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“Hey, I’m Here Right Now”

Camera Phone Photographs and Mediated Presence

Abstract

A photograph can mediate the presence of the absent, the object or person captured in the photograph. Now, with the aid of the network connection provided by the camera phone, photographs can function as communicative objects through which distant people engage with each other quite synchronously, helping them to form a connection in the present, as opposed to a connection between past and present. The purpose of the article is to join these two aspects of presence, thereby integrating the study of photography with mobile communication studies. The article contributes to the discussion on camera phone photography by focusing expressly on photography as a communication medium. The camera phone deserves a substantial position in the study of photography, as a rapidly increasing share of cameras are placed in mobile phones. In the article, it is argued that mediating presence visually is an integral practice of using photographs in mobile communication. With results from an empirical case study with Finnish camera phone users, it is demonstrated how photographs can provide means for both maintaining a connection between individuals and mediating presence.

Keywords

Photography; camera phone; mobile communication; mediated presence

Introduction

Hey, I'm here, check this out ... it [the photograph] is sort of like an authentication of that one is in that place and can show that hey, I'm here right now.

This quote from a Finnish camera phone user illustrates the possibility of a photograph to mediate the 'present presence' of a person. In the converged camera phone, the camera is not just connected to an arbitrary communication device, but a device that is intrinsic to the history of personal telecommunication. The *telephone* is a medium used precisely for communicating in the present. The camera phone offers the same possibility, but with the added visual dimension.

Importantly, many practices of camera phone photography and communication cannot be explained only by the conventional modes of photography (see e.g. Sontag; Lister, "Introductory Essay"; Batchen, *Burning with Desire*), but rather by practices familiar from verbal mobile communication. The main question in the article concerns the ways in which the mobile phone as a communication device affects the use of camera phone photographs. In studying this, 'mediated presence' is utilized as an overarching framework.

The camera phone deserves a substantial position in the study of photography, as a rapidly increasing share of cameras are nowadays placed in phones and also other telecommunication devices, such as tablet computers. This is not only about the emergence of new photographic devices, but the emergence of such devices that radically alter the ways in which photographs can be communicated and, thus, can potentially also affect photography

itself. Therefore, a focal goal in the article is to integrate the study of photography with mobile communication studies.

The mobile phone has received minor attention in communication and new media studies, and humanities and social sciences in general (Goggin, “Cultural Studies of Mobile Communication” 353; Oksman), compared to its huge popularity and ubiquitous nature. Similarly, study on vernacular photography, such as family photography, has been lesser when compared to professional photographic practices (Price and Wells 17). Despite several notable exceptions (such as Spence and Holland; Hirsch; Rose; Prøitz; Ganito and Ferreira; Sarvas and Frohlich) the ordinary photographs captured by everyday folk have been mostly excluded from the studies, and most research has focused on the artistic ambitions of the medium (Batchen, *Each Wild Idea* 57).

In this context, it can be understood why researchers have not earlier given camera phones the attention they deserve (David 96), despite the fact that the advent of camera phones has been very swift during the last ten years. Yet, camera phones are gradually becoming an object of study for scholars writing on photography (e.g. Gómez Cruz and Meyer; Rubinstein and Sluis; Palmer; David; Rantavuo; Prøitz; Wagner). In order to contribute further to the field, I focus expressly on camera phone photography as a communication medium. Thereby, this article contributes also to the discussion on mobile communication (Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda; Goggin, *Cell Phone Culture*; Katz; Ling, *New Tech, New Ties*).

I argue that mediating presence visually is an integral practice of using photographs in mobile communication – although, naturally, not the only one (see Gómez Cruz and Meyer; Lehmuskallio). The idea of mediating presence by using camera phone photographs has been brought up earlier in several studies, such as Mäkelä et al. 553-554; Koskinen, Kurvinen, and Lehtonen 78; Rivière 174, 183; Scifo, “The Domestication of Camera-Phone and MMS

Communication” 368; Lillie; Satchell and Graham 256; van Dijck, “Digital photography” 72; Lehmuskallio 292. My intention now is to discuss mediated presence more extensively in the context of the study on photography.

It is important to note that not only camera phones interlink photography with telecommunication, as stand-alone cameras are also becoming telecommunication devices – ‘connected cameras’ – by providing access to the Internet via built-in 3G, 4G and Wi-Fi connections or Wi-Fi memory cards. Visually mediated present presence does not, therefore, belong only to the realm of camera phones, but is a practice enabled by an increasing number of DSLR and compact cameras. In this sense, mediated presence as a framework is functional in studying photography at large, and emphasizes the need for new multidisciplinary approaches in studies on photography.

In the first part of the article, I outline my perspective by discussing mediated presence in relation to mobile communication, photography and the communication of photographs with camera phones. In the latter part, I complement the theoretical insights with actual examples of camera phone communication from a study with Finnish camera phone users.

Presence in Mobile Communication

Mediated presence is not a clearly articulated theoretical model, but rather a conceptual theme describing the use of telecommunication technology in being in contact over physical distance (Licoppe 147). Mediated presence does not refer to a physical, face-to-face presence, but rather to a feeling of presence, a communicative presence. The presence is communicated through a medium, it is mediated. Mediated presence, thus, represents an ‘as if’ presence: people can be connected to a remote location as if they were there themselves; they can talk

on the phone as if they were sitting next to the other person (Huhtamo 95). The fundamental ambivalence of telecommunication media consists of their usability as tools for both presence and absence: they can induce a feeling of presence and facilitate absence (Villi and Stocchetti 104).

Media and communication studies have begun to use the concept of presence in an effort to offer a more accurate connotation of the social rationale for the use of new communication technology. Presence is often defined as the sense (or the illusion) of ‘being there’ (IJsselsteijn et al.) or ‘being there together’ (Schroeder, “Being There Together and the Future of Connected Presence”) in a mediated environment. The sense of being there and being there together relate to ‘physical presence’ and ‘social presence’, respectively. For the major part, verbal mobile communication can be described essentially as using a medium to be with another, providing social presence. More often than having a sense of the place, the users experience the sense of being with another. (Biocca, Harms, and Burgoon 456, 458) In verbal mobile communication, the actual place of communication often has very limited significance and is not necessarily known to the other communicator; it is mainly manifested only as background noise.

Howard et al. regard presence as the subjective sense of social others while separated from them by time or space (909). Mobile phone communication is about technologically mediated sociability (Schroeder, “Mobile Phones and the Inexorable Advance of Multimodal Connectedness” 83; Jensen 26; Ito and Okabe, “Technosocial Situations” 263) in times of absence (Haunstrup Christensen 435, 446). Mediated presence, thus, captures the most salient trait of mobile communication: the possibility for close communicative engagements among distant agents, a form of absence in which proximity can be established and preserved through mediated communication (Villi and Stocchetti 102). Actually, the aspect of ‘tele’ in

telecommunication can be equated with absence. As Manovich notes, “The essence of tele-presence is that it is anti-presence”.

The telecommunicative connection is not necessarily valued as a setting for interpersonal communication. The general assumption is that a medium that best imitates face-to-face interaction is somehow more social (Postmes, Spears, and Lea 692–693), and that negative effects result from withholding or diminishing face-to-face interaction (Woolgar 34). Rice notes how some writers still project onto face-to-face communication a sort of romantic, mythic, idealized notion. However, from the perspective of mobile phone users, mediating presence may actually signal precisely the interest in togetherness and ritual bonding (Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication*).

In mobile communication studies, the concept of presence has been augmented with various attributes. Gergen uses the term ‘absent presence’ to describe the state where one is physically present, yet at the same time absorbed by a technologically mediated world elsewhere (227). Compared to the past, the freedom from the constraints of space only makes simultaneous presence more difficult (Villi and Stocchetti 109). Ling describes as ‘remote presence’ the situation that arises when, with the aid of a mobile phone, a person has an on-going sense of another person’s location (*The Mobile Connection*, 192). The antithesis of these mobile spaces or states can be described as ‘full presence’, the state of being absorbed and constituted by the immediacy of concrete, face-to-face relationships (Gergen 227).

Presence in Photography

Notably, presence is a theme that is focal also to many writings on photography. In fact, presence – and absence – can be said to have always been the constitutive core of photography. A photograph mediates presence by conveying the presence of the absent, the

object or person captured in the photograph. A photograph is both a ‘pseudo-presence’ and a ‘token of absence’ (Sontag 16). In this sense, photographs offer presence-in-absence.

The writings on photography have generally regarded presence in photography as relating to the ‘that-has-been’, presence being subject to the passing of time. According to Barthes, a photograph does not establish a consciousness of the ‘being-there’ of the object in the photograph, but an awareness of its ‘having-been-there’ (*Image, Music, Text* 44). In his essay *Rhetoric of the Image*, Barthes presents a specific space-time category for photographs: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, “the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then” (*Image, Music, Text*, 44). According to Green and Lowry, the overriding experience of the ‘what has been’ and the countervailing force of what we see also being unquestionably ‘present’, are merged in a photograph (57).

In the presence mediated by a photograph, of importance is the indexical relation, the physical trace between the photograph and the object or place photographed. Barthes notes that every photograph is a certificate of presence, “literally an emanation of the referent”; the fact that the photographed object has been there is the essence of photography (*Camera Lucida* 80, 87). Photographs are images produced as a consequence of being directly affected by the objects to which they refer (Batchen, *Forget Me Not* 31). There is always a presumption that something exists in the place, or did exist, which then is depicted in the picture (Sontag 5–6, 154).

The attribute of resemblance (Eco 33) is irrelevant regarding the indexicality of photography. Although the photograph cannot tell us exactly how the object in the photograph was, what further properties it had, how it looked from other angles, it can tell us that there was before (and may still be) some particular being – the object photographed. Photographs depend on this original presence. (Sonesson 77; Batchen, *Each Wild Idea* 139) It is possible to believe that the object existed (or exists) in that place, although we are presented with just an

image in two dimensions. Therefore, in emphasizing the capability of photographs to mediate presence, I follow Batchen in arguing that the reality offered by the photograph is not that of ‘truth-to-appearance’ but rather of ‘truth-to-presence’ (*Forget Me Not* 74).

The concept of spatial immediacy (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*) can be read as the ability of a photograph to provide in itself a presence in space by being in front of the viewer as a material artefact, the ‘here-now’ of an event photographed in some other place, some time ago. The ‘there-then’ is present here and now in the photograph. Based on this it can be concluded that photography is about *presence in space* and *absence in time*. (Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication* 85)

I already noted how mobile communication exemplifies the interplay of presence and absence. Photography also illuminates the epistemological dialectic of presence and absence (Lister, “Photography, Presence, and Pattern” 353). As Sonesson writes, “the whole point of photography is to offer us vicarious perceptual experience, that is, the illusion of having seen something without having been present at the scene” (73). Jean-Luc Nancy illustrates well the relationship between photography and presence:

The image gives presence ... But what is ‘giving presence’? Isn’t it giving what cannot be given: what is or is not? You are present or you are not. Nothing will give you presence except your arrival, which is no one or is yourself ... The image gives a presence that it lacks – since it has no other presence than the unreal one of its thin, film-like surface – and it gives it to something that, being absent, cannot receive it.

(66)

Visual Mobile Presence

What is it then that the camera phone adds to the presence mediated by any photograph? Most importantly, the camera phone brings in the quasi-simultaneous character of the mobile connection to the communication of photographs: the sender of the photograph can mediate presence purposefully over distance, not over time. Then the photograph forms a connection between *there-now* and *here-now*, instead of mediating the *there-then* to *here-now*. This is in contrast to Sontag's notion that with photographs the other cannot possess the present, but only the past (163). Barthes, although stating that a photograph is a 'certificate of presence' (*Camera Lucida*, 87), argues that "a photograph is in no way a presence", for "in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of this is how it was" (*Image, Music, Text* 44; see also Price and Wells 44). When Barthes notes that the photograph is in no way a presence, he is referring especially to the presence in time, or the lack of it in photography (in his time). A printed photograph in a family album is not an index of the family members gathering to celebrate uncle's birthday in this exact moment, like a weather vane would be an index of the wind blowing just now. The photograph says only and for certain 'what has been' (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 75) – there is a strong resonance of absence in time in the photograph.

By contrast, the photograph sent from a camera phone can act as authentication of the sender's present presence, the 'I am here now'. Because of the real-time nature of visual mobile communication, the feeling of absence in the photograph has more to do with distance; absence is not absence in time but absence in space, the other being in some other place at this precise moment (Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication* 133). The physical distance is emphasized by the fact that a camera phone photograph very seldom depicts both

parties involved in the telecommunicative act.

Camera phone photo communication is connected to the ‘here and now communication space’ of telephone communication (Poutiainen 11). The screen of a camera phone differs from the screen of a regular stand-alone camera in that it is a ‘telecommunicative screen’; it can show photographs of distant events that are happening just now. Like a phone call, a photograph sent directly from a camera phone right after the capture does not create a connection via the past (as when family members are looking together at photographs taken, for instance, in the 1970s) but rather a connection between two physically separated presents, those of the sender and the receiver(s). The photograph is therefore not a time machine (Batchen, *Forget Me Not* 97) but rather a ‘tele machine’. It does not communicate the passing of time but the *being in time*. (Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication* 133) Such a photograph is valuable for the purposes of interpersonal interaction and engagement at a specific moment, like words during a phone call (Villi, “Visual Chitchat” 49). An extreme example of photographic transience is the *Snapchat* mobile app that offers the sender of the photograph the possibility to determine a certain period of time (e.g. ten seconds) after which the image disappears forever from the recipient’s phone.

The aspect of visual interpersonal communication can be elaborated by discussing the idea of ‘pictorial conversation’ – a dialogue with photographs, achieved by sending photographs back and forth to one another (Koskinen, Kurvinen, and Lehtonen). It is about conversation *with* photographs rather than conversation *about* photographs, and illustrates how the function of photography can become more pronouncedly interpersonal through the easy sharing of photographs from camera phones (Villi, “Visual Chitchat” 42, 49).

Another important motivation for engaging in mediating presence visually with one another is intimacy, i.e. a close relationship between the communicators. The photographs can support closeness between friends and family members and function to maintain social bonds

in times of absence (Döring et al. 2007; Gai 2005; Koskinen, *Mobile Multimedia in Action* 135; Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication* 75-78).

A distinctive value of visuality in mobile communication consists of the ‘synchronous gaze’ (Villi, *Visual Mobile Communication* 139-141; Villi and Stocchetti 108). By sending a photograph of what the communicator is seeing her/himself at the present moment, the sender and the receiver of the photograph can experience the same view in an almost concurrent manner. Koskinen illustrates the shared vision of the synchronous gaze by describing how, when a person observes something interesting and communicates it visually to others, the communicators for a brief moment “share a point of reference” (*Mobile Multimedia in Action* 132). The synchronous gaze, the act of seeing together, is a very concrete way of mediating one’s presence. In addition, it demonstrates how mediating presence does not necessarily involve a photograph of the sender. This type of ‘side-by-side presence’ is common to mobile communication in general: Ito notes how the metaphor of text messaging is side-by-side, in contrast to the face-to-face modality of a telephone conversation.

The research on camera phone communication provides several examples of how the wish to be present can be communicated by sending photographs. In *Mobile Image*, a pioneering study on camera phones (Koskinen, Kurvinen, and Lehtonen 78), it was concluded that mobile images are used to share one’s visually mediated experience, often in a very concrete way: “Look, I am at a café with my friends! My, what a mountain of dishes I have to do! Now I am abroad, now I am parachuting!” (examples of similar practices can be found in Mäkelä et al.; Kindberg et al., “How and Why People Use Camera Phones”; Aoki et al.). Koskinen follows these findings by stating that it is the fact that one is there right now that often justifies sending the photograph. People simply report with photographs what they are doing at the moment and communicate the place where things are happening. (*Mobile Multimedia in Action*, 51, 57)

According to van Dijck, the use of photographs is increasingly about ‘distributed presence’ (“Digital photography” 72). Camera phones can offer a “glimpse of reality-at-a-distance” (Lillie). Users can send up-to-the-minute pictures, mediating a presence that reflects a continual digital representation of their life (Satchell and Graham 256). In the study by Kindberg et al., one subject described the photographic connection as ‘telepresence’, in that it made his absent girlfriend feel as if she were “here to see it” (“The Ubiquitous Camera” 46; for similar views see also Counts and Fellheimer; Jacucci et al. 212; Gai 205; Scifo, “The Domestication of Camera-Phone and MMS Communication”). One conclusion of Kindberg et al. is that

[u]nlike text messaging, many of the images sent to absent friends and family were in fact visual evidence or proof of something having had occurred. ... the fact that they [the photographs] could be captured and shared almost in the moment added an extra dimension to this kind of remote sharing. Proof of being somewhere or experiencing some event could be made more potent by showing when something was happening as well as what was happening. (“How and Why People Use Camera Phones” 12)

When communicating with photographs from a mobile phone, there is often a connection between the physical setting and the act of communication. The photograph is, after all, captured in a definite place, and with the aid of the mobile phone, it can be shared right from the spot immediately after capture. With the photograph it is possible to send the location, give the other a sense of being there; the photograph re-localizes the act of communication. By contrast, verbal mobile phone communication is mostly confined to places that have no intrinsic relationship to the act of communication; the content of communication is

determined by the participating subjects, not by the physical places in which the communicators reside.

Scifo writes that “the camera phone enables the multiplication of connections between different physical and social spaces rather than the weakening of a sense of place – even though mobile communication is often cited as contributing to the processes of disembedding experience from local contexts.” With its new visual potential, mobile technology emphasizes forms of experience that are strongly rooted in physical places. The camera phone enables the ‘doubling of place’, or more accurately the ‘translocation of place’. Scifo also contends that in photographic communication, the place or situation in which the person is located is transformed into the content of the communication itself. (“The Domestication of Camera-Phone and MMS Communication” 363-365, 373)

In order to mediate presence, photographs can be communicated from the camera phone by several means. In the 90’s and early 00’s, before smart phones and the mobile Internet, sharing of photographs directly from the mobile phone to distant others was limited to using MMS (multimedia messaging service). However, as a consequence of the advent of the mobile Internet, users can now mediate their presence visually from camera phones by using IM (instant messaging), email, or, increasingly, the various social media services and platforms (*Facebook* as currently the most prominent one). In addition to the content sharing platforms on the web, mobile apps (such as *Instagram*) are extending the diversity of photographic communication on the Internet. In general, the integration of the Internet into mobile phones enables a seamless and perpetual photographic connection to others; the users are ‘visually online’ all the time.

The online sharing of photographs has introduced a novel dimension of mass communication to personal photography, more aptly called publishing (Villi, “Publishing and Messaging Camera Phone Photographs”). Posting a photograph to Facebook resembles the act

of placing the photograph on a pedestal in a crowded room, entailing characteristics of both sharing and exhibition. The others may or may not view the photograph, and if they do view it, not necessarily immediately. From this follows that publishing photographs to a larger group of people is often less about mediating the present presence, when compared to communicating the photographs interpersonally via MMS or IM. Nevertheless, those photographs can function to mediate presence to the distant (and possibly anonymous) audience.

Another, even less interpersonal context for mediating presence is ‘citizen photojournalism’ (David, 92; Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti), which illustrates the practice of ordinary people recording public events and then sharing the photographs in social media or offering them to mass media. Central to many of those images is that the photographer has been in the right place at the right time, for example, at the scene of an accident (Kobré 29). Immediacy plays an important role in citizen photojournalism, as it is often important that the photograph is as timely as possible. In contrast to how Company (127) sees it, the journalistic photograph is not forced to capture only the aftermath of an event, but the omnipresent citizen equipped with a camera phone can mediate presence from an event as it happens. In this sense, mediated presence is closely tied to witnessing (see Allan).

Next, I will present examples of photographic communication in action by studying how Finnish camera phone users describe their practices of mediating presence with photographs.

Method

Utilizing qualitative in-depth interviews, I interviewed eight subjects individually. The sampling procedure for the interviewees was purposive and consisted of searching for

exemplary informants – people who have shared photographs from their mobile phones. The interviews lasted on average 1.5 hours and they were recorded and transcribed.

I used a semi-structured model for the interviews and presented a set of questions to all of the interviewees. The dialogue during the interviews was staged according to a thematic, topic-centred structure, which also provided the context for unexpected themes to develop (Mason 62–63). The interviewees could continue their thoughts along new lines, and they were asked to elaborate on certain themes that seemed interesting and to express reflective and critical views. I was mainly interested in the perceptions and interpretations of the interviewees. The study proceeded from analysis and coding of parts of the data set to developing a holistic understanding of the practices and views expressed by the interviewees.

The accumulation of the empirical data and its analysis were systematic and grounded on a firm theoretical foundation. By applying thematic analysis, I classified the interview material based on a study of previous literature on camera phone and mobile communication, including Koskinen, Kurvinen and Lehtonen; Kindberg et al., “The Ubiquitous Camera”; Rivière; Scifo, “The Domestication of Camera-Phone and MMS Communication”; Goggin, *Cell Phone Culture*; Koskinen, *Mobile Multimedia in Action*; and Ling, *New Tech, New Ties*. I was also open to themes that emerged from the analysis or originated with the informants, but the analysis was predominantly theory-based. When analyzing the data for this article, I specifically used the framework of mediated presence to form a theoretical lens as a way of drawing attention to particular aspects of the empirical material studied (Alasuutari).

In the article, I report ‘telling extracts’ from the data: the most articulate and apt expressions, and those views that were pronouncedly expressed by the interviewees, yet providing also deviant cases (see Silverman 83). As examples, I also present three photographs from the interviewees. The first two images highlight the importance of immediacy in mediating presence, and the third one serves as an example of mediating

presence in a situation of prolonged distance between the communicators. I have obtained permission to include the camera phone photographs in the study, during the interview and also through a written consent via e-mail later on.

In the following, I use pseudonyms when referring to the interviewees. *Kasper* (aged 21), was specializing in digital multimedia in his college studies. He had previously worked as a photographer at a local newspaper and had also taken promotional pictures for music bands. *Lotta* (aged 21) was specializing in digital multimedia as well. She was a habitual photographer, describing her habits as “taking pictures for fun, from parties and different occasions”. Like Kasper and Lotta, *Joakim* (aged 23) was specializing in digital multimedia. For him, photography was a hobby, and he usually carried both a stand-alone camera and a camera phone with him. *Mikael* (aged 21) was a student of media culture. He had studied photography a bit but had not published photographs. *Anja* (aged 55) worked at a college as the director of a study programme. She took pictures of family and nature, as well as travel photographs. *Kjell* (aged 52) was a programme director. He photographed regularly, several days a week, and had also developed photographs by himself. *Ulla* (aged 35) was a teacher in the media technology department. She had the habit of building pictorial archives; she had archived plants, and at the time of the interview she was archiving photographs of VW Kleinbuses. *Bengt* (59) worked at a college as a research coordinator. He took a lot of pictures when traveling, but also photographed his grandchildren when he met up with them.

The interviewees formed a quite knowledgeable group when it comes to photography, and in that sense they are not representative of the general population. Yet, none of them were professional photographers (although Kasper did some gigs as a photographer). They were interested in taking and communicating photographs, which, however, seems to be nowadays quite common among people, demonstrated e.g. by the popularity of posting photographs on Instagram and Facebook. A significant share of people in the developed countries, and

increasingly also in the developing countries, are potential photographers, as they have access to a camera in their mobile phone. In this sense, I consider that also individuals without specialist knowledge in photography can and do use their camera phones for mediating presence.

“It’s Like This Here”

The insights and experiences of the interviewees in the study are in line with the views on mediating presence with camera phone photographs that I have found in other studies. In accentuating the importance of the real-time aspect in mediating presence, Kjell commented that “[communicating with camera phone photographs is about] what I am experiencing at the moment ... something that is bound to the moment”. For Mikael, the camera phone “makes it [photography] a lot more personal and immediate, it brings maybe a new dimension to visual communication, you can send them [the photographs] wherever you are”.

Anja presented a case of establishing a contemporaneous and moment-based sense of presence through photographs when thinking about the possibility of sending a photograph with her camera phone from Lapland, in northern Finland, to her friends at their summer house, expressing “it’s like this here”, when, in spring time, Lapland is still covered with snow and at the summer house, in southern Finland, the ice in the lake has already broken. If they viewed the same photograph together a month later, the difference in the weather would not be so drastic anymore, as the snow in Lapland would also have melted away. In general, Anja had the custom of communicating her camera phone photographs almost instantly after capture, except for such “stock photographs” (e.g. pictures of flowers) that she communicated as birthday greetings.

Ulla mentioned that certain photographs, especially those tied to a situation, lose their interest over time. It is appropriate to send a photograph of the situation immediately, but after a while, other forms of communication might be more feasible. For example, after catching a remarkably big pike fish, she had sent the photograph (Figure 1) “quite immediately”, “because it’s the situation, and after a while it’s not big a thing getting the fish. Later on it’s something you can tell or mention in a text message.” The plastic basin where the pike fish is placed exemplifies the size of the fish. The volume of the basin is familiar to those Finns who have bought one in order to bathe their baby. In a sense, it is a classic “look how big a fish I caught” photograph, but this time indicating the contemporaneous aspect of the achievement, which, for Ulla, made it worth communicating. However, of the participants in the study interviews, Ulla was the only one who explicitly stated that she did not feel like she was mediating her presence through photographs.

Figure 1. Pike fish in a plastic basin. Image reproduced with the permission of Ulla.

Bengt stated that “[w]ith this camera phone it is more to show where you are and what you do, and there is not so much aesthetic value in that picture”. For him, a photograph can also act as an invitation or wish for the other to “join” the presence, as in “I wish you were here”. Likewise, Anja could imagine sending a photograph from a party when somebody could not attend it, “so that also she [the absent one] could take part”.

According to Mikael, the reason for sending a photograph from the camera phone might be that “[i]t has been something funny you want to show some friend or you want to say ‘hi’ from a ski resort”. The photograph sent to classmates from a skiing trip to northern Finland (Figure 2) is emblematic of the photographs sent by Mikael, as it portrays Mikael himself. It is a proof of his present presence in a certain place. The skiing goggles and the

snow-covered trees in the background reveal the locality. The holiday feeling is accentuated by the fact that the sky is clear and the sun is reflected on the lens of the camera phone.

Figure 2. “Hi” from skiing trip. Image reproduced with the permission of Mikael.

The difference to verbal communication, especially text messaging, in mediating presence with photographs is often quite obvious. Bengt remembered sending a photograph of a sunrise to his lady friend, as she likes the colours, and they had talked about sunsets and sunrises earlier. The photograph had “a connection to what we had discussed earlier”. By contrast, according to him, a text message reading “I’m looking at a beautiful sunrise” would not have had the same effect. Similarly, for Kasper, it would be useless to write a text message concerning a sunset (cf. Satchell and Graham 256), but it’s worth sending a picture of it, as “it’s like visual moments that are captured that I send, and I don’t think there would be any sense to try to recreate them in words”.

Based on their descriptions, it is easy to notice how many of the photographs sent by the interviewees resemble postcards, especially ones sent from holidays. Kjell explained how he can send an ‘instant postcard’ with his camera phone: “That I want to say what I am doing now, this is my moment.” In a similar vein, Bengt explained that “[t]he longer the distance, the bigger reason there is to send [photographs]. You send postcards, these are instant postcards.” The relationship between postcarding and sending camera phone photographs has been discussed already in previous research. According to Hjorth, the postcard provides ‘postal presence’ and is therefore a precursor to the communicative role of an MMS message (54). Lehtonen, Koskinen, and Kurvinen, too, maintain that visual mobile communication has, as its most important point of reference, the cultural form of the postcard (72).

The time during the compulsory Finnish military service serves as an example of an active phase of mediating presence with photographs. The need for communication increased at the time when two of the male interviewees, Kasper and Mikael, were forced to be separated from their girlfriends for long periods. During the military service, Mikael sent many photographs to his girlfriend presenting him in different situations of the everyday life of a (peace time) conscript. He also communicated photographs from the army to his male friends – those with mutual knowledge and awareness of what it is like there. Sending such photographs is, however, in contrast to sending postcards, because at least in Finland it has not been a common custom to send postcards from the army as, after all, according to Mikael, “[t]he army is not like a holiday”.

One of the photographs that Mikael sent during the army service is presented as Figure 3. The important detail in the photograph is the green attire, which indicates Mikael’s presence somewhere in Finland taking part in some army camp or other training procedure. If he were dressed in civilian clothing, the photograph could in fact portray a holiday scene, with the sun shining and the lake behind.

Figure 3. “The army is not like a holiday.” Image reproduced with the permission of Mikael.

The idea of the synchronous gaze surfaced in several interviews. The use of the verb ‘to show’ was exemplary of this in the descriptions of the camera phone communication practices. Joakim remarked that “[with a photograph] you can show unusual or strange things happening at the moment they happen, and you can send a picture of that to a friend or somebody, ‘hey, something like this happened right now’”. Bengt commented that “I can take a picture and show that hey, now this is going on ... share the experience.”

According to Mikael, “[i]t’s something funny you want to show, or it’s something special you want to share. Often the only way to share it is to show it, you can’t explain how I saw a funny duck, because it isn’t funny, but to show it with a picture it is more funny.” Lotta noted that “[a] text message is a simple way just to say one thing you have to say, and if you put a photo in it, it’s probably because it is something fun or good-looking, like a view or something, you want someone to see what you are seeing”.

Concluding Remarks

In camera phone communication, the presence mediated by providing a visual notion of the existence of the person, object or place is augmented with the possibility offered by the mobile phone to communicate the presence in a synchronous manner. Like other forms of telephone communication, camera phones enable interaction in the *present*. However, camera phone communication is also about visually mediated *presence*, or more specifically about mediating the *present presence*.

The feeling of presence that a photograph sent from a camera phone can establish is not necessarily any more potent than it is with any photograph, yet different, as the presence can be communicated primarily over distance, not over time. The novel element of telecommunication affects the way a photograph can mediate the being of the object or person in the image. A conventional photograph mediates it from *there-then* to *here-now*, as for example, when a photographic print is here in front of my eyes (present), but at the same time the situation depicted in the photograph is already gone (in time), the person photographed might even be dead. By contrast, a photograph sent forward from a camera phone immediately after capture can form a connection between *there-now* and *here-now*. Of course, the photograph can also be archived and then viewed later on, in which case it establishes a

connection between the past and the present, connecting it firmly to the *has-been*.

The qualitative study with Finnish camera phone users shows how sending photographs is much about the communication of where one is or what one is experiencing at the moment. The idea is to share a specific, fleeting presence by using a photograph. Overall, the significance of photographs in mobile communication and the mediation of presence are crystallized in the interview quote from Mikael:

Maybe the photograph helps to put the text in place and time, that now I am here and doing this, and this is the place where I am, whereas text messages are only, like, they could come from anywhere.

Photographs bind mobile phone communication more closely to the location where the communication occurs. When using the camera phone to capture and communicate a photograph, one's presence in the place can in fact be the purpose and motivation for the act of communication, similarly to when a user 'checks in' on *Foursquare*. In this sense, the sharing of camera phone photographs acts as a forerunner for the location-based services and apps that enable the easy communication of location and also emphasize the significance of place in communication. Mediating presence by sending a photograph and by checking in are both examples of location-based mobile interaction. Mediated presence serves as valuable framework for studying the practices that are emerging in the field of 'locative media' (see de Souza e Silva; Wilken), and therefore the results of the present study can serve in further examining various novel forms of mobile communication, be it the communication of photographs or some other content.

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