



+Nudity

+3gp

+Intimacy

+Mobility

+Ubiquity

## How can cameraphones contribute to cinema?

+Sketch

+home-movies

+Performance

+ cinéma impur

+Immediacy

+Mashups



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## MOBILEFEST 2006 Symposium

>>Presentation paper

>>How can cameraphone contribute to cinema ?

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### Presentation abstract

How can cameraphones contribute to cinema ? When I took part to the first Pocketfilms festival in Paris a year ago, journalists used to ask me this question constantly. I was not sure how to answer it exactly. Obviously it just depends on how you use it, for what purpose. For more than a year, I have thought about the various ways cameraphones could indeed contribute to cinema. Here are some propositions regarding the new forms of cameraphone movies.

This presentation deals with the way cameraphone allows us to think and produce movies differently, in a more creative and proactive way. It put the stress on the strong decrease of costs in the course of production, and the significant role that chance plays in the creative process. It also explore a broad spectrum of cinemactical themes, from the forms of intimacy (self–portrait, Home–movies) to the forms of performances and impure cinema.

I will use some extracts of videos evoked in the presentation to nurture and illustrate more concretely my thoughts.

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## How can cameraphones contribute to cinema ?

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### Introduction - Cameraphone movies : the tag cloud

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There is no authoritative word to name cameraphone movies. I will therefore use a rather poetical one, films de poche - in English pocketfilms - when I speak about them.

I will only pick a few keywords, in order to define pocketfilms as precisely as possible, and to deduce from those words the main aspects of pocketfilm's esthetics. Just look at these words as relevant tools to explore the potentiality of pocketfilms.

<< **Mobility** >> we carry cameraphones in our pockets, and use it as a small tools to capture whatever we might find interesting. We move with it. It captures all our moves, while we walk, make a gesture and take a glance at something.

<< **Immediacy** >> Something catch my glance, I grab my phone and film it. I do not have plans (yet), I just record images and sounds. No scenario, just some kind of elusive instant I want to capture. Immediacy has its counterpart, which is mediacy: I mediate images as soon as I have a plan for them. I clean the mess, select a few images that could make sense, think about a theme, a structure. But in any case and most of the time, immediacy comes first. Cameraphones' images do not think, they grab reality first.

<< **Ubiquity** >> Even when we forget to switch off the phone, or look at something else, cameraphones capture whatever occurs around us. It captures not only what we see or intend to show, but also what we do not or cannot see. It is, litterary, our third eyes.

<< **Intimacy** >> I always keep my cameraphone with me. If I don't sleep with it (thanks god, not yet !), I travel with it, I talk to it, I watch with it, etc. One could say this is my closest friend, and it is definitely more than a basic tool. It captures what I like and am interested in. Sometimes I can talk to it and record my voice. It makes monologs exist; with it my life becomes a true story.

<< **Nudity** >> In the prolongation of intimacy, there is nudity. When I confess myself, I somehow get naked. I do not even need to confess, just to talk to somebody who is close to me. I do not lie, I do not play. Which means the more people play and construct a character, the more you see a discrepancy between as they usually appear, and as the cameraphone reveal their true personality. The cameraphone produce this very bazinienne trace that cannot lie. It captures forms as they are.

<< **Blindness** >> Cameraphones have hitten the market a few years ago, yet their image definition is quite poor. As a matter of fact, we cannot even shoot in DV format and still have to deal with 3gp most of the time. 3gp images look like paintings rather than video images. Lots of people have already put the stress on its pictorial virtues. Pixels are described as small touches of paint, the all video as a impressionist attempt to catch a certain kind of light. Actually, cameraphones cannot see distinctly, all the forms they capture are blurred. Faces appear as drawings, pan shots of landscapes as Mondrians in motion. And when the night comes, silhouettes move like ghost.

<< **Life-expectancy** >> Once you bought the phone and the memory card, then you can shoot as much as you want to, for free. It is just data you can store or erase. You can shoot all day long, upload it on your computer, and do it again. That means the pocketfilms have at the same time a short-life expectancy (they can be erased instantly) and a long-life expectancy (they remain in your computer as long as you keep them in it).

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## I. Producing movies with cameraphones : between improvisation and premeditation

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### 1. My 3gp refrigerator

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When the Jean-Charles Fitoussi's feature film was projected at the International critic's week in Cannes, Jean-Charles spoke a little about the way he had worked on that particular film. He shot a lot with its Nokia 6630 while he was staying in Rome, and stored its rushes on his computer. Then he looked at those images more attentively, and started to select some of them. He wrote a monolog and had it read by an old man. Afterwards he took some music he had in itunes to use it for his film. The all process was about improvisation. At first he didn't have a clue what to do with his images. Then more and more ideas came up. He had no plans, only images that somehow showed him the way. Until the very end, he improvised. He even completed the editing only two hours before the first screening ! It was all about accidents, chance and feeling.

Cameraphone footage cost nothing, and takes almost no memory space. You can therefore, as Jean-Charles did, shoot anything you want. Choose to film with some particular angles, or just randomly. You can wait as much as you want to for something to happen in the frame. In a nutshell, cameraphone is king in what Jean-Charles calls the castel of chance.

Once you have all those images and accidents stored in your computer, then you can start thinking. What the hell I am going to do with it ? You have what Jean-Charles calls "this refrigerator" in front of you, and you do not know what you want to use, or even when. Actually you can use it now, or in a year or two. This is your video database, your magic refrigerator!

Finally the good old times of 80's video footage is back! Everyone can shoot, the more exquisite as the more mundane, as much as he wants.

### 2. From text to sketch

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When in the sixties Alexandre Astruc coins the notion of the caméra-stylo he expresses the idea that a director should wield his camera like a writer uses his pen and that he need not be hindered by traditional storytelling (cf. Wikipedia). That was the beginning of the new way to

conceive cinema, not anymore as a language of editing as Vertov and Eisenstein defined it, but as a language of writing. No one speaks about editing, neither Alexandre Bazin, nor Hervé Bazin, the nouvelle vague godfather. From now on, the keyword of camera-stylo is plan-sequence. Until nowadays, we can see films in which camera-stylo plays a significant role, especially documentaries. I really like for instance the way DV camera was used in Jonathan Nossiter's *Mondovino*, catching plenty off really meaningful details such as dogs while interviewing the dogs' owners.

You can use your cameraphone as a pen. It is as small, as light as a pen. But it just moves way too easily. You would almost need a tripod or even a steady-cam to make steady shots. As a matter of fact, the cameraphone is rather a sketcher than a pen. You can catch instants with it as if you were drawing a sketch. It reminds me of Charles Baudelaire's famous « painter of modern life ».

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, he writes about Constantin Guys : « Thus in M.G.'s execution two things stand out: the first is the absorbed intenseness of a resurrecting and evocative memory, a memory that says to every object: 'Lazarus, arise'; the second is a fire, an intoxication of pencil or brush, almost amounting to frenzy. This is the fear of not going fast enough, of letting the spectre escape before the synthesis has been extracted and taken possession of, the terrible fear that takes hold of all great artists and fills them with such an ardent desire to appropriate all means of expression, so that the commands of the mind may never be weakened by the hand's hesitation; so that, in the end, the ideal execution may become as unconscious, as flowing, as the process of digesting is for the brain of a healthy man after dinner. »<sup>1</sup> Beyond their ability to resurrect immediately reality (always this religious reference, from Baudelaire to Hervé Bazin with his reference to the Saint Shroud), Constantin Guys sketches manage to catch the frenzy of modern life.

I like to compare the cameraphone to a sketcher to that extent it is indeed the most adequate tool to capture the modernity of nowadays. It goes really quick, and is able to capture any details of an ever-changing reality. It has this documentary touch and yet this very pictorial aspect, that make the world so real and at the same time rather poetical.

Recently a Russian plane crashed. The accident was recorded with a cameraphone, as many other accidents and terrorist attacks. The cameraphone is the tool that fits perfectly to immediacy; it records accidents – *stricto sensu* speaking – of any kind.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" in Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature trans. P.E. Charvet (Viking 1972)

### 3. From sketch to film

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This sketcher analogy not only works for directors but also for producers. In France, lots of producers complains about the fact they have to present synopsis and lots of other details about the movie they want to produce. But it is only a project, and some French directors do not even write scripts before they shoot. How stupid is that system who ask for scripts and details, while filming is just about process, not intentions. Institutions just need some warrants, that's all.

The same way you draw something before painting, you will be able to shoot all kind of pocketfilms in order to prepare your film. Producers will be able – as they already do with small PD 150 – to produce for strictly nothing some new kind of documents to show what the film will or could look like. This approach is totally relevant in terms of production. More than any PD 150, pocketfilms are able to draw some aspects of the movies' projects, in a really evocative and beautiful way.

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## II. A few cinematic forms to explore, renovate and invent

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### 1. Scenes of our intimacy : self-portraits and home-movies

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In “*Mes voyages*”, Takako Yabuki tells about her life in France and the way she feels away from Japan. She cries from times to times in front of the cameraphone, just as Warhol slept for hours in some of his movies. She shoots a couple of images in the north of France (Tourcoing), then in Tokyo, her home-town Okayama and Paris. In-between we can hear her voice through the phone. One could say this movie is built as a monolog, but it is just the opposite. It speaks directly to you, that is why it is so moving. True, those self-portraits have a lot to do with pop-art : everybody has his own cameraphone, everybody can speak, eat, make love and upload it on YouTube the minute after. Here are a few facts about cameraphone that will change self-portraits :

- You can talk as much as you want, since it costs nothing.
- You can get really close to it, it won't bite. You can even touch it, look at it like an animal. It will look at you, and film the very details of your body.
- Intimacy is everywhere, in any public place. You own your cameraphone, and are the only one who can speak to him. Hence, you can call, confess, testify everywhere.
- You are everywhere, always on the move, in a new town, with new people. You are what you are going through, the places you're going to, the people you're meeting. Think about your personal page on Myspace, Flickr or even Flickr : all those images and friends, this is you. Cameraphones capture all this, and make movies out of it.

If you use YouTube, Google Video, Grouper or any other video platform, I am sure you have already watched plenty of small home-movies, full of cute babies and happy faces. This is just the beginning and the most obvious form of home-movies circulating on internet. But think about *Tarnation*, by Jonathan Couette. Some of its images have been shot 20 years ago, that is when the video cameras appeared in the mid 80's. The same will happen with cameraphones. More than that, the relationships with cameraphones is even stronger than with DV camera. Teenage users for instance do not only identify with their phones (think about the avatar mania), they reflect what they are interested in, and what they think is fun. Cameraphones are regarded as the ultimate privacy tools that record ideas and interactivity.

From another point of view, one may say webcams already do far more than cameraphones, and record the everyday life of the all family, 24/24 hours. Yet cameraphones have nothing to do with webcams, just because it moves all the time. It is shakings close-up shots VS. static pan shots. Cameraphones makes home-movies more rock'n'roll, with this strong documentary touch that is always there. It amplifies the smallest gestures, just because it moves so much. Bodies are moving all the time, it is all about adjusting the cameraphone to people's moves. It is almost like dancing.

I also remember Couette's mother screaming in *Tarnation*. When the sounds are a bit loud, it gets quickly saturated with cameraphones, cause the microphone's quality is even worst than the video camera's one. Whether you just whisper or scream, it will amplify it: you'll hear hardly nothing or too much. Cameraphones speaks the voice of excess. Be prepared to the most terrifying home-movies you have ever seen !

## 2. Performative video

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You all know about Happy-slapping I guess. The first video I watched were shot in U.K by a few nasty kids. The principle is rather simple: people are hitten by surprise, just once or sometimes more, some teenage girls are even raped, all this is shot with a cameraphones, then sent to friends. Happy-slapping has no boundaries, since the principle is precisely to break them. Kids do these stuffs just to be filmed doing it. It is not only a performance. The fact of filming it makes it happen. Only the cameraphone makes it thinkable and therefore possible.

New technologies are usually hijacked really quick, for better and worst. But this radical form of performative video is just the symptom of a performative revival in video I believe. I like the idea the cameraphone - this very contemporary tool - causes some kind of art revival. It would be provocative enough and obviously wrong to say happy-slapping is art. I already had this discussion in France, and won't go into details. I never said it was, it is only a symptom to me. I prefer the symptomalogist approach to define this phenomenon.

Now just think about all the possibilities implied in this performative approach. You shoot something, and therefore make it real. You are no longer into fiction, nor in documentary. You are far beyond documentary as a matter of fact, you create some new kind of reality that raises in front of your tiny and yet powerful cameraphone.

### 3. No fiction, no documentary, but something in between

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In *Au centre de neige* I filmed my girlfriend – Chen – playing in the snow, and then asked her to write a few texts that goes with the images. The all film was shot with a super-8 camera, and re-shot on a wall with a sharp cameraphone. I like the way this video looks: it is just some kind of holiday movie. I had no plans, and just shot whatever I found interesting at that time. Then Chen began to elaborate a monolog, and wrote a few poems. This wasn't only about holidays anymore, but the way she had felt in those days, and how she related to the place and the people then. The video has some documentary aspects, yet the final form is definitively not a documentary. The cameraphone image is some kind of modern extension on the super-8 footage, it keeps the colors, but smash it into thousands of pixels. It looks even more real, and yet this voice tells us a story in her own language.

I truly think cameraphone more than any other camera, allow us to get closer to a genuine “cinema impur” as Bazin coined it. Not only because you can make a fiction out of documentary images, but especially because most of the time you have no plans when you film those images, and you have to build your film almost from scratch afterwards. You build it with what you have got, that is images, ideas, maybe some editing and some music. You build it in a way it cannot properly make a standard fiction. Even when they are used in a specific video, cameraphone images are still open to interpretation. It also implies you can entertain yourself – this is only a side effect – by doing plenty of mashup versions, but this is a common place.

Here is another exemple. In *Porto Vecchio*, Jules Foral filmed a young French actress – Fanny Valette – during a trip for a special screening. The actress is in bathing suit, she has a good time swimming and sleeping on the beach. Jules Foral asked to a Fanny Valette fan to speak about the reason why she liked fanny. I like this way of mixing fiction and documentary: Fanny Valette is an actress who plays in front of the camera, yet she is just a teenage girl having some vacations. On the other hand, the fan speaks about an actress, not a teenage girl.

I like the way huge stars appear when filmed with a cameraphone : they just seem so normal that they look naked. You will find on Guba.com a small pocketfilm of Britney Spears talking to her boyfriend I guess. The result is just horrible for that poor Britney. She looks awful and stupid. The difference is really thin, but what these pocketfilm tells me is that “it is no fiction”, rather than “it is for real”. Because some particular types only exist in fiction, we only know them the way they were constructed by media.

#### 4. Experimental forms

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The oldest your cameraphone will be (Nokia already 6630 rules !), the more you will be able to experiment deformations of all kinds. Everyone has tried at least once to film in a train or a car : trees appear in diagonal. You will get all kind of abstracts and beautiful forms if you move your cameraphone quick enough, and catch some strong contrasts of light and colors. But to me, the more promising form of experimentation are those forms I have already told you about. And I strongly believe one will be able to do some amazing things while exploring those various trails I tried to describe.

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Go shoot and experiment your brand new tool ! Praticice is the only way to figure out how you can use your cameraphone, the most relevant and nurturing one.

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## Books

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BAUDELAIRE, Charles, Selected Writings on Art and Literature, trans. P.E. Charvet, London/New York, Penguin Books, 1972.

BAZIN, Hervé, *Pour un cinéma impur: défense de l'adaptation* in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1999.

ASTRUC, Alexandre, *Du stylo à la caméra... et de la caméra au stylo : écrits (1942-1984)*, Paris, L'Archipel, 1992.

## Websites / Weblogs

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>> Mobile video / Industry and economy :

- <http://www.moconews.net/c/mobile-video/>
- <http://www.paidcontent.org/c/viral-video/>
- <http://mobilecrunch.com/category/mobile-arts/>

>> Mobile video / reviews and analysis

<http://www.souzaesilva.com/>  
<http://filmsdepoche.blogspot.com/> (french)

>> Mobile video / (a selection of) festivals

<http://www.festivalpocketfilms.fr/>  
<http://www.mobifest.ca/>  
<http://cellflix.metroer.com/>  
<http://mobilefest.org/>  
<http://www.thirdscreenfilmfestival.com/>  
[http://fest06.sffs.org/films/film\\_details.php?id=73](http://fest06.sffs.org/films/film_details.php?id=73)

>> Mobile video / Online exhibitions

<http://www.100lies.com>  
<http://dlux.org.au/mobilejourneys/profiles.html>  
<http://www.nokia.co.uk/nokia/0,,62759,00.html>

>> Mobile art websites and directories

<http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com/>  
<http://www.dlux.org.au/mobile/artandfilm.html>

## Selective biography

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I received a Master's degree in cultural management from Sciences Po Paris, a BA in modern literature and am currently pursuing a Ph.D in film theory in La Sorbonne-nouvelle. As a film critic, I contributed to various film magazines, including Les Cahiers du cinema, Objectif-cinema and Fluctuat. I have also assisted Alain Robbe-Grillet, in the preparation of his last movie "C'est Gradiva qui vous appelle". I have been a member of the International critic's week (Cannes film festival) selection committee for the past two years. I also teach Aesthetics at La Sorbonne-nouvelle, in the film department.

As a director, I have already directed a few short-films, selected in various festivals including Locarno, Funcion Video (Barcelona), Chapito (Lisboa) and the Pocketfilms festival.

### Blogs

>> <http://filmsdepoche.blogspot.com/>

>> <http://www.mociologic.com/>

### Moblog

>> <http://www.treo-blog.com/>