set of people crossing to the other side; it's also about those on the other side crossing to this side. And ultimately, it's about doing

away with demarcations like 'ours' and 'theirs'. It's about honoring people's otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view, belief system, skin color, or spiritual practice. Diversity of perspective expands and alters the dialogue… (2002, p. 4)

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

In our returning to the significance of our International Cellphilm Festival and how it motivated us to embark on this book together, it seems to us that any conversations about what a cellphilm *is* needs to account for mobile technology and cellphone video production practices and must extend beyond descriptions of the potential and limitations of any one handheld device. This includes considering the ways in which the cellphone is being used in different social contexts and as a technology of social change. We also explore the ways in which cellphilms are implicated within formal and informal research frameworks of knowledge production. In so doing, we argue that there are some distinctions that can be made between cellphilms and other videos made using a cellphone, with particular attention to the ways in which cellphilming is understood as a form of knowledge production. This includes a systematic process of video making for research. We take an inductive approach to identify these distinctions by looking to the different chapters to identify existing cellphilming practices and inform our understanding of cellphilm methodology.

Recognising that the making of cellphilms is still emerging as a research practice, *What's a Cellphilm?* brings new and established scholars together from the fields of education, gender and girlhood studies, Indigenous studies, film studies, communication studies, and public health. This volume includes chapters that look at cellphilm research in Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, the Netherlands, and South Africa, but we feel that many of the insights offered on cellphilm methodology extend beyond the borders of these places. The evolving nature of the cellphilm research practice is evident in the individual chapters with many of them beginning a discussion based on a small body of foundational literature (e.g. Dockney & Tomaselli, 2009). The chapters are intended to stimulate critical discussions about cellphilm as a methodology amongst readers interested in civic engagement, critical race studies, digital technology, HIV and AIDS awareness, literacy education, language revitalisation, women and migration, media studies, participatory visual approaches to research, participatory archiving, teacher education, transactional sex, and sexual health education.

However, the chapters can be read together to allow the reader to gain a sense of the field of cellphilm research in its own right. The volume is structured into four sections, with each section organized around a specific theme: (I) Cellphilms from the professional to the personal; (II) Cellphilms as pedagogy; (III) Cellphilm

dissemination and audiences; and (IV) Cellphilm technologies and aesthetics. Taken together, however, all the chapters engage in a discussion of a number of overlapping concepts, including ethics, participation, ownership, and agency.

Part I, *Cellphilms from the professional to the personal*, is taken up in four chapters whose authors are interested in the ways in which cellphones have been used in different communities around the globe. Claudia Mitchell, Naydene de Lange and Relebohile Moletsane consider cellphilms as expressions of teachers' "everyday poetics" through their in-depth description of 5 South African female teachers' cellphilms on topics of their choosing that are mostly about home and family life. Their work also explores how researchers can use poetic inquiry as a tool for analysis in order to explore the aesthetic quality of the cellphilm across genres. Caitlin Watson, Shanade Barnabas and Keyan Tomaselli's chapter considers how the representation of Indigeneity in video and the use of cellphilming is experienced by a group of performers working at South Africa's pheZulu Safari park. This chapter also takes up issues related to conducting cellphilm research across cultural differences. Continuing with issues of Indigeneity, Joshua Schwab-Cartas's chapter investigates interventions aimed at language revitalization in Mexico. He argues that cellphilms represent an embodied method of Zapotec ancestral practices. Vivian Wenli Lin's chapter looks at the tensions of facilitating cellphilm workshops with migrant sex workers in Hong Kong and the Netherlands. This chapter illustrates how participant engagement with cellphilm production can confront current understandings of anonymity during participatory visual research practice.

Part II, *Cellphilming as pedagogy*, looks at the use of cellphilm method as a learning tool applicable to different geographical regions and curricula. It begins with Sean Wiebe and Claire Caseley Smith's chapter that describes a cellphilm-making project with Caseley Smith's grade 8 learners in an English language arts classroom on Prince Edward Island, Canada. Following an a/r/tographic practice of living-inquiry, the authors explore how the Digital Economy Research Team's (DERT) threshold concept map can aid in conceptualizing cellphilms as a multimodal practice in new literacy pedagogy. Then, in their chapter, Ashley DeMartini and Claudia Mitchell explore the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework in order to examine rural South African teachers' use of cellphilming in classroom practice. They investigate the ways in which cellphones are currently problematized in many educational contexts, and visualize the cellphone as an educational technology that can be used to promote participatory pedagogies in a digital age. Bernard Chan, Bronson Chau, Diana Ihnatovych, and Natalie Schembri reflect on their collaborative experience of cellphilm-making for a graduate course in Education at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Their chapter explores how cellphone method—the development of an idea for a cellphilm, brainstorming, filming, and screening—promotes multivocality and reflexivity. They discuss the implications of translating this research process into a classroom-based pedagogy for learning about potentially contentious issues.

Part III, *Cellphilm dissemination and audiences*, considers the post-production of cellphilms and issues that arise during the dissemination of research findings. This section includes Katie MacEntee's chapter in which she describes how issues of race, intersectionality, and deficit assumptions about African girlhood arose in her presenting, in academic conferences in the Global North, cellphilms made by South African girls about South African contexts. She argues for increased transparency and reflexivity on the part of researchers as they decide whether or not to screen participant-produced cellphilms at academic conferences. Casey Burkholder's chapter discusses a cellphilm-making project on identity and civic engagement with ethnic minority youth in Hong Kong. She explores the development and maintenance of a participatory archiving practice with youth participants on YouTube.

Part IV, *Cellphilm technologies and aesthetics*, looks at the intersections of cellphone technology with the social practices of visual production and these authors speculate on some aspects of the future of cellphilm research. Lukas Labacher's historical account of the development of the cellphone as a communication device outlines how technology influences cellphilm-making. He highlights the cellphone's significance to visual research by mapping the ways in which the technology has replaced other digital recording devices in our daily lives in order to illustrate the suitability of the cellphone as a tool for self-expression and documentation. Continuing with an exploration of how and why people use mobile devices, April Mandrona's chapter conceptualizes the cellphilm as an aesthetic artefact. She urges researchers to adopt an approach that directly links participants' cellphilms to a practice of aesthetic exploration, and to do so with ethical awareness.

In the concluding chapter "Where do we go from here?" we describe a cellphilm that speaks to our concerns, we present a polyvocal reflection on cellphilm method, and we suggest future directions for research.

NOTES

[1] Cellphone is a term used in South Africa to refer to mobile phone technology and the term that we have adopted throughout this book.
[2] See https://internationalcellphilmfestivalblog.wordpress.com
[3] In Japanese, *Ketai* means something hand-held or portable.
[4] Moody, B., & Lee, A. (2003). My immortal [Recorded by Evanescence]. On *Fallen*. New York, NY: Wind-up records.

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PART I

CELLPHILMS FROM THE PROFESSIONAL TO THE PERSONAL

CLAUDIA MITCHELL, NAYDENE DE LANGE AND
RELEBOHILE MOLETSANE

1. POETRY IN A POCKET

*The Cellphilms of South African Rural Women Teachers and the
Poetics of the Everyday*

> As a narrative strategy mobile media can enable personal and intimate
> storytelling in a self-reflexive and self-representational style utilizing the
> mobility and pocket format of mobile devices.
>
> <div align="right">(Schleser, 2014, p. 155)</div>

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we explore what we choose to call the everyday poetics[1] of rural
teachers as expressed through the production of cellphilms, or, as we refer to them
here, pocket films, in recognition of the ever-present mobile phone that fits easily
into a pocket. As the organizers of the highly successful Utah-based annual pocket
film festival note, such an event aims to support and "celebrate the filmmakers
who are doing the most with the least" using their cellphone, tablet or flip-phone
"to tell a great story" (Pocket Film Fest, n.d., n.p.). A key feature of the use of
mobile technology in participatory visual research (and especially in participatory
video) is its democratizing role that draws, in particular, on the ubiquity of the
cellphone. According to Pew Research Center (2015), cellphones are an everyday
tool, and are as common in South Africa as they are in North America. Although
smartphones, with their access to the internet and a range of applications, are less
widely used—only 34% of South Africans own a smartphone—in 2011 there
were 59,474,500 cellphones in use in South Africa in a population of 50,586,757
(GSM Association, 2011).

Building on work with teachers in rural communities in South Africa, our
experience indicates that the use of cellphones in participatory studies opens up new
avenues for study across a wide range of areas of research. For example, there are
numerous studies in sub-Saharan Africa highlighting the potential of cellphones to
revolutionize everything from drug compliance and adherence in patient care (see
Labacher & Mitchell, 2013), to shifting power relations in agricultural markets.[2]
To date, however, much of this work has ignored the possibilities of what we term
agency—and, perhaps, activism—in cultural production and, especially, what it
might mean for teachers or young people to create images, stories or documentaries

about their lives. In our early fieldwork with cellphilms, dating back to 2011 (see Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2014), we drew on the research of Dockney and Tomaselli (2009) to imagine the ways in which the use of cellphones could revamp community-based research in participatory video-making. As we describe there, the strength of using cellphone technology has been to eliminate, as much as possible, the dichotomy between the *insider* and the *outsider* of participatory visual research by using technology that is already in the community. Little did we anticipate that in the hands of a group of teachers experimenting with filmmaking using their personal cellphones, the resulting productions would lead to our studying the poetics of the everyday. As we explore in this chapter, the potential of using cellphones to produce cellphilms for evoking and capturing such a poetics suggests a platform for both personal expression and creativity.

This adaptation of cellphilm methodology comes out of a larger study with two groups of teachers in rural South Africa participating in a project called "Digital Voices: Rural teachers in the age of AIDS and social action". In total, 19 primary and secondary teachers worked in small groups with cellphones to produce cellphilms as a type of participatory video (see Mitchell & De Lange, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2014). This work draws on our long-standing tradition of what we describe elsewhere as a No-Editing-Required (NER) approach to participatory video (Moletsane et al., 2009; Mitchell & De Lange, 2011), and on the idea of both the "one shot shoot" (OSS) and videos made up of a series of shots or scenes. The collaborative participatory cellphilm work focused on engaging teachers from two provinces, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, to consider local community-led strategies for addressing HIV and AIDS in and around schools. In the first round of our participatory work with the teachers they created five cellphilms all of which gave some indication of how teachers could readily take up using cellphones to produce cellphilms, and how they envisaged what needed to be done to address HIV and AIDS, highlighting for example, the need to address stigma and the taking on of advocacy roles. However, there were also instances of the production of messages, particularly those directed at children and young people, such as, for example, that condoms are for adult use only that could reinforce some of the very practices that may have been responsible for making children and young people more vulnerable in the first place. This echoed examples that we saw in our previous research with teachers in KwaZulu-Natal schools (Moletsane et al., 2008).

We positioned the follow-up cellphilm work as a set of speaking back activities, as we have termed them, encouraging teachers to reflect on and critique the messages of their cellphilms, considering, for example, the significance of audience and the appropriateness of various messages (Mitchell & De Lange, 2013). The speaking back activities with the teachers included viewing a collection of photo images of stigma that were produced by grade 8 and 9 school children from the same district in rural KwaZulu-Natal (Moletsane et al., 2007); small group discussions about the photographs and how young people eight years later might be seeing the challenges of dealing with stigma; the re-screening of the original cellphilms produced by the

teachers; and planning for the production of a new set of cellphilms that would speak back to the ideas contained in the original set. This work resulted in four new cellphilms that saw the teachers tackling the task of engaging young people in understanding critical issues related to sexuality in ways that were less moralistic about youth sexuality.

What we think to be of particular significance is the heightened reflexivity of teachers in relation to video production as a result of this speaking back process, and their increased interest in cellphilm production. Encouraged by their enthusiasm for making cellphilms and our seeing the value of teachers bringing something of themselves into the cellphilm workshops, we invited the participants to do some homework, as the teachers termed it; they were to make short cellphilms about themselves. We suggested that they share these cellphilms in a follow-up digital retreat workshop. Six of the teachers (all women) took up our invitation and arrived at our next workshop six weeks later with a collection of their own cellphilms which were screened for the whole group. In this chapter, we are interested in exploring the everyday reflexive and aesthetic expressions of the teachers and the ways in which they used their own cellphones outside the school and group context to create personal and poetic pieces. Self-reflexive film-making, including the production of selfies as Berry and Schleser (2014) observe, suggests new approaches to creativity and, as we explore here, to the poetics of the everyday. We draw on examples of the work produced by the teachers and, in so doing, highlight the significance of the everyday poetic as explored through the medium of the cellphone, itself an everyday multimodal tool.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

We frame this work on cellphilms and the poetics of the everyday in the context of several key areas of work on textuality, and on combining aesthetics, cultural production, and the poetics of self-representation through mobile device film-making. This perspective encompasses Rosenblatt's (1978) pivotal writing on the idea of the aesthetic and the poetic transaction in her classic work, *The reader, the text, the poem*, Fiske's (1989) work on textual readings in cultural production in which he talks about the place of the primary text, the audience text, and the producer text in television and film studies, and the emerging work by Schleser (2014) and others on self-reflexivity and self-representation through mobile film-making or cellphim methodology. In this chapter we put forth the idea of the poetic encounter as a transaction, as Rosenblatt terms it, involving the producers of personal cellphilms (in this case individual teachers), the cellphilm viewer (in this case, members of the research team, and other teachers), and, of course, the primary text, the cellphilms themselves—short 3–5 minute video productions created by the teachers on their own mobile devices. Rosenblatt applied her theory of transactional studies primarily to reading, distinguishing between what she termed aesthetic reading or a type of "living through" (1978, p. 39) engagement that typically takes place with literary texts (short stories, novels, poetry), and efferent reading or "taking away" (p. 40)

associated with reading manuals, guides, and various factual texts (see also Mitchell, 1982). For Rosenblatt, the poetic encounter is more likely to be associated with aesthetic readings, but we are, of course, interested in the aesthetic engagement with film texts and the various filmic devices used in the film-making process. We might have limited ourselves to working only with Rosenblatt's work here, but realized that for studying both the production aspect of cellphilms and the audiencing (Rose, 2012) or spectatorship of the cellphilms (see MacEntee this volume), it was necessary to include Fiske's work which, as Buckingham (2012) described it, suggests a textual reading as a triangle made up of the audience text, the producer text, and the primary text. For Fiske, the critical point is that these three texts are not really separable, but, rather, that they leak into each other. For this project, we saw the possibilities of looking at the ways in which the idea of the audience text, not unlike Rosenblatt's notion of the reader text, provides for the study of a type of aesthetic engagement or poetic response. Finally, we were drawn to an emerging body of work that studies creativity and self-representation through cellphilming. As Schleser observed of what he terms the "mobile aesthetic" (2014, p. 158), "the mobile camera phone, as a personal and intimate medium allows an immediate formation of subjective expression" (p. 154). We see this notion of the mobile aesthetic as providing a much needed framing device for interpreting cellphilm production.

ABOUT METHOD: WHAT CAN A WOMAN DO WITH A CELLPHONE?

In the project we build on method in two ways. The first asks, as Spence and Solomon (1995) do in the title of their collection of essays on women's uses of constructed photography, "What can a woman do with a camera?" This same question was posed by our research team more than a decade later when we looked at the collective gaze of rural teachers and community health care workers who turned the individual gaze, as it were, of the video camera on their own situations (Moletsane et al., 2009). In this case, however, the focus was on the work of individual women as opposed to being on collective work. While several of the women used their cellphones to document the school environment, the majority of the cellphilms went right to the heart of Citron's (1999) world of the domestic sphere as she described it in *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*. The women's domestic settings include the front seat of a car, a large butchering table just outside the backdoor of a house, and several couches in living rooms. But their titles say it all: *Christmas Crazy*, *Ntombi's Home Video*, *Thembi Kumalo, My Beloveth Kids*, and *Village Gathering*. All were family oriented documentations of domestic events, and, with the exception of one, *Village Gathering*, all reflect the gaze of mothers on their own children. The teachers found the viewing of each other's cellphilms interesting in that they highlighted life outside the classroom, something that was particularly eye-opening for all the participants involved in the study since most of the teachers often travel long distances by bus from various communities to teach in their rural schools and, as a result, often know very little about each other.