

CINEMATIC INTERRUPTIONS

Dr Lee Campbell

ARTISTS AND MOBILE PHONES

As demonstrated in *Cell Phone; Art and Mobile Phone* (2007), an exhibition held at The Contemporary Baltimore, USA in 2007, there is a rich contextual history of practitioners generating creative works that expand the possibilities of mobile phone technology within the context of contemporary art practice. For example, artists Chris Brown and Véronique Chance have used their mobile phone cameras to record journeys. Brown's approach relates to connections, cycles, loops, delays and phases whilst Chance has relayed live action from her mobile phone through a stream of images along with her GPS coordinates e.g. Chance's *The Great Orbital Run* (2012). Performance practitioners Blast Theory and Tim Etchells have used mobile phone technology to generate audience participative encounters e.g. *Can You See Me Now?* (2001) by Blast Theory and Etchells' *Surrender Control* (2001) which consists of a series of SMS instructions. Mahmoud Khaled's *Do You Have Work Tomorrow* (2013), recently included in *Electronic Superhighway*, Whitechapel Gallery, London consists of a pseudo SMS conversation. Indeed in my own practice as an artist, I have similarly used mobile technology to generate a form of live performance that plays with elements of liveness and recording for example in my performance *Balloon Baboon* (2009).



BALLOON BABOON. A performance by Lee Campbell (2009)

BLUETOOTH CINEMA

In Sarah Atkinson's *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences* (2014) she refers to mobile phone technology in respect of 'respective and distinctive textural aesthetics' and points towards 'mobile cinema', a form of immersive, participatory 'experiential cinema' in which mobile phones operate as the apparatus of production as well as display of film works; viewers watch recordings on the same phone used to create them with. For example, Sally Potter's *Rage* (2009) is a movie shot entirely on an iPhone and intended to be viewed on an iPhone and *SOTCHI 255* (2010) directed by Jean-Claude Taki, is a film that was shot using different mobile phones.

In 2015, I was awarded a Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Award relating to implementing technology creatively in the learning environment as part of a research-informed teaching project I labelled *Technoparticipation*. As part of a teaching session that I gave at Loughborough University in early 2015, students engaged in a learning experience that combined discussion of theory with practical experimentation forefronting mobile phone technology. In terms of the practical element of the session, their collective effort added to the above canon of practice through their creative response to a task that I set them. Entitled *Bluetooth Cinema*, students described their work as a live audience participative cinema that immerses viewers in multi-sensory experiences relating to sight, touch, and sound. It is important to note that amongst the group of students was a student with visual impairment. Relying on aspects of visuality (watching and recording movies) on the one hand, *Bluetooth Cinema* also pushes forward sound elements, the haptic and the tactile for the benefit of both sighted and visually impaired student(s) (you literally hold a movie in the palm of your hands).



BLUETOOTH CINEMA (2015)

Bluetooth Cinema consisted of students recording a series of short films that contained instructions both visual and verbal in nature for viewers to undertake. These instructions often related to viewers doing a series of actions that resulted in humour and comedy. The instructions contained within these films forced consenting viewers as participants to be deliberately clumsy with their bodies e.g. trying to balance a pineapple on top of their heads or attempting to move an *After-Eight* dinner mint from the top of their foreheads into their mouths without the mint falling onto the floor. Rather than engaging passerby in the street to watch one of their recordings to be viewed by the audience member on the student's mobile phone device, when approaching passerby and asking them 'Would you like to see a film?' the students decided to send the movie file via Bluetooth (free of charge) to the passersby' Bluetooth-enabled phone device.



SEARCHING FOR DEVICES. Bluetooth-ing a mobile phone recording to a passerby (2015)

By doing so, the viewer had the recording at their disposal and could make a number of choices. They could either watch the movie immediately with the students in their presence or choose to watch it discretely or with others at another time and another place. They could keep the recording on their device once they had watched it for however long a period and then re-watch it at a later date or quite simply watch it and then delete it. Alternatively, they could choose to delete the file without having watched it at all (and of course keep the recording on their phone and never watch it). The choice was theirs. They could also share the recording (edited or unedited) to whomever they choose. The life of the recording was out of the students' hands but they liked this aspect of putting something (the movie file) into the world without having any sort of control or much control as to its future. Emphasising the dialogic nature of the work by engaging in a collective experience of watching something and being able to enter into conversation about it with the director(s) (the students) first hand, on most occasions of students Bluetooth-ing movie files, the recipient would opt to watch the recording with the

students/the directors and discuss it as it was being shown, or soon after performing the slapstick-like instructions. This process also enabled the students to get instant feedback and gauge immediate reaction to their work from an audience. Alongside the activity of inviting people to watch recordings that students would send via Bluetooth, students also engaged in the act of interrupting in a bid to explore different kinds of audience and their participation. Anonymous filesharing to strangers by surprise, a surprise/interruption that may be welcome or not, this process involved students enabling their phones to 'search' for devices in their immediate locale that are Bluetooth-enabled. Students then picked a device at random and attempted to make a connection with that device and if the user of that device accepted their request then they would be sent a recording. The recipient would be asked to film themselves enacting the slapstick instructions using the same phone and send the recording that they had made of themselves back to the students' phone via Bluetooth. Putting myself in the shoes of someone receiving such a request (a message on my phone informing me that such and such a phone wants to make a connection with me via Bluetooth, I instantly delete such messages. Even though the student's success rate of engaging audiences in *Bluetooth Cinema* in this way was relatively minimal compared with *physically going up to people in the street*, it really helped them to think about concepts relating to an invisible and unknown audience. When a connection did occur through anonymous Bluetooth filesharing, the exchange that took place between the unsuspecting passerby and student generated meaningful dialogue. These experiences also provided students with an opportunity for reflecting upon virtual as opposed to face-to-face physical communication and how communication shifts when it is restricted to a virtual rather than physical state.

POLITICS OF SPACE, POLITICS OF VIEWING

In dialogue with my students at Loughborough University about how *Bluetooth Cinema* could live beyond the confines of what they had produced as part of their studies and be presented in a professional context, I presented a later version of *Bluetooth Cinema* as part of *Bodies That Resist*, a performance art festival held at Athens School of Fine Art in Athens, Greece in June 2015. An outcome of this version was that participants experienced first hand the difficulties attached to the importance of location as informing the production, the narrative and critique of a creative work.

This version of *Bluetooth Cinema* started with me hosting a workshop on filmmaking using mobile phones and inviting participants to Bluetooth file-share the films that I had made (similar in nature to those produced by my Loughborough University students) to

passersby in and around Athens' Exarcheia Square, a very popular area for anarchist interventions and political demonstrations. Before participants engaged in this activity, I had been informed by Maria Glyka one of the festival organisers that I needed to be aware that any kind of group or gathering forming in the Square antagonised locals, paranoid that any sort of play taking place in the Square may be rehearsals or warm ups for actions of a violent nature e.g. non-peaceful political protests, riots etc.

Bluetooth Cinema in Athens operated entirely within a liminal space of passive-aggressive play beginning from the moment when I led the workshop participants from inside the art school building where they had been trying out making their instructional recordings to outside down Notara Street towards Exarchia Square. This was no ordinary stroll down the street; this was a playful protest Dada-esque slapstick march. *Shout left! Do right! Do right! Shout left!* As we assembled into the Square, our slapstick march stirred up a lot of attention by locals panicked at our presence interrupting the calm atmosphere with our slapstick marches and bodily interruptions of space being recorded. Audiences assembled from eager passersby. Some of whom actively participated in 'performing' whilst for others their spectatorial engagement for me signalled their complicit participation through the act of having their imagination aroused by their gaze, leading to reflection on their complicity in what we were doing and engaging in critical self awareness.

DECLARATION OF RAPIDLY CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

Zones of demarcation between 'art' and 'life' blurred when *Bluetooth Cinema* took place in Athens. Its outcome was possibly problematised due to the fact of *where* the activity was taking place and what the activity may represent to others unaware of the motives behind the activity. Yes, I wanted *Bluetooth Cinema* (art) to generate interruption but not descend into violence (life). The outcome was definitely complicated due to the fact that few passersby actually had a Bluetooth function on their phones. Had *Bluetooth Cinema* emerged only five or ten years prior when iPhones were not commonplace, maybe the outcome and future of the work would have been different. As most people who took part in Athens had iPhones and Apple had made the commercial decision not to include the Bluetooth file-sharing option on their most recent version of the iPhone, the future of *Bluetooth Cinema* hang in the balance. Although it was commented upon by the participants in Athens that alternative applications which operate in the same way as Bluetooth could be used and do just as good if not better a job, for me, this would compromise the work. Sure enough, participants could have uploaded their recordings

onto YouTube or in the fashion of 'happy slapping' used MMS to fileshare to passerby but by doing so, the work would have fallen down aesthetically and technically as there are certain things that only Bluetooth allows which are integral to *Bluetooth Cinema* as a process. I understood Bluetooth and its no-frills operations and for me its simplicity was indeed its complexity. I liked how *Bluetooth Cinema* made use of Bluetooth in quite a sophisticated way. *Bluetooth Cinema's* eventual demise was due to the commercial decisions of one American multinational technology company. It was at that point that I decided to abandon *Bluetooth Cinema*. Not because I had been 'defeated' by Apple, or that Apple technology had rendered my project redundant, but because I did actually like the fact and accept that everything has its own life span and *Bluetooth Cinema* in its current format had run its course as a declaration of technological developments.

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