

# Mobile Camera Phones: A New Form of “Being Together” in Daily Interpersonal Communication

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## 11.1 Introduction

Roland Barthes concludes his essay “La chambre claire” by stating that “what characterizes so-called advanced societies is the fact that Society consumes images now instead of beliefs.” He writes, “Pleasure is experienced via the image: this is the great difference” (Barthes, 1980). In analyses of the transition from modernism to post-modernism, society’s saturation by images and their increasing impact on relationships between people, things, knowledge, imagination, events and information is essential to understanding cultural and social changes. The “image” industries have been the subject of close examination and endless interpretation. Attention has focused on industries, such as the television industry, advertising and the cinema, and their mass effect. The more intimate role of the image in interpersonal relationships has remained marginal. Put simply, we could say that two key issues in the social sciences are involved here: first, the analysis and study of specular (mirror) images and their imaginary role in the development of the self and the identification process; and second, sociology and ethnography with studies on the social and family-related function of photography following Bourdieu’s definitive study on “the average art” (Garrigues, 1996). However, even in the second domain, there are still very few sociological studies on photography as a social, domestic or everyday practice, possibly because of its status as an artistic practice and as a stylistic and singular representation of the world.

With technological progress, the role of the photographic image has now become central to interpersonal communications, which apparently involves a radical transformation of its everyday social function. In fact, by the mid-1960s, Bourdieu described the photograph's social function as a way of celebrating and making the important moments of family life last, strengthening integration within the family group by reasserting the feelings that it has about itself and its unity. Considered as joint family property, the camera, widely used at family celebrations, thus served above all to fix the image of the family unit's major events (Bourdieu, 1965).

Considered to be the most faithful means of reproducing reality, photography in the context of personal uses was called upon to represent the family group at the times and in the places and poses defeating the passing of time, which best symbolized the memory of good times spent together. Although this family-centered function of photography is far from having died out, technological progress has extended the use of photography to more and more diverse situations and rendered its use commonplace where it was once reserved for special occasions. According to a study carried out by the Research Centre for the Study and Observation of Living Conditions (the CREDOC, cited in *Le Monde*, 2003), "in 1965, 40% of individuals stated that they took photos; today, 81% of the French population practices, at least occasionally, amateur photography." According to an earlier survey carried out by the INSEE (France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) in 1989, the rate of photographic practice was 62% at the time, which leads us to conclude that disposable cameras have had a major impact on the increasing popularity of photography since 1989. Furthermore, and still according to this same survey, "different social groups and age groups now practice photography in a similar fashion. The youngest and oldest members of the population have made up for their relative delay compared with the age groups in between (30–50 years old)" (*Le Monde*, 2003). Finally, since 2001, sales of digital cameras have exceeded those of conventional cameras at an adoption rate that is "faster than that for the refrigerator and the television and similar to that of the mobile phone" (CREDOC, 2002).

The development and availability of digital cameras and the current fusion of digital photography and the mobile phone – the technological innovation that enables you to take photographs with your mobile phone and send them to friends and family – brings photography into interpersonal relationships as a new form of "scripto-visual" communication. Continuing on from the success of SMS (short message service), telecoms operators now talk of MMS (multimedia messaging service) in Europe to describe these new services, which, furthermore, lie at the heart of the scenarios being developed by the manufacturers of tomorrow's mobile society (Koskinen and Kurvinen, 2002).

From our point of view, this enriched form of communication is of interest in examining the image's function as a medium for social relationships insofar as concerns its visual and imaginary aspects. Based on analysis of the representation of the technical object that produces it, we will first show how the mobile phone creates the conditions for a new photographic practice. We will then give examples to illustrate changes in the use of and the social significance of photography. Nevertheless, there is an opposite issue of bullying or victimizing people through the use of mobile photography. While the total effect of mobile photography may be to bring people together, it may also estrange people or be used to enhance power differences. This point of view is not discussed in this chapter for several reasons. First, it did not appear strongly in the respondents's speech, and second, because we chose to develop an analysis around the new function of photography in a context of friendly relationships and then because our study took place in Japan, where a large number of persons have a mobile-camera (sha-mail), so that it seems to be very usual and considered like a sign of integration and not like a power sign of distinction.

The empirical material that we have consists of a qualitative survey, carried out in Japan in July–August 2002, on the reasons for using mobile phones and the situations in which people used them within the framework of a study carried out by the UCE laboratory (Usage Créativité Ergonomie – ergonomic design and use) at France Telecom Research and Development's (FTR&D). A series of semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 2 hours were held with 41 people, in the capital, Tokyo (32), and in Osaka (9) on the reasons for using mobile phones and in what situations they are used, and also on the sociability of the participants surveyed (personal relationship networks, going-out "rituals", etc.). More specifically, 25 interviewees owned a phone with a camera called "sha-mail" in Japan that we discuss in this chapter. The interviews were held in Japanese in the presence of a professional simultaneous interpreter. A recruitment company selected the people who took part in the survey based on socio-demographic criteria and the equipment used.

The fact that the study was carried out in Japan and performed by a western sociologist in the presence of an interpreter obviously had some effect on the nature of the results obtained. How far does analysis of the discourse produced remain relevant as an aid in examining the function of the photographic image in social relationships? Insofar as Japan has a very specific social structure, where social relationships are organized according to a traditional system of relating to others which is very different to that in, for example, France, we shall not refer in this chapter to the analysis of this social practice from the point of view of the specificity of Japanese culture and intercultural differences. Nonetheless, we will consider the image's new function in interpersonal communication as a common trend in advanced industrial societies. We will analyse the uses

of photography described by the people questioned as part of the Japanese survey, to examine this medium from the point of view of the changes it brings about in everyday exchanges. Two other surveys showed similar results on the same subject: the first was an “experimental” Finnish study, carried out between July 1999 and February 2001, that used an ethnomethodologically oriented conversation analysis to analyze the mobile visual messages between five groups of individuals who were lent camera phones for a period of several weeks (Koskinen and Kurvinen, 2002). The second was a more general French study on new interpersonal communication practices, in which a subsample group owned a mobile camera phone (Rivière, 2003). The common points in the results of all three studies concerning photography’s uses as described and situated in context in daily mobile interaction seem similar enough to us to validate the value of the Japanese survey as empirical material for our study of the mobile image in daily communication. Given the experimental nature of the Finnish survey and the limited uptake of mobile photography which is still in the process of developing in France, we decided to retain an element of consistency in the observation and analysis of real and well-established uses in Japan, in order to give concrete examples in our analysis.

## **11.2 The Effects of Integrating Photography into Mobile Phones: A New Space for the Social Representation and Function of the Photographic Object**

With the photograph, everyone recognizes that it is able to represent reality, which distinguishes it from other forms of pictorial representation. In their analysis of press photography, Castel and Schnapper (1965) emphasize “that everything contributes to bring photography, which is, above all else, an unbiased way of recording reality, closer to the Press, whose role is to communicate real human action.” This assumption that there is a “natural” connection between using an image for bearing witness to an event and using a communication media to broadcast it may be extended to the combination of the mobile phone and the photographic image. Once we have got over our initial wariness of the idea of such sophisticated and innovative technology and the possible perception that it is a worthless gadget, using images to communicate with close acquaintances by means of a mobile phone leads to a wide range of daily uses, maintaining the mobile’s social function of “reliance”.

The technological development and marketing of the latest generation of mobiles has given us handsets with colour screens of a decent size and quality, making digital photographs both legible and acceptable on them. Moreover, such handsets enable us to communicate by e-mail and/or SMS, connect to an increasing number of mobile Internet sites, connect to

our computer's e-mail inbox and provide more memory space for saving and keeping texts, music and pictures. Integrating a camera with a mobile phone means that we can take pictures, framing them with the help of the phone's screen, view them on the screen, select one as our screen background image, store and archive them in your phone's memory and, finally, send them to our friends, to their mobiles or PCs.

In addition to such hi-tech performance, it is their effects on photography's social function and use that are of interest to us. By integrating with a mobile phone whose characteristics are compatible with the tool's portability and the correspondent's permanent availability in addition to the instantaneous nature of the exchange, the photographic image will gain an everyday usage value very similar to photography's function of representing events in the daily press. Furthermore, the mobile pushes the concepts of real time and the uninterrupted continuous link to the limit and photography, fixes and immortalizes the bond in time, thereby negating the passing of time and the distance that separates you from the Other. The meeting of these two imaginative modes creates the conditions for an emotive experience that is over-charged with connotations within a symbolizing function of being together. In their domestic use, the two practices are supported by representations that register the relationship with Time and the relationship with the Other within a positive imaginary of the interpersonal bond and, even more so, the intimate bond.

### **11.2.1 Making Photography Commonplace by Using It Daily Without an Aesthetic or Archiving Purpose**

Combining a mobile telephone with a camera significantly transforms photography's social function by integrating the possibility of producing and exchanging photographs with an interpersonal communication medium. This does not mean that one becomes the other and, in common representations, the camera is still associated with a specific practice that is laden with meanings linked to its traditional social function. This is why we will talk here about making the photographic act, rather than photographic practice, commonplace.

When it becomes part of the daily experience of using a mobile phone, photography departs from the realm of the occasional, or even the exceptional, that gave it its traditional function. Moreover, the photographic act is disassociated from the possession of a unique, specific object, the camera, whose existence and representation consolidated the perception of photography as a specific practice reserved for certain occasions, for specific events. As Bourdieu reminds us, the camera, considered then as joint family property, was brought out at the family unit's special reunions, intermittently and relatively infrequently, and was limited to certain occasions (Bourdieu, 1965).

In contrast, the status of the “mobile” telephone is primarily that of a “prosthetic” object, it is part of its owner:

We always take the mobile with us everywhere we go. (Mika, student, aged 21)

It's less of a burden to carry around than a digital camera. (Mrs Takana, aged 28, working)

It's the sort of camera that I can easily take out in comparison to a digital one. (Mr Aoki, aged 40, engineer)

This status of the mobile explains also the eruption of the backstage in public places analyzed by Fortunati (2003), for whom the “incoming or outgoing calls completely modify information about self-presentation”. In the same respect the success of written communication by e-mail and SMS in France and in Japan has been observed (Rivière, 2002; Rivière and Licoppe, 2003). Furthermore, in new representations of the photographic act, it is not uncommon to find the need to make a formal distinction between the traditional practice of photography and the new sphere of meanings and uses with which it is endowed thanks to the mobile phone. The latter brings photography into the 21st century as an agreeable form of communication or language, one that can be used by anyone, anytime, anyhow. In this sense, it makes photography “commonplace”, stripping it of every intention other than for one's own pleasure and the pleasure of expressing something in the immediate present.

When I want to take serious photos, I use the digital camera. Sha-mail<sup>1</sup> is for photos that are for fun. When I want to keep a photo, I use my digital camera; it has one million pixels. For everyday use, when you have no specific reason for taking a photo, sha-mail is fine. (Sanae, aged 32, graphic designer, female)

If I want to remember a scene, I take a photo with a camera. (Mi Isii, aged 20, student)

Here, the social perception of the technical object that produces it frees photography from its conventional uses associated with aesthetic or archiving purposes. Its everyday value is bound up in the chance encounter, the unexpected. It is in this sense that mobile photography gains a usage value similar to that of reportage photography in the press.<sup>2</sup> It is the unpredictable that is preferential, regardless of the subject and however banal the subject that we photograph. On the other hand, anything that reminds us of the posed photograph is rejected and/or

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<sup>1</sup> *Sha mail* (picture mail) is the Japanese name for a mobile with a camera.

<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of the photographers for *France-Soir*, R. Castel notes that “photography of everyday life does not entirely draw its intrinsic value from what is represented, but rather from the exceptional nature of the encounter between a chance event and the photographer ... As photographs of the dramatic, of the speed of the dramatic and of the unpredictable, *France Soir* photographs are necessarily instant!”

perceived as relative to conventional photographic practice because it can be anticipated as the respondents tell us above. Any event in the private world can be used as the subject for communication and the account of one’s self, the selection criteria for which, as we shall see later, carries a more intense yet spontaneous degree of emotion, strangeness and rarity compared with the expected norms of social behavior. The snapshot becomes an extension of the way in which one sees oneself and it gives value to communicating with other people.

If I come across an event that surprises me, I want to be there to take some photos. In Shibuya, there are always protests and concerts that I come across by chance. If I know that I’ll be there, I take my digital camera. (Mrs Seki, aged 30, employee, Foma)

I photographed a cat that I saw by chance on the road. (Mrs Seki, aged 30, employee, Foma)

### 11.2.2 A Visual Instant Communication Function and a Function for the Imaginary Symbolization of Being Together

Photography integrated into a mobile phone also entails a transformation of the photograph’s relationship with the past and its emotional charge. In 1965, Bourdieu pointed out that “the need to take photographs is nothing more than a need for photographs that, thanks to their function of reproducing reality, bear witness to and express the truth of the memory” (Bourdieu, 1965).

Taken up by Barthes, this relation to time, described as “that has been”, reflects the unique position of photography, which juxtaposes reality and the past, thus creating that emotional charge in which reality and life, reality and the present are blurred, imbuing in the authentic re-presentation of that which has irredeemably “been” with a particular intensity and brilliance (Barthes, 1980). We can use the juxtaposition described by Barthes to distinguish between two different aspects of the photograph: its power to authenticate and its power to represent. The former refers to its value in ratifying the world, its value as the indisputable truth, the certitude that what is represented in the photo really existed. The latter refers to the photograph’s “punctum”, that which is piercing, “which shoots through me” in the photograph and which feeds the emotional and often nostalgic (although not necessarily) perception that one may have of the object present in its absence.

By highlighting the photograph’s power to record time, rather than the actual subject of the photo, Barthes emphasizes its power to ratify a past situation, its power to bear witness, the reason why we want to immortalize what is important to us by taking a photograph of it. Sontag (1983) expresses the same thing when she writes that, “in current practice,

photographic activities are of little importance unless the photos are taken and kept with love.”

With the mobile phone, the representational aspect is placed at the service of the real, not of the past but of the present. Almost as soon as it has been captured, the photographic image appears on the screen. It can then be shared with the people that we know, thus consolidating a way of being part of the world, portraying and symbolizing what is experienced together. The photo can be sent and received on a mobile phone, accompanied by text or not. Photography thus acquires the status of an instant communication medium that is nearly as synchronous as voice and text messaging (SMS and mobile e-mail).

Most of the time, I send the photo straightaway. When I want to send the photo immediately, the fact that I can do so is great. Sometimes, when I'm traveling, for example, the sunset is a magical moment so I send it. At the same time, I don't know what the other person does with it, but for me, it is a way of showing what I can see. (Eita Kido, aged 25, working)

By laying the emphasis on a visual mode of communication, photography first acts to reinforce the viewer's capacity to perceive things in hyper-real mode. Integrated in actual messages sent, it then represents a relationship of substitution, since the criteria of resemblance and legibility that define photography work to enhance the capacity of the message one wishes to communicate to be objective and authentic.

When I changed my hairdo, I took a photograph of myself. I sent it to my best friend. She would do the same. (Tie Satou, aged 31)

At the same time, photography operates at the level of emotional perception and increases our capacity for emotion and to feel “together” (as opposed to operating at the intellectual level). This implies that what is mobilized is less what we see objectively than what the photograph signifies symbolically and what it refers to, from the point of view of the imaginary. Whether it is in the immediacy of the exchange between mobile phones and/or in the instantaneousness of the photographic act that we see photography's power of representation, a new imaginary and visual language is introduced, one which upholds and reinforces the emotion inhering in an imagined “being together”.

I can imagine the atmosphere better with a photo. If they only send text saying “we're eating and drinking”, it's not quite the same. (Kinebushi, sales rep., aged 39).

It gives you a good feeling to receive a photo. If it was of a cat, I thought the cat was cute. If it was of friends in a restaurant, I can sense the lovely pleasant atmosphere. It's the same when you send photos, it's easier to convey what you are feeling, to get across your state of mind. (Mrs Seki, aged 30, employee, Foma)



If the photographic image here works as a symbol of “being together”, it is because it refers to a familiar and shared world which each member of the group is able to decode. It is not so much the objective legibility of the photograph that produces the feeling of being together as what is referred to in each member’s memory, the shared meanings that each gives to it. To use Castel’s terms, we might say that the image functions here as a symbol in its passive aspect, i.e. by referring to pre-existing collective knowledge, nourished by a bank of memories and perceptions that is built up day in, day out. The image here makes a leap and expresses the existence of an imaginary with symbolic value (Castel, 1965).

In the same view, Harper and Taylor’s analysis of text messages exchanges shows how mobile phones have specific meanings in young people’s daily lives. The authors show how text messages can be thought of as forms of “gift-giving”. The value of the “text-gift” is connected with the intention of cementing social relationships. By sharing mobile contents, mobile credit communication and the mobile phone itself, teenagers express their relationships with one another, “demonstrate and preserve their commitment to the relationships (...), offer each other an intangible show of trust and loyalty”. So, say the authors “phones, in this sense, give young people something to talk about amongst themselves, providing them with yet one more mechanism for sharing their emotional experience and exchanging objects of personal significance (Harper and Taylor, 2003). A part of the value of the sha-mail (picture-mail) is created by the same model of reciprocity exchanges.

### **11.2.3 The Life of a Photograph: A Cross Between the Fleeting Temporality of the Memory and the Magical Presence of the Other (When Absent) Brought into Sight**

The integration of the photographic image within a world of instant communication also comes with a lack of interest in the value of the photograph as a photograph-as-memory. This is another major change in the way we relate to photography. The digitization of the image that operates the switch from an object-image photograph to a screen-image photograph dematerializes the photograph as a memory-object that can be kept, handled and even displayed. However, there is nothing particularly new about this: indeed, there is nothing to stop owners of digital cameras from printing their photographs on paper and reserving a special place for them as the memory and record of a past event that is commemorated and maintained every time they look at them.

Mobile photography becomes a routine form of instant expression and communication because of the interactive model of the phone call, i.e., short oral communication that exists only for the amount of time that the interaction lasts. It is also conditional upon the fact that photographs

taken and sent via mobiles are not of such good quality as those taken with digital cameras. Although we shall take this last factor into consideration, it is not, in our opinion, a determining factor. It is really photography's new social function, which consists in consolidating the feeling of an "image of being together" in the immediacy of the exchange and/or of the encounter, that goes to explain why the storage of the photograph is becoming less important.

Technically speaking, it is, of course, possible to conserve the photographs in the mobile phone's memory or as a background screen image. Depending on the phone's capacity, several dozen photographs can be kept or even sent to be stored on computer. Nonetheless, the purpose of taking a photo-as-memory remains marginal and the normal "life" of a photo is consistently deleted as more recent photos take its place.

Generally, when a photo comes with an e-mail it is kept with the e-mail. Photos are deleted in time along with the mails. (Melle, Aya, aged 20, student)

I don't save any photos because the image quality is not good. I delete as soon as the memory is full. (Isii, aged 20, student)

In the phone's memory, however, a special place is given to the photograph that may be used as a background image. This indicates a desire to maintain the presence of an absent loved one via their image, thereby ensuring the continuity of the symbolic bond.

I have a photo of my baby as a background image. (Tie Satou, aged 31, housewife)

I've got a photo of my girlfriend. (Igarassi, aged 20, student)

This form of transport (in all senses of the word) calls upon the memory not at the level of memories of the past but rather at a ubiquitous level. This relates back to the traditional practice of carrying a photo of a loved one with us wherever we go (in one's wallet, at the office, etc.), a practice that is more in line with a magical belief in the power of the image to represent, consubstantially as it were, the person or object represented.

To conclude this first part, we would say that the mobile phone captures the photograph and what it re-presents within a contracted and almost completely fused space-time continuum which transforms the role of the photograph without actually reinventing it. We will now go on to question the significance of the photographic act in more detail within various use situations that have been observed and see what they tell us of our relationships with the world and with other people and with regard to the values perceived to be important enough to trigger the desire to take a photograph.

### 11.3 Daily Use: Situations and Motivation – Meanings of the Photographic Act Become More and More Diverse

A photograph is always the result of a deliberate choice, a process of selecting what we perceive that results in a choice that is more or less conscious and through which we operate a foregrounding of one reality over another. What can be photographed is a reflection of social norms which are more or less obvious depending on the contexts (Castel, 1965). Bourdieu also described the social norms to which family photographs have to conform in order to be considered to be good photos. This might mean, for example, a posed attitude, wearing your Sunday best, not being taken by surprise in an ordinary outfit or task and, lastly, avoiding anything that would have gone against the rules of propriety and convention agreed by the group. More recent studies carried out in the USA show that:

while photographs still play a central role in the imagery of US households, they show the family in quite a different light than that implied by the information analysed by Bourdieu. The photographs on display in the contemporary home do not show a romanticised version of the family and its value system. In fact, the people are shown doing things, rather than sitting and standing in symbolic poses as in the traditional family photograph. Family portraits have been replaced by photographs that show people acting and interacting in an informal manner. (Halle, 1993)

Hence we may well wonder whether the new liberty involved in the private use of photography, and its becoming a function of interpersonal communications, refers to a new set of social meanings. Does it define a set of specific expectations and norms shared by the group within which the photographs are exchanged? Does it, moreover, point to a way of representing oneself or the aspiration to be what one photographs?

In other words, what do you mean to yourself and to others when you take a photo? Psychoanalytical research such as that carried out by Tisseron (1996b) indicates that taking photos is an attempt to appropriate the world by means of each gesture involved. Thus, his definition of photographic "activity" includes the billions of hand movements required to press the shutter and not just the developed and printed photographs. The photographic act therefore backs up the act of thinking and participates in the process of making the world symbolize something, of psychically assimilating the world around us – in sensory-motor terms (the movements involved in framing the shot) and in emotional terms (the emotions felt) and in verbal terms (the photos discussed and described).

This finding seems all the more interesting for our purposes in that the ratio between the number of photos taken and number of photos printed has increased considerably since the emergence of digital photography.

People take twice as many photos with a digital camera (an average of 24 compared with 13 in France) but they only print between 5 and 10%.<sup>3</sup> The photographic act of using a mobile phone makes this phenomenon even more widespread since it contributes to the formatting and the communicating of the world as image without any intention to archive such images and with little desire to remember. The greater liberty and simplicity provided for the individual to take photographs and create images reflecting his/her perception of the world mean that there is a much broader variety of events to which he or she may wish to give such a special place.

So, what are the choices made by people who have mobile camera phones? By analyzing the situations in which this is used, we see that a special place is given to the desire to fix emotion insofar as it is unexpected and spontaneous, whether this is in the form of a festive atmosphere, an unusual situation or a sense of beauty when seeing a landscape. The photographic act itself becomes a fun way to explore the world that is shared together. In addition to this most popular configuration, there is a second, more practical, use category which consists in optimizing the efficacy of a call using the visual properties of the image. Lastly, there is an intermediate category in which the values assigned to the emotions and to efficacy merge in the practice of using your mobile background image to carry around a photo of someone you love. There is also the issue of economics. Although this may not be a priority, I would argue that all matters conflate to make the mobile picture right for that moment.

### **11.3.1 Fixing an Unexpected Emotion and the Pleasure of the Present Moment**

Unlike the use of a camera, which is usually related to anticipating an event in daily life (a family celebration, holidays, an organized cultural event, etc.), the mobile camera phone is the tool for taking snapshots par excellence. The desire to fix a specific moment is triggered by the unexpected thrill of a situation, a mood or event, a feeling experienced spontaneously. Concluding their analyses of visual messages in an interactive situation, the authors of the Finnish survey mentioned earlier also point out that “humor and the expression of feelings appear to be salient features in the production of mobile images”.<sup>4</sup> “In contrast”, they continue, “a much lower number of ‘useful’ calls were reported” (Koskinen and Kurvinen, 2002).

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<sup>3</sup> Source: report published in “20 minutes”, March 11, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> In the examples quoted and analysed, the focus is mainly on photographs of landscapes, friends and funny situations intended to communicate feelings of well-being, to tease or defy, or for the purposes of sexual titillation or providing trivial information about oneself, one’s friends and one’s environment.

There are at least three interpretations that we could give to this way of capturing the present moment. Thanks to the simplicity and regularity with which it can be used, the camera phone helps to de-solemnize the exceptional as a group symbol. Based on the photographic choices made, focused on capturing inner emotions and/or shared pleasures, we shall also develop the idea that it makes possible a process of empathetically participating in the world and produces an effect of acculturating intimate experiences.

### 11.3.1.1 Festive Atmosphere

When I go for a drink in a restaurant, I take photos of my friends. For example, one of my favourites is a photo taken in a restaurant with friends celebrating a birthday. They all look like they are having fun. There's another showing 5 or 6 friends that I went to the beach with. All 5 or 6 faces are in close-up. (Sanae, aged 32, graphics designer)

I usually take photos of my friends and colleagues at the karaoke bar. (Kinnebushi, aged 39, working)

Parties have always played a central role in analyses of rituals that form cohesive bonds between group members and develop the feeling of belonging to the group. Durkheim analyzed the family party as a rite proper to the cult of domesticity whose function is to renew and recreate the group (Durkheim, 1897). Bourdieu associates photography with the party, demonstrating that it provides a way of rendering the high points of family life more solemn. In a certain sense, the decision to capture the party atmosphere as an image refers to a continuity in the role of photography through symbolizing each member's participation in the group. But difference with the camera phone is that this participation is sought outside any institutionalized form of ritual, and the experience is disconnected from its solemnization aspect which made the festive occasion coincide with a conventional special occasion. Where photography may once have been assimilated into a technique of repeating the celebration as a special moment in exceptional situations and outside of daily routine, it now becomes the tool used in the objectivation of the individual in all his or her uniqueness. The photographic and communicative act itself is imbued with value as a fun activity and a social sign of complicity.

I usually take photos of my friends in restaurants and bars. For example, friends acting up in the bar. There was one time, some friends were really drunk. They were having fun in a karaoke bar, singing and dancing. Just for a laugh, two boys kissed each other (they were drunk). So I caught them on film. (Hosogai, aged 28)

One might almost say that the new way of using the photographic act is developing in opposition to traditional social norms, against which peo-

ple adjust their position in order to conform to the social expectations shared by the group. At the same time, the photographic act is also freed from a specific awareness of time related to the event photographed. According to Castel, taking a photo implies a certain distance in relation to the present, intensified by the feeling that the instant you want to capture has already passed. It was from this that he observed a desire in “classic” photography to break with the everyday, with subjects related to leisure activities and holidays, for example. Such a break with everyday life introduced, he thought, a certain distance in time from the event. In contrast, with its desire to capture the moment, the everyday, and the lack of desire to keep a record of the event that quickly “turns into” the past, mobile photography blurs the awareness of time in which photography traditionally participates. Indeed, when we photograph ourselves in an inebriated state, when we have little control over our gestures and attitudes – this could even be regarded as anti-social – and what is revealed is a form of consciousness of the social constraint implied. It is as if one were acting on a desire to see oneself objectively as existing outside one’s social role. The unexpected, spontaneous emotion then reveals a quest for self-authentication that the photographic image captures and authenticates.

### 11.3.1.2 Landscapes, Unusual Situations and Chance Encounters

We can look at photographs of landscapes from the same perspective. There is no aesthetic intention or intent to conserve that can explain the photographic act. It is a pleasure of the senses which is expressed through a landscape reflecting a more intensely happy moment that one wants to capture either for one’s own pleasure or to share with one’s correspondents. This may involve the beauty or the unexpected aspect of a landscape or situation that one comes across which triggers an emotion that is not part of the expected order of things.

When I find something pretty, a field of sunflowers, a sunset or fireworks, I take a photo. (Mrs Tikada, aged 28, employee)

I use it when I’m traveling. I get someone to photograph me with friends and in front of landscapes and I send them to other friends. (Isii, aged 20, student)

Last spring I photographed the cherry trees in blossom. During a trip to Karuisawa, I took a photo of the Shiraito cascade. (Eita Kido, aged 25, working)

In general, as Tisseron recalls, when the individual is overcome by something he or she sees, he or she comes up against the problem of introjecting the resulting new experiences into his/her ego (i.e. accepting them, making them familiar, finding a place to put them in the psyche), regard-

less of whether the experience is one of strangeness, beauty or horror or simply an echo set up in the conscious or unconscious mind by the sight. This is the sense in which he talks of the photograph as an attempt to fix one’s presence in the world. For Tisseron, photography is a way of empathizing with the world which is not so much an attempt to hold back the passing time (which would be its traditional family-oriented function – to fix and immortalize solemn scenes in a bid to halt the passing time) as a way of trying to touch the fleeting fragility of time as it passes (Tisseron, 1996 b).

Observing the use situations described above, we can say that to capture the emotion, the unexpected by means of the image is also to attempt the extraordinarily difficult operation of assimilating a sensitive relationship to the world and to other people. The fact that the photographic act is becoming more common and more commonplace may then make it another way for the individual to control the emotional events which are experienced but which cannot be fitted into a rational logic of understanding, which, in this sense, are “beyond him/her”. Can we talk here of an attempt to “acculturate” inner emotion? If we base our opinion on a history of culture in the anthropological sense of the term, defining culture by means of its opposition to Nature, technical progress thus comes to constitute one of the primary vectors through which humans appropriate their environment and has developed ever more elaborate cultural systems in all areas of cultural activity (thought, language, the law and social institutions, etc.). Understood as a form of learning behavior, as defined by Tylor (1871),<sup>5</sup> capturing experiences photographically could be seen as a way of learning how to deal with our emotions and to recognize the existence of an inner life that usually escapes explanation. This hypothesis is based on the connected idea that the image and sight mediate more and more frequently in everyday life and photography’s widely recognized role in the process of sensory, emotional and motor symbolization that is brought into play when the shutter is pressed.

### 11.3.2 Optimizing the Informative Efficacy of Communication: A Hyper-real Language

If visual enrichment exists in all cases, here it is optimized to the maximum and becomes the most effective means of expression for transmitting a piece of information that is difficult to put into words. Here, what is at stake is the power to represent reality, valued as a means of expressing reality in a way that is less ambiguous than writing. Paradoxically,

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<sup>5</sup> “Culture is this complex whole that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, the Law, customs and all the other abilities and habits acquired by Man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871).

removing ambiguity does away with the need for “other” communication. As Baudrillard and Guillaume say, communication is nourished by misunderstandings such that “it relies on what is contrary to it and on the gap between people. If two people have everything in common, communication is swallowed up in too great an intimacy” (Baudrillard and Guillaume, 1994). To take this idea further, we could say that the less distance there is between the thing and the word, the less need there is for language to define and signify reality. From a certain point of view, photographic language belongs among the most primitive communication systems in which people show what they mean rather than say it, just like the first forms of writing that relied on the resemblance of reality and its representation.

Hence the situations that are photographed correspond to a concern for efficient and optimized communication in time and a concern for precision so that the correspondent can share a vision of the same situation without any possibility of error. Lastly, this new form of communication consistently brings the values of hedonism and play combined with the values of saving time, efficiency and profitability driven by a desire for performance in economic life into the private sphere of interpersonal relationships.

In practical, organizational situations:

When I went shopping, a friend asked me to get something for him. I wasn't sure what to choose since there was a wide choice in the store. So I took a photo and told him to choose. (Melle Aya, aged 20, student)

To show people's faces:

I was with a girlfriend in a café and we saw a guy who looked like a film star. Since we weren't sure, we wanted an objective opinion. We took a photo of the guy and sent it to a third person to see if he really looked like the film star. (Haya, aged 20, student)

To show clothes and accessories:

I went to a wedding reception. I had made an outfit for my baby, which I photographed and sent. Also, for something a friend of mine bought. She sent a photo of it – it's more practical. (Tie Sato, aged 31, housewife)

### **11.3.3 To Carry Loved Ones With You and Keep Them Present Symbolically: The Intimate World**

This third way of sharing an “image of being together” reflects intimate, personal boundaries and values that are recognized and authenticated beforehand as such. This has less to do with active involvement in the



photographic act and more about the use of mobile phones as a container, enabled thanks to the background image as a permanent photograph holder. The choice of photographs here reveals a cultural dimension that reflects the extent to which typical Japanese society tolerates public displays of affection and feelings in general, given the fact that the background image is visible to the outside world, i.e. in public space. Hence the photos selected are bound to reveal a conventional aspect of this intimate world, secured and contained within given limits. We will therefore discuss them to illustrate how, thanks to the photographic image, the emotional force carried by the mobile object is intensified.

The choice of photographs is dominated by three main categories connected to intimacy in one's home life: family photos symbolized by pictures of the children, pets and, more rarely, of the couple.

I took a photo of my son when he started at nursery. I sent it to my sister's mobile – she lives with my parents who don't have a mobile themselves. (Kinnebushi, aged 39, sales rep.)

With my boyfriend. We each take photos of us together and then send them to each other. (Sanae, aged 32, graphics designer)

I like taking pictures of my dog. Especially if he's lying in a bit of a funny position. (Mrs Takana, aged 28, working)

## 11.4 Conclusion

With mobile photography, the image as a form of interpersonal communication becomes, more than ever before, a part of everyday life. It comes in at least two forms: first, it is the visual image, iconic, a demonstration of hyper-reality via the screen of your mobile phone; second, it is the mental image, calling on the imaginary to structure exchanges between correspondents.

Photography intensifies the experience and perception of feelings within a relationship with another person, in other words, the capacity to share an experience at the same level (unlike thought, which is intelligible). By over-investing emotion as a form of relating to another, the instantaneous aspect of the interchanges encourages us to subscribe to an agreeable, shared and common imagination which will be sought after for itself and which creates the perception of "being together" founded on an affective reality that is shared at the same time and together. Every new photo and every new exchange are also incorporated into a brief temporality linked to a never-gratified quest for satisfaction, for the pleasure felt in the immediacy and intensity of the moment, inducing ephemeral, fluctuating modes of belonging, guided by a mode of empathy involving recognition of and identification with the Other.

Using the concept of the tribe to describe the individual's new mode of social existence, Maffesoli, for example, partly describes this scenario by highlighting the idea that an alternative mode of being, an alternative form of social existence is developing, one which places the emphasis on the emotional and affective, as opposed to the concept of the social contract with its emphasis on the rational and free will. Thus, he speaks of "Homo estheticus developing on the basis of shared emotions" functioning in the same way as the tribe, i.e. through belonging and identifying at many different levels to micro-communities (Maffesoli, 1988, 2003). In his analysis of post-modernity, Bauman (2000) uses the metaphor of liquidity to examine the present new phase in the history of modernity. In this liquid modernity, the author talks about "cloakrooms" community to describe the kind of identity of being together. "The community in question tend to be volatile, transient and single 'aspect' or 'single-purpose'. Their life span is short while full of sound and fury. They derive power not from their expected duration, but paradoxically, from their precariousness and uncertain future, from the vigilance and emotional investment which their brittle existence demands."

We believe that this finding carries on from one of the main trends discussed in post-modern theory, which relates ideological disillusion to the idea of progress, i.e. to an eventual end, a purpose that corresponds to the future achievement of great ideals, which has been superseded by a society for which the present, the present moment and immediacy are the end-purpose of the quest and the satisfaction of pleasure. This creates a new way of entering a collective communication space centered on exchanging content that is intimate, fun, and has no rational or informational purpose but is, rather, sensation-oriented.

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