

Mikko VILLI

Spatial and Temporal Immediacy

Camera Phone Photography in relation to Time and Distance

My paper focuses on visual mobile communication, especially on camera phone photography and MMS messaging. The starting point is the convergence of photography and mobile phone communication. Mobile applications, such as MMS, enable pictorial communication directly from the mobile phone. This can influence photography, particularly its relation with time and distance. A photograph sent as an MMS message (i.e. photo message) can offer an almost synchronous photographic connection, thereby functioning communicatively in the present. This differs sharply from the traditional conceptions of photography and time; e.g. based on the writings of Roland Barthes it is clear that a photograph does not establish a consciousness of the being-there of the thing, but an awareness of its having-been-there. I also discuss the potential of photo messages in establishing a feeling of presence, or tele-presence. A traditional, printed photograph can offer a sense of spatial immediacy by conjoining the "here" of the viewer and the "there" of the photograph, but a photo message, by providing also temporal immediacy, can create a stronger connection and a sense of immediate presence. I review the aforementioned aspects of camera phone photography more closely in the context of family photography. I compare family albums and photo messages sent between the members of the intimate family circle, especially how they act in maintaining the family community. Photo albums do this by creating a bond over time; photo messages, on the other hand, establish a connection between family members separated by distance. Thus it is a question of absence in time versus absence in space.

Mikko VILLI is currently working as researcher at the University of Art and Design Helsinki, School of Visual Culture. He is writing his doctoral thesis titled "Visual mobile communication. Camera phone photographs as communication." His supervisors are professor Ipo Koskinen, D.Soc.Sc., and professor Merja Salo, DA, from the University of Art and Design. Mikko Villi's background is in communication studies. His research interests include visual communication, mobile communication and media convergence. During the years 2001–2006 he worked as a lecturer at the Department of Communication at the University of Helsinki, specializing in new communication technologies. More information can be found at <http://www.uiah.fi/~villi/indexengl.html>. E-mail: villi@uiah.fi.

