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Narrative in Hybrid Mobile Environments

by

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NARRATIVE IN HYBRID MOBILE ENVIRONMENTS

The permeable and fluctuating nature of human identity, assisted by the adoption of personal digital tools, provides compelling opportunities to reformulate, narrate and represent aspects of one's story to the world. Mobile social media tools enable individuals to function as self-promoters and public commentators, with practices that offer a personal and often very explicit engagement between the self and technology. Boundaries shift between the disseminator and the stories they distribute in the digital realm, and participants who may talk back, add to and redistribute, or indiscriminately receive them. What are the ramifications of such creative engagement, and widespread dissemination of personal digital narratives? How can this process be enacted creatively and collaboratively as an artistic or creative practice? And how might these activities be tied intimately back to presence, and to a sense of place?

In personal experience, the narratable self is at once the transcendent subject and the elusive object of all autobiographical exercises, particularly in exercises of memory. These narrative relations can be small and intimate and intended for a close circle of companions,

ABSTRACT

Personal digital technologies have become the tools of reproduction for personal narration and dissemination of broader cultural commentary. Mobile social media enables individuals to function as self-promoters and public commentators, with practices that offer a personal and often very explicit engagement between the self and technology. Narrative dissemination can also make a contribution to a larger collective memory or mood, speaking back to aspects of culture at large. Communications become entangled and imbued with social currency as they are referenced, added to, and disseminated on multiple channels. These hybrid activities suggest an important relational interaction that is attentive to participant's identities, to their presentation of themselves, and to where they are located in virtual and physical space. This collaborative effort between narrators and participants and their locales adds complexity to personal stories and ties them to places and communities of practice.

such as families and friends that use Instagram to share images of their holidays and pets and children growing up, and Facebook to relate their personal milestones. Narrative dissemination can also make a contribution to a larger collective memory or mood, speaking back to aspects of culture at large. Personal digital technologies have become the tools of reproduction for personal narration, and dissemination of this broader cultural commentary. Communications become entangled and imbued with social currency as they are referenced, added to, and disseminated on diverse channels.

Personal narratives may expand and multiply into cultural productions involving multiple voices of

narrators and participants. These narratives are usually created with, transmitted and received through any of a number of semi-ubiquitous mobile communication devices. Stories are often related to the practitioner's culture, community, place or home; these are tales in which the personal and particular becomes more universalized through its digital transmission. As is usual in personal experience, stories are grounded in place and occur over time; their retelling with the use of digital tools in a specific locale can also create responsive hybrid spaces. The most powerful take the real, embodied, personal experiences of the narrator alongside the interactions and responses of the audience (who may be present or virtual), to create a participatory opportunity. This can be an embodied

experience, as in the case of actual physical interaction with others in located space; it may be supported by the augmentation of mobile device-driven virtual layering of that space. Such hybridity charges the ephemeral space and timeline of the interaction. The scene of the narration, in which participants attend to and tell each other their stories, may also be transformed into a place of potential exhibition. These hybrid activities suggest an important relational interaction that is attentive to participant's identities, to their presentation of themselves, and to where they are located in physical and virtual space.

This exploratory reading of the place of narrative in a lineage of mobile media art and design works focuses on some exemplars of the history and philosophy of narrativity in mobile space. It cites a number of important formative projects that have shown the potential to address the creation of a narratable self, operationalized through hybridity and mobility. These narratives are relational, revealing, and expositive, while at the same time tied to place and to community. They support ambitions to create a space that is open, diverse and richly aware of the delightful intimacy of personal stories; and one that may also scaffold the larger aims of community narratives. The narrative creators have used strategies and methods of working in both located and virtual space that have exceeded conventional expectations, taking and reshaping their stories with the use of mobile technologies in unexpected ways. The trajectory of the projects I have discussed follows a chronological and contextual arc, from the highly personal through to the political, as the potential of locative media becomes better understood. Narrators and audiences have experimented and played with the media, manipulated, rehearsed and finally, strategized with its potential.

RELATIONAL NARRATIVES

Hannah Arendt elucidated the function of narrative enquiry in her conceptual construction of the 'narratable' self, in *The Human Condition*. As an epigraph to her chapter on Action, she quotes the author Karen Blixen: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."¹ Arendt refers to Blixen's use of the narrative arts when she speaks of the ways that individuals may be realized as unique existants through the act of narration. Narrative allows grief to be assuaged by people telling one another their stories. Arendt insists these strategies are needed, because the 'who' that someone is remains inexpressible in philosophical terms; the uniqueness of an individual is a concept that philosophy fails to express. Philosophy, she maintains, is primarily concerned with the 'what', and modes of thinking and reasoning about larger questions of existence within the frameworks of culture and society. Philosophy does not deal in the stories of unique individuals and their relationships to one another; and yet 'who' someone is, although not uncovered philosophically, is not ineffable. Hannah Arendt sees the narration of life stories as an alternative to philosophical analysis, because narration both deals in uniqueness and illustrates the interactions between unique individuals. She formulates the theory of an existant's narrative, which can be revealed and made manifest through actions and speech, and continuous appropriation, through "words and deeds, which ex post facto, form the unique life-story of that person."² Arendt maintains that narrative reveals meaning in one's life that would otherwise be perceived as merely an intolerable sequence of events.³ And she states that narrative is the tool that allows the individual to avoid this meaninglessness, so that "every individual life can eventually be told as a story with a beginning and an end."⁴

The Italian feminist theorist Adriana Cavarero focuses on the moments when the disjunction between discourse and life is suspended through personal

memories and the act of narration. She states: "Every human being, without even wanting to know it, is aware of being a narratable self – immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory."⁵ In the most personal sense, the interior narrative enquiry becomes self-reflexive, revealing, and expositive. She also describes a relationship between one's life, and one's life story, in terms of the desire for that narration. Lives are disjointed and fragmentary and do not form an easily narrated story, or coalesce with an appearance of unity around events. A life does not follow the three-act play in a coherent beginning, middle and end, with instructive outcomes. It is the creation of a sense of unity or form or arc in the narration of one's life story that is desired by the narratable self. Cavarero states: "The self desires and is open to the tale of a life story that unfolds in his or her lifetime in a way that uniquely reveals who that person is."⁶

Alasdair McIntyre also refers to narration as a joint and collective struggle towards subjectivity, which makes clear the fragility of each unique individual.⁷ When Cavarero speaks of the 'narratable self' she speaks to the formation of the story of a unique subject. Cavarero also suggests that the setting or context of subjective narration, echoing Arendt, is attentive to who rather than what we are, the "plural and interactive space of exhibition," making explicit a relational interaction and providing a place of exchange between narrator and audience.⁸ Finally, by inserting its texture, place provides a location, a context, and a local reception that brings plurality and communality into the exchange.

I have adopted and extrapolated Cavarero's notions of the importance of context and the place of narrative exchange, into my own thinking about locative mobility and art making. Mobile art practices may allow individuals to experience stories and places differently and anew. Narrators may use these opportunities to

access and re-narrate situations, and remediate surroundings. Some projects have attempted to address the uncovering and dissemination of personal and community narratives, with broad aims. These range from serendipitous discovery of the past, to more strategic support for collective community building and social exchange. In this way the personal narrative in mobile locative media builds relationship to the community or public narrative. Such practices allow for the collective process of sharing and co-constructing narratives in ways that annotate existing communities anew. They may also support the creation of new communities around playful forms of inhabiting shared physical and virtual space.⁹

Mobile art practices may engage communities and audiences in social practices and narratives that are personal, playful, often provocative, and ephemeral in their interactions with place. Locations and contexts are sometimes public, and audiences are almost always on the move. The participatory realm in mobile art and design creates speculative links between individuals and their narratives, in real places that then become virtually augmented environments. These mobile projects may mine an evocative local narrative, and in this way they create a compelling new medium for exploring the past, as well as the current life of a community. Locative storytelling lays alternate narratives over space and place, offering artists, designers, story-tellers, and participants new opportunities and locations for creative interactions. In this way, mobile art and design can sometimes be used as a force for community building, critique, and social change.

Over the last eighteen years, a growing swell of digital narrative works, enacted with the use of new mobile technologies and networks, provides ample evidence of individual and community concerns with storytelling in public space. There are mobile narrative practices, art and design works, and applications that have

set important precedents. The most innovative and groundbreaking of these projects and practices engage creators, audience participants, and often, whole communities in the participatory creation of personal-public narratives. I have chosen to highlight some of the projects that particularly address the challenges of realization, aesthetic implementation, and artistic installation of narrative in hybrid public spaces, as exemplars. These projects have exceeded all expectations in creating meaningful, technologically mediated interactions between narrators, participants, and audiences within specific contexts and locales.

LOCATIVE MEDIA ORIGINS

'Locative media' is a useful term that refers to mobile media works which attach themselves to real located places and communities and their geographical coordinates. The web-artist, mapper, and media activist Karlis Kalnins coined the phrase in 2003. Its catalytic premise was a growing civilian awareness and engagement with a construct that had precise military origins. Prior to this, mobile communication and media simply existed in the spaces defined by, and between, servers and handsets or receivers. Kalnins used the term as a radical test-category for new processes that could facilitate the annotation of physical space, by combining mobile data communications with GPS data and mobile computing hardware.

RIXC, an international media art collective and network of researchers working with mobile, context-aware computing devices and applications, held their first 'location-based' workshops, also in 2003. They were hosted at K@2, on the site of a former Soviet military naval base on the west coast of Latvia.¹⁰ Rasa Smite and Raitis Smits, Latvian artists who were working with the Acoustic Space Lab project at the decommissioned Soviet RT:32 Radio Telescope at the

former base in Karosta, led a series of transcultural mapping workshops to further explore this new territory.¹¹ This newly defined group of 'locative' artists and researchers found themselves facing a profound inter-dimensionality in their experimental proposals. One such was the ability to simultaneously move through and address physical space and electronic space. Their work explicitly acknowledged the potential and the use of the Global Positioning System satellite-based navigation technology created by the US military. Their innovation was in adapting this technology for geographically and socially mediated artworks and investigations. With the introduction of GPS and mobile technology into the public realm, they saw new possibilities for social interaction, annotation, and a way to reclaim locative public space as a site for a new kind of shared experience.

But long before K@2, a number of pioneering artist investigators were working with combinations of location and mobile technology in innovative ways. In 1991, the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff created a portable audio walk, assisted with some of the first personal mobile audio technology, at the Banff Centre in Alberta. Her *Forest Walk* project guided participants with an audio cassette deck and headphones through the local pine forest, accompanied by walking directions and observations, interspersed with a dramatic audio dialogue. Cardiff admits that the instructions were difficult to follow and the sound quality wasn't great, but it changed her thinking about the potential for this new form, and became the prototype for her later mobile audio walks and artworks.¹² Three years later, in 1994, the pioneering Japanese new media artist Masaki Fujihata created an early GPS locative work using a car and a laptop computer equipped with a GPS device and a roof-mounted video camera. He employed this setup to drive around Mount Fuji and create a real-time locative image map. His resulting artwork *Impressing Velocity* offered the data map, the

GPS co-ordinates, and his video images available for viewers to explore interactively or in situ.¹³

The media artist and designer Teri Rueb created her beautiful memorial project *Trace* in 1996, extending ideas explored by Janet Cardiff in her original audio walks with computer hardware and software. *Trace* was composed of embedded narratives, poems, songs, music and conversation that respond to a participant's movement through a plotted path in the rugged landscape of Canada's Rocky Mountains.¹⁴ *Trace* was one of the first geo-annotated mobile art projects, using GPS coordinates embedded in the landscape to access a database of collaboratively created artistic materials, which the participant literally navigated physically by walking in the environment. Rueb's interactive walk was a memorial environmental sound installation, created as a site-specific response to the network of hiking trails near the renowned Burgess Shale fossil beds in Yoho National Park, British Columbia. *Trace* created a kind of narrative soundscape that was at once personal and intimate, which became a networked experience when shared with other walkers. Each walker brought a sense of collaborative reflection to the piece; its particular weather, time of year, and time of day. And as with Cardiff's audio walks, the participant's interior monologue and exterior reactions to the landscape, and their interactions with the materials they listened to on their journey, were pivotal to the experience. Through the use of a compelling media-rich narrative, delivered via rudimentary mobile locative technology (a large, heavy custom knapsack equipped with a portable computer, headphones, and a GPS receiver), *Trace* experimented with relationships between shared experiences and place making, and foreshadowed many of the concerns that locative media artists would build on and refine in the years to come.¹⁵

More than a decade after *Trace*, Teri Rueb's project *Elsewhere: Anderswo* (2009) sought to engage

visitors in a kind of sonified experience of dislocation and play, this time in an outdoor urban space in Oldenburg, Germany. The work is based on the premise that while children readily create pastiches of place through make-believe, conversely, adults often seek out familiar qualities in unfamiliar surroundings. This may include 'reading' a landscape in relation to prior experience or knowledge. Rueb states, "Idiosyncrasy reigns in these 'vernacular landscapes,' patched together unconsciously as memory blurs fact and fiction, real and imaginary, actual and mediated experience."¹⁶ With *Elsewhere: Anderswo*, Rueb explores an alternative aesthetic where the dislocations that occur in place-making as an outsider or 'auslander' are fully embraced: "While the physical place itself still serves as the literal and conceptual ground for the work, the sound overlay may seem foreign and out of place, out of sync or registration, as if rendered in crude translation."¹⁷ Interwoven with the narrative are fragments of sound that evoke highly specific landscapes, some of them familiar from television, film, and radio, all coming from other places. In these moments Rueb says that personal identity snaps back into hyper-sync with the site itself, interacting with personal memories and narratives that create familiarity in that otherwise unfamiliar place.

PROPRIOCEPTION AND NARRATIVE IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The criteria of narrative experience are continuity, and interaction: a sense of experience as continuous is framed by tensions concerning temporality, people, place, and action. The British moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre describes the difficulties in enframing an adequate Telos, or climactic unity, within the narratives of individual lives.¹⁸ He relates the ways that telling stories and hearing them told back affirms and makes sense of disjointed experience. Lives begin to

make sense through the framing device of the life story, fixed and situated as they are within time and place. MacIntyre describes narrative as a way to enable the narrator and the existant, (the one to whom the narrative is being related, whether they be its subject or its recipient), to enter a quest together. The quest is a shared education in self-knowledge and experience, a revelation of the character of both participants and the events, people and places that have shaped their lives. Narrating life stories in situ provides sense of place and is revealing because it also offers the possibility of a kind of proprioception, or experiential interaction with the environment, mediated through the senses.¹⁹

The desire to use new mobile technologies to imbue public space with subjective personal annotation, and to send participants on a quest to find these narratives, inspires others. The simple premise of these projects is to lay an invisible but easily accessible veil of community narrative over situated public space. Concurrently with the locative experiments at the K@2 workshops in Karosta, the *[murmur]* project was launched in Toronto. Story telling in situ, and the relationship between narrative and embodied experiences informs the *[murmur]* project, originally developed by Shawn Micallef, Gabe Sawhney and James Roussel, at the Canadian Film Centre Media Lab. The project uses a simple mobile phone-based locative process for urban annotation that has been extensively elaborated in all kinds of more recent applications. The project seeks to share stories in urban locations and sites, by embedding their co-ordinates in a physical sign, which is a both a call to action and a stand in for the virtual signposts that reside in that location.

The first iteration of the *[murmur]* project, located in the transitional and diasporic community of Toronto's Kensington Market, started an urban community



Figure 1. *[murmur]* project sign in Toronto's Kensington Market, 2007. Photograph by Bryce McFarlane. © Bryce McFarlane, 2007. Used with permission.

storytelling movement. Signs depicting a large green ear with a telephone number inscribed on it started appearing on lampposts in the market and adjacent neighbourhoods in 2003, where they remain to this day. Intrigued passersby can call the number on the sign with their cell phone, and hear a short personal story concerning someone's experience in the place where they stand. The storyteller is someone who had lived in the house, worked at the market stall, worshipped at the synagogue, escaped to the theatre or (now defunct) cinema, visited that restaurant or club for a memorable evening, or had witnessed dark deeds in this back alley the listener was now standing within. The stories are personal, and as diverse as the Kensington Market neighborhood and its denizens. The *[murmur]* project enables interaction with the 'murmur' of other voices, bringing the city to life through listening to its multi-layered narrative. The project continues, and green ear signs have been popping up in international locations as far away as Edinburgh and Dublin, São Paulo and San Jose, all

designating story-telling projects that have been co-developed with the *[murmur]* project creative team and local communities.²⁰

Alasdair Macintyre's concept of quest also connects narration to purposeful movement through an environment and discovering its affordances, often in a search for self-knowledge. This idea of the quest informs other mobile locative media projects such as *Park Walk* (2008-2014), the *Tactical Sound Garden (TSG) Toolkit* (2007-10) and Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007-) and *You Get Me* (2008). These locative media projects call for direct location of oneself in a specific environment; they cannot be adequately

accessed or experienced remotely.²¹ A number of technological advances collided to enable these concepts to be realized in locative art making practices. It is not surprising that so many artists, game designers, and creative mobile engineers came up with locative media projects through 2007-2008, at around the same time that GPS was beginning to become standard equipment in mobile phones; the impulse to experiment with this powerful technology at personal, portable, artistic, and design levels was irresistible. These new mobile art and information works and games became a force for community building, critique, and change, through the collaborative production of narrative and its insertion in public space.



Figure 2. *Rider Spoke*, Blast Theory, 2007. © Blast Theory, 2007. Used with permission.

Figure 3. *Park Walk Project*, Martha Ladly & Bruce Hinds, 2007. Students undertaking field work in High Park, Toronto. Photograph by Martha Ladly. © Martha Ladly, 2007. Used with permission.



The *Park Walk* project is a mobile public artwork developed with my collaborator Bruce Hinds and our research students at OCAD University in Toronto, in 2006-2007. The project was just one of many in the Mobile Digital Commons Network (MDCN), a consortium of Canadian universities and arts institutions interested in collaboration on the development of new mobile technologies, designs, and artistic practices. At that time there were no standards for compressing large data packets such as image streams, audio, and video tracks, or protocols for them to be stored on or delivered to rudimentary handsets. The response was to engineer and build a new technology, the Mobile Experience Engine (MEE), designed by engineer Tom Donaldson and his team of university student

hackers.²² The MDCN projects were also created just prior to the standard embedding of GPS technologies in mobile phone devices, so artists and engineers hacked together Bluetooth GPS devices which could talk to the Bluetooth receptors in a variety of mobile handsets. Our researchers looked pretty unusual in the field, carrying GPS devices held aloft and taped onto long poles, sensing our GPS plotted co-ordinates, attempting to geo-locate and 'talk' through Bluetooth proximity to the primitive phone handsets.

The first version of *Park Walk* was a social and environmental mapping project, originally envisioned for Toronto's High Park, an urban wilderness where extensive documentation and fieldwork with GPS

Figure 4. *Park Walk Project*, Martha Ladly & Bruce Hinds, 2007. Grange Park with OCAD University and downtown Toronto in the background. Photograph by Martha Ladly. © Martha Ladly 2007. Used with permission.



Figure 5. *Park Walk* workshop in the cemetery of the Convent of San Domenico, Fiesole, Italy, 2014. Photograph by Martha Ladly. © Martha Ladly 2014. Used with permission.



and mobile devices was undertaken. In the end, poor reception for these devices in the forests of High Park convinced our research team to move the project to downtown's gritty Grange Park, an historic former estate adjacent to the Art Gallery of Ontario and OCAD University, which is bordered by some of the oldest buildings in Toronto. Grange House with its formal park, a playground and skateboard arena, as well as the ruins of St. George the Martyr Anglican Church, are all found here. Destroyed by fire, the tower is all that remains of Toronto's largest neo-gothic church. Architectural treasures and layers of urban history are hidden away in relative obscurity in Grange Park, which, until recently, was bereft of all signage or information about its significance. The *Park Walk* project in Grange Park sought to remedy this situation by offering historical and cultural narratives, and user-generated stories contributed by the local community.

The project engaged aspects of urban orientation and nature identification, local cultural activities, historical insight, and bioregional mapping. Over time, with the addition of community members and visitor's own experiences of chosen sites in the park, in conjunction with a website offering uploads and downloads of user-generated narrative layers, the project built on community associations with the historic site.

The latest versions of the *Park Walk* project in 2013-14 were both instigated in urban cemeteries where incredible monuments and storied lives abound, at the vast and famous La Recoleta in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and at the more intimate cemetery in the Convent of San Domenico, in Fiesole, Italy. The *Park Walk* project continues to lay veils of storytelling and participant narratives and images over familiar urban places, creating a rich and eloquent layering of shared public space. ²³



Figure 6. *You Get Me*, Blast Theory, 2008. © Blast Theory, 2008. Used with permission.

Mark Shepard's *Tactical Sound Garden (TSG) Toolkit* (2007) also shares a desire to overlay public space with user-generated enquiry and importantly, sound. TSG is an open source software platform for cultivating 'sound gardens' in urban public space. Shepard describes the Toolkit as a parasitic technology, feeding on the propagation of Wi-Fi access points in dense urban environments, which constitute free, ready-made, locative infrastructures. TSG enables anyone living within a wireless 'hot zone' to install a sound garden for public use, by creating and planting sounds which are mapped onto the coordinates of the city with a 3D audio engine commonly used in gaming environments. Based on the idea of the participant-gardener working within their chosen physical location, sounds are 'planted' in the garden 'on-the-fly' within the surrounding three-dimensional space. Where the presence of 802.11 wireless access nodes is minimal, gardens may simply consist of plantings along a sidewalk. Where a local density of nodes exist, gardens can potentially take on the scale of a neighborhood; and in cities where wireless networks are ubiquitous, gardens can potentially extend throughout the entire city. The project draws on the culture of community gardening to create a participatory environment, allowing participants to drift through virtual sound gardens as they move around the city. In 2007, collaborative sound gardens were planted in Belo Horizonte in Brazil, in San Diego, and in Zurich. In 2010, a new sound garden was planted in São Paulo, and in 2012, in Belgrade, Serbia. TSG allows participants to serendipitously discover urban sound gardens, to plant their own, and to contribute to other's sound gardens, in a delightful geo-located rendition of guerilla gardening.²⁴

The British art collective Blast Theory do not attempt to classify the new form that they have created. Their signature mash-up of mobile, online and other narrow and broadcast technologies is combined with strategic, embodied calls to action, often for multiple participants and players, within urban cityscapes which formulate the 'sets' in which their interventions take place. Creating urban games, interactive art, immersive theatre performances, and research projects, they have pioneered new locative media forms.²⁵ *Rider Spoke* (2007-) is one such, a mobile game for urban cyclists. The *Rider Spoke* project combines theatrical narrative with cycling and mobile game play, situated

in its first iteration in the Barbican district of London. Participants arrived at an announced time to play, equipped with their bikes. Cycling through the London streets at night, with a mobile device attached to the handlebars, they searched for and found a hiding place to record a short message in response to a question posed, and then continued searching for the hiding places of other participants' messages. The game builds a tactical and networked narrative construction, which goes beyond the more neutral annotation of place that *Park Walk* and *Tactical Sound Garden* proposed. *Rider Spoke* involves a kind of mobile locative game play, in which the interaction hinges on narrative process, leading to different outcomes, depending on the participants' interactions with their environment and their responses to the narrative presented. Players' interactions become intimately place-specific and personal, depending on the locale and the players' desires. *Rider Spoke* games have been developed and played in London, Brighton, Athens, Budapest, Sydney, and Adelaide.²⁶

Sociologist and mobile researcher Mimi Sheller notes that many of Blast Theory's works "...uptake embodied and mediated encounters between familiars and strangers, and between familiar and 'strange' modes of interaction, challenging boundaries of comfort and raising issues about trust."²⁷ In the 2008 Blast Theory played a pervasive game with participants at the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden. *You Get Me* stretched narrative communication across both geographic and social strata, in just such an attempt to test barriers and issues of trust, between London's elite and its urban youth.

Visitors to the Royal Opera House entered a kiosk in which they were greeted virtually by one of the young protagonists of the game, a group of teenagers located across town in Mile End Park in London's East End. Kids waiting in the park responded to operagoers with a text greeting: "Welcome to You Get Me. This is a game where you decide how far to go, now, at this moment. Each one of us has a question we want you to answer..." and then the unsuspecting Covent Gardeners were dropped into the virtual/real game world. As visitors to the East End park they were allowed to choose one of the teenagers, known as runners, as a potential partner in the game. Their choices were



Figure 7. *I'd Hide You*, Blast Theory, 2012. © Blast Theory, 2012. Used with permission.

based on photos and on questions the runners posed. For instance, runner Rachel Scurry asked a participant, "What is your line between flirting and cheating?"²⁸ Runner Hussain Ali was wrestling with leaving home and asked for some tips. And runner Jack Abrahams wanted to know, "Would you employ me?"²⁹ Jack then told his story about a drunken evening jumping the barriers at Southend railway station and pissing in a cup on the back of the rail replacement bus. Given this information, the response from an opera-lover at Covent Garden would probably be "highly unlikely," but Jack asked his potential partner to persevere. These were tough questions, and they were being directed at people who were of a different generation and very different social milieu.

By navigating their way through the virtual Mile End Park the Covent Garden visitors then located their chosen runner. The goal was to listen to the personal stories of the chosen runner over a walkie-talkie stream as they navigated the park with their peers; gradually as the participant learned more about the runner, and vice versa, a conversation developed. Individual participants and runners continued their

conversation via text message. Runners could make demands, and they could also invite participants for a private chat. If personal contact was achieved and both agreed, an image would slowly materialise to reveal the runner to their interlocutor, creating a subtle shift in the dynamic. Runners were clearly invested with asking hard questions and telling their risky personal stories; a similar investment was required by the participants to listen and respond. From the establishing text message to the intimacy of a mobile phone call with a stranger, this was a conversation and an experience in which the runner and the visitor would never have otherwise engaged.

The last contact might be a final text message from the runner; "This is Hussain. I'm near the canal with the Pallant Estate behind me and I'm taking a photo for you. You get me."³⁰ As the participant left the Royal Opera House a photo arrived on their phone. Story and personal memento sent – and received. This one to one exchange allowed youth to ask for and receive direct input into their adolescent quandaries, at the same time challenging members of a privileged élite. *You Get Me* rends the curtain between public

and private, asking questions and setting up challenging uncertainties between narrators and participants.

Blast Theory mounted a new locative game *I'd Hide You* at the *FutureEverything Festival* in Manchester, in May 2012, using the concept of runners again, and the mediation between virtual and real players in urban space. With this new game there are further elements of risk for the runners, if not for the participants. The narrative is in the moment and then dispersed; players are on the move and trying not to get caught. Here is the announcement and call to action for the game:

I'd Hide You is a game of stealth, cunning and adventure online and on the streets. Jump onboard with a team of illuminated runners live from the streets as they roam the city trying to film each other. See the world through their eyes as they stream video: ducking and diving, chatting to passersby, taking you down the back alleys to their secret hiding places. And play against your friends online at the same time. Use your wits to choose which runner to ride with. Get a snap of another runner onscreen without getting snapped and you score a point. Get snapped by someone else and you lose a life. Play online or spot the runners in the city and tweet it to @hideyou. ³¹

Less a narrative project than a live strategy game, *I'd Hide You* employs a rudimentary rule set: the objective is to try to 'catch' other players by capturing them on video without getting caught on video themselves. The designers found that this simple strategy supplied "...a surprising set of emergent properties. The game was concise and simple. But the pleasures invoked and the strategies required to play were rich and subtle." ³² This was especially relevant as, like most of Blast Theory's output, the game is complexly doubled, with two games nested within each other. Multiple online players choose which player to ride with by hop-

ping from one video stream to another. They score and interact with the runners at points in the game by capturing a photo whenever they see another player in their screen shot. In this way, participants are mediating various dependencies between their own online presence and the real and virtual players. The use of Twitter adds a further mobile twist to the real and 'in-game' virtual worlds. *I'd Hide You* takes the genres of strategy games, and so-called 'big games' played in urban space, with live-action and video gaming, and mixes them with surveillance, strategy, and adrenalin, to create a complex and multi-layered locative media experience.

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PERSON NARRATIVES IN MOBILE ART PRACTICES

Adriana Cavarero states that human beings are constitutively exposed to each other through the bodily senses. She claims that it is through the act of narration that a constitutive exhibition occurs, in which the self comes to desire their life story, as told through the mouth and voice of another. ³³ In this way, individuals become selves who are narratable, to and by others; and people depend upon others for the narration of their own life stories. ³⁴ The important function of retelling stories to one another is unique to second person and third person narratives. Second person narratives are addressed to the 'you' whom 'I' address. They are common in families, when parents, custodians and friends tell children stories of the events of their childhood, which the children may not recall themselves. These second person narratives bond children to their families and communities, and harken back to the impulses for creating shared narratives in many of the earlier projects described.

A number of mobile locative art and news projects have taken up the first person narrative address, while



Figure 8. Re-Tweet (RT) Driller Application, Martha Ladly, Greg Van Alstyne, Geneviève Maltais, Jonathan Resnick and Britt Wray, 2011. © Martha Ladly, 2011. Used with permission.

setting up a doubling with participants in distant geographical and geopolitical situations. Sheller suggests that there are "...instances in which 'I' may inhabit another, and there is a kind of displacement of the subject, or a stereoscopic doubling."³⁵ She notes that this plays into the potential for self-invention and the ability to play with doubled 'real' and 'virtual' selves, within hybrid mobile environments. While participants may find themselves in richly complex doubled positions, the contextual environment of the narrative may also be doubled. This phenomenon occurs in Alyssa Wright's *CherryBlossoms* project (2008), and another of my projects entitled the *Re-Tweet Driller* (2011). Both projects speak to shared narratives where the personal has become larger than the individual, reaching into the political sphere. Both projects use news reports to show the impacts of live geo-political events on real people, and both also employ psycho-geographic mapping with closely bound narrative processes.

CherryBlossoms was a GPS-activated mobile art project, developed by Alyssa Wright when she was a PhD student at the MIT Media Lab in Boston. Her project aimed to build a visceral sense of empathy for the victims of the Iraq war. The project took data from the locations of bombings in Baghdad, and mapped them on an overlay of GPS hotspots, to the streets of Boston, Massachusetts. Participants donned a backpack outfitted with a small microcontroller and a GPS unit attached. Recent news feeds related to bombings in Iraq were downloaded to the unit nightly, and locations relative to the center of the city were superimposed via GPS coordination on the streets of Boston; walks through the city were staged on these days. As the backpack wearer walked through a GPS co-ordinate in Boston that correlated to the GPS location of a recent bombing in Baghdad, the backpack automatically detonated. Instead of shrapnel, a compressed air cloud of scraps of paper was

released. Each scrap of paper was inscribed with the name of a civilian who died in the attack, detailing the circumstances of their death. Looking like a mixture of smoke and the falling white blossoms of a cherry tree, the mini explosions often completely threw, and then engulfed, participants and onlookers. Alyssa Wright's *CherryBlossoms* resonated in the streets of America, far beyond the boundaries of the conflict.³⁶

The *Re-Tweet Driller* application (2011), a project undertaken through the GRAND National Centre of Excellence research network, visualized the impacts of citizen journalism on the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt, in late 2010 and early 2011. The application was built to analyze conventional news stories and their relationships to their sources, using 're-tweeted' (forwarded) Twitter reports as the base reference point for events rapidly unfolding in Cairo's Tahrir Square. The application was deployed on a mobile platform that allowed readers to access a snapshot of news stories that were currently being disseminated by mobile citizen journalists, and then compared them with similar stories on syndicated news outlets. The *R-T Driller* showed how often stories had been picked up, adapted, or even run in their entirety, based on posts and retweets of the people who were live and on the ground, in the thick of current events. The project presents individual's short narratives, which are often accompanied by their Twitter ID images, as an interactive visualization of Twitter feed data alongside correlated syndicated news stories. This juxtaposition allowed participants outside the conflict to see that tweets were often the basis of so-called hard news, and that they were often coming from locations outside of Egypt, especially over the period that the Internet was shut down during the uprising. A capture of the live Twitter feed could be navigated interactively, mapped, or printed out as a digital 'news clipping' of the events of a particular day during the uprising. The project gave readers an insight into the

stories behind the news, and a chance to make their own comparative analysis of mobile and conventional news stories.³⁷

The collaborative story telling documentary project *18DaysInEgypt* also aims to document the events of the Tahrir Square uprising through social media channels that captured the revolution, with a simple premise: "for the first time in history, citizens are recording an actual revolution in real time. Throughout the 18 days of the 2011 uprising – and now – Egyptians are filming pivotal events on their cell phones, taking pictures, texting, tweeting and Facebooking their extraordinary bid for freedom. Here, at 18DaysInEgypt.com, you will be able to access stories from the revolution in a whole new way."³⁸ Mobile projects can bring attention to issues, with politically active individuals using social media as a means to ignite social change, influence mainstream news, and ultimately play their part in tipping the balance of public opinion and power.

The Tahrir Square uprising was re-imagined as a social media revolution, with many of its main proponents being women. The location of women of the revolution in the midst of the political turmoil in Tahrir Square, and their use of social media to distribute news and stories, speaks to new mobile modes. Our research concluded that without access to mobile social media it is doubtful that many of the stories that fueled the revolution would have been so widely and successfully disseminated, or in turn taken up by the powerful traditional news channels. The unique combination of location, situation, and a compelling narrative offered interdependent catalysts for social and political change. Mobile social media gave the Egyptian women a voice and a way to present themselves as a vital political force. These were compelling times, which offered an unusual opportunity for women to represent themselves

and their stories, and to reformulate their positions within the political spectrum in Egypt. This opening has unfortunately not borne the fruit that was so optimistically anticipated; the rights of women are again conspicuously absent from the agenda in post-revolutionary Egypt. Having been a driving force for change during the uprising up until the present, Egyptian women remain unwilling to give up the progress they have made. With the tools of free speech, open information, and access to civil society so tantalizingly close, it is impossible to send Egyptians back to a period of uncontroversial submission to repressive laws and outmoded social practices.

In conclusion, mobile media have opened new channels, creating real-time interaction with people and their personal stories, and bringing human interest into focus, with wider implications for emerging social interactions. Creative practices in mobile media and art have progressed from the personal and serendipitous through to the political and strategic. From their beginnings as a form of benign veiling, layering and annotation of public space, in projects like *Trace* and *Park Walk*, projects have emerged that document and actualize the strategic activation and politicization of public space, such as *You Get Me*, *CherryBlossoms*, the *Re-Tweet Driller* and *18DaysInEgypt*. Mobile media plays a crucial role in enabling direct address between story-tellers and their audience. These first person narratives are powerful and personal. 'You' are the one who 'I' most probably do not know, and yet you are reading or listening to my words, and beginning to understand and perhaps picture me, and empathize with my situation. This is a direct form of address that implicates 'us' in an active, political encounter.

People who are creating mobile media and actively using these channels to strategize, share, and disseminate their ideas and views have become skilled public

commentators, activists and actors whose digital identities and stories are managed with equal assiduousness. Mobile media supports the construction of personal and community narratives through collaborative narrator-participant interchange, which may in turn encourage greater social and political awareness. It is my firm contention, that mobile narratives, aligned with the power of being located in political public spaces, have the potential to provoke a profound sense of interconnectedness, and belonging, engaging with the participatory power of social change. ■

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