THIRD SCREENS, THIRD CINEMA, THIRD WORLDS AND TRIADOMANIA: EXAMINING CELLPHILM AESTHETICS IN VISUAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses cellphilm aesthetics and their resultant effect for visual culture in the 21st century. The new media have impacted traditional analogue structures with profound effects. The cellphone, for example, has become a part of the film and television industries. Accessibility and relative ease of use have ensured their popularity. The article operates from previous work on cellphilms and establishes an argument for the social value that cellphilms have and their attendant social impacts. What becomes important is not so much their comparative aesthetic qualities, but what these qualities mean for their users and the social contexts. The article discusses aesthetics based on work on many cellphilms including Shane *(WFC 2009a),* Trains *(WFC 2009b),* The Sacred Orchid *(2009),* Pussy G'awn Crazy *(2010), and Aryan Kaganof's* SMS Sugar Man *(2008).*

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INTRODUCTION

The new media have impacted traditional analogue structures with profound effects. The cellphone, for example, has become a part of the film and television industries. Accessibility and relative ease of use have ensured their popularity. This article discusses cellphilm[1] aesthetics and their value for "visual culture" (for discussion of this new paradigm see Van Eeden and Du Preez 2005). Our invention of "philm" is based on the neologism cellphilms (cellphones + films) – a shorthand of sorts of films made with a cellphone. What are the aesthetic qualities and their attendant real-world implications and effects? How do cellphilms operate within the social and cultural parameters of an African context?

Rather than operating from a singular definition of what constitutes a cellphilm (see Dockney and Tomaselli [2010] and Simons [2009] for a discussion about the complexities of defining cellphilms), this article is developed premised on the already extant practices in which cellphones are used in imaging industries. The "cellphilm" includes citizen journalism, documentary, fiction, the ordinary person's "show and tell" philms, philms made for cellphones, made with cellphones, for the cellphone screen, for the computer, etc.

VISUAL CULTURE

Postmodernity is marked by an emphasis and almost intense reliance on the visual element. Jay. D. Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) and Lev Manovich (2001) contextualise new media within visual culture from a historical perspective – aesthetically and culturally – starting from the Renaissance (Fetveit & Stald 2007: 3-4).

The centrality of the visual has engendered its own cultural formations, visual culture. In an effort to contextualise digital film theory, Robert Stam (2000: 315) defines visual culture as:

> …an interdisciplinary formation situated at the frontiers of such diverse disciplines as art history, iconology, and media studies… which names a variegated field of concerns having to do with the centrality of vision and the visual in producing meanings, channeling power relations, and shaping fantasy in a contemporary world…

Hyperrealism, simulation and spectacle dominate twenty-first century visual culture. In investigating a cellphilm aesthetic then, it is necessary to ask the questions: what is the relationship between representation and the pro-filmic in cellphilm aesthetics and then, what is the resultant contribution to our world today?

Postmodernity has brought forth its own aesthetics (Creeber 2009: 17). Cellphilms as constitutive elements of postmodern visual culture give life and perhaps a release or reprieve to the schizophrenic anxiety inherent in modernism. The containment provided by scientific and rational certainty – denying chaotic diversity – is singularly being unravelled by the attendant changes that the twenty-first century is witnessing in postmodern visual culture – with cellphilms more than adequately playing their role. A "massified" and seemingly pointless Culture Industry sits quite smugly alongside all

manner of conceptions of culture and art, including high art. The divisive distinctions provided by the Structuralists and the Frankfurt School about mass, pop and pulp culture's deluding effect on a duped public – who needed to be protected from the "standardised and debasing influence" of media (Creeber 2009: 14) – has proved somewhat unfounded (cf. Creeber 2009: 11-14).

The relationship between audience and media has been a central point of debate in the shift from modernist media-audience relations to postmodernist audience relations. The postmodern world has resulted in paradigmatic, conceptual and operational changes in the economic, cultural and political worlds. Consumer culture has come to dominate the cultural sphere where experience is invested in the "product" and consumption and leisure determine experience (Creeber 2009: 15). Mediated visual culture, as an element of the postmodern world, is reflective of modifications in critical theory; post-structuralism has broken down determinism and stability for situatedness and polysemy (Creeber 2009: 15-16).

CELLPHILMS, VISUAL CULTURE AND POWER RELATIONS

As the "visual" becomes all the more a productive and meaningful factor within human life, it becomes increasingly necessary to scrutinise what Stam (2000: 315) calls "the asymmetries of the gaze" – how is the gaze and "looking" organised such that certain individuals are given preference; are power relations skewed in the gaze and if so, how? The "visual" has become a constitutive and socially constructive aspect of our lives.

Cellphilms offer an opportunity in the productive moment to re-align skewed visual codes which augment certain ways of seeing. User-generated content (UGC) allows for audiences' involvement in the productive moment, thus creating dominant hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional readings (cf. Hall 1980: 136-138). Users can generate their own content and thus their own fragmentary ways of seeing which either conform entirely, partially or not at all to the dominant hegemonic reading positions. Cellphilms therefore provide means for remedying mediated viewing and reading positions.

Shane (World Film Collective 2009a), for example, is a cellphilm made in conjunction with the World Film Collective[2] (WFC). *Shane* tells the story of Shane, a young, gay, bi-racial and HIV positive man from Gugulethu[3]. The philm documents Shane's relationships with various members of his family and provides exposition on aspects of his life. What *Shane* does is provide a potentially corrective measure to viewership, particularly in an African context where homosexuality is frowned upon. Although *Shane* cannot necessarily shift the social power relations associated with the "gaze", it can provide a means for encouraging the correction of disempowering and destructive viewership patterns through providing personal, nuanced and celebratory representations. In the face of restrictive and suppressive mass mediated representations which ignore representative locality, specificity, and nuance, *Shane* is all the more powerful and necessary. Vision is always linked to issues of social power. Cellphilms and their respective aesthetic qualities provide means for qualifying media power in visual culture (also see Dockney, Tomaselli and Hart [2010] for further discussion about *Shane*).

CELLING CULTURES, SUBSISTENCE FILMMAKING AND SHAPE SHIFTERS

Digital film technology in general, of which cellphilms are inclusive, allows for a unique and localised take on events. In addition to this, digital film technology can develop aesthetic qualities and coding systems that are unique and specific temporally, spatially and culturally. Analogue industry structures do not necessarily afford the space to develop organic and indigenous aesthetics and codes. Digital film technology, as argued by Michael Allen (2009), services national cinemas through a closer alignment to nuanced cultural tones. Accessibility and virtually zero budgets – "subsistence filmmaking" (Mba 2009: 5) – have placed the camera within the ordinary person's reach. These features are seen by some as a means for "bypassing the cultural blockage created by a glut of Western film products which fails to relate to the reality of life in Africa" (Allen 2009: 66; cf. Dockney, Tomaselli & Hart 2010).

African popular memory is revived through the organic creative processes opened up through digital film technology (Bakupa-Kaninda 2003). "Africa" is re-mapped and reconfigured against colonialism, corporate (Western) media, and the ensuing Chinese scramble for Africa.

Digital media – as shape shifters (Stam 2000: 327) – offer users opportunities for critical progression. Authoritarianist, restricted and hegemonic notions of identity and power are singularly subverted through digital media. Digital media challenge the "increasingly vulnerable representational hegemonies" of older media (Everett 2003: 3) although the power relations inherent within digital media need to be addressed in order to tap into their progressive potential.

In order to holistically utilise cellphilms, one needs to address the ideologies inherent within digital technology. New media may cancel out the "stratifying effects of embodiment" (Stam 2000: 320), however the inertia of history ensures that access to new media privileges certain individuals over others. Technology has not necessarily alleviated the dire conditions of most Third World countries. In many examples the Digital Divide has grown wider. Therefore, new media need to be thoroughly investigated before being lauded as devices for the rescue of the disadvantaged.

THE PERSONAL AND THE OTHER

Social power as expressed through Other-Same (O-S) relations is continually being encountered and to some extents confronted in globalisation. Crippling O-S relations that hamper the constructive collaborative relationships amongst various parties can be singularly overcome through cellphilm productions, but this is entirely dependant upon the producer. One can respond to attempts at "othering" oneself through portraying the self through the "othered's" eyes and thus solidifying O-S relations. However, the accessibility provided through mobile filmic devices and the ensuing organic codes – they are developed from the community up and not imposed as in traditional media representative strategies of codes – established can overcome the restrictive binary which functions to maintain O-S relations. What makes cellphilms significant – as

alternative media – is their accessibility and their organic, potentially disruptive, codes. The chances of personal stories and organic codes being generated within corporate and mass media operations are slim indeed. Cellphilms, particularly those used in citizen journalism, thus have the potential to disentangle destructive mass-mediated representations through deconstructing the binary oppositions present in O-S relations. In so doing, cultural, historical, temporal and spatial others are overcome.

Trains (WFC 2009b) and *Shane* (WFC 2009a) both present examples where O-S relations are potentially dismantled. *Trains* highlights the plight of the working classes. Inefficient and unreliable Metrorail train services in Cape Town often leave commuters stranded – with multiplied social effects. What is important here is not the image quality as many film theorists become bogged down with in new media and film. Rather, the cellphilm aesthetic and codification systems ensure dissenting voices are given expressive power. These codification and aesthetic systems however bring the personal – the working-class Other – in face-to-face contact with authorities. Rather than espousing the semantics of the violent civil unrest approach ("We will kill for Zuma"[4]) characteristic of South African labour, the philm humanises and personalises the plight of the working classes and in doing so, it helps to overcome the preventive binaries in O-S relations.

Like *Trains, Shane* also provides a means for overcoming disempowering O-S relations. *Shane* reworks stereotypes of gay men in corporate media – the effeminate buffoon, the morose butch guy searching for love, etc. – through incorporating a personalised and organic code into its narrative and aesthetic structure. *Shane* fractures the stock identities utilised by corporate media and which permeate popular culture of gay men through making what is usually inaccessible, accessible. Shane's story is now available to public culture and memory. Although, distribution is obviously key to making *Shane* and other cellphilms available for public consumption.

H/B/NOLLYWOOD 2.0

The cellphilm aesthetic straddles numerous cinematic styles: digital cinema, analogue cinema (remediation) and its own cellphilm aesthetics. As new media have become repositories for old media, cellphilms have adapted older analogue film techniques, styles, genres, etc. The informative and constitutive relationships between new and old media are often ignored in studies of new media. Rather, what a historical analysis of new media would show is how new media often remediate old media – "the combination of homage and rivalry" (Bolter 2007: 26). New media and digital aesthetics need to be conceptualised within the frameworks of this argument. The significance for new media, and indeed what distinguishes them from old media, is the establishment of new representational practices; new claims for effectively, albeit culturally tinged, portraying the real (Bolter 2007: 26).

The Sacred Orchid (O'Hagen 2009) is a cellphilm that aptly demonstrates remediation. It literally miniaturises the kung fu/martial art film genre. In true style of cellphilms which emphasise visual over verbal, the philm opts for little dialogue and instead

centres on the "prowess [its] heroes" – which is typical of martial arts film indeed (Hong 1995: 8-9), but the cellphilm takes the spectacle to the extreme in this instance; it is purely surface – sensation over verisimilitude (Stam 2000: 317-8).

The simple but effective binaries incorporated in the philm immediately associate themselves with Western cultural values. The philm imports and Westernises the values associated with "new heroism"[5] (Zhang 2004: 41) such that the white-clad hero stands for virtues such as "integrity, altruism, honesty, dependability, as well as abstinence from sex, money and officialdom" (Chen 1996: 15-106). The black-clad villain stands as the antithesis to the hero. The central point to note here is how the cellphilm draws on the analogue aesthetic and modifies and manipulates it.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: POST-CINEMA, POST-TV AND DIGITAL AESTHETICS

The other area which encompasses cellphilm aesthetics is that of digital cinema aesthetics. Digital cinema is defined by Benoit Michel (2003) as:

> above all a concept, a complete system, covering the entire movie production chain from the acquisition with digital cameras to post-production to distribution to exhibition all with bits and bytes instead of 35mm reels.

Television, as with cinema, has "alternate futures" (Nicholas 2006: 153). Digitality has changed the very concepts of television and cinema – an "ontological shift" which has altered media forms, infrastructures and practices (Everett 2003: 3). Television and cinematic screen sizes are changing, film and television are increasingly being consumed in non-traditional user situations and contexts (television and cinema can be consumed anywhere and anyhow), which directly relates to the idea of television and cinema going mobile. Small hand-held devices such as cellphones are increasingly becoming distribution and consumption platforms (cf. Tomaselli & Dockney 2009: 128-134). Many television and cinema firms around the world – e.g. Cartoon Network, BBC World News, Skylife (South Korea), China Mobile Network, Swedish Public Television, Naked News (Canada), Fox Sports, NBS News, Universal and the South African Broadcasting Corporation, etc – are boarding the mobile phone bandwagon (Nicholas 2006: 157). In many instances, television and cinema companies are teaming up with mobile phone brands. Consumption practices have also meant that notions of television and cinema are changing.

The notion of the "prodsumer" (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly 2003: 33; some authors refer to the "prosumer" – Marshall 2004; Tapscott & Williams 2005) has systematically changed media production as we know it. UGC has meant that the traditional analogue categories of television and cinema producers and consumers need to be reconfigured to include content which is generated and uploaded for consumption by audiences *themselves*. "The synergistic evolution of digital technologies and audience activity may be the most telling portent for the future of television" – see iTV, MyTV and Daily Me (Nicholas 2006: 154). Synchronous and linear television and cinema are giving way to television and cinema which are asynchronous, omnipresent and mobile media (Nicholas 2006: 155).

As a result of this, a digital aesthetic is emerging. Trying to delineate the entire digital aesthetic would be impossible if not a worthless effort. However, various key elements need to be highlighted.

Digital aesthetics, as presented by Sean Cubitt (2009: 23-29), presents an aesthetic form which is markedly different from that of analogue aesthetics. He quotes the work of Andrew Darley (1999) who characterises digital aesthetics as encompassing simulation, hyperrealism and spectacle. Visual pleasure is preferred over narrative. The mediated image does not necessarily need to index a real-world referent anymore – the disconnection between information and capital, image and experience (Marks 2003). However, Cubitt argues that the notion that image and reality have become disconnected is premature – he bases this argument on the fact that in many instances digital aesthetics need to reference the real-world; their base comprises an existent object in the real-world.

However, much of what makes digital aesthetics so hard to define and capture is that firstly, there is no single digital aesthetic form, and secondly much that constitutes digital aesthetics is invisible – we often have no idea how digital representations were created and produced, unlike more obvious aesthetic forms such as painting, music and literature (Cubitt 2009: 28). Trying to define digital aesthetics remains an obstinate task owing to reasons concerning the aesthetic principle of the whole and the sum of its parts. The whole should comprise an entity greater than its parts, but the parts are far too numerous to be considered a whole in the digital domain (Cubitt 2009: 28). In addition to this Lev Manovich's (in Cubitt 2009: 28) principle of modularity means that the parts remain distinct to the whole.

As a reprieve, Cubitt (2009: 28-29) proposes two aesthetic principles from David Gelernter (1998) and democratic aesthetics built out of computing and mathematics. Gelernter's key value of "elegance" emerged from mathematical concepts which propose that formulae are only as complicated as they need be and no more – that beauty of design lies in its simplicity and effective power. The second aesthetic principle works from the renewed democratic endeavour enabled by networked media. Every part, be it human or non-human, should be able to partake in the digital domain, and constitutes it.

DIGITEXTUALITY

The concept of digitextuality was developed by Anna Everett who also outlined digital aesthetics and various attendant issues. Digitextuality is hinged by Everett on the "post-television age" and Jean-Luc Godard's notion of the "end of cinema" (in Everett 2003: 3). Digitextuality is defined by Everett (2003: 6) as:

> a utilitarian trope capable at once of describing and constructing a sense-making function for digital technology's newer interactive protocols, aesthetic features, transmedia interfaces and end-user subject position, in the context of traditional media antecedents…intended to address…those marked continuities and ruptures existing between traditional…media and their digital…media progeny…

Intertextuality is a central concept in understanding digitextuality and digital aesthetics. It references the emergent transposition of different signifying systems within differing platforms (Everett 2003: 6). Comprehension attains in the "field of transpositions" – the redistribution of signifying systems within a singular text (Everett 2003: 6). As applied to digital film technology and cellphilms, they appropriate older, analogue filmic systems and our ability to "read" them effectively results from our accustomed reading of other texts. This results in a new articulation or enunciation (Everett 2003: 6). However, intertextuality only captures a part of digitextuality. As a combination of the words "digital" and "intertextuality" the other necessary emphasis should be on the word "digital". Where digitextuality distinguishes itself from pure intertextuality, is that it becomes a meta-signifying system of discursive absorption and translation of differing signifying systems into ones and zeroes (Everett 2003: 7). It is in these two processes – intertextuality and translation – that a *digital* aesthetic emerges.

An "über-real image construct" is how Everett describes the digital cinema aesthetic (2003: 9). "Über" here refers to the ability of digital media to represent the sublime and what was previously unrepresentable (Everett 2003: 9). Iconic codes disappear or at least become irrelevant, whilst their indexicality references computerised binary codes (Manovich 2001: 25). Believability and verisimilitude have also become unnecessary in the face of a curiosity towards "technological magic" (Everett 2003: 9). Have the drastic changes in the media environment resulted in what Everett calls a "fundamental hyperattentiveness" (2003: 8)?

With the advent of digitality, various production techniques were hauled into the computer binary system and made available for anyone with enough patience to teach themselves. As a result of this, multi-faceted production techniques are combined into one editing and production system – the Manovichian concept of "deep remixability" (2007).

CELLPHILM AESTHETICS

Digital film technology has blurred the boundaries between the mainstream and the avant-garde (Stam 2000: 317). With this in mind, cellphilms become sites for experimentation and haphazardness.

Cellphilm aesthetics develops from the aesthetic forms and principles discussed above. Some of the most notable features of cellphilm aesthetics will be discussed (cf. Dockney & Tomaselli 2010; Tomaselli & Dockney 2009).

The duration of most cellphilms usually does not exceed a few minutes. Various user-situation characteristics such as screen size and the pragmatics of consumption mean that users generally do not want productions which require the same attention span as for other visual media such as television and cinema. Cartoon Network offers a five-minute *Star Wars* mini-series (Nicholas 2006: 158); Vodafone (United Kingdom), Verizen and FME (America) launched one minute mobisode[6] versions of the television series *24* (Lovelacemedia 2005). However, Aryan Kaganof's[7] *SMS Sugar Man* is an exception to the rule – the philm is a full length feature.

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The narrative structure of most cellphilms is generally simple and linear. Once again user-situation characteristics require that philms are fairly easily understood and offer bite/byte sized movie snacks to occupy brief moments of unused time. Cellphilms also seem to fit comfortably into diegetic and memetic narrative techniques. However, memesis does seem to be the dominant of the two.

Even though an individual example of a cellphilm will probably incorporate a linear and simple narrative, a collective of cellphilms can contribute to a synthesised and multifaceted "achronological and multiple-entry 'narrative'" (Stam 2000: 323) for a singular media event. Interactivity has also meant that users can generate their own narratives, plots and story lines for certain texts.

As mentioned previously, there would seem to be a preference in cellphilms for the visual element over the dialogue or word. *The Sacred Orchid* certainly demonstrates this. In this philm, only four lines of dialogue are spoken between two characters. The total talk time is 13.34 seconds for a philm of 124 seconds in duration (excluding the brief introduction by the director at the beginning). Sound effects too seem to replace dialogue. A few argh!s, and heh!s suffice. However, this does not mean that all cellphilms privilege sound and visuals over dialogue and words. There are many citizen journalism cellphilms which present the opposite – words preferred over visuals. Indeed, Everett labels some media critics' lamentations for the fall of the word as premature (2003: 12).

"Image quality" seems to be an unavoidable topic of cellphilm discussion. Cellphilms just cannot capture the pro-filmic with the same level of quality as high-definition (HD) television and HD film cameras. The move from professional to ordinary seems to have done something to aesthetics and quality (Hilmes 2009: 49). However, two points need to be made here. "Image quality" seems to be very much linked in two ways: 1) to a stable ontological definition of film; and 2) to the social values attached to aesthetics. Essentialising film's ontological status is futile. According to Janet Hardbord (2007: 118-145), the developments in film and television suggest that we rather take a multi-layered and supplementary approach to film definition. Talk of image quality appears to be ruinously attached to a singular definition of film and point of comparison. For while one cannot argue that cellphilm image quality is necessarily inferior to that of HD cameras, one does need to acknowledge the meanings associated with a particular image quality. What associations develop in relation to cellphilm image quality? "[I]mage quality takes on a different meaning, especially when the screen of the future is the one on your cell phone or iPod" (Hilmes 2009: 50).

'Pussy G'awn Crazy'

Cellphilm-making is a *learned* practice – as first author Jonathan Dockney was duly reminded at a conference on African filmmaking in the digital era (cf. Dockney 2010, forthcoming). As a result of this and a praxis-oriented theoretical approach to cellphilm-making, a friend (Eldriën Jooste) and I (Dockney) decided to utilise our cellphones (Sony Ericson w950i and a Blackberry Curve 8520) to make a philm. What resulted

was *Pussy G'awn Crazy* (Dockney & Jooste 2010), a 53 second philm. The plot involved seeing my hand irritating my cat (Muffin) and then Muffin meowing and getting increasingly irritated. We did not have a story board, shot schedule or plan – we literally pointed and shot. Coincidentally, Muffin yawned after a few exasperated meows; we appropriated this yawn and digitally overlaid it with a lion's roar – courtesy of free sound files available on the Internet. Hence the viewer sees a hand annoying a cat that is meowing with increasing irritation and then finally hears/sees the cute cat expelling a guttural roar – über-real indeed.

Part and parcel of the filmic-entertainment experience also includes the introductory and end credits. We decided to appropriate the English language by re-organising the spelling – Direcktor, Edit-awr, etc – and rolling the credits to Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* (1973) – used in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973) – for dramatic effect and made available for manipulation by YouTube and Internet-based downloading platforms such as Keepvid. The innocent cat's transformation into a lion mimicked the demonic transformation of the young Reagan into Satan himself.

CLICK 'N GO AESTHETICS: DIGITAL LIONS

Muffin's roar very crudely highlighted a phenomenon that is emerging in visual culture media products. Firstly, the boundary between the real and the media image is gradually being eroded (Creeber 2009: 17). Parody ensured that Muffin's roar was obviously fake. However, the point is in the very ability to replace her meows. Had we chosen the roar of a North American Mountain Lion – a more cat-like screech – then the effect may have been less apparent to some. The media image and its digital modification became part of the same entity, taking on a life of its own. The image indexed no known real-life animal – to the savvier it would have indexed digital manipulation – as the media image, a Baudrillardian "copy" of sorts would have taken on its own life. Perhaps this warrants another example. It is quite common to see thousands of people digitally recreated from their real-life "cousins" and then digitally recreated from the digital copy. The "third order of simulacra" is a concept developed by Jean Baudrillard (1994) to explain the copy superseding the original object. Digital lions' roars thus became the copies for our perusal and replacement or substitution of the real.

Furthermore, we did not need to seek out a real lion in order to record its roar, thanks to the Internet. This highlights Stam's comments about the "de-ontologisation of the Bazinian image" (2000: 319). "Virtual irreality" (Stam 2000: 319) means that the digital media image is no longer connected to the real world, but rather in a dynamic relation with itself.

However, in the face of virtual irrealities, its important to point out that the physical real world has not necessarily become irrelevant. The very creation of the digital world is dependent on the healthy functioning of the real world – if we stop eating, we die, and so does the digital world. Extending on this, we reiterate calls for scrutinising the real-world effect and power stratifications existent within digital media.

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TRY IT AND SEE IT PHILOSOPHY[8]

Without realising it, we (Dockney and Jooste) fell into the cellphilm (and digital) aesthetic "norm" – short, sharp philms, where visual dominates over verbal, narrative and plot are fairly tight and simple and characters – in this philm: "Hand" and Muffin are caricatured or made larger than life, irreal and fantastical. Syuzhet structures are also manipulated and modified – potentially disconnected from fabula verisimilitude (Muffin did not roar) – in accordance with the director's creative intent.

A number of points were raised in this experimental process of significance for cellphilm aesthetics. The insertion of cellphone technology within the visual arts has meant that increasingly people are able to capture coincidence – we did not expect Muffin to yawn. Coincidence then becomes part of the haphazard aesthetic and final product.

What was also significant here was how new media narratives and aesthetics have permeated visual culture – we almost instinctively, without conscious reflection followed the norms of new media narratives. In studying various cellphilms, it has become evident that people's ability to make cellphilms with some final effect shows that people are obviously aware of how to produce effective story lines. We knew how to: create tension, tell a story, play with anticipation and expectation, thwart expectation and generally operate within the genre without any prior "training". The professional has now become the ordinary.

'SMS Sugar Man'

SMS Sugar Man (Kaganof 2008) presents to the audience a swirling Johannesburg underworld. Sugarman, played by Kaganof himself, is a pimp whose girls are his sugars. The philm plots their various escapades on Christmas Eve.

The issue of image quality presents a unique aesthetic effect here. On the one hand, "lower" image quality results from a lower megapixel resolution in cellphone cameras than HD cameras. On the other hand the "lower" image quality works to reinforce the underlying themes in *SMS Sugar Man*. Image quality serves to reinforce the philm's social commentary. In a sense, *SMS Sugar Man* denies the media image's replacement of real-world – a shortcircuiting of the sign, where the image and the real-world Object become the same entity in the audience's minds. The lower image quality almost serves as an interface to deny verisimilitude, or at least dilute it, thus preventing audience identification to some extent.

The hazy effect – the denial of audience perception fully penetrating the media image – also reflects the Johannesburg sex and drugs underworld that Kaganof tries to capture. Through the haze, the underworld is made inaccessible and Other; somehow alien to the audience and perhaps maintaining a jarring effect – this is certainly not a world you are meant to feel comfortable and at home in.

Hazy media images seemingly force viewers into the position of a voyeur. The cellphone camera, with its ability to go where no HD camera has been before, reinforces voyeuristic positions. Extreme close ups combined with the intense immediacy afforded through hand-held recording devices peel away the concealed and congealed layers of the urban underworld.

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Stable narrative structures are systematically broken down in *SMS Sugar Man*. Multiple narratives snake their way through the philm, often leading nowhere and remain seemingly unresolved, "the narrative is filled with plots and schemes that go nowhere, that implode on the plotters themselves" (Hardy 2009).

The hallucinogenic effect developed through the camera work on *SMS Sugar Man* seems to be the resultant effect of cameras that can manoeuvre with greater dexterity than an ordinary HD camera. In many of the scenes one feels that one is flying as the camera swirls and twirls. The overall effect is a fluid and experimental film style, an apparent allegory to Kaganof's comments about the "superficiality of our hyper-real late capitalist society" (Hardy 2009).

CONCLUSION

Cellphilms' contribution to the film and television industries straddles various areas. They have provided, first and foremost, an opportunity for the ordinary citizen to partake in what was once available only to trained professionals. In doing this, they have re-conceptualised the industries as we know it, with significant consequences for film/philm aesthetics.

The central thrust of this article has been one of relating art back to visual culture; the real-world effects of our creative endeavours. In addition, cellphilms aesthetics have been celebrated, as well as tempered. For while we acknowledge that cellphilm aesthetics cannot compare from a technological standpoint, their cultural meanings and values are the most important starting points for discussion. Understanding cellphilm aesthetics from this point of view provides a positive framework for understanding their social impacts; for what cellphilm aesthetics mean for twenty-first century visual culture.

Endnotes

[1] This is how we will refer to cellphone films.

[2] The World Film Collective (www.worldfilmcollective.com) is a non-governmental organisation which works with disadvantaged communities to make films using cellphones to tell their stories.

[3] Gugulethu is a township about 15 km from Cape Town.

[4] One of the slogan's used in support of South African President Jacob Zuma's campaign for presidency.

[5] "New heroism" emerged as a filmic response to the horrors of wars and massacres in China (cf. Zhang 2004: 41).

[6] Episodes made for mobile phones.

[7] Kaganof is a South African film director. *SMS Sugar Man* was shot entirely on cellphones using eight Sony Ericsson w900i cellphones.

[8] Allen, M. 2009. Digital cinema: Virtual screens. In: Creeber, G. and Martin, R. (eds). *Digital cultures: Understanding new media*. Berkshire and New York: McGraw-Hill and Open University Press.

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