

## Mobicasting: Let 1000 Machines Bloom<sup>\*</sup>

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Let us suppose that life is a dance, a chaotic unfolding of bodies in motion, repetitive but utterly unique gestures tracing lines of flight over the unfolding of the new earth these steps create: the resistance of fleshy bodies and their collisions embodying the limitless nature of human experience, from the antagonism of the unexpected blow to the warmth of the gentle caress. Each interaction always exceeding our capacity to enunciate its experience but paradoxically embodying the very basis from which we come to communicate, to relate, to describe in common.

Stepping back from the metaphor consider: is the art of political communication all so different from this? Moments of creation, resistance, and expression, from the collaboration of gardeners growing a patch of vegetables in a community garden to mass actions in the streets, are constituent elements in an on-going process of creating new forms of sociality and community, new forms of life. But in the same way the experience of motion always exceeds our ability to express them, forms of political communication stumble on the gap between an ever-present sensation of movement and our attempts to describe it. The intricate weaves of affective bonds, experiences, and memory tatter and fray from their immediacy in the shaping of representation. And all too often attempts to describe become methods of capture, transforming vibrancy into pallid reflection.

The tension between the inside and outside of experience, between the *emic* and the *etic*, has long frustrated attempts to communicate the immediacy of experience beyond itself. From the bodies in streets proclaiming their collective desires to busy hands of artists

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\* The mobicasting system is free software and is documented at <http://www.streaming suitcase.com>. The system was realized in the context of the Trans-Siberian web documentation project produced in collaboration with m-cult and Kiasma [<http://www.kiasma.fi/transsiberia/stream.php>].

and philosophers shaping singularities with creative techniques, we find ourselves caught in a dynamic where the description of an experience or event forces one to step outside of it into the logic of removed narration. When asked ‘so what happened?’ one can attempt to piece together a sense of the event through collections of its bits and pieces or to grasp the whole through description, binding oneself away from the event through the separation of inscription. Such dynamics find themselves seeping into even the most earnest forms of independent media where all too often logics of professionalization and attempts to gain legitimacy lead to communication constrained by format and expectations.

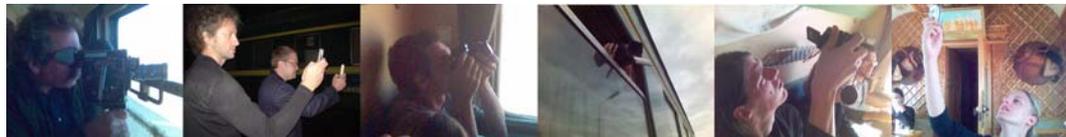


Mobicasting is a new platform of media technology developed by Adam Hyde and Luka Princic for ‘Capturing the Moving Mind’ that provides opportunities to address these dynamics. It is at once two ideas. The first is technical: build a system to deliver ‘pseudo-live’ video from any device capable of delivering images by email. The second is tactical: build a system that enables the production of video reports positioning the mobile phone as a networked ‘outside broadcast’ studio. The first goal is an exercise in developing models of ‘broadcasting’ that employ the simplest technologies possible. Simple technologies are the ones we already know how to use. So simple is the idea: send a sms or an email with attached images, sound, text or video. In the subject line of the email put the name of a video program. This is your new ‘program.’ This material is then compiled into a video as either a ‘live’ stream or as a downloadable video file. That is the technology, but the pay-off is the tactical side, for which the tool was built. With this mechanism it is possible to make collaborative online video content from any device capable of sending email. This can be used for capturing moving minds, or it can be directly used as a device for reporting on events that are normally out of reach of wired or wireless Internet connections.

Sitting in tension between the fragmentary ingestion of experience and the formation of a narrative flow, this represents an attempt to move beyond the logic of post-production. As a pragmatic solution to challenges around a limited bandwidth, instead of a smooth stream, which always represents an almost-recent-now over a fragile connection, fragments of media can be aggregated from numerous sources into a continuously flowing output subject to repetitions, sporadic updates and an *ad hoc* alphabetical editorial algorithm. It is both processed and raw at the same time. An open archive of media materials formed from the multiple experiences and perspectives embodies of a wealth of ingredients that can be creatively redeployed, mixed, interspersed, and scrambled proliferating into journals, art exhibitions, films, manifestos, and forms of media art. Not knowing what others will be contributing or what they are intended for, Mobicasting is a platform designed with a high degree of user hackability; it creates an interface for the flexible shaping, reshaping, and ordering of media materials for creative uses, many of which may not have been anticipated beforehand.

Rather than shaping the description of an event afterwards into an accepted narrative framework, Mobicasting allows for the on-going *modulation* of an event representation as part of the production of relations and interactions that construct the event itself and networks of relations formed out of it. As a social technology of dispersal and transmission Mobicasting exists in their interstices between the technical apparatus of media production and corporeality and immediacy of experience. It creates a space and method where an emergent collectivity and the flesh of the event can construct and shape its representation in a process immanent to its own unfolding.

The goal is not to construct a high tech other within the created social space, but rather to open up a space for the collective shaping of self-representation and narration as a part of the unfolding event whether a conference on a train making its way across Siberia or any other gathering at which Mobicasting could be useful. It is a platform for the enabling of emergent narratives, an indeterminate media form in that the frameworks, structures, and memes generated are open to the situation in which they find themselves created and are shaped out of them. It allows for forms of media production that are enmeshed within the aesthetics and affective conditions of their creation. Things like Mobicasting in this sense could not just be one more trick up the sleeve of media activists but potentially offers a format for collective mediation shaped through the technological environments we find ourselves in. By enabling collective participation in the shaping of an event's representation and the technology through which this is done it transforms the dynamics of attempting to capture experience into those of creation beyond and through the collectively created experience.



This is not to say that tension between capture and representation, between experience and articulation, has been finally and successfully addressed through the promises of yet another piece of high tech gadgetry. Far from it. And perhaps the very dynamic that new forms of independent media attempt to address the ones that are the most important are the hardest to handle: why does one want to capture a moving mind in the first place? What fuels this desire for mobile communications to transcend distance as if they could become transparent and now for the first time create an ideal speech situation and democratic public sphere? Emerging from today's cybernetic salons to develop new privileged forms of mobility that desire constant connection with distributed forms of community created by their own movements; these traces and reflections, recorded through mobile media forms, often constitute its own self-referential and self-contained audience. The dividing line between reality TV style titillation and collective documentation, between the corporate media logic of rolling news coverage and grassroots media, increasingly blurs and breaks down. It may very well be in that trying to capture a moving mind we are captured by our very desire to form coherent forms of self-representation; have we formed a polyvalent and participatory media panopticon where the inmates all watch each other, recording every motion, utterance, and moment from multiple angles and modes of inscription? Mobicasting by building itself on an open platform suggests opportunities for reshaping its usage and deployment in new

forms that are open to the multiple and fluctuating forms of desire, motivation, and connections we bring to media communication.

The multiplication and expansion of new forms of movement, experience and life must find ways to escape, to move through and beyond a logic of representation which confines them in updated versions of the same old story. It is a form of walking while asking questions, not only about the world and our shared experiences, but also about how we ask and represent these questions to ourselves. It may stumble awkwardly trying to find its footing, perhaps even tripping over its own immaturity at points, but is ultimately strengthened within the molecular proliferations from which it emerges. Rejecting both uncritical techno-utopianism and naïve Luddism, the task is to seize upon opportunities for political communication by working from the social dynamics of technology and the technical forms extended across the entire social field. Let then a thousand machines of life, dancing, celebration and movement bloom across the endless fields of human experience.

Photographs from Capturing the Moving Mind, Helsinki-Moscow-Novosibirsk-Beijing, September 7 – September 20, 2005. Photos by Adam Hyde, Netta Norro and Sophea Lerner.

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