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The Wheel - A Smartphone Novel: Multimodal Composition on the Move

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***The Wheel* – A Smartphone Novel:
Multimodal Composition on the Move**

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Abstract

This practice-led research project explores the construction of a smartphone novel in China. Its purpose was to create a narrative of Mobile Moments on a smartphone, documenting and analysing the effects of this multimodal composition on the creative process. This project contains both the published multimedia artefacts and the critical exegesis.

The creative artefact features digital chapters presented in WeChat Moments, plus a chronological multimedia PDF and screen recording. The digital fiction contains video, photography, audio, emails, social media entries, and animation. These media were chosen in accordance with the range of developing smartphone capabilities from a Nokia E63 to an iPhone 12. The modes of creation and applications utilised demonstrate the scope of a ubiquitous mobile capturing device, and these were examined in the critical exegesis in terms of functionality, situational opportunity, and as a new platform for expression.

The critical exegesis scrutinizes how composing multimodal texts on an all-purpose device affects the author's capturing, experiential, and editing processes. The analysis presents chapters on practice-led methodology; an examination of how the practicalities of working on a smartphone differ from more traditional modes of writing and even how it differs from constructing 'cell phone novels'; an examination of how specific media are chosen to best portray particular characters, scenes, or narrative devices and how this offers a modern, sensory alternative to text-based novels; and a discussion of to what extent the environment offers creative inspiration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am incapable of conceiving infinity, and yet I do not accept finity. I want this adventure that is the context of my life to go on without end.

Simone De Beauvoir

The goal of the project was to create a cell phone¹ novel structured as WeChat micro fiction via practice-led research in China. As technology progressed at such speed, the cell phone novel became a smartphone novel—one constructed of Mobile Moments—delivered in chapters ala Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*.²

With cell phone novels somewhat established as a niche genre, there were still no significant avenues of research on their construction or future direction. Creative practice, or practice-led research, on the other hand, had developed over recent years as a serious academic field, so there was a rich seam of existing content to tap into. To carry out a purposeful literature review, it became necessary to cast the net wide to form a composite background study of adjacent research. Picture books, hypertext novels, flash fiction, and original cell phone novels, studied in combination, provided a wealth of information.

¹ Cell phone novels were originated by Yoshi in Japan, and the first accepted novel is titled *Deep Love*, which went on to spawn actual books, TV series, manga, and a movie. It sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

² David Copperfield profoundly affected the practitioner as an undergraduate student and is the ultimate mock-autobiographical inspiration for Sam Chen.

1.1 Research Questions

The resulting study and exegesis ultimately answer the fundamental questions:

- How does WeChat writing develop a novel writing form and/or creative output?
- How does mobile media change the creative writing process?
- Does a multimodal approach relate to the computational affordances of writing on mobile devices?

1.2 Research Context

As the research progressed, it became noticeable that mobile phone technology was advancing exponentially, and practitioners were utilising its capabilities. Equally, the setting of China emerged as ideal in terms of technological and creative opportunity, audience, and the specific affordances of WeChat as a platform. Caroline Campbell³ (*Bridging the Gutter*, 2015) specializes mostly in children's literature (this proved to be a bonus as one of the chapters portrays a childlike innocence, centred upon a father's relationship with his son), and her work on multimodal composition provided a much-needed springboard into more directly comparable practices. Campbell explored the concept of 'multimodal composing' and how media combine to activate 'meaning-making.' She investigated alternative modes, beyond the picture book traditions of image and text, to find means for communicating powerful ideas.

Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran (*Introducing Multimodality*, 2016) detailed the emergence of 'multimodality' in the mid to late 1990s, with initial scholars using the term independently of each other before its more consolidated understanding into the noughties. If a 'means for

³ Caroline Campbell's *Bridging the Gutter* (2015) addresses hybrid storytelling in the digital age.

making meaning' is a 'modality' or a 'mode,' then 'multimodality' is to use multiple means of meaning-making. To analyse multimodality is to investigate the synergies between modes (images with words, speech with gesture, etc.) and recognise how different kinds of meaning-making are combined into an integrated, multimodal whole. Multimodality moves beyond the empirical boundaries of existing disciplines (like semiotics) to account for meaning-making. The introduction of digital technologies, which enable people to combine means of making meaning that were difficult or impossible to disseminate before (for example, moving images), exemplifies the need to recognise the interaction of semiotic resources.

Campbell's excellent work showed the possibilities of merging text with pictures for a modern, digitally focused audience. The practitioner was looking for something similar but more adult and incorporating social media in evermore exploratory ways. Campbell's description of the work as a 'screened book' encapsulated her field, and while useful, felt quite different from the proposed 'smartphone novel.' The analysis of her own practices, however, proved invaluable as she navigated the terrain from print to digital. The practitioner had been in the digital world for a decade or two in some form and did not meet the same problematic levels of adaptation but was more involved in pure trial and error invention—often guided by the emerging smartphone technology itself. However, finding Caroline Campbell's work was vital in establishing confidence in the merging of such multimodal composition and academic discourse regarding the process. Campbell coined the term 'screened book' to encompass not only the analogue and digital reproduction technologies used in print but also the actions of scanning, swiping, and touching as employed by the reader.

Campbell's research highlighted the necessary consideration of ordering and composition in terms of the creative practice as well as the aesthetic of the final delivered artwork. Comic books and graphic novels, although similar in design to the project at hand, were never

considered truly relevant. This was a result of the researcher's lack of exposure to these media and also of wanting to create a unique multimedia experience. Campbell's secondary contribution was presented in her ergonomic consideration of the reader/viewer experience. Although the term 'screened book' does not fully evoke the 'scanning, swiping, and touching' in this practitioner's view, it does certainly 'enhance comprehension.' As the research progressed, it became apparent that the reader experience was going to be a more complex component to evaluate than first envisioned. The final delivery of the artefact is via two main outlets: WeChat Moments and a multimedia pdf. The PDF has a standard scroll-and-see mechanism, whereas the WeChat Moments option involves navigation that impinges hugely on the reading/viewing experience. Later in the research, the work of Kress and Leeuwen (*Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, 2017) added much to the conversation on multimodality.

Gerrard Goggin (*Disability and Haptic Mobile Media*, 2017) charted the development of the cellular mobile phone, from its evolution as a telecommunication tool to its embrace by media industries, driving the delivery of content via modified programmes and materials on more and more advanced mobile handsets. The developing uses of cell phones question and extend our typical understanding of media, redrawing the boundaries between private, intimate communications, and media. Technology plays an indispensable role in driving this transformation, particularly in the smartphone epoch. Andrew Duffey (*Smartphones and the News*, 2021) cited a ten-year study by Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink (2015) that investigated how smartphone audiences engaged with online content, particularly the news. The study identified several key words, as expressed by users to categorise their own activity. These included 'reading' to describe the immersion sought for gaining knowledge or understanding of a topic and 'viewing,' with content running in the background while the

individual is engaged in a simultaneous (more absorbing) task. ‘Listening’ is halfway between the two and can involve simultaneous activities, such as doing housework or driving; it is valued for offering a connection to the world beyond the home or car. By contrast, ‘checking’ is a way of glancing at headlines to achieve a generalised awareness, which can later be followed by reading or listening. The emergence of new apps on smartphones has enabled the ability to frequently check on updates or breaking news, as associated with news ‘snacking’—to keep abreast with what’s happening and not appear ignorant in social situations. With smartphone users able to link, share, ‘like,’ or comment on a news story, the study gathered evidence of the social nature of news. Interviewees gave reasons for why they did not share or ‘like,’ being mindful of how it would appear to others on social media and what others might think of them. News becomes incorporated into self-image, to only be shared when there is a benevolent outcome anticipated—looking well-informed or smart, being the first to share a story, demonstrating kinship with the original poster, etc. Smartphones offer an audience experience in which content becomes engaged with personal values, enabling these values to be exhibited or projected in dialogue with other users.

The use of a device, particularly a smartphone, which allows users to read, view, or ‘consume’ content and also signal this activity, invokes the concept of ‘perceived affordances’ as posited by Donald Norman (*Affordance, Conventions, and Design*, 1999)⁴. J.J. Gibson’s (1977) theory of ‘affordance’—the actionable properties of an object based on its users’ physical capabilities—was modified by Norman when applying it to the field of human-computer interaction. Norman believes designers should incorporate actions that can be perceived by the user and considered possible. In a graphical, screen-based interface, a designer might use

⁴ Donald Norman’s use of ‘affordances’ was first postulated in *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (1988), but the term ‘perceived affordances’ later coined in his summary article *Affordance, Conventions and Design* (1999, *interactions...may + june*, <http://www.jnd.org>)

a virtual button (for example *add to basket*) as visual feedback to signify the affordance. For Norman, these are ‘perceived affordances,’ the knowledge of something actionable as derived from the users’ prior experience of using a similar interface (conforming to the same convention). A multimodal story, like *The Wheel*, told via a mobile device, needs to be navigated and is enabled by the readers’ awareness of the required or likely actions using this device. Cumiskey and Hjorth (*Mobile Media Practice, Presence, and Politics*, 2013) highlighted the goal of digital technology to be seamless, not just between online and physical spaces but also between devices. The mobile experience becomes:

‘...specific to the material and immaterial affordances of mobile media’ (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2013, p.17)

The interruptive aspect of mobile gameplay/usage is a key element to its success, providing punctuation between achievements and new game objectives, signalling times for users to immerse or defer, etc. Devices and interfaces (for playing, viewing, and reading) must afford their user audience the junctures to engage and disengage. WeChat Moments offers this scan, scroll, and delve model. The ubiquitous application (in China, at least) offers astounding levels of practical functionality that are yet to be matched in Western social media.

Multimodal works, such as the ‘screened book,’ might be considered a response to changes in reading as well as advancements in technology (*Mobile Story Making in an Age of Smartphones*, Berry & Schleser, 2014; Dresang, 2008; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2010). Alison Gibbons (*You’ve Never Experienced a Novel Like This: Time and Interaction when Reading TOC*, 2012) states:

‘In the humanities and communication studies, multimodality refers to the multiplicity of semiotic resources within a particular artefact or event.’ (Gibbons, 2012, p.5)

Semiosis is combined and integrated rather than one mode working in isolation from others. The linguistic mode, a traditional and central means of communication, becomes one resource

among others, nestled within a wider frame. Ruth Page (*New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*, 2010) cites Kress and van Leeuwen's (*Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, 2001) argument that a given semiotic mode can appear in different media, such as the capacity for language to be spoken or written. Also, different modes can be realised in the same medium, as demonstrated using images and words in comics or illustrated stories. Multimodal narrative analysis treats media as one element operating within the wider ensemble of semiotic modes used in storytelling, with less concern for media-specific affordances in isolation. The analysis can highlight a single medium (for example, print literature) or may survey narratives from different media (audio-visual and written). Ultimately, the focus remains on the integration of semiotic resources, not the comparison of media alone. As such, the multimodal writer was conceived and confirmed along the journey of this creative practice.

As a media lecturer, the practitioner attended conferences and delivered modules where the death knell of the printed word was sounded on numerous occasions; however, it has not come to pass. There is still, of course, an appreciation and demand for pure-form media. This also partly explains the lasting appeal of the cinema. Nostalgia and habit are powerful forces of the massive wheels of industry. However, globally, and daily, the smartphone has populated the world, aided by 4G, 5G, and Wi-Fi forces. Consequently, the multimodal experience has become the norm. New Media creation and consumption are vast, but the smartphone as an accepted tool for making novels has not yet emerged. Dean Keep⁵ (2014) has gone some way to address this gap in the market. His work on mobile devices contributed hugely to this research and is no doubt at the forefront of a movement on the precipice of a breakout. Unlike the technical and aesthetic conventions of film and photography, Keep believes the small,

⁵ Dean Keep has played a large part in pioneering the creation and digital release of smartphone photography and filmmaking.

portable, and hybrid nature of smartphones promotes more informal and spontaneous media production. The smartphone is ever at hand to capture personal experiences.

Keep's skill is in identifying the essential features of hybridization and spontaneity. As such the smartphone does not fit neatly into Hayles et al.'s proposed media analysis models, whereby texts are appraised monomodally in the field in which they best fit. The very nature of smartphones as ubiquitous 'jack of all trades' devices forces the need for the media they produce to be assessed via different parameters. To some extent, a beautiful photograph will be acknowledged in terms of composition, use of light, the rule of thirds, contrast, hue, etc.; however, being composed on any device, the standards expected are vastly different and so is the sheer quantity. As the late, great Norm McDonald once said on *The Letterman Show*,⁶

‘Years ago every guy had one picture of himself back then . . .
50 years from now, “Hey, you wanna see a hundred thousand
pictures of my great grandfather? Plus, everything he did every
day of his life?”’

Keep (*Decombres*, 2014) makes an excellent point about smartphones not requiring ‘specialized skill.’ This is especially the case with later models and the practitioner’s use of the iPhone 12. Lighting, white balance, focus, and even night shots are all easy to configure. Many features are automatic and only require experience to let the camera phone make momentary adjustments autonomously before commencing shooting. However, the practitioner would disagree with Keep’s assertions in terms of oversimplification of the narrative. There are millions of poor-quality photographs on Instagram and Facebook—poor in terms of framing, composition, lighting, and general aesthetic content. Skill and knowledge are required to recognise a good shot, to establish a scene, and to find art in the mundane or

⁶ Norm MacDonald on *The David Letterman Show*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MZHHBb3rP4>. The late comedian was a confessed gambling addict and, oddly, had a major plot point that was similar to *The Wheel* in his recent pseudo-autobiography.

the colourful. It is certainly easier than carrying a video camera and lighting rig; however, it is not without skill or acquired knowledge. Smartphones simplify traditional film and photographic cameras and also evolve our understanding of how visual media can construct, share, and screen personal narratives.

The production of media on a smartphone can generate fleeting or momentary content that achieves permanence and accessibility through sharing and distribution. Paul Grainge (*Ephemeral Media – Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, 2011) describes such artefacts as ‘ephemeral media,’ encapsulating that which might be discarded after use, especially in the video, now digital, age. While major screen content (films, documentaries, etc.) can be preserved or archived, non-theatrical genres such as adverts, industrial films, training videos, home movies, educational pictures, religious shorts, etc. are marginalised despite their relation to or impact on the everyday. The earliest, most rudimentary, cell phone novels now join this ephemera as artefacts that endure to become objects of interest, enabling further examination of cultural life within cycles of time and circuits of value. The ephemeral can provide a different way of expanding what counts in media culture and of exploring contemporary media specificities. Burgeoning digital culture produces more and more ephemera and provides artefact upon artefact with which to examine its development.

Additionally, Argarwal (*The 3 Vs of Digital – Voice, Video and Vernacular Content*, 2020)⁷ has highlighted studies suggesting the preference of online consumers for watching recommended rather than search-driven content, prompting companies to engineer content accordingly. Vernacular video, in the age of compressed times and shortened attention spans, is the resulting trend for digital content to be increasingly tailored to its intended consumer.

⁷ *The 3 Vs of Digital – Voice, Video and Vernacular Content* – Sajal Agarwal:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/3-vs-digital-voice-video-vernacular-content-sajal-agarwal>

Tom Sherman (*Vernacular Video*, 2008)⁸ has noted vernacular video's other common characteristics, such as the use of canned music. Advertising messages are short and efficient, often sound tracked by pop music for maximised attention/appeal. Recombinant work is increasingly common too, emulating the use of audio samples and repetitive structures in popular music. The use of collage, montage, and other recombinant forms can generate content that errs left of copyright restrictions, playfully skirting the use of tried and tested content. Sherman notes the use of crude animation, negating the time and money required for slick animation and aiming more for a 'cool' factor. Also, the use of slow motion and accelerated image streams breaks the real-time and space edge of straight, unaltered video. Such tailoring, to reach users and pique interest, evokes the marketing maxim to 'know your audience,' especially when smartphone technology enables greater penetration of content into the consciousness of consumers.

If distribution facilitates the permanence of 'ephemeral media,' and with Keep's emphasis on 'construction' and 'sharing' well noted, the ultimate destination to share *The Wheel* is an important consideration. Through prolonged stay in China, a result of family commitments and COVID-19, WeChat social media platform provided the answer and opened up the world of Mobile Moments.

Late in the research process, the practitioner found the work of Craig Batty.⁹ As a screenwriter, his approach was specific in nature, but his end goals and processes meshed well with this research:

'If there is no discernible culture of "smartphone screenwriting" beyond what amounts to little more than digital notetaking, does it follow that the specific and often (by most definitions)

⁸ *Vernacular Video* – Tom Sherman:

https://org.noemalab.eu/sections/ideas/ideas_articles/pdf/sherman_vernacular_video.pdf

⁹ Batty's work on screenwriting transfers well to the world of smartphone novel construction, at least as far as the typed or dictated word is concerned.

collaborative practice of script development is likewise ignoring the possibilities offered by mobile media apps?' (Batty, 2018, p.15)

Batty's (*Digital Development: Using the Smartphone to Enhance Screenwriting Practice in Mobile Story Making in an Age of Smartphones*, 2018) commentary upon 'digital notetaking' and 'ignoring the possibilities offered by mobile media apps' resonated strongly. On the Nokia E63 and even the Samsung S5, there was a dearth of useful writing apps for cell phones. Google Docs was laborious and prone to freezing. It was also inaccessible in China due to censorship constraints. Similarly, the in-phone apps for notetaking were poor in terms of functionality, storage space, and formatting. Batty (2018) highlights the *Scenetweet* app (as developed by Stewart McKie), which encourages writers to develop screenplays in 'snippets, constructing scenes 'as they go' without sitting at a computer. Users can also comment on each other's work, encouraging collaboration and shared story-making practices.

This specialized app did not add any value to this smartphone project, but one could see how it could be useful for screenwriters. The practitioner's needs were for better dictation tools and easily navigable document and imagery software. Ultimately, as was the case with the methodology in Chapter Two, the best path was a piecemeal option. This involved WeChat Dictation in live messages to the practitioner and trusted others, the iPhone's much better notetaking software, voice memos, and eventually editing software. Batty cites the Irish Times journalist Declan Burke's observation (2018) that handheld devices are particularly suited to shorter works of fiction. With a capacity for composition and reception, the duration of works intended to be viewed on devices and the types of content might no longer be standardised. The shorter, even micro, format of content may affect the understanding of screenwriting craft (for example, the three-act or five-act structure) and possibly necessitate the evolution of the craft for its fuller exploitation on handheld devices.

For this end-user, delivery concern was secondary at the outset of the project, but the issue rose in importance. Ultimately, the filmed content of *The Wheel* serves to support, reinforce, and emphasise a textual narrative. It is best described as phone-to-phone in nature. There is no scope for big-screen production or even internet web series adaptations. Of course, some viewers may enjoy the video and animation content on a large screen, and some readers do read novels on computer screens; however, that was not the primary purpose of this study. As the project advanced to iPhone 12, the content was automatically filmed in 4K or high-resolution HD. This meant the quality was able to be broadcast but presented huge problems in transfer and storage. Ultimately the apps chosen—Glitch, Dizzi, and Olli—solved this problem by compressing data as filters were being applied. This afforded a greater avenue of creativity and eventually incorporated digital aspects compatible with WeChat, such as doodles/drawings, photography, and AV clips. The idea originates from an extrapolation of the adage ‘write what you know’ into ‘write *on* what you know.’ In an Instagram world, on the cusp of the Metaverse, fiction could be seen by many to be obsolete. In some of the cell phones in this research, however, there is still an audience for it, and there is still credibility in the art of writing. There is also a great deal of freedom in terms of creation and publishing opportunities. Freedom and technology are interesting bedfellows. As soon as one technology is invented and developed, it can feel like a trap of sorts. Even ‘open world’ games and ‘sandbox’ technology have parameters and limits. When embarking upon the smartphone project, it was natural to pine for the pencil and pad and even the old, trusty laptop. However, the words of Nack (*The Path Tells a Story*, 2009) were reassuring:

‘It is mobile technology that makes people aware that a digital environment opens opportunities to everybody to freely socialize through and with stories relevant for the current spatial, temporal, and social context.’ (Nack, 2009, p.18)

As early as the cell phone novel came to mind, it was followed by the central conceit of the roulette wheel. But these were ideas without substance, suggested by some whim and the burgeoning pressure of technology. Jack Heffron (*The Writer's Idea Book: How to Develop Great Ideas for Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry & Screenplays*, 2012) believes:

‘It’s a question and a quandary that bedevils every writer. And once you’ve got an idea, what then? Ideas without a plan, without a purpose, are no more than pleasant thoughts.’
(Heffron, 2012, p.137)

It was also a period where the practitioner was reading mostly textbooks and not fiction. However, he soon became embroiled in teaching AP English Literature and therefore was once more immersed in the classics. *Ham on Rye* (Charles Bukowski, 1982) and *David Copperfield* have always been in his top ten, and they were suitably inspiring upon a second reading. Stephen King came to mind: ‘If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.’¹⁰

The interactions between reader and device and how they may inform the consumer experience also presented an area of interest. Larissa Hjorth (*Mobile Media in the Asia-Pacific – Gender and the Art of Being Mobile*, 2009) highlighted:

‘With the rise of mobile media we are seeing new forms of labour, creativity and user–producer/author–audience paradigms that reflect emerging forms of post-modernity and new media.’ (Hjorth, 2009, p.32)

Hjorth suggests the developing entwinement of users and devices—of consumers and content. The audience enters and exists in a dialogue with content creators, evolving traditional dynamics into a new interface. The practitioner had been largely preoccupied with the double-

¹⁰ Stephen King is the master of horror, but his book *On Writing* is a subtle and direct masterpiece on the craft of writing itself.

edged swords of creativity and methodology and thus was enthralled to read the work of Norman (1999) and the discussion of ‘affordances’ and the cognitive, physical, and scientific approaches to the very experience of holding phones and swiping across screens. Inspired by this, he conducted an informal experiment to ascertain trusted bibliophiles’ responses to consuming fiction on a smartphone device. This minuscule study-within-a-study will hopefully provide useful commercial information and aid the delivery of better content to an audience further down the line. The notion of the phone as a multimodal portal to creativity also hugely resonated with the practitioner as the protagonist owed a debt to Billy Pilgrim and Kurt Vonnegut.¹¹

The literature review also had to concentrate on the methodology itself. The practitioner was lucky to be exposed to the work of Lyle Skains¹² and her experiences with media creation and reflection. This intuitively felt like an avenue he already knew and felt comfortable with. Practice-led research and the existing literature upon it gave solid foundations and guidance. The acts of observing and analysing working processes are natural and beneficial for such an elaborate and piecemeal project as this. The creative artefacts will consist of a digital PDF of the novel, *The Wheel*, a release in WeChat Moments Mobile format (with instructions), and a screen recording of the ‘reader’s’ experience, for easy access. *The Wheel* draws upon multiple avenues of inspiration. It is a digital faux autobiography in design, fashioned and directed by the modes of a roulette wheel. This, in turn, acts as an embodiment of the I

¹¹ Kurt Vonnegut and Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) are interesting in terms of being at the forefront throughout the construction of the novel. Vonnegut struggled with writer’s block when faced with writing the horrors of Dresden. Eventually, he found a device through aliens, time travel, and the personage of Billy Pilgrim to tell his truth.

¹² Skains provides valuable insight into the work of a multimodal practitioner embarking upon a digital project. Her methodology and attention to detail during self-reflection proved that academic rigour could be pursued and achieved in practice-led research.

Ching,¹³ and to some extent is also a nod to the wheel of dharma.¹⁴ Whilst it is not a travelogue, it does take ‘otherness’ as a central motif and places the protagonist at the mercy of a deterministic reality. Sam is a 36-year-old conduit of universal forces. He is not at a crossroads but rather at the wheel of life. He has the illusion of free will and so does the audience. They will eventually choose his fate from three options: red, black, or green (although green is a surprise option with a low probability that is not even considered by the protagonist). This will be taken as a vote on WeChat and released in an individuated manner as much as possible. *The Wheel* itself acts as a character of sorts and so does the backdrop of China, where most of the action is set. The issue of representation is central throughout the novella and, certainly, through the analysis, which will be addressed in Chapter Five. The multimodal aspects distance the narrative from a single perspective and allow for a more immersive reader/viewer experience. These choices will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. There is a general colour scheme that mirrors the narrative, as well as a blurring device that evokes memory and preserves a level of required reader imagination. The smartphone novel is a brand-new medium, but flash fiction and cell phone novels—especially in China and Japan—rely on certain tropes and storylines, and they are honoured in this project to a certain degree. The digital medium and increasing mobile capabilities meant that this project surpassed many original intentions and provided a greater percentage of audio-visual components than first envisaged in the days of the Nokia E63.

1.3 Method (The Digital Capture Model)

The process began with textual notetaking and the outlining of the central ideas on the phone.

¹³ The *I Ching* is a seminal book in Chinese history. It is still revered in terms of numerology and Feng Shui. *The Wheel* pays homage at certain points with the use of the number 6 and recurring, cyclic themes.

¹⁴ Dharma here is fused intertextually with the Buddhist quotes and also the moral tradition of the Bildungsroman. As a student of Buddhism and semi-resident in China (where religion is, perhaps surprisingly incredibly prominent and important), *The Wheel* represents the time of dharma—which can be read numerous as insight, observance, and life itself—and of sheer, incessant biology.

Then the chosen modalities were aligned with narrative purpose and character development as well as for aesthetic purposes as much as possible. The Nokia E63 did not have much functionality at the outset, and so the progress was laboured. The Samsung S5 provided increased photographic capabilities, but it was the introduction of the Apple iPhone that truly elevated the project. Functionality, ubiquity, and operability ultimately proved as important as creativity throughout this process, and these issues will be discussed within the methodology and in Chapter Three.

Alongside the phones themselves, apps played vital roles in the enlarging of the possible. Equally, myriad new design and editing applications rose to inspire and ignite his evermore fantastical whims. One app called Glitch became particularly infuriating yet useful. Late in the game, this app was supplanted to a degree by ones named Dizzy and Olli (by Tinrocket). As discussed in Chapter Three, simple acts of emailing, transferring from phone to phone, making copious notes ala Judd Apatow, and phone-based word processing in Word, WPS and Google Docs made this project possible.

1.4 Hypotheses

1. A smartphone novel is one that utilises components on a mobile phone that can offer means of expression through text, photography, audio, video, and animation.
2. This project will explore the mechanics and psychology of creating on the move with an ever-improving mobile technology.
3. As the first of its kind, *'The Wheel'* stands at the intersection of transmedia, vernacular video, and ephemeral media.
4. It is the natural successor to the cell phone novel and is best delivered via the platform of WeChat Moments as this affords nine images at a time, with added text, audio, and video.

1.5 Explanation of Terms

A **smartphone novel** is one that utilises components on a mobile phone to offer means of expression through text, photography, audio, video, and animation.

In detailed terms, the practice-led approach followed in this project is a journey into the mechanics and psychology of creating on the move with ever-improving mobile technology. As the first of its kind, it stands at the intersection of transmedia, vernacular video, and ephemeral media. It is also the natural successor to the cell phone novel and is best delivered via the platform of **WeChat Moments**. This affords nine images at a time, with added text. Alternatively, audio or video may be added as entries.

The contemporary works of Berry, Keep, and Campbell et al. became known upon further study, but at the start, it certainly felt like a Brave New World. Alice Bell (*The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction*, 2010) provides a useful definition of the appeal and specificity of **digital fiction**:

‘Fiction written for and read on a computer screen that pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, would lose something of its aesthetic and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium.’” (Bell, 2010, p.32)

Actual smartphone novels did not exist at the outset of this research; however, **cell phone novels** have been around in some form since Yoshi’s *Deep Love*¹⁵ in 2003. Originating in Japan in the mid-late nineties, they told stories within the limited word constraints of a cell phone text message. These stories were often divided into short chapters as per the maximum word count and used minimalist punctuation for storytelling effect. Early writers of this genre were mostly young women, chronicling romance, love triangles, abuse, and unwanted

¹⁵ Yoshi’s **Deep Love** is a difficult and controversial read. Many Japanese cell phone novels suffer from the hentai problem.

pregnancy. Traditional publishing routes were eschewed, and monetary gain seemed to be a secondary concern. Readerships were small and intimate; communication and dissemination occurred via sending directly to the reader via email, text messages, or through subscriptions on dedicated websites—often chapter by chapter. The rest of the world was slow to follow the trend that started in Asia. In Europe, it started circa 2007 with publishers BlackberryMobilmedia. South Africa was hit with a so-called m-novel named *Kontax*,¹⁶ a novel specifically written for mobile phones. North America joined the party with a cell phone novel called *Secondhand Memories* (2013). This was a breakout publication that led to a paperback equivalent. In China, *shǒujīxiǎoshuō* (*cell phone novels*) have a cult following. However, as the population is so large (1.4 billion people), this has made the prospect of cell phone novels commercially viable, especially with the increasing scope of apps such as **WeChat**.¹⁷

The smartphone novel follows the cell phone novel and is a literary form still evolving, both as a tool for composition and distribution. Unlike the cell phone novel, with limited word count and selective audience, the smartphone novel embraces the ‘pocket computer’ capacity to compose texts as short or long as any printed novel. Such composition is possible in virtually any context that affords creative time, including commutes, between domestic duties, etc. As for the impact on the storytelling itself, Josh Rothman (*Novels in a Smartphone Age*, 2012) cited Toby Litt’s recognition of separation as a traditional element in Western literature and how this might conflict with the modern connectivity enabled by smartphone devices when Odysseus can catch an easyJet flight home or send a text to Penelope. In an age saturated with connections via ready devices, with the constant availability of trivia and distraction,

¹⁶ *Kontax* – A hugely successful cell phone novel that impacted the South African digital landscape.

¹⁷ WeChat is a phenomenon in China. It is more than a social media platform; it is a way of life. It is also a way into life; its accessibility features are staggering.

storytelling (and the characters therein) must adapt. Litt believes novels of the future might grapple with the nostalgia for such separation, finding characters who have been forced to disconnect from the communications culture.

Teenagers have been the key audience for the cell phone genre since its inception, partly because they are the doyens of the mobile phone. Paul Levinson notes in *Cell Phone* (2004): ‘Nowadays, a writer can write just about as easily, anywhere, as a reader can read’ (p.20). It is an obvious fact but will be stated here for the record: cell phone novels changed reading habits. Readers could go online using their cell phones, download a novel, and read it at their leisure. When creating something, it is important to consider the audience, but it is equally important to consider narrative voice, authorial integrity of design, and the veracity of character construction. The practitioner decided to honour the audience and conventions of the cell phone genre and also to give weight to naturalism wherever possible. Similarly, the WeChat Moments format meant the characters would have a certain nuanced verisimilitude. Indeed, the photo-video-graphic nature of some of the novels would also present the protagonist as an ‘actor,’ therefore blurring the real world with the story world. Equally, Ensslin and Bell’s (*I Know What It Was. You Know What It Was*, 2011) idea of the ‘you’ here discussing the audience, could equally be replaced with ‘I’ as author/narrator/character become symbiotic in some scenarios.

‘The textual “you” features widely across digital, interactive texts. Interactive Fiction (IF) perhaps constitutes the most obvious narrative form employing the second person throughout. Using present tense and imperatives.’ (Ensslin & Bell, 2011, p.311)

Many of these novels chose short chapter formats consisting of around 100 words. Slang was not often used or even emojis. Some literary conventions were followed, and the haiku was an influence in terms of artistic brevity with added meaning. There was a certain minimalism

that was sought and appreciated by both sides of the creative contract. Early cell phone novels also contained fragments and incomplete dialogue; characters and topics were left hanging, mirroring real-life conversations and situations. Conversely, they also featured hackneyed literary devices in the form of cliffhangers and dramatic dialogue. Poetry was commonplace as well as plot twists.

There was an immediacy to the writing. Consider waiting 4 minutes for a subway train and being able to read a quick chapter of a cell phone novel instead of scrolling through Instagram or Facebook. Writing appeared to replicate the feeling of reading on the go, creating a symbiosis of sorts between creator and audience. Even if interactivity was not an actual option, it somehow seemed a collaborative experience between the readers and writer as the story developed in pseudo-real time. Referring to hypertext fiction, Hayles¹⁸ (*The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext*, 2001) welcomes a print version of the completed narrative but feels it would be inferior to the different, possibly fuller experience of the digital version.

Skains (2013) notes how digital narratologists apply media-specific post-textual analysis to digital fiction, analysing the effects of these digital media. As an author of new media, and ultimately a smartphone novel, the multimodal and multimedia technologies will directly affect the composition process. The textual analysis that results must adapt and consider the medium in context. When discussing ‘modes,’ Jennifer Roswell (*Working with Multimodality: Rethinking Literacy in a Digital Age*, 2013) cites Halliday’s (1978) extension of text analysis to meaning making that exhibited three meta-functions: ideational function, when modes reflect human experience and occurrences in the world; interpersonal function,

²² Hayles (2001) is here primarily concerned with hypertext fiction, but there are many parallels to my own study.

when modes enact personal and social experiences; and textual function, when modes form and shape meanings. The analysis must recognise the ephemeral, even immaterial, qualities that are materialised to generate meaning.

The methodology employed by this practitioner attempts to negate the criticism given by the likes of Flower, Hayes, and Garfinkel¹⁹ (*Writing Research and the Writer*, 1986;1967) in terms of the subjective nature of self-reflection and self-analysis. The digital nature and capturing technologies outlined in the methodology give some objective overtones to the purely opinion-based reflection in other practice-based models. Also, with accepted photographic and video-making conventions, there is a level of quality control/appraisal that may be absent in other reflective models.

This is not to say that a reflective creative practice can truly be objective in any scientific way but only that a focus on digital capture can offer an extra layer of analysis that may offer productive outcomes. Equally, this practitioner sought outside notes to better understand the decision-making process and criteria going forward.

The author's journey is a long and winding road at the best of times. One under self-observation, even more so. In many ways, it felt like a multi-year 'selfie.' Phone in hand, a backup in a pocket—the experimental smartphone novel certainly offered a compelling window into the creative process. Photography, video, and doodling interrupted and enhanced the narrative flow in equal measure. Formerly linear narratives were disrupted or replaced by single images or video. The multimodal operation soon became second nature, and hopefully, a writer morphed into an artist along the way.

¹⁹ Flower, Hayes, and Garfinkel represent seminal studies in practice-led research that have stood the test of time through analogue to digital.

Outline

Digital fiction and creative pursuits of this nature had various frameworks that proved extremely useful for a fledgling practitioner. Methodologies within practice-led research and semiotic analysis provided much-needed direction and reflection points. Chapter Two: *Creative Mobile Media* addresses all elements of methodology and chronicles various modes of learning from seasoned practitioners, finding the process that fits neatly into digital, cyclical, psychological, and motivational concepts. In terms of importance to the creative process and academic worth of this project, Chapter Three: *Multimodal Writing* is vital. This project began as an exercise in thumb-based cell phone novel creation but ultimately delivered a smorgasbord of creative output. The actual phones themselves and the technology they were capable of almost entirely shaped the practitioner's pathways. In the way that communication is often constrained by language, this practitioner was limited by apps, memory, and megapixels. This shift felt organic and symbiotic once the practitioner graduated to an iPhone. Chapter Four: *The Wheel: The Creative Process* explores the true multimodal nature of creating on a mobile phone. The array of creative and final edit options impacted each stage of the methodology and ultimately will decide how successful the project is. It will also address the representation of the central character. The plot and narrative voice become fragmented hugely because of the central conceit, and more importantly for this study, because of the multimodal composition. As a fan and creator of unreliable narrators, colourful characters in general, and non-linear narratives, the practitioner admires most of Hemingway's work, in particular, his words about the possibility of conveying truth.

Chapter Five: *Findings: Mobile Moments* addresses opportunity, inspiration, and censorship. China offered unique perspectives that enriched the project to no end, and they also presented difficulties and sensitivities that must be addressed. They also bled into a general

understanding and discussion of representation writ large. Gender and race appear to be finally making progress in terms of mainstream consideration, particularly through the #metoo and *Black Lives Matter* movements. This research does not attempt to seriously address these important movements, but it does offer insight into how these considerations affected the creative processes of a white male, married to a Chinese female, with the responsibilities of answering to a mixed-race child and an adopted Chinese residency. The research was undertaken in Wales, England, Switzerland, Dubai, Singapore, and China. These locations profoundly impacted the mind of the researcher in myriad ways and ultimately placed limitations upon the finished artefact. It is an extremely sensitive area, ever more so, and often lends itself poorly to self-examination and is more reliant on external verification and judgment. These developments influenced the multimodal aspect of this project, permitting the use of new and different creative modes in telling a story. Technology can also bring both freedom and limitation, with the impacts of financial outlay, storage capacity, etc. impinging upon creativity. This chapter will also discuss the transition from traditional instruments of creativity and expression to modern, digital tools. Also, the shift from ‘write what you know’ to ‘write on what you know’ acknowledges the recognised/unrecognised potentials of smartphone technology and how emotional experience interfaces with technical experience to achieve a satisfying creative output. As the concluding chapter, it also examines the results of the complete project and research ramifications when genuine patterns and habits began to emerge as the process became more dynamic and successful. It highlights how the researcher became more cognizant of useful digital technologies that impacted the creative process, culminating in truly multimodal origins of composition. The digital approach to this study presented an ever-changing (improving) approach to research so far as organisation and efficacy were concerned. Fitting medium to purpose and design were the overriding successes of the project.

Overall, the cell phone novel operates in a decidedly niche field, and the smartphone novel may supersede this area of creativity and study. The research undertaken provides a framework for further exploration in an academic and production capacity. On this, Swarts highlights how mobile devices can distribute both the effort and eventual coordination of actors. As information, locations become moveable and available to others, prompting greater collaboration and achievement. Composing work objects with the character of location also enables distribution to other locations where the object can work.

1.6 Contribution to Knowledge

The key contribution to knowledge lies in the first academic study into the construction of a smartphone novel published on WeChat Moments.

It is also important to discuss the possible commercial and educational importance of such an endeavour. Cell phone novels are big business in Asia, especially in Japan and China. There has also been coverage of the phenomenon in Africa²⁰ and America. Dave Lee (2009) of the BBC reported how unique formats might incentivize teenagers to read. To capture their involvement, companies offer teenagers the chance to win credit for their mobile phones or for the best comment to win airtime. He goes on to cover the format which the practitioner adopted and adapted for his own research:

‘Each chapter is accompanied by polls and debate—and even online incarnations of the characters. When you register on the site you get a profile—like Facebook—you get a wall, you get a status message, and you get four friends immediately.’ (Lee, 2009 [online])

²⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8329537.stm>

Research in the exact field of smartphone novels has largely been smatterings of producers and consumers and not academic thus far. The New Yorker²¹ addressed the phenomenon, and there has been some mainstream awareness from the likes of Paul Levinson.²² Blogs, vlogs, and forums lit up in the early noughties, but these eventually became dark, waiting perhaps for the next innovation and iteration.²³ Up to today, there are hardly any studies on European mobile phone novels, neither from a scientific point of view, be it by the media, the literary or linguistic sciences, nor by economic science or information management. Even European literature on Japanese mobile phone novels is hard to find.

In terms of contributive legacy, the practitioner considered the mobile phone novels thesis by Johanna Mauermann (2009), 'Das Phänomen Handyroman in der zeitgenössischen japanischen Literatur' (*The Phenomenon of Mobile Phone Novels in Contemporary Japanese Literature*). Her findings appear in *Handyromane (Mobile Phone Novels, 2011)* but these are largely anecdotal and lacking in much technical or ergonomic detail to be particularly useful for this research. However, it does point to a smattering of literature emerging in the field.

'The statements are held too general and defining mobile phone novels as a specifically Japanese phenomenon is simply wrong, as it is proven by the existing mobile phone novels from other Asian countries or the German mobile phone novel *Lucy Luder*.' (Mauermann, 2009, p.30)

In 2009, Julia Ricart Brede's *Handybücher: Literatur von und für die Daumen-Generation* (*Mobile Phone Books: Literature by and for the Thumb Generation*) considers Oliver

²¹ A useful early article upon the emergence of cell phone novels can be accessed here: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/12/22/i-love-novels>.

²² Paul Levinson (2004) *Cell Phone*, Palgrave/St. Martin's, New York, pp.15–33

²³ YouTube is far from the academic area of wealth at the best of times; however, the modern reader/viewer and even academic will have to get used to how rich it is becoming in specific content. Podcasts, university, and school courses are not routinely exported to YouTube, and as such, it deserves more credibility and attention. Cell phone novels are discussed at this site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIGTcth-kZ4>.

Bendel's Lucy Luder and 'lonelyboy18.' Of this phenomenon, Mario Andreotti notes how the countless users of mobile phones will likely expand the popularity of mobile phone novels. Mobile literature for modern globetrotters will be a necessity, providing impetus for experimentation and the development of new forms.

The websites for such cell phone novels have largely been discontinued or migrated into web and fan fiction/blogs (see TextNovel and Wattpad), but the imposing global presence of smartphones ensures that something will rise to fill the void. Crucial for the success of a study of mobile phone novels is the examination of distribution. This could be by means of social media, web platforms, and subscriptions. Mobile and online payments are now the norm, and WeChat has far outpaced Apple Pay, Google Pay, or any number of Western competitors. Delivery methods, in terms of instalments or complete books, as well as advertising in multimodal forms will also be notes to consider. There could certainly be a didactic element as youth demographics play heavily into this market. Predictive text has already combated lazy texting to some degree, and it does not take too much imagination to configure Shakespeare or other set texts into mobile formats aimed at book-weary students. Websites such as ThugNotes²⁴ already do a good job of adapting regarding teen audiences. In Japan,²⁵ cell phone novels seem to have positively affected the reading habits of the younger generation already and gone some way to assuage certain stubborn beliefs. For example, Gordon and Alexander²⁶ (*The Education of Story Lovers: Do Computers Undermine Narrative Sensibility?*, 2005) argue:

²⁴ Thug Notes is an extremely effective educational site that translates classic literature into teen-speak and faux-gangland language. It could have been horribly wide of the mark, but the tone is just right, and many of my students have benefitted from it greatly.

²⁵ Japan represents the birth of the cell phone novel and an insightful discussion of its impact can be found here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/20/world/asia/20japan.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁹ <http://stakatsu.com/cell-phone-novels/>

²⁰ <https://www.wired.com/2005/03/cell-phones-put-to-novel-use/>

²⁶ Gordon and Alexander's *Do Computers Undermine Narrative Sensibility?* This work remains of interest even 15 years later as digital narratives have shifted but not changed immensely.

‘...that computers, at least in their common or prevalent uses, constitute an important undermining influence on people’s ability to tell, enjoy listening to, view, and read good stories.’
(Gordon and Alexander, 2005, p.133)

This research aims to dispel that myth, both for the audience and the creator.

Chapter 2: Creative Mobile Media

The methodology used in this practice-led research contains an evaluation of the experiential and technological process, and a multimodal analysis of the completed project. This chapter explores each of these areas of research and outlines the creative process that could be utilized by scholars on a similar academic journey. In essence, the process involves creating a novella on a smartphone that incorporates digital media successfully into an experimental narrative on WeChat Moments, based on a roulette wheel, with age-derived content that mirrors the protagonist's journey. The work of Schlessner and Berry (2014) provided much needed support and encouragement in the brave new world of smartphone creativity. At that point mobile creativity was not seen as a standalone media but one that supports the creation of network media. Deciding upon a useable methodology was pivotal.

"If...a coherent relationship between problem/question, context, method, outcome can be qualified through the criteria of objectivity (replicability), reliability (quality), and validity (credibility, generalisability and transferability), we have to analyse the impact of these two sets of variables and criteria concerning the rigorous use of practice within research."
(Schlessner and Berry 2014, p.10)

The work of Garfinkel (1967) also proved essential in this field and it describes a necessity for immaculate record-keeping – anathema to some creative souls. However, this organization and dedication proved vital, especially in such a piecemeal, multimodal endeavour as this.

"...accomplishing reports that are scientific-for-all-practical-purposes. This involved ""writing"" as a warranting procedure in that a report, by reason of being written, is put into a file. That the investigator 'does' a report is thereby made a matter for public record for the use of only partially identifiable other persons." (Garfinkel 1967, p.16)

Dean Keep's (2009; 2014; 2018) appraisal of the 'digital Wunderkammer' entirely captured the essence and utility of the modern smartphone. At the time of embarkation, the practitioner

had a Nokia E63 that was not capable of much, but having seen iPhones was aware of how transitioning from a mobile phone to a true smartphone would have huge ramifications for the research. Smartphones are reconfiguring relationships with media, enabling users to share mediated traces of the people and places of our everyday habitus. Keep proposes the smartphone to be a ‘digital Wunderkammer’, a portable cabinet in which to store (and make retrievable) captured moments for later use in the production of documentary stories.

Hidekazu Tomita (2016) observed of smartphone technology:

“...virtual information is superimposed onto real space. It means having information from the Internet in one’s daily life and regularly referencing it” (Tomita 2016, p.18)

Such devices have a transformative influence, equipping and connecting users. There is also the transition from a time when media was used to ‘record the past’ to a time when it is used to ‘share the present’. The first mobile phones cut users off from the people around them, enabling only the exclusion of one-to-one calls. Smartphones connect users with friends, family, acquaintances etc to a constantly changing present, a ubiquity that might engender its own trappings.

Cell phone novels emerged during mobile phone technology’s infancy and at present occupy a low-brow, often genre-specific place in the market. Equally, enhanced/multimedia novels have not passed into the mainstream and successful attempts usually appear only in children’s literature. Kindles and iPads are ubiquitous, and smartphones offer the full media package, but thus far they have not been utilized as writing or reading tools. Matt Hamblen (2009) questioned the definition of a ‘smartphone’, reporting:

“All the popular definitions rely on the fundamental understanding that a smartphone brings together a computer with a wireless voice device. Everyone agrees on that. But there are many nuances that separate a smartphone from a standard

wireless phone, which also can incorporate some kind of a computer with wireless voice capability.” (Hamblen 2009, p.124)

The classification of a device as a ‘smartphone’ is not so clear cut, suggesting the ambiguities with which users might still regard such devices, while impacting the freedoms and potentials that users might embrace. Perhaps there is still a difficulty in construction and the labour-intensive methodologies required in compiling multimedia content in a static artefact. Collaborative or networked webpage novels are more prevalent, but they often lack a satisfactory finished product. The rationale behind this project was to create a medium that straddles the novel, social media, and moving pictures. The roulette wheel device and WeChat Moments revealed the protagonist’s journey via multimedia. The resultant exegesis then explored the impact of this method of creativity upon the multimodal writer. Secondly, it explored the changing technology of phone upgrades through time and how they affected the writer and writing process. This project utilized the ubiquitous accessibility and culture of phone technology to create a multi-modal smartphone novel. Keep’s (2014) assertions on the intimacy and potential of smartphones are key here and represent the creative reality and scope of this project. From documentaries to live performances, the possibilities are endless.

The layperson may buy an iPhone and never realize all that it can do. Installed apps, such as Garage Band, largely go unused except to play Jingle Bells at Christmas. Francisco Yuz (2022) observes:

The smartphone can be considered a *metamedium*, as proposed by Márquez (2017), a platform which houses many old and new media. Similarly, Jansson (2013, in Pettegrew and Day 2015: 124) proposed the term *mediatisation* for a transformation brought about by technology that not only influences our communication but also reflects how other social processes become inseparable from smartphone technology (Yuz 2022, p.34)

The oral and video conversations enabled by mobile phones are now antiquated tools of connection in the smartphone era, wherein any number of apps promote interaction. However, when it is the instrument of your research, these apps become extensions of eyes and ears. Keep encapsulates the capturing and transferring potential of the smartphone. This research will also go on to propose that a ‘computer in a pocket’ inspires and stimulates creation and is not merely a means to record the environment. Its sheer force of utility becomes a creative force. At the culmination of this project, the practitioner had four phones that were maxed out in terms of apps and capacity – brim-full of content and the promise of more content. Each day involved gigabytes of data making its way into the cloud and streamed to myself across various email and drop box routes.

Keep’s predominant impact upon this research was his pure pragmatism. His simple statements cut away the flotsam and jetsam of the creative process, the procrastination and deliberation into deliberate action and proactive processes. More than just a communication tool, the mobile, multimodal Wunderkammer is capable of almost anything. Smartphones provide the opportunity to capture, share, and edit mediated traces of everyday life. As observed by Ruth Page (2010), narratives are embodied communicative events, experienced in particular environments.

Although the practitioner’s plot and structure contained an autobiographical structure, it was not considered a glorified literary ‘selfie’ until a reading of Keep’s discussion of Gergen on phones as ultimate documenters of everyday life. In Gergen’s observation, the omnipresence of smartphone imaging devices encourages users to take photos in places, instances, settings, and occasions, thus realising photographic opportunities that would not otherwise be considered.

This practitioner was cognisant of, and had a natural affinity with, the words of Ernest Hemingway, as noted in Plimpton's interview. Having chosen a stream of consciousness style, various attempts to capture and catalogue such musings were made, such as letting the phone record audio while placed in a pocket; letting the video camera record for hours to allow for some degree of neglect, thus talking naturally. Even with texting, it involved over-writing to relax and find the pearls within the oysters:

“Many times during the making of this interview he stressed that the craft of writing should not be tampered with by an excess of scrutiny ‘that though there is one part of writing that is solid and you do it no harm by talking about it, the other is fragile, and if you talk about it, the structure cracks and you have nothing.’” (Plimpton 2019, p.2)

The methodology in this sense needs time to work and needed a fluidity and freedom of design. Trial and error were used in the first few months of the creative process; however, these had been whittled down to a few situational and digital environments already as they had been learned from years of business-orientated dictation and planning. In many ways, the bar was set quite low in terms of literary prowess in the cell phone novels researched, but this could be said to be an unfamiliarity with the genre as sparse, haiku-like language was the accepted norm and there was a power in this form.

‘Practice-led Research’ appeared merely a name for something adopted throughout the practitioner's creative life. However, upon deeper probing, it was far more rigorous and useful than self-reflection and second-guessing. Skains and Mendez proved particularly useful barometers and guides:

“Thus, it is not just writing about oneself, it is about being critical about personal experiences in the development of the research being undertaken, or about experiences of the topic being investigated.” (Skains and Mendez 2013, p.15)

2.1 Practice-led Research

2.1.1 Process

The work began in the middle. Practice-led research is apt terminology for the process undergone in this project and resulting thesis. (Perry 2008, Stewart 2006, Smith & Dean 2009, Sullivan 2009). The project, and the technology itself, led the practitioner on a journey of discovery and best practice. Sullivan terms it well in noting that the “research methods, contexts and outputs then involve a significant focus on creative practice” (Sullivan 2009, 48). Sullivan's second and third key areas proved most applicable and insightful - *conceptual* and *dialectical* notions offered the self-reflexive instinct to find more concrete and common ground. The project had technological and affordance-based considerations that presented challenges and opportunities almost in equal measure. Sullivan's (2009) conceptual framework fit smoothly into the rhythms and learning patterns afforded by increased technological capacity and user-knowhow. Edmonds' (*The Studio as Laboratory: Combining Creative Practice and Digital Technology*, 2005) findings proved particularly true regarding the opinion that creative research of this nature often “...reveal(s) the limitations of existing technologies and open(s) the door to developing new approaches and techniques” (Edmonds, et al. 2005, p.2).

The roulette wheel as a literary device emerged early as an idea that was stored in notes on the phone and the wheel's numbers would represent ages in the protagonist's life. They would function as Vonnegutian, Billy Pilgrim-like time jumps. The practitioner decided against randomizing these jumps that would have offered different starting points/ongoing chapters for every reader. However, the ability to choose alternative endings survived into the final artefact. This was a highly fraught choice. The practitioner always hated ‘choose your own

adventure books' while appreciating the idea of alternate endings, ala *Evil Dead 3*²⁷. This may be due to accepted conventions of the film form or because of the danger of losing the immersion factor of suspending disbelief. Also, from another pop culture perspective – the ending of *Game of Thrones* (arguably the best television ever made) was rendered almost pointless by its atrocious ending. While not comparing this work to that masterpiece, however, audience sensibilities to endings could at least be accommodated to some degree. It also fits well with the karmic pretensions of the whole concept.

2.2 Digital & Cyclic Reflective Analysis

Aptly, for *The Wheel*, the study began in the middle with phone-captured dictated notes:

Proactive and reactive responses to situational experimentation. Capturing creativity – revisiting and editing later, shouting, showers, walks putting oneself in certain situations with a capture device. These became forced inspiration and would somehow become narrative and/or structure. Which were most conducive and for what types of storytelling - A mental speed camera or birdbox? Not choreographed film shoots but more like Curb Your Enthusiasm style loose scenarios. Multiple attempts, some more choreographed than others. Some involving paid actors. Minimal direction, existential and experiential with multiplayer?

²⁷ *Evil Dead 3: Army of Darkness* (1992) Directed by Sam Raimi, the film's original ending was rejected by Universal studios, forcing Raimi to shoot an alternative ending for the initial cinema release. Later, when released to home media, both endings were included, enabling viewers to choose their favourite.

The **Cyclic Model** was a result of this conversation with the practitioner's own self:

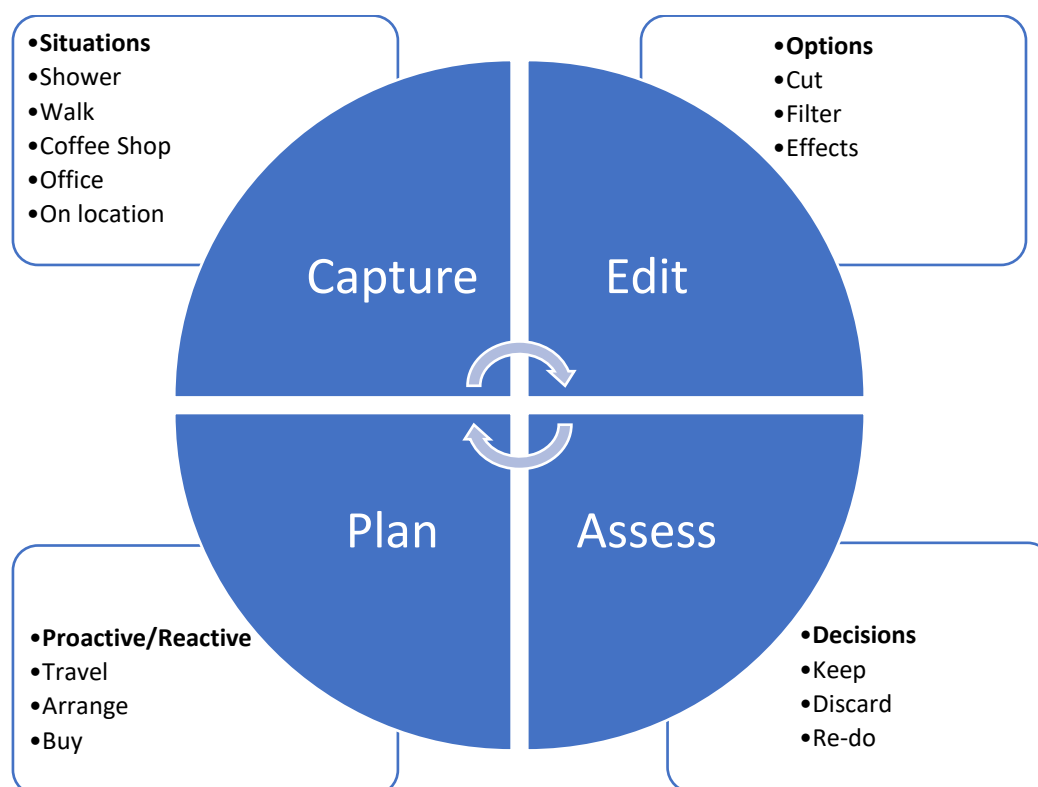


Fig 2.1 Cyclic Model

Below is a rundown of the four components of the model and why they are part of a cycle and not a flow model:

2.2.1 Situations

These set of situations can be planned or spontaneous. The smartphone is always with the practitioner and always charged. It is an extension of consciousness in many ways. Equally, the practitioner is awake, with functional cognition in these situations. Most are flexible.

Shower – this proved to be an extremely creative place, requiring the practitioner to place a phone in the cabinet and set it to record an hour or so before a shower.

Walk – the aimless walk proved an extremely creative stimulus (or lack of). These usually involved audio dictation or brief texting notes.

Coffee Shop – this is where most of the traditional phone typing occurred, usually on iPhone notes or Microsoft Word.

Office – teaching space/office provided the base as a studio for many scenes, such as the podcast/stand-up routine/shower shouting and interview location.

Specific locations - airports, bars, parks, countries in general

2.2.2 Proactive/Reactive

There is a continuum at play here. Most opportunities do not exist in a vacuum, nor are they discreet or consistently continuous. Therefore, there are elements of proactivity and reactivity. Usually, a business trip meant a secondary opportunity for filming. The only completely project focused aspects of travel were local, with the exceptions of Shanghai and Hong Kong. The second was a visa run that had no other purpose so became an ideal filming opportunity. Other travel involved walks, drives, or short bus journeys. For example, frequent trips to Wuxi, Suzhou and Shanghai were necessary. Equally, trips to the countryside in Wales (UK) were used as substitutes for Ireland. In terms of arrangements, most missions were solo and involved landscape photography. The other extreme involved arranging people, places, props, and events. This led to financial outlay and necessitated a stricter approach usually.

Travel – this was possible on foot, e-bike, car, and public transport in most cases. However, only one or two actors could usually be involved in these instances

Arrange – this involved planning in summer holidays for locations that were outside of the practitioner’s employment residences.

Buy – this involved paying for equipment, bars, restaurants, karaoke lounges, acting salaries etc

2.2.3 Options

The cyclical nature of the model comes into play when one considers the possibilities of post-production. The practitioner was armed with a simple, yet effective set of tools. There was also a clear red and black colour motif running through the narrative – with exceptions such as the green McGuffin/alternative.

Cut – the in-phone tool for cutting and cropping was extremely useful and meant filming could be looser (often involving wider establishing shots) in many respects for decisions to be made in post-production.

Filter – the colour scheme allowed actors to semi-portray characters and to remain anonymous.

Effects – these were limited to the colour passes and general overlays.

2.2.4 Decisions

Decision-making is key at every level in creative pursuits. Some are far reaching. For example, the practitioner had a whole chapter that was to be pivotal, entitled Sandstorm. This involved creating a ‘situation comedy’ (animated or live action) based on Sam’s experience in Dubai. The planning had been done and outlines for each episode were texted. Locations and actors had already been arranged. However, self-censorship ruled this an unwise endeavour. It also

was too ambitious, expensive, and time-consuming. Other decisions were small but varied. For example, many characters had specific accents. Irish and Chinese accents were needed and utilised in the main. Visually, the main decision arrived late in terms of the black, red, and monochrome colour scheme – with odd, usually green, exceptions. This then informed the choice of editing apps that would be most useful.

Keep – if a capturing session was deemed useful it was stored on hard drives, laptops, emailed and on at least one phone

Discard – this was a ruthless procedure and because of large files and limited storage space, gigabytes were deleted at regular intervals

Re-do – many shots were fluid and involved sets or performances that were not quite right but warranted further attempts. Skains' observations on Brandt, Flower and Hayes (*Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology*, 2018, p.87) are also extremely useful here as they explore the cognitive, psychological, and continuous mapping that is necessary to maintain a study of this magnitude. It must be flexible but also goal-oriented, Brandt argues for planning and execution activities to be mapped, to sustain the social context that accounts for or displays emerging understanding. Sense-making in writing applies not just to the coherence and appropriateness of text but also the writer's own need to make sense of what they are doing.

This model focused upon collecting these thoughts as photographs, videos, screen captures, weblinks, audio dictation and memos. Garfinkel's note on the level of the expertise of the practitioner is well noted. The more difficult aspects would be in choosing which modes fit each purpose. Also, as the narrative structure was rigid, it was important to keep the action as fluid as possible. However, this was not a matter of multimodal translation, but rather of

complete creation as only the protagonist and a few key players were set in the practitioner's mind. Everything else would develop, triggered by the various stimulatory conditions as set out in the methodology.

Skains' synthesized model of Flower & Hayes and Csikszentmihalyi's²⁸ proved a useful starting point to consider the design of the broader research, that would encapsulate the construction of *The Wheel*, as well as the analysis of the process and finished artefact:

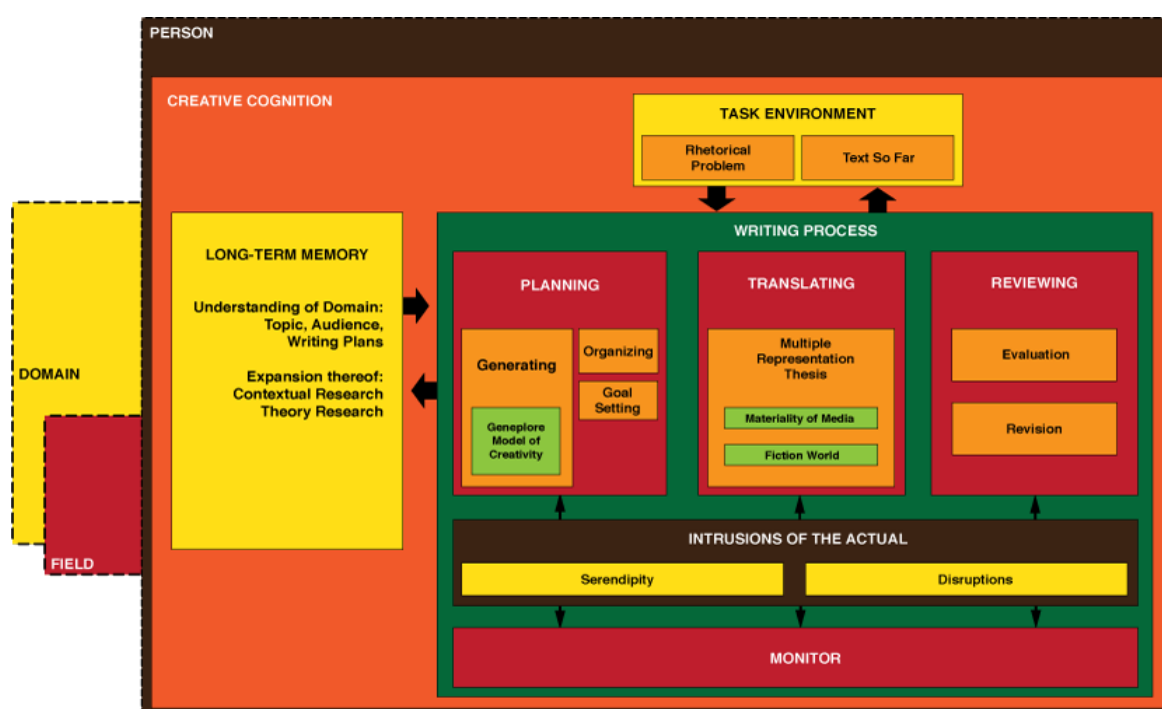


Fig 2.2

As an experienced researcher and practitioner, it was felt that some aspects of the model were cognitive processes already embedded and encoded into existing practices, and so many of these features were discarded, favouring two distinct but far more simplistic models.

²⁸ “the Practitioner Model of Creative Cognition. This model is based upon the strong foundation provided by Flower & Hayes's Cognitive Process Model (1981) but widens it somewhat beyond the internal cognitive processes to incorporate the overall system of the practitioner's creative context using Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model of Creativity(1996), allowing for the examination of external influences upon the writing process.”

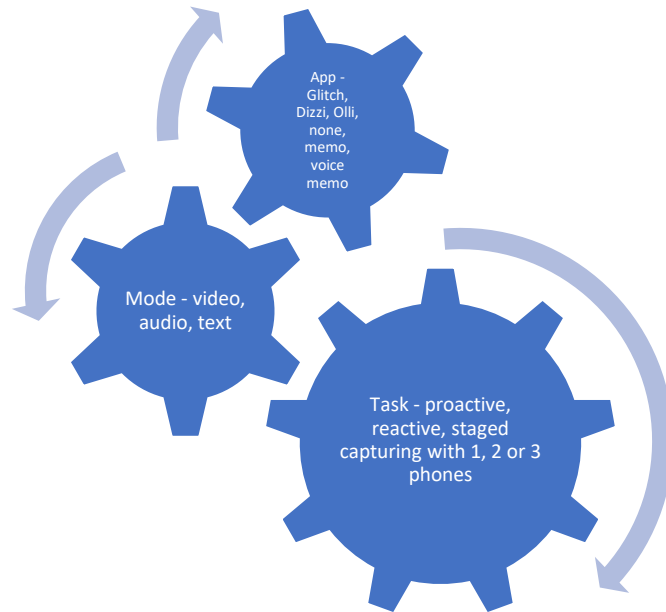


Fig 2.3 Digital Capture Model

2.3 The Digital Capture Model

It was found that two separate models were required instead of a ‘combination model’ to be a truly effective researcher day-to-day. One is more general and easily kept in mind. The other is more useful in the planning and post-textual, reflective phases. This model is fluid, situational and based on opportunity. The practitioner found it best not to proscribe too heavily and left events, scenarios, possibilities, open to the mode/media and objectives of each capturing opportunity. Sometimes this involved extensive planning – actors, sets, props, scripts, and directions. Other times this was completely open and involved a ‘wayfaring’ attitude of walking around with open eyes and a smartphone in a ‘quickdraw’ holster.

The habit, and eventual incorporation into the methodology, of digital capture provided necessary impetus and forward momentum for the project. This was against the researcher’s natural inclinations and psychology and so had to be a new habit formed, made possible in conjunction with Dr Steve Peter’s writings in *The Chimp Paradox*. The latter stages of the

project, with embedded knowledge of phone capability, knowledge of final design and compression awareness via trusted apps, and through a network of actors and stored landscape addresses and permissions, presented pure efficiency from phone to delivery platform. Cell phone novels are notoriously, famously (for an almost unknown medium at least) written under pseudonyms. The researcher wanted to continue this tradition and it also has certain benefits given the confidentiality requirements of the practitioner's primary profession. This is at once profoundly liberating yet limiting.

2.3.1 Practice-Method

This section provides a lineated breakdown of the steps undertaken in this project:

Research

Narrowing the research problem proved a drawn-out affair. The multimodal, rapid movement of technology meant in this body of research it was better to keep the goals fluid in the early stages. In addition to an academic literature review, at this stage it was important to gather creative stimulation, as well as to consider budgeting and actual parameters of the project. Cell phone novels did not really inspire or give direction – they were wholly text based and therefore led to wider investigation of literature, television, and film.

The first wave of texts that initially inspired the practitioner were extremely diverse in terms of mode and content:

Irreversible – the practitioner taught this for many years in 'Shocking Cinema' and was taken with its structural form and complete texture even when divided into chapters that ran backwards chronologically. This chapter approach fit with the WeChat moments delivery intention and proved episodic content could feel complete.

Jeff in Venice – Geoff Dyer was the practitioner's favourite writer for a few years, with work

life mirroring the fictional alter-ego. The idea of placing the familiar in exotic locations or vice versa appealed and appeared useful for the project.

Ham on Rye – Originally, *The Wheel* was going to be a pure example of ‘dirty realism’, A spell in the practitioner’s twenties and thirties connected with Hank Chinaski and everything Charles Bukowski wrote. This also tied in with the semi-autobiographical nature of the WeChat social media platform.

Slaughterhouse-Five - this was specifically for Billy Pilgrim’s penchant for getting ‘unstuck in time’ and fits with the roulette conceit of life chapters that fit neatly into Mobile Moments.

The Dice Man – the practitioner was fascinated by the layers of characterization within this novel and the central premise of treating fate as a bullfighter would. In some respects, this represents the inspiration of red, black, green as the audience choice for endings in WeChat.

Solitary Man – Michael Douglas’ protagonist intrigued in the same manner as Hank Chinaski – was this hyper-masculinity, toxic masculinity, or just masculinity?

Deep Love – This cell phone novel started it all.

When it became obvious what the iPhone was capable of, this enabled a more definite agenda. Segueing from a mostly written cell phone novella into an increasingly visual, and ambitious, smartphone version created a wealth of opportunities that stepped out of the realms of existing research. At this point it was clear the project would encompass filmic, photographic, and visual artistry as well as mobile content creation in the form of micro fiction.

2.3.2 Evaluation & Planning

This enabled the practice-led researcher to generate ideas and set goals and realistic parameters for the creative practice. The multimodal, rapid movement of technology meant in this body of research it was better to keep the goals fluid in the early stages. Practice-led research is often a process of ‘trial and error’, intuition, and a feel for what is right. Experience and learning help expedite this process. In this project, the research questions were manifold to accommodate the scope of the multimodal approach. The practitioner was not writing a book or making a movie; instead creating something betwixt the two that was entirely new. This meant that formulating templates and even drawing storyboards could be a waste of time in the timeframe that ultimately became quite tight. Although both were used at some junctures in the project, they were not essential in most scenarios. For example, many videos were point of view shots and relied upon a changing environment. There was no budget, time, or available actors to produce micro-movies for every situation deemed worthy of visual representation. To answer the following subdivisions of the research, it was necessary to formulate workable stages.

2.3.4 Technical Planning

A capturing device must always be present upon the practitioner. This was easily facilitated as it was common practice to carry a phone. The second condition was met by reflecting upon existing patterns of locations and then eventually ordering and staging them to test and facilitate the creative output (see Appendices).

2.3.5 Conduct Field Research / Practice

The main body of research is led by creative practice itself. The practitioner was stationed in Bangor, Wales for employment at the outset, but frequently travelled to China, aware that

setting would be hugely important. Rightly or wrongly, the practitioner was taken with the notion of the ‘exotic other’ – which will be discussed in Chapter Five – therefore China became the main setting for the novel. Interestingly, despite travelling through many countries in the next few years none fit the characters or plotlines as envisioned and so they were overlooked. Ultimately, only China and Ireland were retained as actual storyworlds.

Five phones (see Appendices) were used to capture, create, and edit the footage in the finished smartphone novel, by means of wayfaring, texting, photographing, and creating on the move. Only footage from the iPhone 5s, iPhone 7 and iPhone 12 made the cut into the final edit.

2.3.6 Reflect and Recreate

As per the method, this was cyclical in nature and grew/adapted with experience. The tripod was only used sparingly, as static shots did not befit the real-time actions of the central character. Even landscape shots could be captured successfully with a handheld phone and adjusted later if necessary. The practitioner has used Steadicams and expensive handheld equipment before, but the quality of the later iPhones meant that this technology was deemed unnecessary. Only for close-up conversational shots and tricky environmental shots was the self-fashioned headcam used. The most notable usage was for Sam’s faux suicide shot on the 19th floor.

Various useful gadgets emerged from curiosity and painful experience. The virtual reality headset was an experiment that was discarded early on for this project but will be discussed for its metaverse implications in the Further Study section of the concluding chapter. The strap at the bottom was used to create a steady camera at waist, chest, and head height. The digital SLR camera was used to gauge the quality of the emerging smartphones. The two stands top left were purchased after multiple heart-breaking failures while attempting to prop

up the phones on windowsills and bookcases and in generally haphazard manners. The tripod was not always available in the correct location and originally improvisation seemed to be the answer. However, many shots were hours long. This was either because of complex filming and working with untrained actors, or more usually cameras were left on for hours for the actors to ‘forget’ about them and therefore act more ‘naturally’ or convincingly. Many hours of great footage were lost until purchasing four of these stands that could be carried around and/or left in office/set environments.

2.3.7 Apps

Apps became increasingly important as the research progressed and vital by the end of the project. Mirroring the cyclic nature of the methodology, as more knowledge was gained, this fed into the planning and staging processes and therefore more useful capturing could occur. iMovie was the first app to be assimilated and utilized. The inbuilt camera settings of the iPhone however did the bulk of the capturing and editing. Voice memos were used to capture standalone audio when the camera was deemed surplus. However, internet research and trial and error resulted in exposure to five or six very important applications later in the project.

Equally, sound effect applications proved too artificial. Car horns for example were poor. This prompted the cataloguing of natural ambient foley from the practitioner’s immediate locale. The opposite end of the spectrum found incredibly useful apps – Glitch, Dizzy and Olli (by Tinrocket). Glitch, Dizzy, and Olli all offered red and black motifs and they became part of the central planning process for the method of successful reconnaissance and capture.

2.3.8 Completion & Delivery Platform

WeChat

The versatility and sheer functionality ultimately led to the decision to showcase the

smartphone novel exactly on the platform where most people in China use their phones – WeChat. WeChat is phenomenally successful in China and offers every possible utility via the comfort of a touch screen. However, there is a dearth of creativity on the platform. Moments, Channels, and articles are predominantly made up of social entries or news articles. There is opportunity for creative avenues to blossom, especially using the Moments features. They offer bandwidth, depth, controllability, and interactivity that appeal greatly to this project.

WeChat Moments will be advised as the primary avenue of reader/viewer consumption, however there is a concern over this. A multimedia PDF is highly likely to be afforded more respect, time, and appreciation by the reader and thusly the art/photography should be given ample musing time. On a social media platform these may be swiped across with the habit of abandon. The other concern is the inaccessibility and somewhat alien nature of the platform. Recent years have meant that WeChat users must be invited to join by existing users, presenting a multitude of problems for Western audiences. Conversely, China's billion-plus users provide a tremendous advantage. Also, the author has control over the release and direction of content on public or even individual levels, however, it is the very definition of Grainge's (2011) ephemeral media and could disappear at any time.

Exegesis

The exegesis considers the background research throughout as inspiration, and at times, as a guide, as well as acknowledging the cyclical nature of the whole process. The processes, strengths and weaknesses of the study will be discussed, and it will be positioned among peer studies in terms of its possible applicability for future practitioners and the potential commerciality.

Chapter 3: Multimodal Writing

Audio Dictated to WeChat via an iPhone 7

Dear reader, you have absolutely no idea how enjoyable it is for me to write this sentence. That is, unless, like me you have been a slave to texting, creating, musing, taking notes, and all-round pitter-pattering upon a tiny keypad for five years. My feelings, lost in, and often defined by, nostalgic media conjure up a scene in an old movie by the name of 'Mr. Baseball' wherein Tom Selleck's baseball veteran is permitted to hit baseballs again after weeks of training with only ping pong balls. Sitting in a café as my cappuccino gets cold because I am so diligent and creative—this is what writers do—my aura of faux elegance, mild snobbery, and bottled-whimsy float effortlessly once more from fingers free from their thumb-shaped overlord. Even the mighty thumb is thankful of the rest and liberated from the clumsy pressures and the authorial screams when again a V is pressed instead of a B. No more phone locks and passwords invalidated by sticky, saucy digits. Interestingly, or maybe excruciatingly not, I chose 'write this sentence.' I did not even waver over whether to use 'type' or not. Writing for me has been typing ever since I learned remedial typing on a battered Olivetti at high school. As discussed in the methodology, the pleasingly divergent creative aspect that resulted, at least in part, from this novel way of writing was the production of neologisms and pseudo-metalepsis components. The fluid nature of this writing and its natural association with texting or talking and more informal internet searching led organically to mistakes, abbreviations, and semi-deliberate compound word guesses. Later, during the project, Siri served as a correction tool and as a hindrance in the first instance but later developed into a complete boon to the whole process. While under construction, the artefact remained undefined in terms of its end-media design. This free-form manipulation allowed the author to at once imagine the enhanced novel or intertwined lexias connected via hypertext. Each chapter was stand-alone in terms of episodic content, and this was obviously abetted by the overarching autobiographical device to allow the reader some contextual framework. Nevertheless, this level of unknowns combined with the small screen and frustratingly unnavigable interface meant a disjointed experience. Ironically, the most enjoyable and ergonomically satisfying experience was during the Nokia E63 phase wherein the Blackberry-style keypad offered my thumbs a playground of expressiveness. My creative mind felt congruent—symbiotic with the applied technology. The Samsung S5 offered storage and

increased multimedia technology, but this non-linear, multimodal door to perception offered more distractions than solutions. Only when I discovered the accuracy and ease of Siri's lady-in-waiting did I truly pick up the pace of narrative authority. As evidenced by my logs and journal entries, this was often a long and painful creative process, but I cannot blame the technology entirely. The imposed timescale on such an academic project necessitates a piecemeal approach in terms of review, assessment, and modification, and therefore, many sporadic interludes were a direct result of these parameters. Indeed, the ubiquitous bulging of my chosen medium in a hundred trouser pockets over five years truly offered the mobile solution to writer's block. It is such a comfortable and reliable medium.

The fact that at least part of this exegesis was constructed in the same manner as the artefact itself goes some way to testify to the usefulness and enjoyability of this medium and technique. From the iPhone 7 onwards, this has proven a perfectly apt mode of text writing, whether on Google Docs, Microsoft Office, or via iPhone notes or WeChat social messaging. As Porter (2003) notes, 'We did a lot of writing—not to express ideas but to form beautiful letters. Later, we advanced to correctly spelt words and then finally to legible prose (p.376).' Having learned a few tricks—such as creating multiple social media accounts in the practitioner's own name so he could send himself messages—it became an ultimately useable tool. The format lends itself to shorter bursts of writing and with less fuss over spelling, grammar, and order. However, writing sessions of over a thousand words were commonplace. At one point, the practitioner developed a daily writing system ala Terry Pratchett whereby the author writes a maximum of 200 words but writes every day. This process proved painful and counterproductive though addressing the age-old writer's block concern. Psychologically, there is a war fought by laziness and fear of failure on one side against egotistical megalomania on the other. The ubiquity of the phone as well as its perceived informality helped address this. Mindfulness and general meditation also helped the process somewhat. Some writers write because they are compelled to write; others write because they are 'compelled' to write. Gordon and Alexander (2005) believe that computers potentially

undermine the narrative sensibility, negatively influencing the ability to tell, listen to, view, and read stories. As computers become more dominant, their influence becomes more central.

This idea of the computer being the enemy of literature does not compute. As some teaching colleagues argued that texting would be the death of literacy, technological progress advanced so rapidly as to make the humble text and that argument obsolete. The fact that so much power and knowledge is at the fingertips of every teenager almost makes the teacher and the textbook obsolete. However, for the moment, humans are still the drivers of these technologies. There is still room for all. Texts are almost free on all phones now, and social media texting is available wherever there is Wi-Fi or 4G. The only dividers and definers now are provided via apps and user skills. First-person narration was the predominant viewpoint, and save for a couple of animations, there was little call for highly edited or polished video footage. As the point of view shots and colour scheme dictated the simplicity of design, the practitioner found reliance on an app named Glitch. This was supported by iMovie at times, also aided by iPhone voice memos and other sound effects software that became prominent in the latter stages of the project on the iPhone 12. Indeed, the quality of the camera on the iPhone proved a hindrance at times as the 4K quality was difficult to transfer and edit across many platforms. Emailing oneself constantly became an essential habit as did WeTransfer.

For all its multimodal ambitions, still, the writing of text was pivotal, and this was divided haphazardly at first between social media texting, dictating to Siri or WeChat and emailing oneself. The results will reveal the process as a laboured affair, and at times, it was far less enjoyable than typing on a computer, but it afforded much more immediacy and scope. Also, there is a deeper consideration. The fact that the novel was finished at all represents an actual success. During this period, the reading and research happened upon the work of Dr. Steve Peters. The eminent and wildly successful psychiatrist and sports psychologist provided a

framework in *The Chimp Paradox* (2012) within which ‘things got done’ in a way hitherto they had not:

‘Successful people are proactive; in other words, they have a plan. They are also responsive, which means that if the plan fails for whatever reason, they respond by regrouping and immediately bring in another plan. They are very resilient and don’t give up. Unsuccessful people tend to be reactive. This means that they base their plans around reacting to problems and are constantly trying to fight back. They see life as a struggle. Chimps tend to be reactive; therefore, they give up easily and take the line of least resistance. Humans tend to be proactive; therefore, they constantly plan.’ (Peters, 2012, p.204)

It may read as ‘self-help’ psychobabble to most but is grounded in respectable neuroscience and mirrored in Buddhist teachings of taming the ‘monkey mind.’ The practitioner was also lucky enough to engage in taught sessions by Don McPherson—another successful sports psychologist—and partook in numerous mindfulness sessions in the same vein. These elements are only touched upon in this creative-practice study, but they proved hugely influential on every level.

3.1

The various alternatives presented in the methodology highlighted that the shouting from the shower technique proffered the most creativity, but represented the most problematic in

terms of re-reading, understanding, and editing. Again, the cyclic model returned the practitioner to the problem at hand in terms of process as well as the final product.

Multimodality is a natural route to take when creating meaning for students or audiences in general. However, they are correct when they assess the various strengths of music and images in terms of encoding. The practitioner's video captures were largely full of popular music in the first iteration; however, copyright is, of course, such a problem that so many scenes had to be filmed again with copyright-free music or silenced and dubbed later if possible. Subsequently and consequently, the practitioner is not entirely happy with the final use of sound in the project. There are definite compromises. Conversely, he is borderline ecstatic/satisfied with most of the visuals that were captured. The red and black motif is not without its limitations, but the overall aesthetic is worth the two-dimensionality, and of course, it helped make certain scenes filmable, where otherwise it may have not been possible. This will be discussed at length further in the chapter. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) highlight the capacity of music to encode action, images, or emotion, thereby enabling meaning making in multimodal works. Similarly, in works designed for mobile platforms, modes might be hierarchically arranged to reinforce or complement each other.

Key wordings of reinforcing, complementing, or ordering are essential here. These were the creative and editing forces at play throughout, especially in the final edit. Selection, combination, and emission are the three toughest decisions for any content creator, and the multimodal artist must consider these with even more precision. Ultimately, the practitioner left hundreds of images, audio, and video on the virtual cutting room floor of smartphone storage. Entire podcasts, Doodly art constructions, songs, speeches, stand-up routines, love scenes, murder scenes—all were cut in the final edit. However, these are certainly not judged

as wastes of time or money as they fulfilled part of the tableaux, smorgasbord, and buffet of creation.

Censorship on a personal and national level was a concern/responsibility in the home stretch. This resulted in swathes of material and story arcs that were abandoned and deleted. Reinforcement was used in most cases as WeChat Moments was considered the ultimate reading/audience platform. This technology lends itself to a symbiosis of text and images. In fact, the default setting is also to provide an image and then a commentary. This can be overridden, and all options are on the table; however, per Norman's 'perceived affordances,' readers are used to this platform, and they respond to the visual feedback that cues their screen-tapping navigation of images and longer text. The shorter text lives alongside images and can be read on home screens or scrolled through effortlessly and speedily. This certainly helps the seasoned cell phone reader.

In terms of the hierarchical order between images, audio, text, and video, this certainly changed and evolved throughout the course of this creative practice. Words were king in the beginning, but they were perhaps occasionally on an equal footing with video, and videos would be luxury, infrequent pockets within the project. Audio maintained a steadfast position at the bottom of the pile. However, images took on ever-increasing importance and utility in terms of 'encoding' action and emotion. The next chapter encapsulates the shift towards art appreciation and an increasing reliance upon the visual medium. These blurred occurrences, mirrored and combined with an iPhone 7 gift, took the project in a far more minimalist, image-based direction. However, even when a video was deposited upon WeChat Moments as part of the plotline, the text equivalent was still offered either as an alternative for the literary purist or as a complement to the visual feast. The reasoning was that a repetition of content would be understood in this format and swiped past with ease. It was a difficult decision, as

was the discarding of Shorthand as the ultimate tool of delivery. Shorthand is a magnificent piece of software, and many articles and magazines have been successfully delivered upon it, but the scrolling mechanism is less than ideal, and there is a lag that pulls the reader out of willing suspension. There is also a 5,000 GBP license fee. The practitioner hopes this wasn't the ultimate decider, but it is truthfully impossible to delineate the decision-making process.

3.2

The practitioner is extremely happy with the final choice, but it is difficult to access outside of China, especially for those readers unfamiliar with social media messaging. Even users of WhatsApp find WeChat difficult to navigate in the beginning. As such, and partly inspired by the work of Norman (1999), outlined in the introductory chapter, the practitioner includes five reviews of the manipulative differences and difficulties in consuming the smartphone novel on the WeChat platform via preexisting reading experiences (found in the concluding Chapter). Of course, this is statistically insignificant in such a short sample group; however, it was deemed worthy of inclusion due to the obscurity of the app from a Western perspective.

‘ . . . photographic texture is not merely a decorative add-on to the story-world visual representation and auditory expression. Rather, it is conceived to enhance proportionally the reader's affect, literacy and perception.’ (Norman, 1999, p.60)

Photography and still life art are emphatically subjective in terms of how they are consumed. Facebook and Instagram are literally whizzed through. Photographs of strangers, strange food, and semi-familiar landscapes offer no interest to most casual observers. Even close friends—per many anecdotal examples—are loath to consider your photographs at even face value. However, some readers/viewers like to pour over art like ravenous culture vultures. As there are plot and protagonist to follow, the chosen images obviously are meant to serve a purpose,

but the habitual swipe and common usage of smartphones would suggest that readers would not linger long on one image. With that in mind, the practitioner composed and edited each image with simplicity in mind. There are no complex structures or hidden artefacts. A glance should be enough for the reader to grasp the idea and move on. However, as a nod to the travel novel is contained within, it is hoped that readers appreciate the beauty of some shots and even some individual characters as this ‘photographic texture’ is essential for the immersion in the story world. Representational issues, such as Mulvey’s²⁹ male gaze and the glorifying/denigrating of exotica and otherness, will hopefully be triggered in some readers/viewers, and therefore, there may be a more visceral reaction to the protagonist that text may have been powerless to evoke. There is titillation in the writing as well as in the more obvious visual imagery; however, there could have been much greater levels of obscenity if sensitivity to the actual construction of such images and the existence within a structured narrative such as this were not considered. The final artefact certainly differs from the ‘dirty realism’ of Bukowski that was first envisioned. At least perceptions may align with the reinforcement of imagery on text or vice versa; however, there are elements when images are intended to subvert or satirize the written content. Of course, this is all speculative and open to the audience to decide. Lefèvre (2011) believes that readers of comic books view the images with prior knowledge and use this context to make sense of visual styles. Skains (2013) highlights the reader’s formal understanding of the tablet screen and actions that will activate the content on that screen. The touch button is a prompt.

The sheer manipulative and functional actions considered by Lefèvre highlight the extended scope of reader response at play. Turning the pages of a paperback are action in itself, as is reading from left to right and top to bottom. However, these are instilled from infancy

²⁹ Laura Mulvey’s seminal piece on the gendered representational bias in the movies, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*

onwards. Also, there is uniformity and consistency of motion that is not at play in terms of reading on smart screens, or tablets in the example. Touching screens, swiping, focusing, lingering, dismissing, returning, etc.—these immersive actions are something else entirely. They represent an evolution of interaction and engagement. This would be profoundly advantageous for author/reader connectivity except for the expeditious rate at which such actions occur in modern social media. This points to the similar need for quality content and pertinent subject matter to truly entice willing readers.

Daydreaming has been replaced by gazing upon shiny glass boxes for hours on end. Thinking, overthinking, and self-reflection each appear the same from a distance and can oft be thought of as pure time wasting. However, the creative practitioner must mull, muse, and analyse the product and the medium of his/her process. Both Garfinkel (1967) and Flower and Hayes (1984) present arguments against immediacy, familiarity, and the elusiveness of memory when undertaking these inward pursuits, while the practitioner maintains that the author is usually best placed to judge the mechanics and merits of his/her own work, provided certain practices can be adhered to. Writer's block, ironically, is usually the result of over-analysis, worry, and fear of failure; therefore, the creative process may be excruciating, but the analysis should be thorough.

Batty (2014) notes that while commenting in the main on mobile screenwriting, the processes that were commonplace in terms of getting an idea from 'script to screen' could now be in danger of being rewritten. As a guerilla filmmaker, the practitioner has often baulked at the stodgy production necessitated by endless reconnaissance, storyboarding, and multiple takes. Of course, these are necessary in many movies and are priced into vast budgets with ample

shooting schedules. However, as a fan of and lecturer on the Dogme³⁰ movement and directors such as Lars von Trier, films such as *Festen* and *The Idiots* provide the preferred cinema vérité. Batty (2014) notes the traditional stages of script to screen might be complicated by the instantaneous nature of smartphone screenwriting, but the emergent cultures of social media, tweets, comments, etc. provide real and immediate feedback for revising stories, character development, plot, and dialogue.

Batty's views on feedback fit well with script-to-screen motives but less so with smartphone novels. Some cell phone novels invite reader participation and offer choose-your-own adventure-style narratives. However, the practitioner chose not to go down that route in preference of a singular vision. It is a lot of work for the author to create so many layers of content for one storyworld; audience votes or pointers may damage the original concept. Equally, the world of Twitter, Reddit, and the like are not for the fainthearted and may destroy many sensitive soul's artistic intentions. Some choice was offered for fans or the 'initiated.' They could choose their own ending based on red or black at the roulette wheel. It was made obvious that Sam would opt for red and so the reader has a direct alignment decision. Do they want Sam to win or lose? Do they like him? Is he a despicable misogynist or an explorer in life? The WeChat delivery format allows direct contact with the author; comments can be turned on or off. Each individual group of fans (500 for each account) can be shown what the author wants to show. There is also a public option which would show all entries into the novel. This also can be tweaked, so most readers will only ever see the ending that they chose. Ultimately, there is the hidden green option, so whether red or black, the reader can opt to get the green 'happy' addendum to their story.

3.3

³⁰ Dogme contained specific rules to produce content with extreme authenticity.

The final delivery of this story involved the painstaking transference of files across phones via email and WeChat. This transference of data mirrored the entire process throughout the project, which relied upon creating and sending files back and forth. Batty notes the value of this and how Hollywood producer, Judd Apatow³¹ followed the same procedures a decade ago at the height of Blackberry popularity. Apatow (2015) adopted the use of sending emails to himself, effectively digitizing the scraps of paper previously used as files that could be stored in relevant folders for later cutting/pasting into other documents such as a film treatment. These scraps of ‘in the moment’ inspiration made it not only to the page but also the screen.

Developments in technology represent the new age where digital platforms, inspiration, collaboration, and feedback can now be captured in useable and adaptable ways (Larson, 2013). These moments of creativity may come during work activities or be inspired directly because of engagement in creative pursuits. The ubiquity of the smartphone in these micro-moments allows ideas to be captured and not lost (Dalglish, 2013). This idea of lost inspiration was one of the major findings and consequences of the practitioner’s own research. Countless times an idea or a piece of the puzzle would be lost in sensory and short-term memory. Ultimately, even bathroom breaks and showers had to have the smartphone handy or recording as the mind maintained its slippery habit of doing its best work while not being captured. This extension of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle³² may be of interest to bored physicists. While conducting research for this project, it became apparent how new this whole area of media technology was. Internet and cell phone novels were the closest comparisons

³¹ Apatow, J. (2007). *Knocked Up: The Shooting Script*. New York: Newmarket Press.

Batty, C. (2014a). *Smartphone Screenwriting: Creativity, Technology, and Screen-Plays-on-the-Go*. In M. Berry & M. Schleser (Eds.), *Mobile Media Making in the Age of Smartphones* (pp.104–114). New York: Palgrave.

³² Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle outlines the difficulty/impossibility of truly observing reality. Quantum mechanics, as well as parallel universes, were a fundamental part of the project until the final year.

to be made, while the hypertext novel seemed to occupy a space that was parallel but not entirely useful to learning.

‘Hypertext fiction, enthusiastically predicted to supersede, in the Darwinian manner, its page-bound predecessor, has not done so. Hypertext has instead turned out to be a mostly different art form, interesting in its own right but with little at all to do with the literary fiction from which it sprang. The Internet.’ (Bell, 1999, p.7)

Ninety per cent of the practitioner’s teaching work output is also produced on a phone, with only scaling requiring a hook-up to a laptop. Even this is sometimes avoided if the phone can be hooked to a television while working from home. Ciccoricco notes that:

‘Digital fiction is fiction written for and read on a computer screen that pursues its verbal, discursive, and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and would lose something of its aesthetic and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium.’ (Ciccoricco, 2012, p.256)

The medium is everything in terms of ergonomics, habit, and functionality. The practitioner has never read fiction on a computer screen, having tried many times when work required him to be on a call, beside a computer all day and night some months, but it was impossible to gather the concentration or to derive any pleasure from looking at that screen. However, the practitioner would happily read from an Amazon Kindle – Fire or Paper White. Conversely, news articles or academic journals could be read on a computer screen without fuss. The advent and acquisition of a true smartphone meant a convergence occurred. A convergence of usage and habit as well as technology. The smartphone was now powerful enough and big enough to fulfil most media consumption requirements. However, production is an entirely different matter. In the way that reading fiction feels right while reclined on a sofa, one hand cupped behind the head, wrestling the paperback with the other hand, or while sat up in bed

trying to fit in one more paragraph before sleep—new media had to find a way to compete with this panoply of pleasurable patterns. Interestingly, there were a few surprising answers that fit the practitioner’s consumption: phone cases with handles and ‘dark’ screens were the most useful.

In terms of production—firstly from the perspective of writing, scribing pens did not fit the bill. They are fun and easy to play with. They are also pretty good in terms of doodle-making and quick notes. However, they are unsuitable when in a frenzied writing fever, when the words, sentences, and paragraphs come flooding out. This is where the keyboard is king for many writers. The typewriter is even more so than the computer keyboard as the sound is hypnotic and self-fulfilling. Some computer keyboards have the rat-a-tat-tat sound of a typewriter and lend themselves well to churning out thousands of words at a time. This exegesis was spilt between an iPhone 12 and an old HP laptop which has survived numerous techno-traumas largely because of the preferred sound and spacing of the keys and because of its funky red colour. It is almost 10 years old. The practitioner has bought two computers since then that are hardly used because of their poor keyboard dynamics and inability to inspire. As previously mentioned, the Nokia E63 was amazing with its thumb-focused QWERTY keyboard. The practitioner would have happily chronicled his whole life on this, but because of its demise and 99% obsolescence, it could only really function as a typewriter, rendering it foolish to carry around with other paraphernalia. As a result of this project, and to a lesser extent, his job, the practitioner always carries two phones so these should be as useful and up to date as possible.

It should be acknowledged that technology is largely a tool and not the purpose itself. This is paraphrasing but that was his point, and the practitioner wholeheartedly agrees. Ong (2003) noted:

‘Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.’ (Ong, 2003, p.69)

Hayles (2001) argues that it is ‘the conjunction of the physical embodiment of techno-texts (whether semi-tangible in digital form or as fully physical as a book) with their embedded verbal signifiers that constructs both pluri-modal meaning and an implicit construct of the user/reader’ (130–1). There is a need for media-specific analysis in ongoing and post-textual analysis. This, however, requires a modicum of realism, for the smartphone is not a video camera, a microphone, or even a digital SLR. There are limitations. Equally, the final artefact is not meant to be consumed on a cinema screen. It is intended as a phone-to-phone, creator-to-consumer experience. There was an intuitive, skills-based, experience-based migration to each media in terms of intention and potential. For example, in the chapter Pop-Pops, animation was always the preferred mode of creation. At various points in the project, this was given a demotion of sorts into purely audio storytelling from father to son. Due to opportunity and a burst of inspiration, the animation option came back to the table. There was a snowball effect from the animation created for Starkraft. The possible became conceivable within available means. This was liberating and motivating for the creative and aspirational aspects of the practitioner’s psychology. This also has implications for quality control and consistency. Some parts of the project undoubtedly had higher production values, but the simpler videos had their place and were justified in terms of frequency and in the creation of desired mood building. The practitioner decided upon a red, black (including monochrome), and green colour scheme for the Chinese part of the narrative. This meant that certain liberties could be taken with the creative process as they would be heavily disguised with blurs, filters, and effects. There were other reasons for this deceit, as will be

outlined in Chapter Five. Skains' (2013) comments also seem to trigger a cyclical appraisal of use-cases, trial and error, and exploration of digital media and devices:

‘... digital media have a significant effect on the outcome of the artefact itself; awareness of these effects, their variations according to hardware and software, and the affordances of these various materials offer the digital writer greater insight and capability to craft his/her texts for the desired meaning.’ (Skains, 2013, p.68)

Convergence and multimodality have been refined to an outstanding degree in the modern smartphone. Operability and user function were at the forefront of creation in an immediate loop. Creation in this sense existed as verb and noun at once as the author moved from idea to artefact in real time. Only the editing process had the remnants of old media. Multimodality is the crux of this research. Skains notes:

‘Digital texts are frequently multimodal, creating meaning through text, image, sound, and movement. While these modes may be used to illustrate one another, as when an image is used to illustrate an article, or merely to provide a pleasingly aesthetic text-scape, most multimodal works create meaning through the interplay of the modes used.’ (Skains, 2013, p.69)

From a lay perspective, the old, quaint adage of, ‘a picture paints a thousand words’ describes the decision-making process of a multimodal operator well. Lemke (1998) expresses it almost as well as a picture might:

‘Meanings in multimedia are not fixed and additive (the word meaning plus the picture meaning), but multiplicative (word meaning modified by an image context, image meaning modified by textual context), making a whole far greater than the simple sum of its parts.’ (Lemke, 1998, p.312)

Skains again addresses the ‘multiplicative quality of multimodal texts,’ but her analysis focuses on how these create a whole. This constitutes part of the current research, but the practitioner is also interested in fragmentation and choice. Not, in a ‘choose your own

adventure' way, per se, but more in a deeper, psychological, philosophical sense. *The Wheel* is about karma and dharma. The choices are to live, to die, or to obey. With relevance to this research, Skains also highlights the cooperative modes of Campbell's work, citing the 'bedsit' sequence where colours and detail coalesce to denote a coherent whole, shaping the narrator's shadowed and fragmentary memory.

Images, videos, and animation within *The Wheel* are at least as important as the text in terms of storytelling, narrative voice, and aesthetic feel. Imagination and reader response will be forever ephemeral, but the range of stimuli facing the reader/viewer positions them in an accept/deny situation in terms of pictorial representation. Using Pop-Pops as an example, the practitioner had a satisfactory pencil drawing of the central 'daddy' character for a couple of years. The animation was a central idea, but this was to be a simple line drawing, perhaps in comic form, that would be more like the doodles of Vonnegut than the work of Walt Disney. The crudity of this animation seemed to fit the innocence of the situation. Indeed, rightly or wrongly, low production values were desirable for the whole project to express the protagonist and creator being in some symbiotic state of incompleteness. This should not be polished; the age-specific device should show the lack of sophistication and need for growth, development, and progress. Equally, there was a desire to maintain the written text in and around the animation. The text delivers the tone, and the animation mirrors the playful innocence of the father and son operating in the world of a three-year-old. The tone, brightness, and innocence of the image matched the text. This was incredibly interesting to the practitioner as a researcher. Without any professed artistic skills, the practitioner still stumbled upon a creation that best captured the idea, vowing to explore the psychology of this phenomenon or statistic. With confidence in the Pop-Pop characters themselves as they are so geometrically simple to draw, the practitioner really could not go

wrong. However, as the animation progressed, there was a constant appraisal to check whether it would deliver the same amount of pathos as hoped emanated from the written text. To digress for a moment—a project such as this is academic but also steeped in pop culture. The greatest media creation of the last decade in the practitioner’s view is *Game of Thrones*. This was magnificent for six seasons and then lost its way for numerous, complicated reasons. One reason is the discrepancy between the writing and the performance/beauty/celebrity of the Mother of Dragons. If the storyline is tracked back then, the final actions of Daenerys are consistent and believable; however, the feel of her final actions seemed so counter-intuitive to a viewer. Obviously, on a much minor scale, the practitioner was concerned that his animation may be too light, and the visual manifestation (and movement) of the characters may take away from the father’s soothing voice and words. Ultimately, the practitioner was happy with the final product and felt that it married well with the text and even enhanced it in some ways. However, the bathos of the car crash that was planned for this chapter felt too strong and jarring to shift from the visual medium to the written medium, so it was moved to a later chapter, changing the whole dynamic of the entire story. This first animation also provoked a major question: whether to include text alongside other media in duplicate. When reading new stories, the practitioner doesn’t mind if a video elucidates an article, even if it contains a lot of repetition, so these options are left for the consumer. This accessibility issue will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

While constructing the overarching narrative of *The Wheel*, the practitioner toyed, even wrestled, with reader-interactivity. The design of discreet chapters allows a certain freedom of order. The iconography of the roulette wheel also lends itself to luck and randomization. From the outset, there was a desire for a random chapter generator, so the reader would be given the novel in any order. However, as the novel developed, it felt important for the first

chapter to be the first chapter. The level of hyper-masculinity in the closing chapters (to be discussed further in Chapter Five) could be very off-putting for some readers, without the pathos created in the first two chapters. Arguably, these readers would be put-off anyway, but it was a controllable action on the practitioner's part, so this was considered for a long while. Equally, the action ideally skips from 35 to other years and back to 35 and 36 to bookend certain narrative forces, and the symmetry of this was attractive to the practitioner as a creator, with a determination to retain control of this. However, the practitioner was adamant that there would be a red or black choice at the end. On WeChat, this could be randomized or asked for. Equally, there was a hidden 0 (zero) green option. In the PDF platform, these are all listed, and the practitioner would be happy for readers to consume all these in the form of alternate endings. Not referring to WeChat itself but citing Johanna Drucker's (2008) examination of navigational devices on graphic devices, Skains highlights the cognitive processes that will make stories coherent, regardless of order or form. Choices of how the digital environment is organised will prompt different user/reader experiences, possibly enabling previously unimagined narrative structures.

Skains was also useful in giving a fascinating nod to the importance of the reader's physical interaction with the text. The materiality of a novel, with paragraph breaks, page turns, etc. can fade through the reader's immersion in the narrative. Similarly, interaction with digital texts enters the reader into the imaginative world to become part of the text and even structure it in some computational communal aspect.

Conclusions

Navigation on graphic devices highlights the cognitive processes that will make stories coherent, regardless of order or form. Choices of how the digital environment is organised

will prompt different user/reader experiences, enabling previously unimagined narrative structures due to the reader's physical interaction with the text. The materiality of a traditional novel, with paragraph breaks, page turns, etc. can fade through the reader's immersion in the narrative; similarly, interaction with digital texts enters the reader into the imaginative world to become part of the text and even structure it in some computational communal aspect.

Chapter 4: The Wheel – The Creative Process

4.1 Situations

Csikszentmihalyi notes “Creativity is about capturing those moments that make life worth living.” (Where Is Creativity? In: *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, 1996, p30) The combination of creativity and capturing is key here. The ubiquity of handheld devices and their speed and ease of use are essential. The much derided ‘selfie’ represents a cultural shift in which life can be scanned and stored when an impulse is triggered. Even digital photography requires a certain amount of button-pushing. Mobile phones opened the door to immediacy and capture on an elevated level. Basic compositional rules and awareness of light have seeped into the public consciousness, increasing the prowess and, indeed, exposure to art and creativity of sorts – and ultimately the modal decisions that are made minute to minute. The interplay between images, text and video is largely taken for granted. Page (2010) argues multimodality is a human, sensory reality, while noting that Kress would strongly highlight the differences here between ‘multimedia and multimodality’. Social media has been pummelled in various channels when it could be argued that the populace is reading and composing more because of it. TikTok is a feast, a smorgasbord, a kaleidoscope of presentation and consumption. If the short videos were in textual, haiku form, then respect would be flowing. However, social media languishes behind high art, and few would consider it a platform for such ambition. The internet’s strength, though, lies in its versatility and breadth.

The interconnectivity of ‘everyday things’ equalizes art and does not necessarily dumb it down. Equally, Norman’s (1999) characterising of cultural conventions as part of the study of affordances act as modes and constraints of sorts to the average users. Juxtapose this with

the fact that the citizens of emerging and developing nations routinely have access to smartphones and can access internet connections. These seemingly disparate facts point to a developing global framework that is realigning, if not resetting. This project does not discuss the global Covid pandemic as the creative artefact exists in a world outside it and, barring a few travel, accessibility, and censorship issues, its content and analysis is largely unaffected. However, the world post-project is vastly different and ready to embrace phone technology as never before. As a custodian of the new metaverse (there have been many attempts to open this gateway), the practitioner feels there will be a blurring of high and low art into useful, accessible, experiential art that exists on a more equal footing. This also takes into consideration the ‘woke’ generation, #metoo, ‘occupy Wall Street’, and a general shift in the mainstream media away from the worship of the elite, the establishment, and old nations and old money. Smartphones are part of this global, democratic shift. The unbanked, unschooled can be on an even footing of sorts with developed countries if the reset involves new paradigms and parameters, new global currencies (Bitcoin), and a removal of many of the trappings of colonial archaism. This political digression is meant to highlight the power of smartphone multimodal functionality in channels even more powerful than media. Technology, in the two embracing arms of the smartphone and the internet, offers a chance for new generations creatively, educationally, and financially.

This chapter will focus upon the kaleidoscope of convergence and capability that was opened by composing upon the multimodal beast that is the iPhone 12. Kress (2017) notes that the multimodal sum is far greater than the modal parts and this truism is embodied in the form of a smartphone. Referencing the reflective analysis, with capturing creativity, and life itself, at its core, this chapter discusses the successes and failures of each chapter of *The Wheel* and whether the multimodal constructive process and final construct provide a viable narrative

whole, for creator and audience.

Caroline Campbell's (2015) discussion of texture runs through this thesis like marbling. She identifies and qualifies the essence of digital authorship through consideration of art, sound, and photographs. Therefore, the understanding of semiotics and haptics is a two-way street for author and audience. 'Specific view on reality' encapsulates one of the major strengths of the multimodal approach; in some ways there should be fewer misunderstandings. A text is, of course, open for interpretation, but equally a creator likes to be appreciated and not misconstrued especially regarding such evocative topics at play here – namely race and gender representation. Written language is a curious construct and only legal tomes truly address the wealth of possible (mis)interpretations that hamper it as a communication tool. The famous 'let him have it'³³ quote exemplifies the power of the spoken/written word and how open it is to abuse. Fine art, photography and film are more obtuse in nature, but they are not judged under the same pressures. Preferred readings will be offered and accepted over time, but they exist to be mused upon. It is unlikely that a religious sect would commune based only on an ancient painting – although it probably has happened.

“Inspired by Rainwater's suggestion regarding authorship and media platforms, I decided to convey the tale of the threatened tuna through the semiotic modes of sequential art, sound and photographic texture. In comic book design, on which this and the seminal screened book are based, sequential art consists of a series of thematically framed and adjoined images that convey the world in which the story events take place. Through the world's design, the reader gains access to a “specific view on reality” that is contingent on a clearly defined “philosophy or visual ontology” (Gardner, J, Herman, D & Lefevre 2011, p.16)

Campbell's use of realistic and 'on-site recorded' sound benefits *Mr Trundle and the Tuna* no

³³ The Derek Bentley hanging case in the 1950s is infamous in its reliance on the misunderstanding of the words. 'Let him have it'. A film released in 1991 shares the name.

end. 4D and 5D cinema experiences offer sensory experiences that go beyond the norm and this dedication to storyworld construction can profoundly affect the reader. *The Wheel* used foley sparingly and much of the action is silent or combined with non-diegetic sound. The discrepancies between nature (animal) scenes and those of human interaction are important, especially when the intention is to let imagination of character remain fluid in the main. However, the character of Hope is a Siren in many ways so her singing voice was paramount to highlight. Equally, given the displaced Irishness that runs through Sam's character so there is an element of weight placed upon some of the WeChat entries from that perspective. Hope is a sensory temptress also limited by second language use, so the mixing of visual and auditory coding is essential for her character's appeal. In *Mr Trundle and the Tuna*, Campbell (2015) observes the additional layers of auditory and textual modes, operating in a similar way to comic book graphic expression and onomatopoeia. These provide the reader with a specific view of the world that articulates characters' inner/external dialogue.

Considering this specificity, it is worth noting the emergence of 'ambient literature' in 2016, as highlighted by Kerry Maxwell (2018). Such literature can be read on a mobile electronic device, and uses data about weather, location, time etc. to personalise the reading experience. Accordingly, a story's action can unfold in the very space where a reader is situated (be it a living room, a train carriage, or a café etc.) The story responds to the reader's presence, potentially drawing attention to the unseen or distracting attention from the familiar, thus reframing the everyday world. Without access to this technology (context recognition software and Application Programming Interfaces) the practitioner, nevertheless, recognised the impact of environments and cultural framing on both the creation and telling of the story.

Relating to multimodality, and the utilisation of various modes, are 'cross media' and 'transmedia'. Drew Davidson (2010) describes 'cross-media' as the distribution of content

(for example, music, text, pictures, video etc.) across different media, as with the marketing of a product using a combination of television, magazines, and online promotion. In the current media landscape, consumers control the use of media, deciding when and where they wish to access specific content. Cross-media also implies the cooperation and coordination of various companies or specialists in achieving cross-media output, to target the platforms used by consumers. Kevin Moloney (2014) describes Transmedia as the extension of storytelling across multiple media forms, playing to the strengths of those forms. Unlike cross-media, where the same story is told via different channels, transmedia utilises video, text, interactive game sections etc. to tell separate chapters or different stories within a larger ‘story world’ (this opens up an avenue for WeChat Moments and increased connectivity, wherein overarching stories are integrated and threaded together across various accounts). Content is crafted for and directed to specific consumers, to build efficient audiences. If done well, the targeted publics will coalesce into a more effective mass audience. Transmedia is a merging of media forms, offering new digital narratives in a way that has been inaccessible to classic forms.

In terms of the writer’s journey and the shift to increasing multimodal expression, Gibbons cites Hallet with the crux of the matter: “The first conceptual shift features the creative process itself – what Hallet (2009: 149) calls the shift from ‘writing to designing’”. This paradigm shift to that of designer, instead of, or as well as, author makes a wealth of difference. In terms of psychology and physiology - the firing of neurons, connecting of synapses, and developing and exercising muscle memory are habit-forming. In the early stages of the project, the practitioner was reticent to take out his phone, but it had to be overcome. This kick-started the move to Samsung S5 then onto iPhone 5s. The world of designing became much larger. No Nokia or Samsung images survived the final cut of the project as they were much inferior

in quality to what Apple could deliver. This is a large drawback and typical of digital obsolescence. Pride in, and love of, some of the creative pieces, had to be assuaged to present uniformity and a product in keeping with 2021 levels of technology. As the project involved so much global travel, it was impossible to recreate the shots in Dubai, Italy and Switzerland and no substitutions were deemed plausible.

4.2 Proactive / Reactive

Film has not replaced literature, but, perhaps to the general population at least, it is a much more enjoyable/accessible medium, whilst retaining capacity for high art. Verisimilitude is a beautiful word and a curious concept. Replications and facsimiles abound in nature and yet authenticity is prized. Film and social media look like life. Writing on a page is pure abstraction. The link between language and reality has always fascinated the practitioner and this project presented a chance to show where the practitioner's loyalties and his imagination lie.

Texting worlds and textual storyworlds have become naturally closer as technology has progressed. Soon after texting became commonplace, the practitioner became a master, genuinely preferring it to face to face interaction. As a result of this project, he thinks and operates visually and textually. To his friends' consternation the practitioner will often send an image and/or video to illustrate a point. The time before smartphones meant this would have been a multimedia text that cost money and did not come with a standard package. However, with WhatsApp and Messenger in the rest of the world, and with WeChat in China – these visual delights are now free and full of utility. The conventions of digital perspectives such as through photography, social media, or film impact the digital writer to adapt into various scenarios.

Not every writing event was situational or dependent upon technology at hand, but the more the project developed, the truer this became. The concluding part of this chapter will address the trials and tribulations brought about by composing upon a minicomputer in one's pocket. Editing and organization were the main authorial enemies, but they were often outweighed by the sheer capabilities afforded, especially as better apps started to emerge.

4.3 Pre-existing writing patterns

Straddling the great art forms of literature and film is difficult. As such, it is important to consider the mechanics of operating in differing modes: writing poetry, short stories, and novellas, as well as composing short films, sketches, and educational/demonstration videos. Smartphones and the WeChat Moments platform join these creative pursuits together. At the start of the project, a picture book of sorts was envisioned, containing a mixture of magic and dirty realism. The idea of a fake social media account came quickly afterwards, along with a narrative and concept based on casinos and the Martingale technique. The Samsung S5 replaced the Nokia E63 and was the first real computer-in-a-pocket that ignited this project. Any prior reluctance to take photographs and videos was washed away. The shift of affordances was vast – however - the practitioner was still stuck in a valley of habit/culture and Norman's assessment of perceived affordances had to be expanded gradually, assisted by the emergence of Apps.

The first iterations were of a composition without an agenda, except to be existential and experiential. It is mimetic in terms of reproductive process but does not aim to slavishly follow filmic techniques or conventions to create filmic reality. The conventions of editing are largely ignored, besides the animation and faux-suicide scene, and there are only live one-camera shots in the main. All of these were captured with the phones at hand.

Infrequently, a tripod was used but usually this was to aid a Steadicam effect and was disguised later. The ‘selfie’ conceit was not used to inspire point of view shots exclusively (although this was utilized) and a headcam was fashioned at one point (see Appendices).

4.4 Multimodal Monsters: Playing with characters

Before the digital world, the practitioner used to love to create characters almost entirely through dialogue but so hated the ‘he said, she said’ component of this that he often wrote dialogue in script form. This lent itself well to screenplays and film, and indeed to elements of social media facsimiles that were used in *The Wheel*. The practitioner’s way of working and thinking about working, often involves the dialectic in his head that borders upon performance. Most of the audio in the animations and videos involved talking to oneself in the guise of various characters and aided by voice and speed manipulation software. Keep’s work of 2014, *Decombres*, and his discussion of the process became useful as the simplistic data collection, and the moveable modes of capturing video, photographs, and audio served to not only inform the narrative, but also the characters themselves. Photographs became behaviour and video became action. The flow of creativity became something fresh and new.

4.5 Narrative holes and wholes

The various modes of creative process in this research offer differing levels of narrative perspective in *The Wheel*. The multi-level nature of the composition process is mirrored in its appreciation, understanding and interpretation. Text is offered alongside images or videos in many instances. This is a deliberate attempt to offer choice as well as clarity, however, it could be seen as at odds with Van Leeuwen’s central argument (2017) and hinders the aesthetic of the finished artefact. It is, perhaps, in keeping with existing modes and

particularly BBC news stories on the Web. Almost every article will come with a range of images in modern news media. These norms encourage comfort and familiarity. Conversely, they can open reader-response to layered interpretations. An image may not fit the textual description or audience imagination and therefore can enhance or diminish the consumptive experience.

The multimodal process was not uniform. Each creative decision involved going back to the methodology, allowing individual chapters to utilise differing knowledge, skillsets and learning states. Although, they were created concurrently, it became obvious where animation was sought and where text was the clear choice. Animation is such a slow, laborious process that there was a feeling of being trapped in this mode, on occasion and it felt far removed from the rest of the proto-real ambient action. These notions shifted over time and in the face of opportunity, and the situational aspect of each plot-point always had a role to play. The nature of the beast also meant that each story was live and alive up to the final year of construction, largely because of the quest to improve and update in respect of technology or cultural sensitivity. There was definitely a mindset of over-filming/capturing. Photographs and video appeared to be the mode of choice in most situations because of immediacy and verisimilitude. Wayfaring was used in this sense, with walks and e-bike trips around the city becoming the norm. In Keep's works of 2014 and 2016, his layering of modes was pivotal to his storytelling. Video captures and daily interactions became bricks of a future bricolage, and the practitioner found the same reality. In one sense, it became akin to predictive text and useful videos lay only a tab away.

Cell phone novels have a reputation that is well deserved. They run to a formula; they are loaded with stereotypes - male and female - and the outcome is never in doubt. They are also strictly monomodal. However, their popularity suggests that an audience exists for such

saccharine text-only literature. It is too simplistic to dismiss the novels as badly written because the writing follows a tradition of expectation. This tradition focused upon copying successful storylines to produce guaranteed sellers. The basic premise being ‘sweet girl meets rugged boy’ with a host of predictable complications in between. The books, however, have evolved with the times as they have become far raunchier, and less imbued with Christian morality, having broken free of the non-representation of premarital sex. *Deep Love* is often viewed as the prototype of the Cell phone novel.

Everything about the story in *Deep Love* begs to be resisted: the central romance is flawed in every respect. Marriage and sex are not bound in religious dogma, but they are combined anyway as a matter of business, therefore keeping prudish readers’ gasps at bay. The characters, the novel, and the genre, are largely patronising to women. Laura Mulvey’s *Male Gaze* (1975) comes to mind, but that is the point. It is the view from one male in his real (fake) life. That is the most difficult aspect of the novel to swallow. If it was honest about its existence in the realm of old-fashioned, passive fantasy then it would not be as offensive. As it is, it attempts to portray positive female role models, but fails miserably. As such the reader cannot take any of this seriously. The descriptive writing is quite adequate, but the themes are so stereotypical and the characters so clichéd that resistance is the only option. The only possible satisfaction a reader could draw would be amusement; or it could possibly substitute for a magazine in the sense of a mindless distraction.

In the classical sense, cell phone novels do not constitute ‘literature’. They are written and read with the lowest of expectations. Every motive is superficial, every emotion is forced, and sexual tension is manufactured in the most unlikely circumstances. It has been said that cell phone novels address social issues and act as an escape from the real world, but good novels do this and more. Sex and relationship fiction does not have to be so limited. Admittedly,

there is a readership that is ready and willing to embrace this kind of romantic literature and the only hope is that they do not take it too seriously. Social media and platforms such as WeChat Moments are ripe to exploit this avenue.

4.6 Deconstructing Sam

Contemporary Irish fiction holds a privileged position within world literature, and it would be a stretch to even contemplate that Sam and *The Wheel* could be part of this fine tradition. This privilege emanates from a strong literary heritage built largely upon the observation and representation of conflict and collision apparent in this extremely complex country. Its disturbing subject matter, nevertheless, also found its way into the media of film and proved very successful. This cross-media pollination will be briefly discussed concerning charges of anti-intellectualism and the historical shifting trends in Irish literature from a Gaelic Bardic tradition through poetry, drama, the novel and film. The primary issues of the essay, however, will be concerned with more intrinsic contrasts and collisions in the novels, analysed through the (symbolically weighted) representations of identities in crisis, masculinity.

Central to the novel is a Campbellian quest for identity. Sam is only ever the sum of his parts and therefore his continuing isolation begins a process of self-doubt and destructive behaviour. As an interface and a narrator, and as the personage of the WeChat profile that the story exists on, his zero-modal to multimodal transition is the embodiment of the project. His personal crisis mirrors the collision between traditional cultural values and modern society. The modern economic climate impinges upon his manhood. He is denied the staple ingredients of Irish masculinity by the absence of stability and family, the limitation of the 'craic' or the 'gas' with the boys, and with the lack of self-respect or respect.

His unworthiness and depression spiral in tandem, and he is left (self)absorbed in a world of

created loneliness. Set in an unnamed but recent time the fragility of his identity is explored along with its reliance on habit and customs. He is denied the traditional intellectual high ground that many Irish literary patriarchs attempt to establish. He readily gives up his home as he feels undeserving of his position and does not want to be associated with being as static as the house itself:

The pub is the age-old answer: full of kindred refugees filling themselves with liquid life-solutions. Here he can temporarily enhance his self-esteem, have his opinion heard, and render himself impervious to the pressures of reality. Alcohol should not be downplayed as a major signifier of identity in this smartphone novel. Ireland, as constructed through literature, is steeped in fantasy, and stewed in alcohol. Regarding Sam's lasciviousness, it is interesting to note the confidence-building juxtaposed with the diminishing responsibility that alcohol offers his fluctuating self.

Sam has strong feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and hostility. He could rebuild his self by identifying with the Bukowskian 'Crazy Psychotic Ice Hockey Guy' and thinking, 'I am exactly like he is' or 'I am the exact opposite'. It is the philosophy of the narcissist, the individual. He thus *becomes* a child, fantasising about Hope, then all women, in an almost regressive return to virgin naivety. His attempts at conquests are part of an elaborate fantasy. The reader sees this not as a triumph of human spirit, but the victory of drunken stupidity. The collision between alcohol and ambition is not a new one in Irish literature. He has no depth, no tradition, no routine, and ultimately, no family to act as an anchor, or to be more organic, a root, to any meaningful existence. As a child/adolescent he is a particularly poignant device utilised to demonstrate the vacuum that can exist inside the many institutionalised traditional cultural frameworks in society. His family are useless and abandon him by their death, resulting in the lack of any value system from which Sam may

learn. Sam is as much forming as formed. His decisions follow a logical process; his thoughts are cognisant of his desired place in society, however seeking of immediate gratification, twisted and psychopathic. His actions spin reactively from one to the next, assimilated only into his logic of territorialism and a need for stasis, or even, nostalgia. His only appeal to the reader may lie in his segmented personality across the ages. His sadness is only present in the subtext at most junctures. He has no coherent, binding self; thus, the reader can be appalled by him on one page, then sympathetic on the next. His constant self-commentary is cartoon-like. In China, he can claim to be a superhero on a planet where his powers are not quite in tune with local etiquette.

On the other hand, his flashes of innocence are also most apparent among his peers as viewed through his relationship with pseudo-friends. The Mobile Moments could essentially be interpreted as one long tantrum that cannot be curbed because of the lack of any credible authority.

True to conventions of Irish society and consequently Irish fiction it is the male identity that requires defining, fixing, and affirming. It is the male voice that echoes the state of the nation and therefore it must be found and heard. Typically, also, is the appearance of the said male voice as underdog: as impoverished, as misunderstood. Hence another collision: modernity and traditional culture collide because once again the women are peripheral. Hope and Scarlet in *The Wheel* are positive characters seeking education and betterment, but this is depicted as incidental. This is not a weakness in construction: the practitioner's view is very existential – if an author wishes to portray a male-centred perspective then so be it. Too much is made of equality of representation and political correctness in literature. Narrative voice is always subject to a certain perspective and cannot be truly allegorical, microcosmic, or analogous to 'reality'. However, in the light of collisions between tradition and modernity, it is noticeable

how important an influence tradition remains, consequently meaning that women are still under-represented in general. It has echoes of O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*³⁴ in its ridiculous levels of bravado. The human condition of existence as a compromise between antagonism and companionship is depicted throughout. Thus, life is viewed more as a series of interactions – moments - than through group dynamics concerned with clashes of tradition and modernity. Every individual has his/her own compromise between these notions and then compromises are made again as a group. Ireland, however, is the most intriguing of locations as it clings more than most to its proud traditions. It is an effervescent land with a tempestuous history and so is a fantastic landscape from which to base a novel, but it is hardly utilised. It is not an Irish story, but an ‘Irishman in China’ story. This longing for freedom or release is echoed throughout the mobile entries and runs deeper than a wishing to escape the conflict of modern society and traditional cultural values; it is a wish to escape oneself; it is a desire to escape the loneliness of the human condition.

Objectivity in art is a philosophically impossible concept. This is overtly recognisable throughout video, wherein every editing decision, camera angle, and choice of mise en scène betrays the subjectivity of the creative process. However, the ambient nature of data collection and performance leads to an art form that exists within and without these parameters. It could be said to be meta-fictional, meta-creative and meta-modal in its duplicity of derivation. The reliance upon close-ups of characters is evident in *The Wheel*, largely with the intention of creating empathy and aligning the audience with the characters. The appearance of reality/objectivity is enhanced by using actual locations. Lighting, camerawork, music and editing are mainly basic, producing a “natural” effect. Here the research draws upon ambient literature and vernacular video in that the geographical positioning and music had to

³⁴ Sean O’Casey, ‘*Juno and the Paycock*’, *Seven Plays by Sean O’Casey*, ed, Ayling (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 45-101.

correspond to expectation and cultural norms.

The pursuit of “naturalism” is problematic in terms of its artistic limitations and its appearance of impartiality. This, of course, is beneficial and detrimental simultaneously: a mimetic approach to drama produces the effect of “realistic” characters and situations, yet if the audience is offered a “slice of life” then the audience are placed in a passive position and an apathetic response is the obvious outcome. This is challenged somewhat with the choice of endings on offer. However, within and around this framework of “realism”, exist strong elements of expressionism, surrealism, and a clear ideological perspective. The mise en scène places Sam’s point of view or personage centrally almost throughout.

To consider the existence of a preferred reading one must first discuss authorship. Sam contains an ideology and intention but there is a process of greater complexity. That said, the actors and multimodal features at large belong to the same creature that the author wished to unleash. The dominant message is one of alignment with the character and of life’s journey that may or may not contain free will³⁵. The loss of his family is not fully addressed, and masculine silence and psychological decline instead fill the void.

The story could be read as man’s inability to live without God, or without a good woman. Sunday school is mentioned, and quotations refer to God or some higher being, but religion is largely absent. The bar scenes are numerous and pivotal to the construction of Sam’s character and place in the world. They are not Dante’s *Inferno*, but they are a purgatory of sort, a limbo at least. This perspective brings the idea of death as new life, initiating the meta-fictive elements within it and essentially highlighting its own commentary on the creative

³⁵ Sam Harris is a contemporary philosopher who rose to prominence via his speeches on Free Will and his convincing argument that it is an illusion.

process of living as well as creating – as existing in the present past, present present, and present future.³⁶ The smartphone novel as a collection of moments in time, interpreted this way, also acts as an advocacy of the importance of postmodernist freedom compared with traditional hermeneutics. Through a process of ‘anagrammatology’, Sam walks through modes of anamnesis, anagogy, anamorphosis and (self) analysis. The novel could be said to be an actual recreation of the past, now present fully. There is a fluidity and a sense of becoming. More interesting than his fluidity, however, seems to be his creation: who made Sam and why is he locked in a perpetual Limbo of weeping, watching himself and trying to escape via sex and alcohol. The human condition is to awake around age 3 or 4 and then live off fragmented, unreliable memory. The finality of death is taken away from Sam, by Sam: his fluidity is ironic and instead he is (meta) static - imprisoned in *The Wheel*. Multimedia here as WeChat Moments, forever recorded, but strangely ephemeral, also represents a true glimpse of immortality.

The interstices of Sam’s history purport to be more interesting than its alleged moments (spots in time). The ‘ball’ and ‘wheel’ link a sexual anamorphosis that produces an image of male pregnancy. This post-structuralist view takes the narrative to a new level yet fits in with a creation discourse, especially one of self-creation which later echoes in themes of biology and natural order. Sam gives birth to himself, also linking the life and death metaphor, but interprets this as being self-creating philosophically and developmentally. The fragmented montage style, afforded by the WeChat platform, however, hides much of this depth as the reader swipes from photograph to text to video.

The Wheel explores issues of love and sex, but basically runs the linear course of a fairy

³⁶ Thomas Docherty, ‘Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney’, Easthope & Thompson, ed, *Contemporary Poetry meets Modern Theory* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991)

tale/Mills and Boon/cell phone novel romantic storyline. Sam appears to be searching for a wife or mother or father and must have his heart/ego/reality broken by the Siren - Hope. At various points in the creation, Hope was named Faith or Star, but the Promethean/Pandoran link, alongside the character existing as a cross red herring/McGuffin of sorts won the day. Sam is a victim of romantic stereotypes and self-help therapies as well as real absence and abandonment and is in a constant state of emotional crisis. 'Falling in love' is a clichéd romantic mystery and the characters never spend enough time together to realistically get to know each other but the invisible hands of time and the interstices where the ball did not bounce account for this on one level. Also, the cultural realities of having a baby give the narrative a push towards realism.

Scarlet is constructed in opposition to Hope therefore presenting the 'willing wife', expecting a baby. This can be seen either as a return to stereotypes or as realistic character progression. However, Hope occupies a more 'masculine' role as the fraudster. Female objectification is far more numerous than male, with KTV and bar hostesses highly sexualised. Feminism is more concerned with freedom of expression than scoring points: Hope and Scarlet both get what they want. They both succeed in representing women as autonomous individuals with choice and power evident within their own lives. Within this representation, however, the details betray a propensity to hark back to old stereotypes and attitudes of dependence and subservience, femme fatales and dutiful mothers. If they make stereotypical choices then this represents that some stereotypes are still desirable: such as wanting to be a part of a loving, monogamous relationship.

The layering of modality as well as narratives and the oppositions created offer the reader insights through the analysis of the fables and the importance of semiotics. The blurring of the literal with the literary, and the degree of irony within *The Wheel*, affords the reader ample

scope for interpretation and an overwhelming sense that topics are being explored rather than opinion being stated. Incongruity between character intention and action echoes the human conditions of confusion, indecisiveness and mixed ideologies that often conflict with a definite viewpoint.

The most significant aspects of the tale concerning predestination, aside from the conclusion, are the tales within the tale. Bilson Mistang and the Blacksmith, meet horrible fates for reaching out, for stepping off their own wheels. The Pop-Pops were doomed but they did not even get to fulfil that destiny and were instead cut-off, forever unfinished, forever only a broken memory.

The multimodal delivery in this sense lost the dynamic and power of possibility that written text alone may have given. Also, the final artefact did not contain as much music as desired (despite the practitioner's dreams of composing, which – ultimately – only stretched to synthesized sounds in the sci-fi short animation, Starkraft). Equally, having decided to forego murder and suicide for Hope and Sam, the plot lost some gravitas and poignancy and became much lighter than first envisaged.

4.7 WeChat Micro fiction Format – Life Moments

The gift of travel – metaphoric and literal distance – also helped to forge this project. In many ways this novel is inspired by a character the practitioner met on travels in China. This person asked for his life story to be written. This is not it. However, that experience certainly informs this whole project. The real person was twice orphaned and faced a litany of obstacles in his life. He also appeared lost in a whirlwind of biological and cosmic forces.

World-building draws from an explicit and tacit knowledge base, using awareness of how people interact, react and display emotions, especially when set in familiar environments and among cultures that have been experienced or researched. The inspiration was a user of QQ - which was an online precursor to WeChat moments. He would display his life online and wait for comments. QQ was an extremely open and messy platform, but WeChat emerged at exactly the right time and with boundaries and pre-sets that fit the project well. As somewhere between a blog and online diary it afforded multimedia entries that were able to construct a narrative.

4.8 The Multimodal Role in Choosing Media and Selecting Ideas

The combined ideas of a roulette wheel device and a social media account for the protagonist came concurrently many years ago. Ciccorico (2012) suggests "... multimodal digital fictions, the domain of interface design can permeate that of the diegesis" (2012, p.260). Indeed, the cognitive processes of the multimodal composition of *The Wheel* significantly affected the narrative structures of the final, creative artefacts. Skains (2013) similarly recognises the contemporary trend for multiple, fragmented, and discordant narratives. Technology affects this, with computers encouraging a wide range of creativity, interpretation and collaboration, between the writer, the apparatus, and the reader. Some chapters were more multimodal in design than others. Van Leeuwen (2017) discusses modes of colour, and how even these decisions affect the creative process and audience consumption. The childlike was afforded more colour, whereas the adult world and the dominant discourse were afforded the colours red and black. The connotations of life and death, sex and suffering were at play for the creator and consumers here. The third and final outcome was assigned pastoral green to usher in new life and new opportunity. Smartphone digital capabilities were certainly stretched. Five phones were maxed out many

times over in terms of storage. Apps had to be installed and uninstalled ad infinitum and hours of footage and thousands of photographs were lost because of laptop malfunctions, phone updates, and faulty external hard drives.

4.8.1 Creating from nothingness

Phone video-editing is different from a textual editing process. This is one major difference faced by a multimodal project. Gonzo/guerrilla filmmaking often only has once chance to succeed. There were few choreographed/storyboarded film scenes and even fewer paid actors, so it was essential to capture useful footage at every opportunity. For most of the shots and videos without actors there was a synthesis of reconnaissance and memory. Keep's 2016 documentary, *Remembering Hiroshima*, served useful once again as the practitioner endeavoured to use recall and an inductive methodology to marry the personal with the creative. This documenting of personal memory, and those of close friends, alongside storytelling that often verged on biographical, was much aided by existing within filmic mode. This was never turned into a diary, or vlog, but it followed the rhythms and wants into bursts of inspiration, reflective analysis and sheer opportunism. The various visual memories from barflies to beauties onto ruins and ramparts were logged in mind and so only required the briefest amount of planning and allowances for light. Equally important were the business models at play in adopted Chinese cities. Censorship and permission are of course difficult areas that blight any filmmaker on location, however the practitioner was lucky to have forged relationships with business owners in the cities over many years, so had access and virtual free reign over bars, coffee shops, karaoke clubs and football arenas. This level of access would have been impossible in the UK. In a similar vein, he had access to a range of amateur and professional actors and performers in a country where the salary rate is much below that of Europe. This assistance was invaluable in terms of film and

voicework and remains integral to the finished artefact. Returning to drafting – some written text was absolute and did not change. Other text was utterly fluid and changed in accordance with captured video and voiceovers/animation. This necessitated a lot of rewriting and discarding of work. Ultimately every chapter was ‘live’ throughout the process. *The Wheel* was more of a collection of spinning plates, or perhaps spinning spokes would be more apt. Nothing was complete until everything was complete.

The most obvious revisions to the project and to the practitioner’s practice in general came about via apps and behavioural change in terms of what was possible and creatively viable. The apps could change facial features, capture, and change video live or in post-production. This meant the practitioner could revise previously unusable footage and plan scenes accordingly without having to worry about the appearance of some actors or background scenery and props. It also assisted the navigation of certain elements of censorship and sensitivity. The chosen colour motif was a godsend of sorts as it allowed an aesthetic feel to be created while mitigating all manner of production setbacks.

4.8.2 “Pop-Pops”: Waking up at the wheel

This unfinished story was created as soon as the idea of the roulette wheel occurred to the practitioner. The ephemeral nature of memory is echoed in studies of Ephemeral Media. Grainge (2011) highlights the evanescent yet impactful nature of short media forms, and especially those that are expected to fade away, be erased, or lost in myriad ways. This project was a monument (sandcastle) to the ephemeral. Ideas, footage, phones, polished artefacts disappeared throughout the process. Of course, the final delivery of the smartphone novel will also be beset with geopolitical concerns around ephemerality, alongside those of a more technological obsolescence. Pop-Pops was originally in text form,

then audio, then finally came together as an animation. It is surrounded by text to create the distance necessary, also to introduce the seminal nature of this starting point for the character. Sam loses his parents at an extremely young, yet psychologically devastating age. This sets the tone. There is a deliberate vagueness, especially surrounding the parents' deaths and the mother figure is almost ignored completely. This also drives the narrative and, arguably, hyper-masculine behaviour of the character. The hamartia of sorts is predictive and used as an excuse by the character and narrator, and the innocence presented in this chapter is both a start and an end point if the novel ends on Green. Red and Black options naturally anti-gravitate away from this bedrock into more uncertain fatal consequences. The medium of animation was largely utilised as cartoons evoke such memories and feelings of youth.

4.8.3 “Breath”: Addressing the hyper-masculine

“Breath”, is the meat, the soul, the air, of the protagonist. The practitioner's research into digital fiction at this point had begun in earnest, primarily focused on literature reviews, readings in digital fiction, and exploration of software systems. In terms of textual analysis, it is where the adult Sam is formed and portrayed. China is the secondary character that emerges and positions the protagonist. Irishness is eschewed for the exotic other of China and it is displayed before the reader's eyes as a tourist may see it. The reader is a tourist in Sam's creation (journey) and gets to experience this via sensory experiences that are usually out of bounds for most entries into Moments. It is like accessing a real social media account, and especially so when viewed through WeChat. This chapter represents breathing in a new culture for the first time. Originally it was entitled ‘Breath of the Dragon’, but this was deemed too cliché in the final analysis. It is also problematic in many other aspects, as are touched upon earlier in The Narrative Whole section and will later be discussed in Chapter

Five. Many trusted peers have read this chapter, and Sam's journey through China in general, and found the character to be hyper-masculine. As a fan of Hemingway and Bukowski, this label is fine and understandable. It also represents a character who is single, orphaned, 35 years old, and displaced in a new country. No readers have expressed the term 'toxic masculinity', but it was probably on the tip of their tongues as they shied away from the negative connotations and the insult it may have caused. It would take another thesis to discuss this charge, but it must be accepted that the character is immoral and engages in various illegal activities. Whether the reader/viewer sympathises/empathises or is disgusted with this character is of course left to their discretion. Ultimately, this is the story and the journey, so the author felt compelled to continue with this representation even after the last three years of increasing pressure on white male privilege and the various fully warranted examinations into dubious male behaviour. However, as there is crime drama and all manner of negative representation from anti-heroes to the glamour of video games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, it felt acceptable to continue the narrative. However, with that in mind, some of the language, sex scenes, and more criminal behaviour have been self-censored and removed. Also, with a Chinese social platform as the primary delivery source and an expected Chinese audience, there has been some consideration of possibly problematic subject matters, so a large section of video talking heads has been removed. The promiscuous, misogynistic narrative remains central to the character arc and so was left largely intact.

4.8.4 “Sextant”: Astral Stream of Consciousness (containing “Starkraft”: Art imitating death)

The silent life of a male teenager is portrayed in this chapter. Planned chapters at ages 13 and 17 were merged into one, and many elements were discarded. 13 was entitled *Game of Sorry*

and contained more grief, confusion, and despair. It did not fit the overall tone of the narrative, also it was decided that less was more in this regard. It was also pure text and the reality of being essentially quarantined in China meant that it was impossible to truly capture the visual feel that one might have searched for in Ireland. The death of the parents is explained in passing – almost ephemerally, as the consequences have not hit the teenage Sam at this point. However, all manner of multimodal emotional outlets were chosen for teenage Sam. The poetry and art act as a frame for the Starkraft central narrative. Nothing was finished until everything was finished. Many chapters were begun and discarded. This chapter only became animation in the final year of the project. Originally it was a short, written story. Ultimately it became a very simple animation. Bilson Mistang is essentially the immortal Sam, the parallel Sam, the digital Sam, the metaverse Sam, or just a flight of whimsy. The impact of the multimodal creative experience, especially through the prism of a mobile phone, can be felt strongly in this chapter. The animation in many ways completely usurped the original short story written text. The character of Bilson Mistang is brought to life by the audio and animated design. The storyworld is given sparse description in the text, and is equally spartan in the animation, but there is a definite aesthetic that comes across. However, the practitioner is not totally happy with the visual representation of the afterlife universe or with Bilson and Suzy. It would take thousands of pounds and much more time and talent to create the desired levels of visual nuance and characterization. Here is where the Mobile Moments conceit and deceit comes into play. The age is important. The character of Sam becomes interested in art and literature at that age and so it represents his capabilities and prowess as a teenager, although it imagines Bilson as an adult, balding character. Bilson is not Sam, but of course he is on at least a few levels. Equally, Suzy is Hope, and Scarlet, and Sam's unmentioned mother, and all women in general. To the average teenage boy, women are the most prized, feared, unknowable creatures in the entire universe. The character of Bilson attempts a

business transaction, but a seduction appears the subtext. The end goal is that he is eaten alive by Suzi's inner sabre-tooth tiger. It is a non-too-subtle game of gender politics metaphor as well as a sojourn into a favoured genre. The script, storyboard and voice acting were all undertaken by the practitioner, with an actress portraying Suzi Minto.

4.8.5 “Social Solipsist”: Prepared Spontaneity

A useful aspect of the WeChat Moments mode of delivery is that the author is reachable, and content can be easily delivered. Ultimately, the major audio-visual component in this section is the therapy session with the phone doctor. Bathos and pathos are difficult to judge in terms of eliciting reader emotion. Comedy and tragedy stand side by side, especially as far as Western men are concerned. Some of the comedy was written many years ago and so its visceral quality and older political discourse may jar with modern readers/viewers. This is an extremely sensitive era, that is taking and making huge strides, and is undeserving of the ‘snowflake’ label that is often thrown at it. However, humour is exceedingly personal and temporal.

4.8.6 “Adam’s Curse”:

Adam’s curse is famously ‘work’ - the necessity of toiling to survive after being ejected from the Garden of Eden. However, for the purposes of this chapter it has been extrapolated to include masculinity at large – testosterone, the pursuit of women, money, power, and homeostasis to some degree. Sam cannot get what he wants (Hope) so he indulges in substitutes - sex and alcohol. This existentialism, addiction, or mere living allows him to stumble into Scarlet. She is looking for something completely different. However, paths often intersect at curious junctions. There is an awareness of Chinese culture that allows this to happen in a semi-realistic way. Relationships and marriages are forged over dinner in Jiangsu

province at least. There are arranged marriages based on monetary and familial alignment. Romance and sentimentality are not common features of these transactions. Even sex and physical attraction are way down the list. The key word is suitability.

4.9 “Endgame”: To Be or Not to Be

4.9.1 Red

Red was always going to be the winning ending, but not necessarily the happy ending. The practitioner toyed with the ending for years, wrestled with it. Happiness was certainly not the life that Sam had lived for the past year. It was also not about beauty or sex or money. However, red always represented those phenomena in the practitioner’s imagination. Therefore, red was left to represent ‘more’ – more bounty, more numbers, more money, more women – philosophers would say, abundance. The conflicting authorial desire was for Hope to win in some way. It was better for her to be the trickster rather than the concubine. Originally, she was going to live ‘happily ever after’ with Sam if he landed on red and would be murdered by the mafia if he lost the money and landed on black. The climate of the pandemic and becoming a father changed these extremes. Of course, drama, television and film still need to have these drastic outcomes. *Game of Thrones* thrived in the early seasons because of unpredictability and death. However, a project such as this, so close to the practitioner’s world in China afforded limited levels of tragedy. In terms of the process and the multimodal approach, Hope was characterised by her voice and her image, more than her words. She sang and spoke poetry and left recorded messages, unlike any other character. Her ending was also visual rather than textual. This emerged after a few filming sessions with the actress. A karaoke lounge was arranged, and her voice seemed to capture the character better than the writing.

4.9.2 Black

Black was meant to represent darkness, the end, the black dog, jumping off the wheel, but suicide deserves the utmost care in its representation. The mechanisms of the narrative meant that black had to mean something catastrophic, so it was deliberated for months. With the suicide jump from the building already filmed the practitioner ruminated upon how it could be used. Essentially, he decided upon a fake-out in the final months. Low-key let-downs, failures, incomplete actions, ran through the narrative from the outset of the unfinished father's Pop-Pops story. It made complete sense for this to be another occurrence of this phenomenon. It was decided to retain the suicide sequence to get a reaction from the audience. Did he deserve to die? Were his actions foolish enough, misogynistic enough, illegal enough? Then his suicide note turned out to be a note of defiance and an echo back to the father and a climbing back onto the wheel. The loss of money is downplayed and there is a hint that perhaps he may come full circle and still unite with Scarlet.

4.9.3 Green

From the first discovery of a green zero on the roulette wheel, it became the new 'happy ending'. Not in terms of triumph or victory but in terms of biology and the continuation of life. Scarlet is an underwritten character but there was design in this. She is new pasture, zero, fresh green grass, opportunity. The bringer of real hope and life. It is a massive cliché to have a pregnancy symbolising this shift, but it is a cliché for a reason – births, deaths, and marriages and all that. One of the most impactful films the practitioner has seen is *Irreversible* (2002). The vignette structure and layered levels of consequence informed lots of the planning of *The Wheel* and its ultimate delivery on the fragmented WeChat platform. On a human and philosophical level – babies and procreation are the absolute meaning of the wheel, and, as

hinted at previously, the true meaning of life. Everything changes when a baby comes into the world. Scarlet is the face of green, of birth and rebirth, but her voice and video are not used. The actress fit the part in still shots, but the filmic performance was not quite right. Also, the sparse characterization seemed to fit the paradoxically open, closed ending.

Conclusions

In the research, multiplicity of approach culminated in the multiplicity of output. The kaleidoscope on offer to the reader is a result of immediate appraisal of desired outcome across a range of media – animation, video, audio, or pure written or dictated text. Author, narrator, and protagonist therefore have more distance than in traditional written texts. Lessons for the next practitioner – use two phones, pay for storage and back up / email files every day. The analysis of the creative practice is layered through this chapter as a showcase and discussion on methodology, postproduction evaluation, and a combined phone-based multimodal analysis of the artefacts through applicable theory. The process and finished artefact also necessitated appraisal of various themes of representation, psychology, and censorship that emanated throughout the journey.

Chapter 5 Findings: Mobile Moments

‘Nobody that ever left their own country ever wrote anything worth printing. Not even in the newspapers.’

Ernest Hemingway

5.1 The Multimodal Role in Choosing Media and Selecting Ideas

In terms of the direct multimodal experience and the situational dependence of this research, the practitioner’s own burgeoning instincts began to shift to start with an image instead of a written idea. In China, the newly developed strategy of walking around with a phone cocked and aimed at possible opportunities was abandoned in the beginning out of respect and other emotions. The practitioner undertook a period of observing phone etiquette and asked a lot of questions of the Wuxi locals. It was at this point that he began to profoundly appreciate the true notion of ‘otherness’ and racial representation in the mainstream media and beyond. Skains makes the distinction that while writers have tacit knowledge of the written narrative (as developed through formal education and the practice beyond), not every writer will have explicit knowledge of digital media and its compositional elements (platforms, programs, etc.) Digital fiction is multimodal; explicit knowledge must support tacit knowledge to fully realise the narrative possibilities.

Using the methodology developed in Chapter Two, it highlights how the process is inspired by and dependent on the environment and situations presented. This very much ensures a project based on opportunity rather than with full creative control. Adaptation, convergence, and innovation are the technological keys to this chapter. Although there is a macro view of the cultural and representational issues in this research, it is still delivered through the prism of the project’s overall multimodal framework. At the most basic level, the situational

environment of working in China impacted the project on every level. This chapter is predominantly concerned with how changes in the writer's environment affect the possibilities of digital media: understanding the rhetorical problem. Fortune (2005) highlights the layered transduction process and how multimodal works may miss the mark with audiences as each medium has its own conventions and frameworks:

‘... Adding multimodality into the mix, however, adds difficulty in “trying to articulate how the transduction works, recognising the variety of individual and social and cultural factors that contribute to its working as it does.”’ (Fortune, 2005, p.53)

The scope of Mobile Moments and the tropes of death or discovery are important in the project, and the age discrepancies afforded allow multimodality to have a consistent representational form. Equally, sex, kidnapping, and murder are tenets of cell phone novels, and these are also respected. One way to avoid repeated statements of toxic masculinity was to use the device of alternative endings. That said, there was a shift and learning during this process. Dean Keep's experience and creation of his works, *Decombres* and *Remembering Hiroshima*,³⁷ were vital in positioning the project as worthy of value and reinvigorated a creative momentum in a sea of quarantined ennui. A combination of ‘walking with a smartphone’ while collecting data, reminiscing, creating, and collating across multimedia proved fresh and inspiring even against the toughest terrain of people and places.

Travel novels and those that deal with ‘other’ cultures must traverse the terrain extremely carefully. The ‘exotic other’ and representations of China and Chinese are arguably even more problematic politically at the current time and require the utmost sensitivity. A pseudonym is used because of the ever-changing political landscape that may persecute such open cultural representation and analysis. This concern must also be approached with measures of artistic

³⁷ *Decombres*, <https://vimeo.com/107441868>; *Remembering Hiroshima*, <https://vimeo.com/191742725>

integrity while navigating and respecting the need for censorship. A project reliant upon mobile phone technology, and by extension, 4G, 5G, and internet connection, was therefore hugely impacted by the Chinese firewall and a lack of access to Google, Gmail, Facebook, Messenger, BBC, and various other creative and scholarly sources. Nevertheless, the researcher found ways around these obstacles and was often presented with more diverse and useful alternatives. WeChat was the greatest of these. Equally, Kilby, and Berry's work (2019) on wayfaring and ambient literature writ large comes into such discussions on location and creative practice. While essentially quarantined in China for two years, the goal was still to deliver the smartphone novel and to analyse the process and resultant artefact.

On the importance and influence of setting, Buckham (2014) emphasises keeping details lean and not at the sacrifice of pacing and story. Only if the pacing is strong will the reader afford such distraction before returning to the story. Setting necessitated a reliance upon China as the primary location, given a need for original images and actors. Of course, there was scope to use existing phone footage, and found images could have been incorporated somehow. This felt like anti-research in many ways, so this option was discarded early. Many narrative goals were planned for China in the first analysis, anyway, and thus upon reflection, it appears that not many compromises were called for. However, the cyclic nature of the reflective analysis and the frailties of human memory cast some doubt upon this. A second trip to Macau (the Chinese capital of gambling) had to be cancelled, as well as trips to Lantau Island in Hong Kong to film beach scenes. Shanghai was also out of bounds for many months during a key time of feverish filming and enthusiasm.

The horrors of Orientalism and the lesser studied Occidentalism, combined with hegemonic stutters brought about by 'white man's guilt,' prove interesting subject matters for the project. This chapter will explore the writer's evolving sensitivities in terms of cultural appropriation,

representation, and racism, whilst still navigating the central problem of multimodal construction on a smartphone. In constructing this smartphone novel, and in general, as an expatriate dislocated to the nth degree, characters and circumstances that have prompted internal and reader concern echo Said's commentary on 'otherness.' Genuine assimilation within another culture, language and history can be assessed against recent travel journals and globalised, millennial mores.

5.2 Creating from nothingness

Landscapes and scenic beauty are less politicised than people, thus the 'Aimless Walk' strategy took on increased prominence in the study. Kilby and Berry (2019) outline wayfaring and co-presence in ways that resonated with this project completely. The practitioner was unaware of the terms at the outset but understood the premise mostly through an antagonistic approach to it in social, holiday, or family situations. The practitioner wanted to be in the real moment and not sully it with artificial capture. Traditional cameras had the appeal of waiting a week for development, whereas digital cameras often only captured hastily snapped pics that lived on the camera for two years before deletion. However, even during this time, serious photographers, SLR-laded travellers, seeking beauty and unusual occurrences were highly respected (Sean Penn in the remake of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*³⁸ comes to mind). Only with smartphones did these two worlds of reality and capture marry. This habit and admiration, and downright necessity, compelled the practitioner to configure himself into a wayfarer - the luxury of the 'exotic,' the unknown, capturing China felt far different than filming the floating, plastic bags in the canals of Greater Manchester's version of *American Beauty*³⁹ and then extrapolating meaning. A digital wayfarer in the practitioner's location by the Yangtze River

³⁸ *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* addresses the battle between internal and external forces in the minds of men. It is one inspiration for the *Intrusive* podcast.

³⁹ The Hollywood movie, *American Beauty*, attempts to portray beauty in the 'every day' while chronicling a male breakout from the 'rat race.'

is the stuff of dreams for many a writer/photographer. Shanghai, a dozen other sprawling metropolises, Anhui's yellow mountains (the inspiration for *Avatar*⁴⁰ and thousands of daily vignettes of poverty and excess). Creative practical research is led by the extreme accessibility of smartphones that gives photographers, artists, and writers new possibilities of expression.

5.3 Mobile Moments

Kilby and Berry (2019) were also important in how they discussed their art in the context of creative practice. Although they follow a slightly different model, the methods and concerns are almost identical to the practitioner's own:

'We follow Haseman's (2006) definition of practice-based research as "concerned with the improvement of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider's understandings of action in context" (Haseman, 2006, p.100). Walking with smartphones is a method integral to each of our respective art practices. As we walk, we write on our smartphones as well as take photographs and video.' (Kilby & Berry, 2019, p.111)

Simply stated, their method of 'walking with smartphones' covered approximately half of this project. The other half involved staging scenes and increased levels of organisation, planning, and set-piece construction.

Berry's remarks about the interior dynamic are interesting. The act of the observer seeing the landscape or event sets a chain reaction of creativity in motion. The response may be intrigue, disgust, or a whole plethora of emotions and useful creative reactions. In short, they are hotbeds for inspiration but also challenging in terms of pushing the researcher to consider privacy and transgression and what is a public space. They truly capture a poignant snapshot of Chinese

⁴⁰ The breathtaking landscape of *Pandora* is modelled on and inspired by the floating mountains of Anhui Province in China.

life but could be construed as romanticising poverty or the struggles of the aged. Permission was given for the shots, but the level of consent may lack cognisance of the ramifications of such representation. Artists in the news media over the last decade have faced a fierce backlash over their representations of the Chinese, especially surrounding the beauty ideals of Chinese women. Representation is certainly a thorny issue, and a creative vision must at least address its choice when so reliant upon verisimilitude. With a smartphone, it is so normal and accepted to snap the surrounding environment, with people and places in the background relegated to the status of flotsam and jetsam in the sea of selfies and social media. The reality is that the best photographs have life in them. The smartphone artist needs to be respectful of the environment and especially of the people or animals inside it.

At the other end of the situational spectrum, Bill Bryson⁴¹ writes about ‘library novels’ where a lot of research and desk work is done. Fiction usually happens at a desk or in a coffee shop. The practitioner contends that the smartphone novel will be a roving genre —always reliant upon external stimulation. Through camera phone photography, Kilby (2019) found a more luminous aspect of the every day, inspiring a game about the discovery of secret cities hidden in plain sight. Berry (2019) proposed that mobile media has disrupted the power relationships in traditional media distribution. People have become digital wayfarers themselves, navigating and creating the landscape of daily lives and also discovering new terrains for mobile art.

The study of the environment must at least consider the home of the cell phone novel. Although Japan and Yoshi’s *Deep Love* represent the origins of the cell phone novel, the movement soon populated other parts of Asia, with many amateur and student writers joining the fold. There is a symbiosis between authors and readers here with teen culture interwoven into their stories.

⁴¹ Bill Bryson writes gentle, sprawling, travel fiction about the UK such as *Notes on a Small Island*, but he intersperses these with novels he can write at home to keep his family happy.

Cell phone novels created a metaverse (of sorts) for teenagers via the mobile phone but were mostly confined to written text and composed monomodally as text messages. To explore further, the practitioner arranged a trip to Tokyo and Kyoto and soaked up the culture and read a few cell phone novels. However, as was the case with his trip to Hong Kong, this did not yield any creative results. The immersion felt within Chinese culture, society, and family undoubtedly influenced some resistance in this regard, alongside feelings of an inability to represent a landscape that he knew little about.

Academically, the issues of identity and our place in society are some of the most interesting in the human journey; however, they are fraught with emotion, politics, and acute historical sensitivity. In composing *The Wheel*, and in general, as an expatriate dislocated to the nth degree, the practitioner encountered and transduced characters and circumstances that have prompted internal and reader/viewer debate. The practitioner strongly believes that representation is not reality, and that the artist has a responsibility to the wider audience in his character portrayals. Conversely, there is a poetic duty to ‘truth’ that an author should perhaps consider. There is nothing worse than soap opera sanitation, but cultural knowledge and representational balance in a piece of work should be admired. Uniquely, this project allows the practitioner to critique/defend his choices with this extended exegesis.

The representation of East Asian women is beset with concerns already acknowledged by others. Joey Lee (2018) asserts:

‘One undying representation of East Asian women in Western media and culture is the dainty China Doll or the diminutive Butterfly. This docile archetype infantilizes and hypersexualizes the diverse communities of people of Asian descent, suggesting a demand for White domination.’ (Lee, 2018, p.114)

Western discourse often repeats the trope of prised and tragic Asian lovers for White men, most

notably in the popular *Miss Saigon* show, wherein a female Asian character commits suicide after the love affair with her white partner ends. For Lee, the portrayal of East Asian women in popular media can be toxic, perpetuating othering and the dehumanization of said women. To balance such common misrepresentation, Lee cites Xing (1998) who suggested that Asian characters can be emotional, political, and fallible or just ordinary human beings. The depiction of East Asian women reflects the foibles that have befallen Western discourse. Xing (1998) argued that the Orient was a 'European invention,' providing white people with the privilege of entering and exiting to escape their burdens. Naficy and Gabriel (1993) cited Homi Bhabha's discussion of racial/ethnic representation in which stereotypes function as both phobias and fetishes, and fear and desire, betraying a fundamental split within the colonial subject and the colonized 'other.' However, with requisite awareness, phobias and fetishes also serve as the stuff of character makeup and motivation in fiction. Laura Mulvey (1975) stated:

'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.' (Mulvey, 1975, p.7)

In part, *The Wheel* depicts Sam's view of East Asian women, not the practitioner's - a view that must be realistically, though conscionably, separated. The WeChat social media conceit certainly blurs this line and leaves it open to criticism.

Conversely, Xiaoxiao Sheng's *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (1993, in translation by David Roy) is a seventeenth-century depiction of sexuality, known for its explicit content, which includes bawdy jokes and euphemism:

'It makes its home beneath the navel in the Province of the Loins. It has two sons who always accompany it wherever it goes; In how many skirmishes, with how many beauties, has it emerged the victor?' (Roy, 1993, p.196)

Although Sheng's tale has garnered similar notoriety to D. H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929), Roy argues for the text's firm moral structure, in which retribution is exacted upon sexual libertinism. Sexuality and representation, however explicit and sensational, can belie an authorial principle.

Mat Hardy (2015) cites Said, regarding:

‘ . . . the tradition of sexual fantasy that had developed in Western depictions of the East . . . harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys . . . The Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe . . . readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient.’ (Said, 1978, p.190)

Without visiting a place or experiencing its local culture, a writer can still misuse, abuse, and ultimately exploit. White male privilege is real, and the practitioner felt the weight of it in his observation and writings. Many theorists and commentators have attempted to right colonialist wrongs, and discussion is difficult these days when language and concepts are so emotive and entrenched in colonialism.

Chiarella (2007) notes on creating dialogue for characters in fiction(s) ‘ . . . since it's about drifting, forgetting, passing time without noticing. Instead, quietly pay attention . . .’ (p.23). Patronising foreigner syndrome can often be found at play in Western writers. Peter Hessler is a respected journalist and author; however, most of his work on China can be viewed as, at best, condescending, at worst, Western colonialist propaganda:

‘I realized that as a thinking person, his advantage lay precisely in his lack of formal education. Nobody told him what to think, and thus he was free to think clearly.’ (Hessler, 2008, p.28)

They were the findings of a tourist—naturally so—but there must be an acknowledgement of a cultural exposure spectrum. Whether multimodal constructs or classical written text, Said's

views on the mass media are on point and echo the Western bias and obvious agenda noticed on even the likes of the BBC:

‘We have to constantly critique imperialist white supremacist patriarchal culture because it is normalized by mass media and rendered unproblematic.’ (Said, 2014, p.92)

The objective of this project was to create a smartphone novel, narratively structured as microfiction in the form of WeChat Moments. As technology progressed, the multimodal aspects of the novel took on new levels of ambition and expectation. This offered increasing modes of creativity and also impacted the financial, storage, and timing issues of the study. Digital frameworks such as WeChat, doodles/drawings, photography, and audio-visual clips usurped written text to a significant degree and resulted in a diverse and layered project. The idea originated from an extrapolation of the old writers’ saying, ‘write what you know’ into ‘write *on* what you know.’ This ‘knowing’, or knowledge became pivotal, and the five phones at the centre of the study became constant companions. Goldberg (2010) states:

‘There is freedom in being a writer and writing. It is fulfilling your function. I used to think freedom meant doing whatever you want. It means knowing who you are, what you are supposed to be doing on this earth, and then simply doing it.’ (Goldberg, 2010, p.23)

However, the words of Nack were reassuring:

‘It is mobile technology that makes people aware that a digital environment opens opportunities to everybody to freely socialize through and with stories relevant for the current spatial, temporal, and social context.’ (Nack, 2009, p.18)

As early as the cell phone/smartphone novel idea came to mind, it was followed by the central conceit of the roulette wheel. But these were ideas without substance, suggested by some whim and the burgeoning pressure of technology.

‘It’s a question and a quandary that bedevils every writer. And

once you've got an idea, what then? Ideas without a plan, without a purpose, are no more than pleasant thoughts.' (Heffron, 2012, p.137)

'Cell phone novels' emerged during mobile phone technology's infancy and at present occupy a low-brow, often genre-specific place in the market. Equally, enhanced/multimedia novels have not passed into the mainstream and successful attempts usually appear only in children's literature. Kindles and iPads are ubiquitous, and smartphones offer the full media package, but, thus far, they have not been utilised as writing or reading tools. Matt Hamblen (2009) questioned the definition of a 'smartphone,' reporting:

'All the popular definitions rely on the fundamental understanding that a smartphone brings together a computer with a wireless voice device. Everyone agrees on that. But there are many nuances that separate a smartphone from a standard wireless phone, which also can incorporate some kind of a computer with wireless voice capability.' (Hamblen, 2009, p.124)

'Writing' on a smartphone seems to have its own inherent problems and is not as tactilely satisfying as writing with pen and paper or on a computer. In terms of affordances, or later, perceived affordances (Norman 1999), the touch screen, even in an iPhone 14 Pro, is not the best vehicle for frantic typing. However, the process improved throughout as the methods and successes fed back into the cyclic model. Everything was possible creatively at any time, but this also promoted some levels of time procrastination and complacency. The upgrade to a Samsung S5 enabled the creative processes to easily include audio-visual materials and to easily create drawings and doodles. The project then moved on to utilising an iPhone 7 and included Siri as a catalyst, collaborator, and sometimes creative nemesis. The situations and scenarios that produced the most work or best work were the ones that were repeated. For example, the setting of China (mostly Jiangsu province) offered the bulk of the photographs as they inspired the creator. There was narrative intent for China to be an important setting, but

that was also the case for Dubai and Switzerland, but they did not offer the same level of inspiration and ultimately were taken off the list of environments. Equally, this mode of photography replaced thousands of words of text in the final edit.

Joseph Campbell (1949) recognised:

‘To be in extremis means to be in severe circumstances, to be near the point of death. This can be the exact condition of the psyche at certain times, depending on the quality of one's choices and/or the terrible twists of fate. Then, even if the means for sharing stories is almost completely disassembled—as when persons are incarcerated in prison—the human spirit will still find a way to receive and to convey stories.’ (Campbell, 1949, p.44)

The Mobile Moments is an evocation of Campbell’s assertion that developing technology becomes a means to share stories, even within mundane trappings (of the commute, of home, etc.). The individual develops too, adapting and adopting new ways of expression. For this project, every character, chapter, and theme brought out some critical analysis, and these were logged in a digital journal. The structure of a true autobiography helped conjure and provoke the practitioner into appropriate design modes. For example, a three-year-old Sam cannot write or take photographs well, but he can draw pictures, watch cartoons, and speak. Pop-Pops mirrors or captures this capability and presents a possible truth of Sam’s experience. Sam listens to his father telling imperfect stories full of pauses, mistakes, repetitions, and silly voices. Ultimately the story goes unfinished and vanishes into blackness as memory is wont to do. Experience and necessary levels of expertise in mono-modes allowed the practitioner to experiment and choose ideal forms of digital media based on desired outcomes and, on occasion, viewer feedback.

The finished artefact was eventually loaded onto WeChat Moments and given a limited release.

These early comments are included to offer some insight into the user experience:

Selected Reviews of the reading experience on WeChat Moments

Ian Dunning, 57, UK, English Literature and Media Studies Lecturer:

*In many ways, the smartphone novel *The Wheel* is reassuringly similar to a traditional printed novel. It is experienced as a series of consecutive pages with the narrative represented almost entirely in written text. Each page is accompanied by one or more visual images, rather like a traditional children's book, which broadly illustrates the narrative without being essential to it. When the text overruns the page, the reader is required to flip to a blank white page to read the remainder of the text so that the image no longer remains in vision, making the experience even more like a traditional print experience. In a digital format such as this, one might expect more interactivity in the form of hyperlinks or gameplay, but there were none; nor was there any audio, although reference was made to a 'song' at one point, and I suspect the intention here and perhaps throughout was to provide an audio accompaniment, which would have combined with the visual images to provide a more effectively sensuous experience.*

While I could imagine a more radical use of the medium, therefore, this particular smartphone novel did not fully make use of it. However, there were other interesting ways in which the alternative medium provided a different kind of experience. For one thing, the small size of the page seemed to demand a more condensed use of words. A significant number of pages, in fact, comprised simply a few words accompanied by a dominant visual image. In some, the words were quotations from outside sources. These pages were effective in presenting a kind of poetic or philosophical commentary on the narrative. Elsewhere, the narrative itself seemed to break down into fragments with few or no words on each page, a feature which, while it is not unknown in printed novels, seemed more organically appropriate in this medium.

*The visual aspect of the text probably represents the most significant departure from the traditional print form. In the traditional novel, visual images rarely feature, and the reader relies on written description in collaboration with their own imagination to construct the world of the novel in their minds. By contrast, in graphic novels visual images are central to the narrative, providing a kind of static representation of the action, similar to a film storyboard. In this respect, the smartphone novel seems to represent a kind of alternative to these two extremes. The visual images in *The Wheel* were designed to accompany or underline certain ideas or motifs in the narrative without too much emphasis on the text, leading to a more condensed verbal text as a result. Digital manipulation in the form of Photoshop-style effects helped emphasise the generally hyperreal atmosphere of the narrative, as did the use of video and animation, with short gifs creating a sense of hypnotic repetition appropriate to the experiences being described. Finally, the way the characters themselves were often represented using smartphones in the narrative—sending texts, taking photos, and so on—produced a neat synergy between the reader and the world of the narrative, suggesting perhaps that the smartphone has become an indispensable medium for experiencing life and communicating about it.*

Steven Pearce, 45, UK, Civil Servant:

The Wheel asks the reader to make a choice: to swipe onwards or to stay and muse/mull. This choice reflects the decisions we make every day to merely glance or to look deeper. Each swipe brings discovery, a discovery of secret places and hidden societies, alongside the fortunes of a wayward narrator. The format is analogous to human consciousness, like the swipes of imagination and attention we apply to the jumble of our own minds—considering this one moment then fixated on the next . . . The story is incomplete, fractured by distractions, seeking continuation through a winning choice, and punctuated by reminiscences.

A story in this form, unlike the texts of old books, delivers an experience perhaps more acquainted with the switching channels of modern minds. Minds assailed by media, by platforms . . . Turning these pages simulates careering attentions, the momentary disorientation, and the swift refocusing.

The images are appealing, storybook evocations, seating childlike whimsy beside adult degradation: innocence and corruption meet. A form for this age, a great read, and highly recommended.

Yusef Montaser, 32, Libya, Teacher:

This is my first time reading a novel on WeChat. Personally, I enjoyed the whole experience. The pictures and words appear in a structured format. Furthermore, the font size is just about right, making it easy to read quickly. I have always preferred reading textbooks online, using various apps. Reading the hard copies is more time consuming and not as convenient as reading them digitally. Regarding the actual character. I feel he is unstable and very impulsive. He goes through a world of emotions. This makes the whole story quite edgy and certainly sparks interest. I must admit it was my first time reading such a novel, and I am not an avid reader. I am not sure if it delivers much differently compared to a normal book, and so it will not change my reading habits. I believe this app can present the novel in a much better way than other apps I use, or from PDFs. Therefore, I would recommend reading novels on this platform in the future to people who read lots of books regularly.

Wu Bo, 35, China, Language Specialist:

I found it interesting and easy to navigate as I was brought up with WeChat after it became the mobile takeover from QQ. It seems light and not too heavy, but you can also take your time

over images and think about them. Maybe the videos were too light for some of the subject matter and quotes, but in terms of jumping from page to page and seeing all over the different media, it was okay. I don't really read books anymore, so it was good to have something to think about that wasn't real even though it tried to be kind of realistic.

Chen Fang, 40, China, Businessperson:

I found the format easy to follow, but it was not an enjoyable experience. I still like books. I have a Kindle but hardly use it. I think there are times and places for books. I do not follow social media, so this was even worse in many ways as it is not even real. I struggled to really absorb it, but I didn't like or know the character. It could also be cultural differences as I could not understand the reasons or motivations for some behaviour. It all seemed quite shallow. The colours were interesting at first, but they became quite repetitive. Perhaps teenagers may like this, but I have never read any mobile phone novels or heard anybody talk about them.

Capturing images of other cultures and placing stories in an 'other' landscape require sensitivity. Nevertheless, it also addresses issues that transcend the boundaries of one text, or even one creator/novelist, and moves on to the very structure of the representation of the 'familiar' and the 'other.' These are the insights that are of interest across race and culture and resonate with the practitioner's creative process. Equally, the world of China is fascinating, with the awe and wow factor and the cultural differences the practitioner sees every day. The Huangpu River in Shanghai, for instance, is iconic. The images of this river and the Bund landscape conjure all manner of positive and negative images and ideas. China, as a representative whole, is hopefully presented within a similarly dichotic framework of differing equals. Dubai was less important as a setting and as a narrative device, so it could be sacrificed quite easily. Sam could certainly be charged with the exploitation tag. Is he a Houellebecqian sex tourist, an eternal gap-year student, or an economic migrant? Other expatriates in the

narrative are perhaps easier to label. Equally, some Chinese characters are guilty of gross social misunderstandings, false insights and, arguably, narrower subjective scope. However, the practitioner maintains that it is a right and privilege of every culture to be shocked and awed by another.

The conclusions of this research demonstrate the actualised effects of multimodal composition on both the creative process and the finished product and its delivery. Planning had to be cyclic in terms of decision-making and offer the best mode of capture and delivery. The cyclic model, based on the success of previous situational or modal experiments, allowed the researcher to dispense with unsuccessful and time-wasting pursuits. For example, shower shouting and aimless walks produced the most valuable written texts via audio dictation. China, as a country, and Wuxi, as a city, provided the bulk of the photographic and video imagery that graduated to the final artefact. WeChat Moments was chosen as the delivery platform for the smartphone novel, but it is almost impossible to get a second account, especially since the clampdown on Tencent and on social media in general in China. However, a way was found, and so the novel exists under Sam Chen on WeChat. Existing WeChat users can find and access this content easily, but new users will have to be invited and face rather a laborious identification and admission process. However, some of the thousands of friends, acquaintances, and clients already on the practitioner's account proved to be useful barometers and ergonomic guinea pigs.

The study-within-a-study, of course, is massively informal and statistically irrelevant; however, the audience feedback was useful for the practitioner to decide upon the ultimate delivery platform and whether there needed to be alternatives. It appears that experienced WeChat users were happy to swipe and scroll left, flip images into text, and exit textual stories to enter videos in other places on the account. The fragmentary, multimodal, chapter-based

content allows this to function without jarring the viewer/reader too far out of the narrative. Equally, it reads as the life of a real WeChat user. Sam Chen is merely oversharing his life story among millions of other users. Inexperienced users were confused, started reading backwards, could not access content, and ultimately reached out for navigational guidance. These users prompted the researcher to deliver the content via a more traditional PDF e-book. NFTs, such as those made famous by the ‘Bored Ape’ series, could be a lucrative sidearm of the smartphone novel’s photographic content. Images and gifs are en vogue for now, and often, new uses of technology have a honeymoon period. Collaboration, writing contests, and collections of existing social media content could all combine to provide stories with minimal textual interventions. The return of limited word count cell phone novels could also be easily adapted to fit a burgeoning smartphone market.

The practitioner asserts that this project will add to existing knowledge in the practice-based learning landscape, give new direction for creativity and study in the fields of transmedia and multimodality, and ultimately usher in a new age of smartphone literature. The smartphone medium via WeChat yielded results of working with new technologies, combining creative modes, and navigating an emergent genre. Importantly, the impact upon research when adopting tools that are ever-developing and necessarily fluid in their application serves to highlight innovative new ground in multimedia creation. The significance to future scholars of the findings herein and their implications for new creativity in evolving mobile media will be found through the lens of practice-based research.

Results

The research questions were ultimately answered thusly:

1. **How does WeChat writing develop a novel writing form and/or creative output?**

The Wheel demonstrates a novel micro-fiction format in the form of WeChat Moments. This new form and format create an opportunity for multimodal practice for future practitioners. The design and interplay of multimodal expression offers a narrative whole as a construct of combined Mobile Moments.

2. **How does mobile media change the creative writing process?**

Writing on the go allows the multimodal writer to absorb influences in the moment. These situations might be semi-permanent. The affordances of smartphones allow multimodal creativity at every turn and the creative writing process often gives way to design and decision-making.

3. **Does a multimodal approach relate to the computational affordances of writing on mobile devices?**

The contemporary environment on social media platforms speaks to a creative practice that is characterised by vernacular and mobile media practices. The WeChat Moments are at the heart of this as they offer immediacy and means of expression via audio, video, and text entries.

The results of this study prove a smartphone novel can be produced and displayed as WeChat

writing and this can indeed be an exciting new genre; the experience of writing, filming, writing and filming again, and questioning each decision across modes available and situations on offer produces artefacts of layered consideration. This project has added to the body of work of practice-led research. Trial and error and cyclic planning and capture have built knowledge and experience that can be passed on to other practitioners. From this exegesis and via the deconstruction of the finished artefact, new authors may derive shortcuts and find ready solutions that they may not have considered. Self-reflection and analysis can be valuable when undertaken under rigorous academic conditions. Through citations and weighting the work and the process via the prism of existing digital fiction, this thesis was able to offer knowledge combined and collated that is not available in other academic journals. The purpose of this project was to explore how a novel could be constructed multimodally on a smartphone and delivered via Mobile Moments on WeChat. The creative practice and multimodal composition of various media affect the writer/creator's journey and almost every decision they make. The cyclic model and subdivision of 're-doing' often meant that each decision was made and remade many times over. The Nokia E63 that began the project was essentially a texting device that could take low-level photographs. Social media was up and running, but WhatsApp and WeChat had not been developed or popularised in 2014. Creative phone-based tools had yet to be invented or adapted to phone technology, and so everything was on the crest of a wave of microchip technology. The iPhone had been established as the market leader but a Samsung S5 was the next tool of the project, before the eventual shift to an iPhone 7. Although some memos and email texts exist from that time, none of the photographs graduated to the final artefact. Skains, Flowers and Hayes, and Smith and Dean provided the academic and methodologic thrust in the early years of the project, alongside research on Japanese cell phone novels. The last two or three years presented exponential growth in the field and the research, and because of the likes of Keep, Berry, Campbell, and Batty, practice improved considerably,

as did the practitioner's confidence in what he was doing. In terms of directly applicable and repeatable methodology, the digital cyclic ethnomethodology was derived from learning on the job. Wasted film shoots and plans that were inoperable led to the constant wheel of learning. The practitioner also appreciated the symmetry of it all. *The Wheel* was planned and composed multimodally, but this was a purely organic process. At no point was it decided that a video was needed for balance or that a photograph should be crowbarred into place. There was a feel, artistic intuition, a step, and a stumble. Then the process was repeated and improved or changed to another mode if necessary. Often, written text, image, and video were all presented together to reinforce the narrative or character representation.

In terms of creative practice and the learning process, the proof of the pudding will be in the actual consumption. To continue the metaphor further, if there is an appetite for this kind of content, then it would be an extremely attractive proposition to make further stories that fit the capabilities of phone technology. The practitioner has no particular interest in adapting or translating existing analogue prose and poetry into digital forms, but even the discarded footage could be the basis of new ideas.

Transmedia proved the closest area of study from which the smartphone novel emerged. The definitions of multimedia, multimodal, interactive, social-media compatible, goal oriented, innovative, and playing to the strength of perceived affordances fit well with what *The Wheel* achieved. It also satisfies the following criteria:

1. Born-digital

Written first for, and specifically to be read and viewed from, the screen.

2. Interactive

Requires user action to drive the story forward.

3. Multimedia

Uses text, images, music, sound effects, puzzles, and games to illustrate and enhance the narrative.

4. A Novel

A reading-from-the-screen experience for the ‘always-on’ generation.

5. Episodic

Each a self-contained story, the chapters occur across media channels.

The Wheel represents a digital story for a new generation of digital producers and consumers. The project ran over many years and naturally encompassed a range of direct and indirect learning. The medium was utterly ubiquitous and accessible; however, the central idea and multimodal production techniques appeared alien to many. The final reckoning deems the ‘glorified selfie’ as utterly valuable and an exercise at the frontier of possibility. The future is bright; the future is mobile.

Research Ramifications

The process of creating a smartphone novel and WeChat writing was rewarding and frustrating in equal measure. The findings, methods, apps found to be useful, and general conclusions, however, should offer useful pivot points for ambitious creative writers, as well as mobile content makers, and of course, other research practitioners. Through examination of the effects of digital media on creative practice, and multimodality in particular, this research proved that it was indeed possible to create a smartphone novel of some substance. The ubiquity of a mobile phone was found to be ultimately liberating and stimulating - as was the habit of taking photographs and recording videos. By the end of the project (2021) it was common, in China at least, for most people to have their phones, if not actually in their hands,

then in their possession at almost all times. Embarrassment and social norms are huge psychological drivers, and as such, this uniformity of behaviour helped the practitioner achieve much more than first envisaged. At the outset of the project, it was quite a daunting task to hold up a video-capturing device in any part of China. However, by the end of 2021, it was commonplace for individuals to be taking videos and selfies in restaurants, bars, karaoke lounges, and any venue except Buddhist temples. For more prolonged video shoots, it was even possible to surreptitiously record while pretending to look at one's phone as the reverse cameras became more powerful and operable. Skains argues that:

‘... any artist working with an incomplete understanding of their medium is unlikely to engage fully with its affordances and limitations; s/he would struggle mightily to push the boundaries of the medium for the purposes of innovation.’ (Skains, 2013, p.137)

This is certainly true of smartphones and apps on the market, not to mention basic composition or transferring techniques.

The multimodal journey, carried across many years and countries, enhanced the planning, production, organisational, and analytical skills that produced a methodology and end product artefact that can be enjoyed and learned from. Modes of expression were heightened and given more weight than expected at the start of the project. For example, animation and photography took on greater relevance and precedence in the final artefact than originally planned. This was a result of improvements in technology, confidence, experience, exposure, and audience feedback. Delivery platforms for such output as smartphone novels remain contentious. For experienced users, WeChat Moments seems the ideal showcase forum and marketplace. This can easily transfer deeper into WeChat Mini-programs and WeChat Channels. These, however, require a greater reliance upon learned/acquired navigation skills and familiarity, which is present in China, but largely absent in the rest of the world.

WhatsApp rivals WeChat only as a messaging service but cannot compete as social media, or as a peer-payment platform. Facebook and Instagram could act as a base for content in Western countries, but they are not monetised or controllable in the same ways as WeChat. Censorship and content removal are of course cause for concern, and so, there may be a battle between financial ambition and artistic integrity.

The likes of Keep, Berry, and Campbell have proven that smartphone creativity is encroaching upon professional practice, while the semiotic discourse analysis provided by Kress, Davidson, Grainge et al. via the disciplines of ambient media, cross-media, transmedia, affordances and ephemeral media hint at an academic future. At the start of the project, digital fiction appeared bereft of exposure and ambition if considered predominantly in the guise of hypertext novels, flash fiction, and cell phone books; however, the convergence of technology afforded by smartphones means that films, books, music, as well as text can be produced easily and affordably with the ‘computer-in-your-pocket.’ This exegesis presents a project on the front line of smartphone research. Technology and obsolescence are the yin and yang of creation and destruction. As such, *The Wheel* is a complete novel in fragments. The bounce of the ball can only land in so many segments through the course of a night, so there was some nod to realism. Also, this device would not be so practicable if every year of life was afforded some avenue of digital expression. Selection, combination, and omission were key watchwords, and so it offers a completeness of sorts. Although ages 13 and 29 were planned for and could have been added, the numerological aspect was a factor that was appreciated towards the final stages of the project—as was the maxim, ‘less is more.’ A definite future direction is more wheels for other characters, learning topics, or indeed real people on social media. Apple and Facebook have created algorithms that capture certain key life events or condensed yearly showcases of existing photographs and videos. It does not take too much of

a leap for this to be made into a wheel format that chronicles important moments of their lives. Facebook and Instagram prove that people want to tell their stories publicly, and expanded lifetime selfies could prove popular. A future WeChat metaverse is an obvious place for this, looking past the confines of existing social media. This could be monetised, to expand upon the storyworld introduced in *Starkraft*. In that world, after death, a soul becomes the inhabitant and creator of a whole new solar system/universe. It is entirely possible to have this idea presented visually in the metaverse. Equally, Virtual Reality could be ready to ignite after years of patient anticipation. Visiting a friend's virtual wheel in the metaverse via your own avatar could help mental health and happiness/satisfaction levels and offer more than mere entertainment.

In terms of commerciality, WeChat offers a digitally captive audience. Billions of people are glued to phones and the sheer economy of scale means that the smartphone novel could sell for 1 RMB (90 English pence) and still make millions of GBP. This business model has been proven to work with English/Chinese teaching as well as with all kinds of product sales and online content. Future studies will need to consider technological advancement and their environments to appraise the possibilities of the medium. Holograms appear to be the next step in business meeting technology, and these have no doubt been expedited because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, *The Wheel* offers focused insight into the practice of smartphone writing (creating), into its methodology, and ultimately serves as a 'how to' guide on writing phone-to-phone WeChat fiction. It steps out of the shadows of cell phone genre novels and creates something more ambitious yet just as accessible. Amazon Kindles had a surge in popularity, and conventional books have a ready-made audience in the form of digital consumers; however, cell phone novels did not enjoy this same exposure because of their content and simplicity.

They were also not visual media that could entice new audiences but existed only on obscure sites that relied on word of mouth. Given all this, there was still a huge audience for them across Asia. With the increasing power of the microchip, in tandem with improving compression and editing software, it may now be possible for smartphone novels to bridge the gap between cell phone novels and e-books. Hardware features such as size and quality of the display, storage capacity, and battery life are also extremely important factors that appear to be improving in the main. The iPhone Pro option certainly advances usability and displaying/sharing options that make it a viable choice going forward. The quality and accessibility of multimedia features (particularly with embedding capabilities) must be addressed. Norman's (1999) concerns about interactivity—controlling, swiping, scrolling, and generally manipulating content on smartphones—must also be factored into any plausibility studies. Norman's affordances and cultural conventions and constraints must also be considered. Technological competition and incompatibility also require some thought as iOS, Android, and Microsoft appear to seek monopolisation rather than cooperation with each other. PDF content requires expensive software to allow editing or even viewing. Digital libraries in the metaverse may be the ultimate place where all humans settle down to read. This level of immersion is the storyworld of which digital authors have been dreaming.

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Appendices Contents

Appendix A.....WeChat Registration Instructions

Appendix B.....Journal & Reflective Writing Samples

Appendix A

WeChat Registration Instructions

How do I sign up for WeChat?

After downloading and installing WeChat on your mobile phone, you can sign up for WeChat with the following ways:

<https://help.WeChat.com/cgi-bin/micromsg-bin/oshelpcenter?opcode=2&id=120813euejvf141023eqnajz&lang=en&plat=2&Channel=helpcenter>

1. Sign up with mobile

Open the WeChat app and tap **Sign Up** > **Sign up with mobile** > choose your region code, enter your mobile, and set a password.

2. Sign up via Facebook

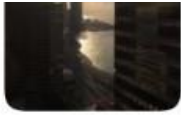
Open the WeChat app and tap **Sign Up** > **Sign up via Facebook**, and then WeChat will redirect to Facebook to request permission to log in to WeChat. Then, choose your region code, enter your mobile, and set a password.

3. Add the address of Sam Chen - lingunirockroad

Notes:

1. One mobile phone number can only be used for creating one WeChat account.
2. If you are required to have another WeChat user help you register for WeChat by scanning a QR Code, [tap here](#) to learn more.

<https://help.WeChat.com/cgi-bin/micromsg-bin/oshelpcenter?opcode=2&id=120813euejvf141023eqnajz&lang=en&plat=2&Channel=helpcenter>



Name: Sam Chen
WeChat ID: lingunirockroad

Edit Contact >

Privacy >

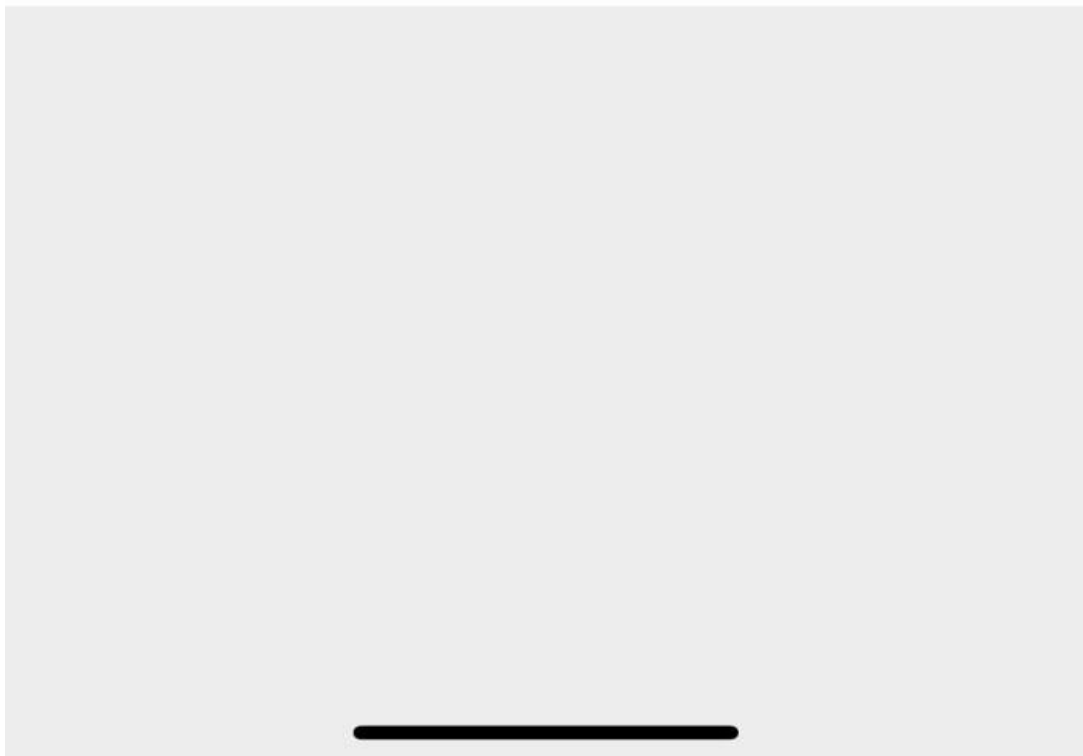
Moments >



More >

 Messages

 Voice or Video Call



Appendix B

Journal Samples

1. Situational – stream of consciousness texting inspired by Shanghai Pudong Airport

China. Airport cramp. Breathing in, strange food, sitting, no sleep. No pleasure until you see the winged wonder. Collective will drawing it upwards. Come on Bessie. Ignoring turbulence. If one person screamed others would follow in seconds. The world is now looking similar to airports. Everyone locked in technology, probing, waiting, shunting along. Insular, yet ever searching, moving on. Doozer trucks screaming around the terminal tarmac. I used to have that job. Seldom any reason to be on there, just the sheer thrill of a privileged surface. Moon walking for civil servants. Staring at the magic business class curtain, wondering what Caligulan treats were being offered. Known as thirsty because of my shyness in asking for water from the dinnerladies even when desperate. I sit dry-mouthed waiting for the be-gloved air servants to serve me. Only 2 on this airline and both have disappeared behind the curtain. Surely not belly-dancing with fruit served out of the navel. Bacchus, Dionysis save me. Ok, 10 minutes and nothing, just a faint clink of glasses and what could have been a Nebuchadnezzar flash of green. Economy class seem to be amusing themselves by going to the toilet behind me. One guy had been twice already. Perhaps they are drinking the toilet water. Enough, my sense of injustice has overcome my shyness. I ring the bell and wait with a warm smile. Could i have so water (my airborne Gaoler). 3 seconds later I am happy and realising cute English shyness is pretty useless. My veggie meal should arrive soon. Am guessing egg salad. They used to serve veggies first, probably they thought we were starvation risks but now there are so many hippies and freaky eaters that I have to wait with the rest. Lots of good heads of hair in front of me. Russian box heads, jet asian goddess hair. Stuffing a prostrate, couchant concertina belly full of weird muffins and fruit juice is a terrible idea but i do it anyway. Never had more than 2 beers on a plane but today could be the time to try. Arm rest wars is on. Big guy thought he claimed them but i got the biceps out and gave it a surreptitious frontal shove. Does the mile high club count if you're on your own? The guy emerging from the toilet behind me has the red face of triumph, guilt and ennui. Surely. Each stewardess is a wonder. Is life as simple as a pretty face and slim legs. Even the one pushing 50 is beautiful. Plump lips. Whoulda thought it? Arriving to smog smeared cities. Depressing it if weren't so dangerous and delightful. Traverssing new apartment like a mishmash of Dubai and Salford, Crossing Lupu bridge and onto the magic. Neon nirvana. Outrun, chase HQ but with shit cars. Drive almost an hour and it still costs less than twenty quid. Feisty women taxi Driver pushed up to the wheel like a baby in aigh chair. Cig ash on the floor like in the Austin Allegro of our youth. Boxed in perspex to shield from the knives. Has David Blaine been here. In my lonely room, porcelain palace. Taking showers with my underwear and tight tshirts. I would be fantastic in jail. Actually, flashback, I remember playing a game on the old 48k called Great Escape. Had to learn the routine of a prisoner for a couple of days and the plan your escape with subtle moves and cunning. My biggest enjoyment seemed to lie in doing nothing. Just reverentially duplicating the exact steps every day. Model prisoner. The way to avoid such procrastination was to have a morale flag that went down to zero if you did nothing. The amount of times I lost that game for not even attempting to escape should have alerted me to something. It is now Wednesday and I have not left the room in 4 days. Jetlag is a great excuse. My woman still comes and services me, so I at least have some focus. Noodles and lettuce, staring and spitting for breakfast again. Threat of violence seems more palpable every time. 'hello outsider. Hello chinese. Goodbye outsider' could be madmax. The smell of coffee and prostitutes overpowers sometimes and my teeth yellow a few shades on the old Dulux measuring card every time i'm here. Is it worth it? The tiny girl with the teeth cheered me up. She splashed the cash on a new bar with a new attitude. Next abr was the same old girls chasing dick round table. There is still that one that i hope catches me. What level of disease must a girl have who has worked here for 4 years.

Perhaps she is immune. Like the deep sea sponges that are heralded as the cure for cancer, maybe this girl can cure any sexual disease thrown at her. She is legend. Broke up a broken bottle fight between the witches of East last week. Super ego still seems fearless. 'Invincible till I die' is the idiotic mantra. Bar. Nor. I ate him for breakfast. Sure I was full all day. All live in a bubble. How is my bubble better than your bubble. When God was watching I was such a nice boy. Since he went away I have been mixed. Does that mean I was faking. Full of shit? But, was also a coward. Now, I border on fearless. I love to see passion but y woeasonality is anti passion.

2. Shouted (dictated from the shower)

Red, black, red, black, red, black, red, black ...

Characters:

- Sam – main guy
- Teachers
- Simon – inspires meditation – but also crazy – believes he can fly etc
- Crazy Wayne – violent criminal
- Austin – playboy – dead at the end?

Chinese characters:

- Strong – love triangle – stabbing, revenge
- Bruce – crazy money, jealous
- Faith – Helen of troy – think she is killed – who did it????
- Faith's bf - uber jealous – maybe dies
- Scarlett – love light
- Crazy Wayne's gf – Sally

Subsidiary characters:

- Mafia guy – Old Donald
- Girls – Banana, Chocolate, Coco, Yoyo, Cat, Juicy.

- Child, Teen, Dubai Uzbekis Sergei & mum, dad and emerati maid Kemla – private tutor – Dane
- Mum, dad.
- Narratives – baby - written by mum and dad - pictures
- child - 1st
- teenager - 1st to 3rd person
- Dubai - 3rd person
- China – 1st person
- lover's chapter (ending back to 1st) - 2nd person

36. Chasing the Dragon

I was at the table, but my eyes were on the drawn curtains behind the croupier. Dirty orange. Somehow the colour registered, but not a drop of curiosity flowed through me. I had left orange behind a long time ago. Now my colours were red and black; my number was supposed to be three. Saying that, I hadn't been able to face the wheel since the last time, so had just been hanging out playing Blackjack. - mostly watching others play, actually, throwing a few hands in when necessary. The first time I came to this place I was terrified - had no idea what I'd had walked into. Not stupid enough to expect James Bond sat there or Siberian tigers chasing gay guys around a stage, but the smell was something else, worse than 'stinky tofu street'. Everything was cracked, broken, soiled. The smoking ban, which had been successfully ignored throughout China – power to the people – had not even been given a thought here. The first course of action, surely, would have to be to implement a 'no hacking lung on the carpet' mandate. Naked oysters on an ash-doused sea of red. There was a strong Pompei motif going on. One thing that was not going on was formal dress. My kingdom for a cumberbund. The antithesis was on view. In hot conditions Chinese men like

to pull up their shirts at the front and let their almighty abs or bellies loose, dependant on their exposure to Western pastries. I mocked it to begin with until one unbearable day I tried it. A revelation – like my internal organs were on a cool spin-cycle. Doing it indoors was pushing it too far though, especially when I was trying to concentrate. It had taken such a leap to come here, but, do you know what, I trusted it more than any of the fancy casinos I had seen. With sophistication comes more chance of corruption. I toyed with Hong Kong and Macau, but I would rather do it on his own doorstep, so one of his dodgier friends had brought me along. I made small bets over a series of visits and judged that it was on the level and huge amounts could be staked. The police weren't a problem, because his dodgy friend was one of them and his even dodgier friend was a local judge. This was just a good old fashioned illegal gambling den. Money had found this city and many of the men had been seduced or bored by it already. Either way it was burning a hole in their faux-designer jeans. His little wholesome self would have been ashamed to see where I was and what I was doing, but I loved that feeling. I was free. China is the freest place in the world, and also the king of capitalism. Who knew? A friend of mine, a real one, sent me an email a while ago and it passed through his mind like a photograph falling to the floor.

'Hi Sam, forgive me for giving you yet another speech but I need you to hear this - It is not possible to 'be yourself' because "there is nothing we can call a self anymore; we are manifold, we have as many selves as there are groups to which we belong". The fragments that men have become must still join together harmoniously. Multiplicity cannot be endured if it has no reasoning core. This filthy life is not asked for, but it is given by love or by accident - not by God or parents but by life itself. Sex and death live side by side as they must for they belong to the same urge. They are driven by selfish escape, an essential need for viscosity or the void in this sedated world. Our sexuality, our mortality, craves acknowledgement, but they are kept in check in a world of sanitation and lies. It is not

shameful or wrong to want to sleep with a stranger. Murder is sometimes not the crime that it appears to be. These are honest emotions and they should be understood as such. Marriage or religious vows cannot stand in the way of nature; they cannot undo what has been done. Men and women should not be controlled by decisions of the past: only the moment matters. But some moments can last a lifetime; some decisions cannot be un-made. With individuality comes a responsibility to nourish oneself. Partnerships and bonds can help but the self is the self: marriages can go sour, gods can be forgotten, friends can disappoint: demons can haunt you, whether they are real or not. The body must be clean and healthy, respectful of life. The mind must be exercised and energised, and sometimes exorcised of hish. Crave truth and seek beauty, fill your days and your hearts with magic and mayhem for they are all you have. Play the game but do not worry about the rules. Listen but do not always learn: trust your instincts. The great and the small face hazards of all kinds – the lonely and the popular often share the same burden. Entangle yourself with life. Make your presence matter to people. Nothing is ever as bad as it seems. Do not be seduced by this act, make your life one that is bereft of fear, for you have seen the bottom of the well. You are now invincible.

I was at the wheel again somehow...red, black, red, black

Stories should really begin with the girl: her name was Faith, and yes, she was. Some names are absurd here – I taught Banana, Chocolate, Wombat and Radio - seven Bruce Lees and five Jackie Chans. Oh, oh, and there was a student who used to be called Prince, but changed it to Marino – so, of course, we called him the Student Formerly Known As Prince. Some names were even better in combination. Elephant was often sat next to Dick and the number of times I had to separate Biscuit and Doggie was ridiculous. But Faith truly was Faith - bliss, rapture, passion, pleasure. She made me feel the crazy love - genuinely blind and stupid; she woke my heart from its long, black sleep and all because of one night. Some girls make

movies and songs speak the truth; they inspire great deeds and great men and great... fuckwittery. Faith was one of those girls. The only one I had met in real life. Sadness wrapped in happiness, good sprinkled with bad – a nymph smothered in beauty and kindness and mischief, a sister and a friend, a conquest even, but never the mother of our golden children. She was the dream that couldn't be dreamt, the race that couldn't be run, the air that I couldn't breathe, no matter how much I needed it, no matter how much I wanted her. Before I lose you in a torrent of vomit and clichés, she was also a crystal meth dealer, an alcoholic and a loan shark. What a woman, girl, whatever. Of course, she is dead now. That first night she walked in Seasons Bar and she saw me playing fussball with one of the shipping guys and gave me a coy smile – wow! The next thing she had bought me a drink and walked over.

'Sam, you are here! You know, don't you?' she asked.

'What, what do I know? I know nothing,' I said, but I was starting to get warm cheeks.

'Haha, I like you. Wayne told you! You know.'

'Maybe. What do you mean, you like me?'

'Ha, nothing!'

She span away and went to sit by a mound of sunflower seeds with an Asian guy and two fat Chinese guys with no tops on. Interesting. I carried on drinking and playing fussball. She came over again and said, 'Come sit with me, stupid. Meet my friends.'

I met the Asian guy who turned out to be an Indian solar-power guru and the two big-breasted lads and they smiled at me a lot. Smiles that said, 'Not you as well? How can I get 5 minutes alone with Faith with all you idiots hanging around?' From our horribly broken conversation and seed-spitting showcase, it seemed like everyone had some claim to Faith and that maybe some lay-away option was going on. I tried to pea-cock as much as possible and we drank a lot of cheap beer and said, 'bottoms up' a lot, because it sent Faith into

hysterics every time. When I looked over at her she shot me eyes that would have raised the Titanic, but before I could enFaith them I saw that she was flashing those beams at the other guys sporadically too. I had no idea what was going on. I was in too deep, so naturally I went deeper. She suggested we go to a club. I can drink and I can dance – we are trained in these arts up North as James Bond is trained to fence and play poker. In Club 100 Degrees Boiling I danced like Elvis to lyric-less Chinese pounding beats. Everyone in a 20 metre radius loved it and tried to copy me. There was stripping of his sweater and t-shirt and a general bi-sexual fondle orgy for a few minutes. Then it calmed down. From his judgement it seemed like Faith had to entertain this Indian guy – maybe some kind of business hostess duty thing. This was a crazy city. It was all guess work, but sometimes Faith would dance so close to me on stage and our lips would touch. I am sure, I think. I can't have imagined it. I would pull her in tight and I am sure gyration occurred, but then she would break away and dance suggestively with others. I think I was slightly preferred though. I am sure I had not seen pelvic contact or lip touching with the others. Anyway, in what would be one of his greatest man-moves ever I caught her eye and went to the back of the club, then beckoned her with his finger, like our lord, Swayze. She came innocently smiling over, almost skipping. I got down on the floor, not quite sure of his intention and she got down there with me. Really? We are doing this? Wow. Her tongue was sweet and delicious and brave. Our bodies became one, touched all over, always smiling and looking into her huge eyes. Her breasts, her skin, her legs, oh his god. She is perfect. Greatest man-moment ever. Afterwards, she jumped up and started dancing by the rail, swinging her beautiful siren hair side to side, completely nonchalant, save for one second when she glanced at me and stuck her tongue out. I love this country! We went back to our table, to meet the pretenders, 008 and two Oddjobs. We drank whisky and tea, then just whisky, then just danced and danced till 6am and I could finally

wipe the smile from his face. Somehow I got dropped off home in the taxi first and could not get a moment with her and tell her I wanted to be with her forever and ever and ever. This girl must have taken Northern Seduction 101 – it was absolutely textbook.

The next two days involved diarrhoea and the promise of more diarrhea. threesomes turned down vegan no strength diarr, skiing, love. Cockroaches, dear reader kafka or starship troopers. Hope you cherished both in equal measure.

3. Notes for Sandstorm Chapter that was removed because of representational/censorship concerns

Sandstorm

...love is the natural occupation of the idle...if I have spoken of money, this is because money is indispensable to those who make a cult of their emotions.
Charles Baudilaire

The Dubai Devils had employed me for no real reason, except that I talked a lot about technology on Skype. Perhaps I had bored/hypnotised them into offering me the position to shut me up. Perhaps it was because it was such a vacuous, horrible place and they were punishing me. I was doomed from the beginning. I always seem to get singled out. Not a law of averages thing or pay too much attention to myself thing, or a I just bought a blue car and now I see blue cars all over the place thing. I think it is pretty close to empirical fact.

Monster in the queue at Heathrow. Told me loudly that he was going to Thailand. For the whores, not ladyboys, mind. He wanted to get into detail about it. I concocted an expression which was non-committal whilst non-offensive. He stank of beer and some of his tattoos hinted at extreme violence.

A few manly nods and a reach for my phone and I was away. Prayed to Odin that i wouldn't be sat next to him on the plane. As it happened i bumped into an old student. He told me he had recently come out as gay. I congratulated him and feigned surprise. Landing in Dubai offered another surprise. Once i got out of the giant greenhouse i faced the real heat - reminiscent of the final scene in Total Recall. My skin burned, my eyes bulged and my veins could have supported a young Tarzan. I was hoping to be greeted with one of those big pieces of cardboard with my name on it. Hopefully typed, perhaps embossed, with Dr. Rather than my first name. But nothing. Zip. I wondered around with my 2 suitcases, backpack, laptop bag and burning face. After 15 mins I must have started to secrete desperation juices. In the UK I Stard someone would have come to my aid but i sensed i had to help myself here. I had a contact number so I approached a series of strangers. The third rang the number for me. A smooth guy told me to wait outside for 20 mins. So i burned. Turned out he meant outside the baggage area. I must stop following orders. He did not apologise. He laughed. He drove with swagger and arrogance, undertaking, overtaking, making my blood boil as much as my skin - and did not look at me once. Just as I was beginning to curse the decision and formulate my escape he shook my hand and my hand emerged a thousand Euros richer. 'For your troubles.' Money is strangely anaesthetic. I began to soothe rather than

seethe, melted into the white leather of the SLK. Interesting. Very interesting. Then some garbled Arabic, a phone call, shouting, laughing, some erratic movements before being thrust a sock in my hands. A long beige sock, soaked with sweat. Put on, put on. I've always been quite passive and suggestible, but I refused this. Put on, put on, you must. I knew i was in a crazy situation, so, i kicked off my right shoe. No, no. Put on your eyes. No see, no see. You must. Ok, now i was scared. I put the dripping sock over my eyes. I didn't think it would be long enough, but it stretched pretty well, no doubt aided by moisture. The smell was not so bad. I must congratulate him on his foot hygiene. Arrived. The driver asked me to take off the sock and nodded slowly, solemnly - then proceeded to laugh his balls off.

‘You English so trust. So obey polite thing. Like you. Like you much. Was joke. No real secret.’

He laughed like crazy for about 4 seconds then became incredibly serious. ‘But Mr Elgun is no joke. Serious family. Watch out. For sure, watch out.’

The car finally stopped and I got out. There seemed to be a Lego world in front of me. Some creature had placed a huge grey road sheet on top of desert waste-sand and then positioned white cubes and green plastic slabs at regular intervals. My only confusion was to how the plastic had not melted in this heat. The driver had screeched off. As I walked closer to the biggest cube I crunched over the first green slab. It curled underfoot and made a racket but somehow retained its spring. It must be real grass. It was harder than any astroturf but there was soil. It must be real. A woman came running out of a tiny sidecube. No, running was not the word. It was more of a limpy amble with a hint of urgency.

Handsome. Handsome! She shouted.

As she emerged beside me it seemed she was saying, ah, Sam or Hassan. You here. Safely arrived. She asked/asserted. Very good. Verrrrry good. Star Scotland journey nice, indeed, very pleasant?

I am from Ireland.

Verrrrry good. Beautiful island of Scotland. My sister once went to London. Wet. For sure. Verrrrry wet.

—

—

So I woke up and rolled into somebody's feet. They were Lady Kemla's. Her grasp of jetlag bordered on the verge of denial. I forgave her as soon as I was sat down in front of a bowl of dates and yoghurt. It is amazing how we can go through life and never encounter such simple pleasures. The oft-quoted 10% of our brain that we use may be directly related to cuisine. It certainly felt like it at that moment as my eyes seemed to open wider and taste was brand new again. Dane was nowhere to be seen. Lady Kemla eyeballed me with stoic blankness until the last date was in my mouth then my ass was off the seat, dragged towards a bathroom - which was disappointingly non-exotic. She left me alone to do what was impossible given the absence of time and a good book then began to bang on the door. Sometime soon one of us would have to speak. Not yet, apparently. She grabbed my wet had and led me down a mammoth corridor. Perhaps a mammoth corridor of doom may describe it better. Reverse Alice in Wonderland activity. Two turnings and modesty gave

way to majesty. My jaw dropped but Kemla must have caught it.

*** AV (Poster of what looks like Stalin. Azeris, scary boss, tiny but fierce, Elgun has a 24 year old step mum, Gulnara – she tries to have sex with Sam. At first Sam does not know who she is. Elgun real mum died in childbirth. Father is never present except once at breakfast where he hands out money. Always an excuse about where he is. In Jail, in jail on business, in Africa selling parts. Parts of people. Parts to people. Kazakh tourettes. Cant help doing borat impressions. Lady Kemla acts as the boss woman but sometimes he catches her cleaning the floor. Whenever I ask about Kemla she says she is local but then from a different place. Same with elgun. Azeri Kazakh Russia, uzbek arrive at compound - see blurred billboards - helluva day - massive compound - but taken to tiny room - with horrible single bed. gets in there - shattered - wondering what the hell has happened - then Kane comes in and ushers him out of b

ed onto mat in the corner.

Kane sneaks out every night around 8pm pretending to teach but really goes to his secret room with pool and gym access.

Range rovers and little jeeps everywhere

scenarios

warming water with hands

kissing boss

sick in pool

matching jumpers

i don't have any friends

evolution

who are you? in a meeting - jibberish - student - teacher

flashback.office of agent - unscrupulous guy - checks his cv - innocent teacher talks in interview formal speak - agent just says excellent, excellent - his pov of cv shows that it is all blurry and he cannot even make out the qualifications. just been teaching in india - job in tunisia beautiful Kuwaiti princess

4. breakfast in big palace - long table - Kane schmoozing boss lady and servants. Whenever she tries to tell Sam anything he interrupts. His excuse is women like to be dominated. In private conversation it is obvious that the teachers should be enStaring the luxury - big picture on wall - it looks like gaddafi but can't see it clearly. Each room has a despot. Idi Amin, Pol Pot etc. Sam vows to learn history better

5. session with 15 year old boy - bodyguard watching and commenting on things that were too western. K giving bullshit information and blagging everything. S takes over, long gruelling session - covered in sweat... and student kind of likes him. boss lady gives him a present - horrendous 80s shirt. K sees it and goes and puts on his matching shirt to show he was given a gift in the past. kid gives K some money sneakily for the homework he did for him. he only got a C+ - but K says that he needs to dumb it down and keep it realistic - but secretly says 'shit'

6. walk round town in crazy shirts - K tries to order chicken but gets a massive fish - pretends he meant to order it. scorpion fight - maybe they have a bet. metaphor for their relationship. K reveals a hint of his nasty, competitive side

7. they have their fish in the tiny room on a disposable bbq. K pretends to eat

eyes and everything to prove he is assimilated - act throws out of (prison style)window

8. back in bed - bert and ernie style. talk of the previous tutor who disappeared in mysterious circumstances

9. S shaking and green in bed with food poisoning - throwing up in a bucket. Kane gets up and raids the palace fridge.

10. After finding Kane's secret room and refusing the boss's wife's advances, he pretends to go shopping in a jeep and escapes to the airport.

scenarios

*** movie/sitcom

Need to win money to buy a house and car for Scarlett. 64000 not enough.lose her otherwise. Took knife from boxer shorts. Stabbed myself. Not in the heart. Right in the guts, where life really happens. New phone I always loved peace. And quiet. And harmony.not sure how good it was for new long term but I needed it hated shouting angry faces chaos. Because I was small? A weak animal. Don't know. No real trauma just the usual but I was abnormally sensitive. I've re branded it an asset but looking back with at least an attempt at honesty. It must be a liability. I don't know maybe just needs managing. . Remember everything as s baby. Dirty nappy. Screaming. Kind parents. Memory quirk. Nov 5 Scream xingfen in bed. Means excited but sounds a little bit too much like sinn fein. And this girl didn't even have a beard Zombie blow jobs. Not quite stopped pis sing. Old woman broke into toilet Nov 29 Mega

loneliness of the cross-cultural traveller. Empty void avalanched by nothingness. Seize the day. Seize what. Armed with the language skills of a tone-deaf budgie. Christmas songs flitting through non - white noise. This particular dialect is known as bird talk. I am as far from comprehension as my pasty white skin is from the biting cold - enveloped in ignorance and flannel. Hate that term pasty white. I retract it. Go back and scrub it out please. tippex if you like. Tippex white. Almost luminous. If picallili were white. Some kind of cottage cheese hybrid. Man. Ur gonna blow it. I know it is not the right way. Not the right way to win. But I don't want to win. I want to express myself. Yeah, but is it worth it? Strangely it is. Car crash reels for breakfast. People die. It for others Turner prize Charles Dickensesque. Names mean something here. Not everything but they are a vision, an intention. Not as clichéd as second chances yet they are a pause for thought. Perhaps we should all rename ourselves. Give ourselves a target to live up to. W: Always on my dick! S: who is? W: My girl. Can't shake her off it. Always. She loves it. S: She loves dick? W: Nah, man, she just loves my dick. S: You got a special dick? Fire stuff out of it like the ping pong girl...maybe sweetcorn? W: Nah, nah, she just loves me. S: You're the dick? W: Fuck off, English prick! S: Prick dick. A world of nobs. Phallus in Wonderland! Just playing with you, man. Not your dick, I should add. She likes you and loves your special dick. I get it. Some kind of bend in it? Am

serious. Mine has a serious left turn in there. Can fuck round corners. The boomerang. Bendy straw. W: Nah, man. Mine is a straight 8. All the way to my belly button. S: Congrats. Let's go home and get your girl on that dick, u prick. Dad watching man v food making porn noises. Remember salami honeymoon. Daughter disgusted. Veggie pig dying cds The grunter, swallower, anti spitter Occidentalism Friend even said 'you people' no hint of Tropic Thunder irony So, I was in the bar. I was always the first, even had to circle the street a few times because I was ridiculously early. Don't get me wrong, I was no Chinaski. My spirit was willing but my body was weak. Hangovers took 72 hours of my life these days. First day was death and diarrhoea followed by heartburn and Starlessness, finally paranoia and pensiveness. I was a slave to alliteration. This was a dry bar - the only one on bar street without bar - girls. It is hard to describe these creatures to somebody who has no idea about the far east. Basically they are gangs of freelance waitresses who usually answer to a mamasan. They offer companionship to the weary traveller. Buy them a drink and they will play dice with you and tell you how great you are. I had seen Crazy Wayne use one as a hand puppet. His hand was so far up her skirt that she looked like a tripod. She seemed to like it. Morally, I think I was against it but I was also curious as to how that transaction happened. Knowing how little these girls earned I would sometimes buy them a drink out of good old

fashioned

Scarlett places pregnancy test into his White Russian – positive. as she can show him love. Bet goes ahead but she already spoke to the boss and made it void. The dream of the lotus leaves adam and eve

Photography and mirrors sahara steal the soul sahawis. Talked about chemistry and beauty and attraction many times. Now it was the practical. Star sent the abstract pictures about where she was and what she was doing in the Star that Sam would find her. Crazy bf checked her messages. Even translated English messages. Prototype 2 style strobe lighting. Phoenix wife of the dragon.

Coach of the year. Boobs Israel tax on chocolate 64000 after parents died.

Question indeed. Lived on noodles and water. Did not touch it. Language failure Mime seems more real. Expression of the body. Swearing lesson.

Mother fucker cuntbubble. Thinking outside the box. Transgression. Forming new links in our brains. Signs and signifiers. Religious principal walks in. Red faces. Step up the academics. Stud –

*not from her from some gangster – use AV pics to find her also include a map – hand drawn

locations around town

Warm face, cold ass Chinese saying

. *come back to and have the dilemma of roulette crazy or love – Star will marry me if I win the money. Does not go through with the bet. Maybe Star needs it to fight off some gangsters or pay the police, Bought a house and Scarlett pregnant.

Well maybe not all the way home all the way was Island already was already to go home really go home to my real home. I was my home something else was I pining for someone who's the feeling not a place you must to be one of these two girls is always about the girl. I splashed and splashed the rainbow neon puddles these plus Pakistan. They splashed back this time not Pakistan.

The funeral anyways it was magnificent 6:16 always such food situated in the morning maybe when I was a child this is what I thought finish it should be feeling should be I should be a cop uncomfortable I should dress different I should feel that the world is broken will be shaken should should should should should should should. I was OK this time to let myself feel the way I really felt because this funeral wasn't so close and I was calling friend acquaintance somebody I need mu for a short period of time to review the film of the borderline sociopath psychopath whatever I felt nothing. The cannons went off again and again difficult and fireworks here fake fireworks this one rocket launcher. Add missiles was chaos color wife makes strange dumplings

I've never seen before sweet nothing really so sweet sweetheart maybe it is a metaphor so I didn't have to.

I'd read before I came about the fake mourners what are you come by somebody to cry and you'll be home crying behalf of level books it wasn't what I expected there is a real sense of genuine loss times if I try to skate about this it's just another tool we have a washing machine for michelle close to the microphone so good to hear

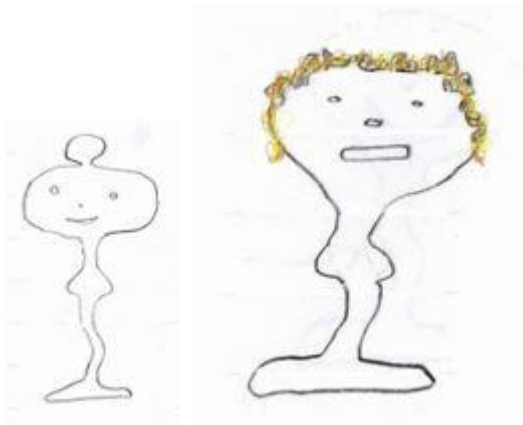
4. Early Nokia thumb text stream of consciousness

Hope flew back to me. She danced, literally, into my arms, adorned in white, seemingly a gown, cathy like. A ghost. My ghost, remembered and realised. Closer inspection showed it was some kind of 80s jumpsuit. Still, it was lighter than air. Marshmallow. She had not hugged me like this for months. That smell. Wet hair. Perhaps the bf was gone. I had to ask. No. She bought me dinner, paying before i knew what she had done. Then we were drinking champagne, dancing, singing. Whirling, twirling. I was good. Everything from my lips was funny, wise, well-timed. She looked at me. Languid, sprawling, yet penetrating, looks. Pure. Poetic. I was not aroused, i was mesmerised. Still, i did not act. Cowardice or good instinct? She was unfathomable. How could her bf make love to her? She was Magdalene, Aphrodite, mythic in every sense. We got drunk, touched, lingered, joined. When she left I wanted to die. I texted her 5 times within 2 minutes of getting in the taxi. Back at the hotel, i lay naked and sobbed. Undefined tears. The ac made the hairs on my chest stiff. I spun gold between finger and thumb, lost in something, unimagined, undone. My mirror muse. She replied to my texts at 9am. I must have slept, somehow. 'can i tell you something funny?' 'my bf said him and me had sex last night, but i can't remember. I was so drunk. Bad Hope. Emoticon. I told him he was great. Laugh. He asked who i drank with. I said i was with my sister.' 'actually you are my sister' my thumbs replied before my brain 'you make me laugh, crazy girl, and cry. sister, brother, father, mother, lover, dog, kitten, god and lover. I wish'. If i were a normal man, 1 man i would have killed myself long ago because of her. Luckily i abided in the super ego, the ether, truly ethereal. I transcended the pain, sometimes subsided to enHope the trauma of sorrow, but i could always climb out. Clawing with dirty nails on occasions. Ironically life had taught me not to value it. Time alone had built a well in my mind. I could always drink from it. Yes, i smashed thing sometimes, but only when drunk. Alcohol tied me to the physical. Delicious in its own way. Surely damaging. My phone rang. More parties, more drinking, more singing, more squatting naked in Chinese toilets.

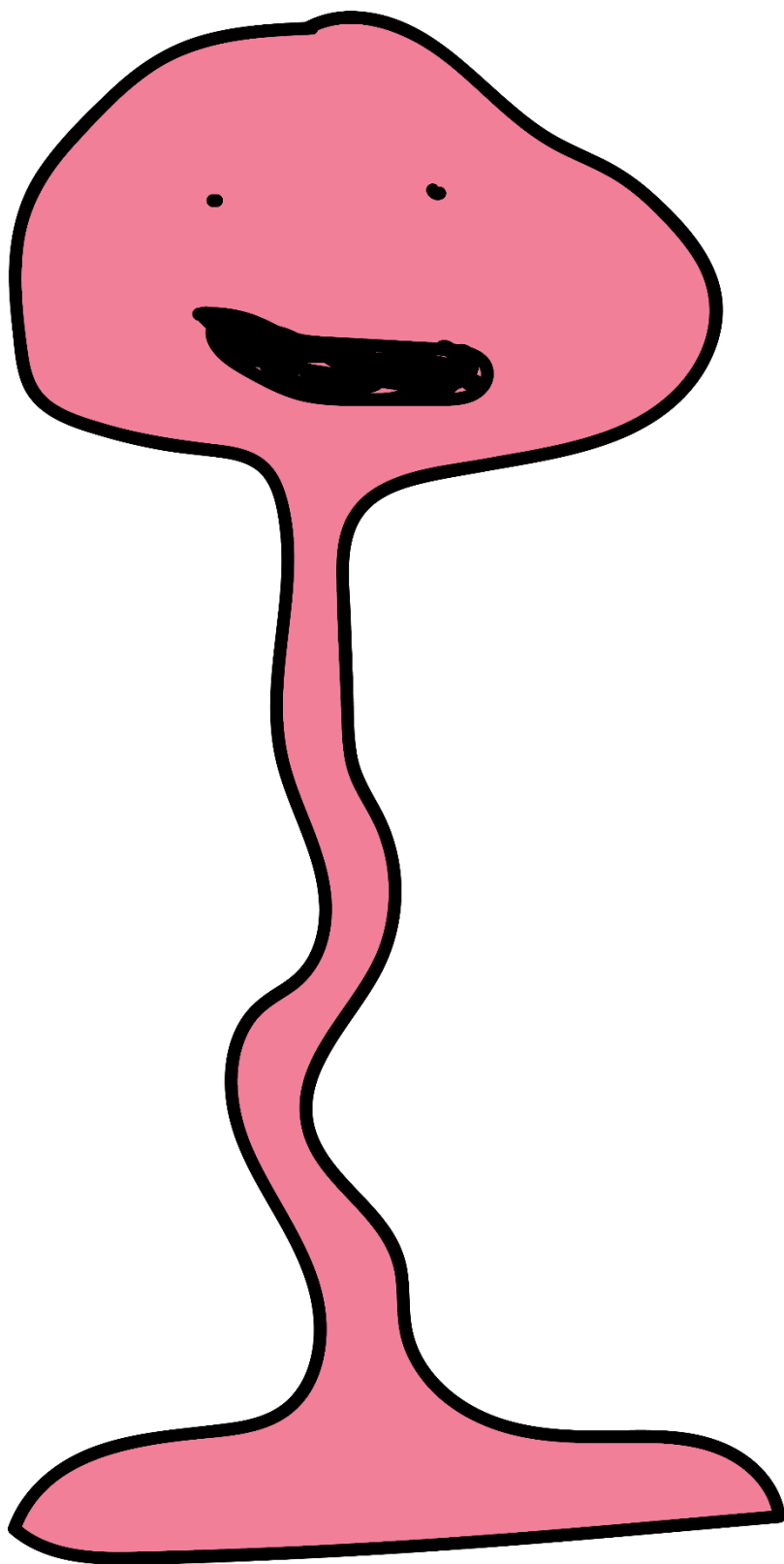
5. Aimless Walks (an example of combined texted and dictated stream of consciousness)
Freed mind. No phone. Football game, pastoral life. Beauty of Britain. Is everyone as alone as me or have i cultivated it. attack dogs - sonny, cher, max, bygraves, bruce...sprinsteen, forsythe, hornsby, campbell. Alien beauty, but how big is the bush? Battle between 1 and 2 brain. How do we choose to choose. Sometimes the big guy is in a mood, or depressed, or just wants pancakes. How can we override it? What are you smiling at? My teeth needed some air. phone writing lacks the vanity but also the mystique of writing at a laptop in a cafe. The pitter patter, 'i-am-a-writer, I am a writer, drumming the keys and infesting my lips into smugness sardonay - not a word, but should be, i am now in a terrible routine. I read and write

between 1 and 4am while scratching my scalp. Suffering for my art. You look like nobody owns you. Agreed, pedantically. Still the same now. Don't iron unless it's an official engagement. Desensitized to news tragedy or just powerless. False global perspective. Would we help our neighbour?

6. Early Doodle animation experiments from analogue to digital on Draw Something and Photoshop. Photographs of mafia murder storyline self-removed because of censorship concerns











The five phones below were used to capture, create, and edit the footage in the finished smartphone novel, by means of wayfaring, texting, photographing and creating on the move. Only footage from the iPhone 5s, iPhone 7 and iPhone 12 made the cut into the final edit:



Improvised capture devices, tripod, and 'Steadicams'



Assorted Tools

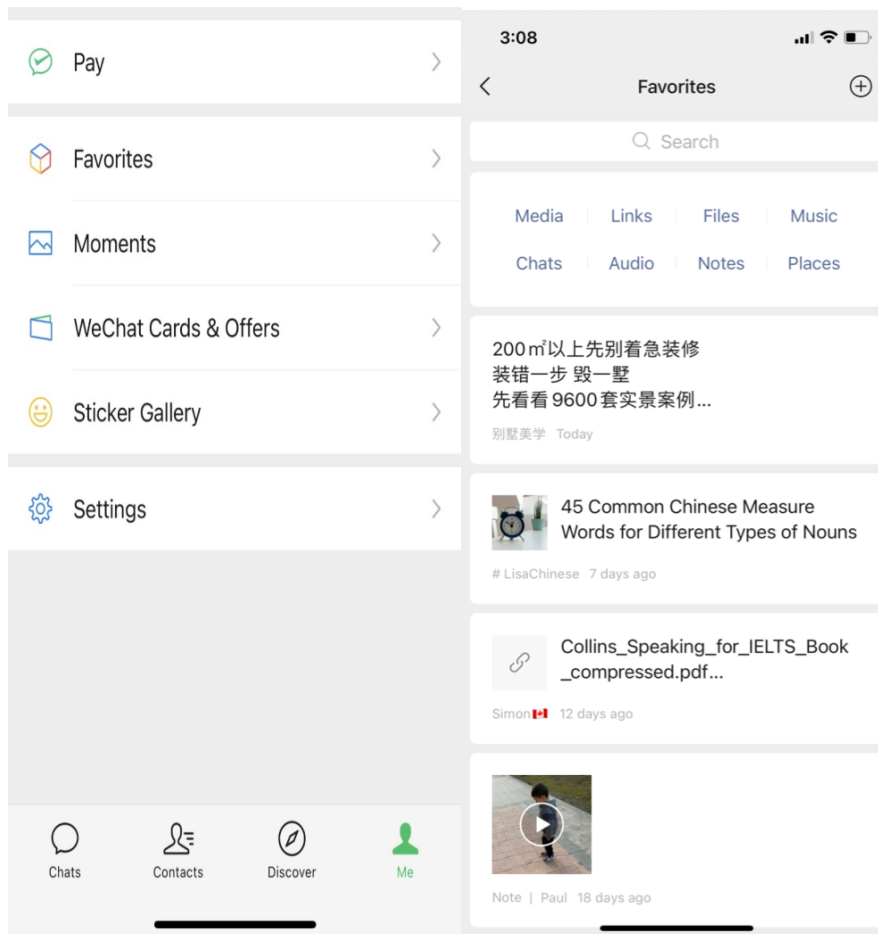


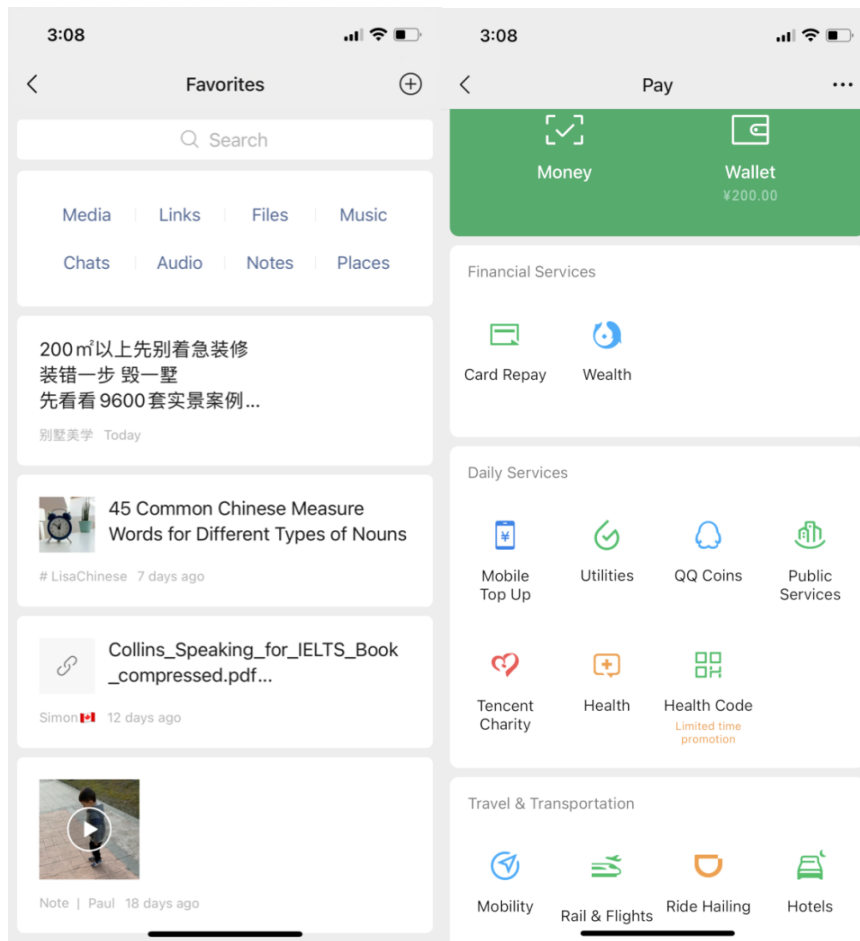
Apps



Completion & Delivery Platform

WeChat





Name: Sam Chen
WeChat ID: lingunirockyroad

Edit Contact >

Privacy >

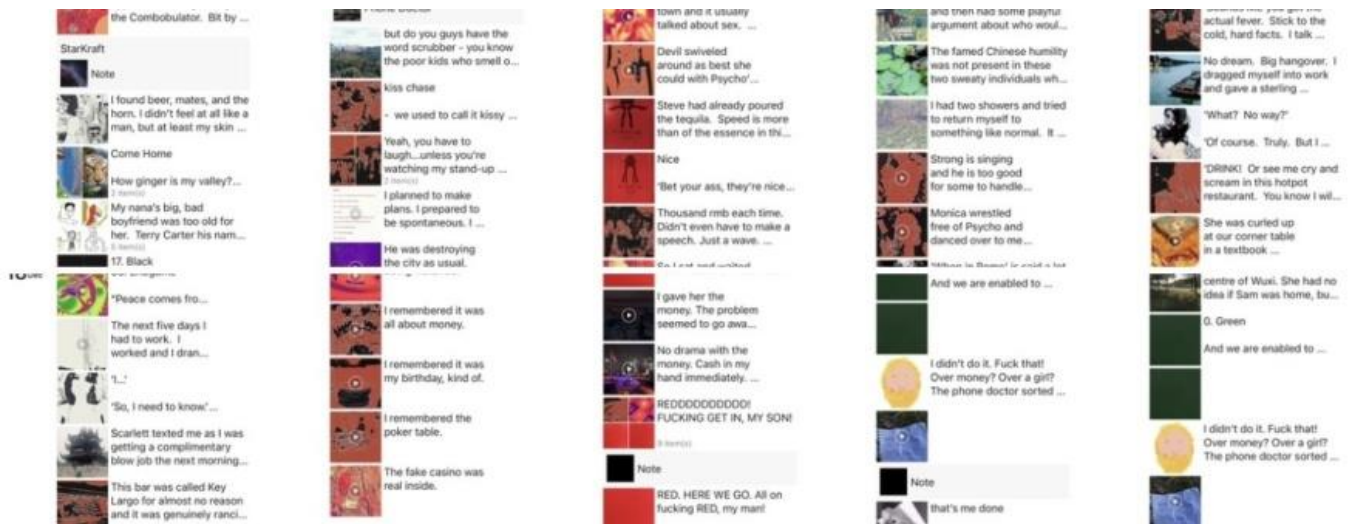
Moments >

More >

Messages

Voice or Video Call





Reflective Context that fed into the creative process

At present I use a phone 16 hours a day – it is always with me. I work on it, conduct research on it, create on it, bank on it, trade stocks on it, take photographs and video on it, order food on it, pay bills on it, operate an e-bike and car through it, chronicle my son's life through it, and make the occasional call.

As a media lecturer, I was in the fortunate position of being in the habit of thinking and producing in a visual medium when the need arose. Indeed, my professional and academic life has straddled the world and conventions of literature and film.

Having matured sufficiently I avoided writing about my own life and focused research upon more interesting clients and acquaintances. Very early on, one of these clients gifted a phone. Amusingly, they said they were utterly sick of seeing me batter away on a Nokia with thumbs. They were obviously against monomodality. Having professed a love for the ergonomics of it, I would not be parted. However, they insisted as only they could, so the next day there arrived a shiny new smartphone.

The central rhetorical problem in most of my fiction is 'What is the meaning of life?' It is navel-gazing of the highest order. As a young writer, my fiction was too autobiographical. However, with experience and an outward looking perspective, fiction becomes more nuanced and more interesting when it takes inspiration from others.

The narrative changed because of the process of creation itself but mostly by the fact that the I had a baby. This is a personal revelation, but it is a personal project and therefore requires the truth of this. Writers' block, work commitments, house husbandry, cannot compete with the feelings of fatherly responsibility towards a son. One of these duties was to complete this project – but also to complete it responsibly and avoid murder and suicide within the narrative.

On the roulette wheel literary device - I have never gambled but I taught often about free will and determinism. I also made a video called 'Dice Man' many years ago for students to teach them how to construct endings. This was inspired by Luke Rhinhart's (1971) novel of the same name. This visual memory, even the memory of editing for months on end, dictated that the gambling scenes would be filmed to some degree. This had been forgotten during the course of everyday work, until a meeting with a stockbroker who was a friend to a professional gambler. He used the Martingale principle of doubling down on red or black until you make a profit. Upon further research, this was a terrible life-plan. However, the creative seeds had been sewn. Life, and casinos, in the UK did not seem appealing enough to start writing this story – for whatever deep-seated reasons of psychological inferiority may be at play. However, when visiting China, I immediately wanted to tell friends about this place. I was forever writing emails back home or sending photographs of architecture or lotus flowers. Then I saw all the competitive Mahjong being played in the town squares. The idea and the visuals were now mostly completed. I just needed a muse or a character to hang this upon. Most 'foreigners' encountered in Wuxi were ESL (English as a second language) teachers and were soon found gathering in the bars. An American became the inspiration for this novel. At this time I had a trusty Nokia E63 and an SLR camera. I began to chronicle visits more fervently, but the idea had not yet formed. Journeying back to Wales, leafing through the photos and QQ messages while sat on the plane, I had the idea to put my thumbs to creative use. At the time, I thought it may be among the first ever cell phone novels but was mistaken. That summer a client relocated to Lugano, Switzerland and I was gifted the Samsung S5. The central premise and character were born but each chapter needed a plot and there also needed to be some pay-off. I was drawn to existentialist quandaries naturally and my favourite colour is red, so there was an early leaning towards a suicide/debauchery zero sum game. I had no idea that roulette wheels even had a green segment at this point. QQ blogs were around at this and they would soon become the WeChat of modern social media.

On the importance of China - it is essentially the secondary character that emerges and positions the protagonist.

As a visual learner, I am happy with the outcome of the animation. Even as an avid reader and literature graduate, I had trouble picturing landscapes in his mind. I would read Emily Bronte and feel the characters, but not the howling wind on the moors.

On the sensitive topic of suicide - being the father to a young toddler and reading stories of suicide weekly, I had to change this strand of the novel. It is a real concern among students in China.

On the film, Irreversible being a good structural guide for the novel - it was recommended by a colleague and a first reaction was to attack it because of the pregnancy cliché. Upon second viewing, there was a realisation of having misjudged it hugely. It is not an enjoyable film experience, but it is an impressive one and an important one.

As a student and teacher of Women's Studies and a lecturer in gender, I was cognisant of and reticent to follow through with the original, problematic plotline.

Becoming 'other' in a country far removed from everything I knew; the journey into interracial marriage and fatherhood also had lasting ramifications for me. All these changes impacted the creative process, especially the final decision-making. It is hard to change instincts or habits, but it is easier to omit final artefacts in the face of discomfort, displeasure, or disgust in others and in oneself.

A couple of decades ago, I had a good-quality digital camera and a Polaroid before that. However, there was an extreme reluctance to take it out with me, even on exotic holidays.

Equally, a huge catalyst for me was the birth of my son and the seemingly natural inclination to chronicle his every waking hour. There are photographs and videos of his everyday life—not in a cute, 'record the moment' kind of way, but in an incessant, habitual, compulsion to capture his essence.