

# *Blue Lines at Blackrock:* Digital Wayfaring and Mobile Media Art

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In my video poem, *Blue Lines at Blackrock*<sup>1</sup> I explore what it means to be present in a place with a smartphone camera, specifically the coastal paths running through bayside Beaumaris and Blackrock on unceded Boon Wurrung/Bunarong lands in Melbourne, Australia. Material bodies, physical surroundings, and circumstances are at the center of experiences, perceptions, and understandings of lifeworlds. The idea of an a priori lifeworld (Lebenswelt) is a concept that may be traced back to phenomenology and the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1954-1970). The lifeworld is the world as directly experienced by people through the subjective sensorium of everyday life and includes individual, social, affective, perceptual, and practical experiences. The trouble here is that things and actions that are fundamental to how we intervene in, and make sense of the world, are often not discussed or acknowledged in academic literature. Places and lifeworlds are subject to conditions that are constantly changing. Material bodies, physical surroundings, and circumstances are dynamic and unsettled. These qualities in turn make them troublesome for academic enquiry.

My main proposition in this essay is that creative practice research using practice-based research methods (Candy and Edmonds) and informed by a non-representational ontology

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<sup>1</sup> [vimeo.com/370457674](https://vimeo.com/370457674)

(Ingold, Vannini) provides a strategy that embraces the troublesome qualities of lifeworlds and provides methods and methodologies for new ways of perceiving and understanding interactions and relationships between material bodies and physical surroundings. I present the genesis and development of a video poem called *Blue Lines at Blackrock* to illustrate how a non-representational research strategy may be employed to both generate creative works as well as to situate these as non-traditional research outputs. *Blue Lines at Blackrock* explores what it means to be materially and digitally present in the lifeworld with a smartphone camera. The work was shot on a smartphone and participates in the emerging field of mobile media art.

Through my mobile media art research, I explore an ongoing research question: What new ways and methods for making creative works (including mobile films) are emerging through the practice of digital wayfaring and how can I capture and share life on the move? I take my definition of digital wayfaring from Hjorth and Pink whereby, a “digital wayfarer as we conceptualise her or him does not simply weave her or his way around the material physical world. Rather, their trajectory entangles online and offline as they move through the weather and the air, with the ground underfoot and surrounded by people and things, while traversing digital maps, social networking sites, and other online elements” (45-46).

The entanglements of smartphones and the everyday have helped to shape our lifeworlds and have expanded opportunities for vernacular creative practices and art-making involving photography and video that draw on intersubjective experiences within collective everyday activities and interactions. Bourriaud theorized such intersubjective experiences as relational aesthetics and argues that these come into play where the artist tries to capture “the world on the move” (14) and where “each offering becomes a proposal to live in a shared world” (15).

There are numerous examples of mobile films that reflexively draw on relational aesthetics to capture and share dynamic lifeworlds such as Gerda Cammaer's autobiographical work *Mobilarte* where she documents her travels in Mozambique using an iPad; Leo Berkley's *57 Tram* where he filmed his tram commutes on a mobile phone, and Adam Kossof's *Moscow Diary* where he revisits streets and buildings in Moscow mentioned by Walter Benjamin in his diary from his visit to Moscow in 1926-1927. Furthermore, the affordances of mobile media, according to Schelser, have provided filmmakers and artists in the 21st century with new opportunities to make cultural contributions to movie-making and storytelling. Mobile filmmaking is part of a wider and expanding field of creative arts practices that may be regarded as mobile media art.

In a recent volume, Hjorth, de Souza, and Lanson bring together essays about mobile media art written by a diverse ensemble of creative practitioners and academics. They seek to delineate the field of mobile media art whereby "artists are generating lively, playful, and imaginative ways of being in a digitally enhanced world by performing and experimenting with the everyday" (3). They point to the intersectionality of the entanglements mobile media art has with everyday sociability and how artists and writers are "seeking to create affective modes and alternative ways to consider how lifeworlds flow through a lively balance of social aesthetics and ideals" (3). They emphasize the materiality and liveliness of mobile media art. They identify the importance of the relationship between everyday social rituals and activities, smartphones, and art making.

*Blue Lines at Blackrock* is situated within a wider frame of art practice and interventions that fit within the ever-expanding boundaries of mobile media art. My mobile media art practice has developed into ritualized methods of digital intervention in the form of photos, haiku-like

text, and short videos posted to Facebook and Instagram through wayfaring around my neighborhood with my smartphone. My small social media posts seek to touch and connect other humans about ongoing everyday sights and ordinary feelings so as “to nurture well-being on a damaged planet” (Haraway 76). *Blue Lines at Blackrock* is a practice-based culmination (Candy and Edmonds) of one of my digital wayfaring interventions.

My art-making methods include the use of my smartphone to gather material joining digital and physical co-presence together as a wayfarer artist and poet searching for evocative moments. I draw on the anthropologists Tim Ingold and Phillip Vannini and their non-representational approaches to situate and theorize my mobile media art-making practices. Vannini presents a way to enliven ethnographic writing through a focus on what he terms an “ethos of animation” (320) which has five qualities: vitality, performativity, corporeality, sensuality, and mobility. In other words, close attention should be paid to the materiality of experiences in the lifeworld. I applied these five qualities both as methods to make *Blue Lines at Blackrock* and as a theory frame to theorize my creative practice research.

Vannini begins with the quality of vitality where he observes, “A vitalist ethnography, in short, is an ethnography pulled and pushed by a sense of wonder and awe with a world that is forever escaping, and yet seductively demanding, our comprehension” (320). Intuition and inductive ways of working that embrace both the evocative and the affective. Attention to vitality opens a myriad of possibilities for methodological synergies and complementary relations between ethnography and creative arts research. A vital creative practice is forever unfolding and often filled with wonderings. The making of *Blue Lines at Blackrock* was motivated by watching the sunset unfold and wondering about the connections between my lived experience and

Rebecca Solnit's musings about the blueness of distance and horizon lines. I discuss this association in detail later.

The second quality Vannini describes is performativity whereby there is a focus on action, which "emphasizes the importance of ritualized performances, habitual and non-habitual behaviors, play and the various scripted and unscripted, uncertain and unsuccessful doings of which everyday life is made" (320). Performativity emphasizes the background and mundane aspects of how things get done. My digital wayfaring is a daily routine for me where I post photos and videos of things that catch my eye and I add haiku-like descriptions to them. This is a performative routine. My sojourn to Blackrock at sunset when I shot the video material for my video and shared it on social media was one such routine. Feedback from friends and followers was a key factor in deciding whether my posts had resonance and whether this intervention was worth developing into a fully realized video poem.

The third quality is corporeality, whereby "the researcher's body as the key instrument for knowing, sensing, feeling and relating to others and self" (321) so that "affect is a medium through which ethnographic research unfolds" (321). The researcher's body itself is a way of knowing—an ethos of animation acknowledges enacted and embodied forms of knowledge. Creative practice by its very nature is embodied. Digital wayfaring is embodied where affect is a key medium for my creative practice. My lived experience of standing still and filming on a chilly winter's evening became part of my video poem.

The fourth quality in Vannini's ethos of animation is sensuality and this serves to "underline the not-necessarily reflexive sensory dimensions of experience by paying attention to the perceptual dimensions" (322). This quality is key to my intentions and permeates my creative practice research. Through the words of the voiceover in *Blue Lines at Blackrock*, I invite the

viewer to imagine the sensations of wonder evoked by the sea and horizon at sunset. The words focus on the perceptual aspects. The poem opens with the following words taken from the script: “A blue line in the distance—scattered wet motes of blues and rosy golds dance their way into the horizon—of where I am not, cannot be when I’m here—colors inhaled dissolve with each breath out.”

The fifth and final quality is mobility, which seeks to account for the kinetic dimensions of fieldwork where “ethnographic journeys are not planned transitions from the office to the field site but wanderings through which movement speaks” (323). Once again, enacted and visceral methodologies are acknowledged through non-representational research approaches. Digital wayfaring, according to Hjorth and Pink is not about getting from A to B but rather a situated and embodied way of observing and evoking the nuances and dynamism of being in the lifeworld. Mobility is central to digital wayfaring. On this occasion, mobility became about standing still so that I could get video clips that were more like photographs where the frame was still and only the movement was sea and birds within the frame.

*Blue Lines at Blackrock* began as a series of video clips and haiku-like poems posted to Facebook and Instagram on a clear winter’s night at sunset as I stood very still and filmed the sea and horizon in static frames. I wanted to create a visual meditation where there was no motion deliberately created, rather the only motion would be the changing light and waves in the sea. I didn’t have a tripod, so this was quite challenging. My hands were cold too as I couldn’t wear gloves and use the smartphone camera to record. This place on the unceded Boonwurrung (Bunarong) land of the Kulin nation is very familiar to me, yet each time I come here, it is changing—sometimes the differences are dramatic and at other times they are subtle shifts in the light and sheen of the sea. I began to wonder about how I understood this place on this evening

as I looked towards the horizon. The image of the horizon below is from one of the clips I videoed while standing still.

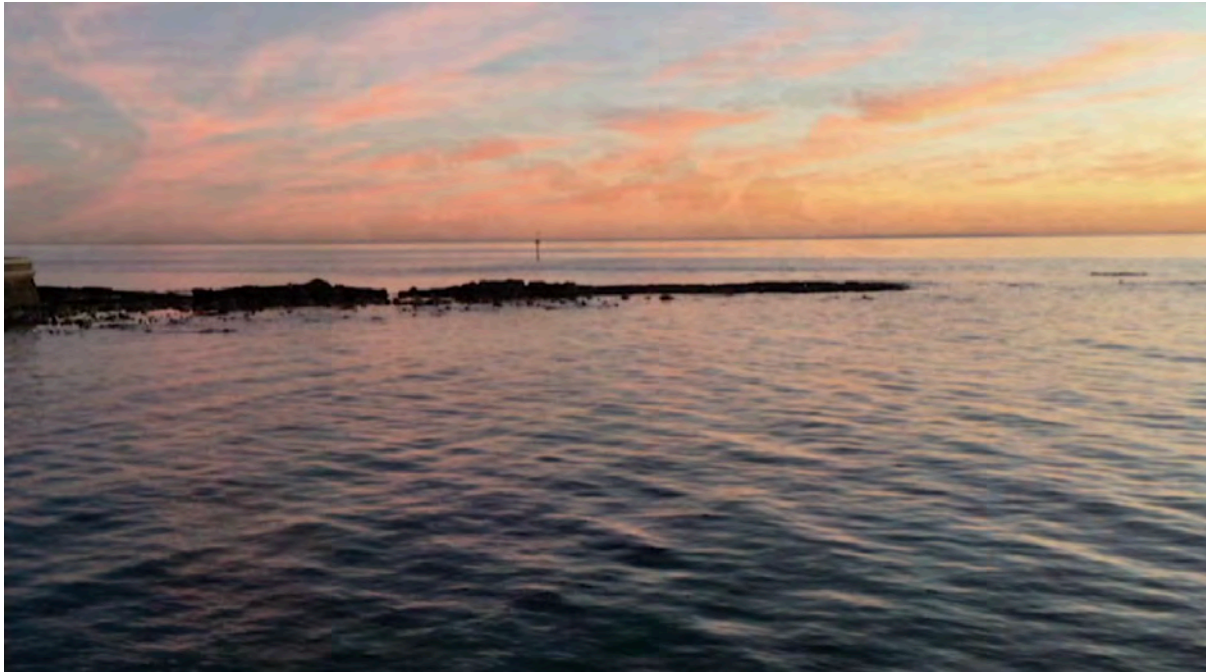


Fig1. Main layer for *Bluelines at Blackrock*.

My thoughts turned to Rebecca Solnit who wrote about how horizons, depths, water, and distance appear blue. She claims that blue comes from light that gets lost and gives us beauty. Her essay is constructed as a series of conjunctions where her thoughts meander tenderly between philosophy and the materiality of her experience searching for epiphanies. She speaks poignantly of the beauty of her experience of walking towards Antelope Island one drought year and how while she could not get literally lost, she lost all track of time so that being lost was not about “dislocation but about the immersion when everything else falls away” (Solnit 36). I videoed the sea with the reference point of a horizon line that I would use later in the editing process to evoke a sense of immersion.



Fig 2. Overlay from *Blue Lines at Blackrock*.

I thought I could riff off Solnit's musings about getting lost in moments of wonder - my intention became to evoke the corporeality of the common human experience of losing one's self in the horizon line between the sky and sea at sunset around sunset when the angle of the sun and earth creates a magical light, which tends to evoke an atmosphere of reverie. I videoed numerous clips of the horizon line.

Digital wayfaring is integral to my creative process. I posted some of the video clips to Instagram and Facebook to gauge people's reactions. (Later I would blur and disrupt the horizon line with overlays of the sea with no horizon for reference.) I added poetic phrases to photos. The process of composing video poem through digital wayfaring had commenced. I continued to post clips and haiku about this experience on social media. The reactions I received were very encouraging and my images were evoking reveries.





Fig 3. Screen shot from *Blue Lines at Blackrock* with main layer and overlay.

Later, I compiled the poetic phrases and haiku I had posted. I edited these into a narrative poem which became the voice-over to go with the vision I had shot. I sent the poem to a friend in the UK who read it for me – she had read my poetry out loud before and I liked how it sounded. Then I chose some clips and edited the footage using overlays as depicted above in Figures 1 and 2 and added the voice-over recording. My intention was to blur and disrupt the horizon to draw attention to its slipperiness as a reference point in our lifeworlds. I used a main layer (Figure 1) with an overlay (Figure 2) to achieve the effect I wanted.

I use film and poetry as a way of understanding a place and then sharing that understanding with others and feeding the reactions in real-time back into my filmmaking. Utilizing digital wayfaring as a method, my mobile media art expands the field of screen production and mobile media art. Furthermore, my research strategy using mobile filmmaking and digital wayfaring connected into a constellation with a non-representational ontology and

ethos of animation (Vannini) allowed me to address the troublesome sensory and dynamic aspects of places and lifeworlds in a systematic way that provided new insights about how relationships to geographic places may be constituted, conceptualized, and shared.

*Blue Lines at Blackrock* is a valid contribution to knowledge in screen production research and creative practice research methodologies because it places digital wayfaring, smartphones, and a non-representational ontology applying Vannini's ethos of animation at the center of our conceptualizations of media production. I found that Vannini's explication of non-representational theory through an *ethos of animation* (319) is a helpful theory frame to analyze creative practices and processes. Digital wayfaring is a valuable research strategy that can expand ways and methods for capturing and sharing lifeworlds through vernacular creative practices, storytelling, and art-making using smartphones.

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