

Snapshots of *almost* contact: gendered camera phone practices and a case study in Seoul, Korea

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Abstract

As a burgeoning component of visual media cultures, camera phone practices are arguably both extending and creating emerging ways of seeing and representing. In media footage of late, camera phones have been heralded as providing everyday users with the possibility of self-expression and voice in the once one-way model of mass media. Building on discourses of analogue photographic practices and a so-called democratising of photographic media, camera phones are affording users with the ability to document, re-present and perform the everyday. In turn, camera phone practices also extend historical ideological constructions around bourgeoisie performances of intimacy and family that were initiated with the introduction of the Kodak camera (Gye 2005).

In particular, the “exchange” and gift-giving economy underpinning mobile phone practices (Taylor and Harper 2003) is further enunciated by the camera phones function to “share” moments between intimates (and strangers) through various contextual frameworks and archives from MMS, blogs, virtual community sites to actual face-to-face digital storytelling. With the rise in convergent media through the interactive, pervasive, personal features of mobile media, we are seeing everyday users creating their own digital storytelling techniques and diverse networks of distribution that further instill that *context* is one of the key factors in determining *content*.

With almost all mobile phones now coming with cameras, many users – not necessarily interested in photography *per se* – are becoming avid practitioners in the making, circulating and socialising of their own images. The recent launch of the Samsung 8 mega pixel camera phone in September 2005 in Korea heralded a new epoch in camera phone discourses; serving to render the binary between high-resolution digital cameras versus the low-quality camera phones, obsolete. But how does the producing and circulation of everyday digital images change when contextualised in what Ito et al. (2005), dub the “portable, pedestrian and personal” characteristics of camera phone images? How are the three ‘s’ – sharing, storing

and saving – identified by Ito and Okabe (2005) recontextualising mobile content and the digital storytelling possibilities for users' identity? The implications of this miniature and mobile context for the camera image content are indeed, like all mobile media, subject to the cultural nuances at the level of the local. So what are the defining emerging camera phone genres and how do they play into earlier photographic practices and the politics of identity (for the user)? Moreover, what are the emergent digital storytelling practices and do these really afford the everyday user with agency or is this further anesthetization of the everyday creating more individualized and atomized networks?

This paper builds on the seminal work on camera phone practices conducted by Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe in Japan (2003, 2005) and Dong-Hoo Lee (2005) in Korea. Drawing on these seminal works, this paper will elaborate on Lee's argument of possible female empowerment by further thinking through some of the ideological implications of current camera phone practices and the contextual possibilities in digital storytelling and the legacy of realism and analogue metaphor (Manovich 2003). Utilizing ethnographic research conducted in a mobile media seminar at Hallym University in South Korea from October to December 2005, this paper will explore some of the ways a sample group of students were thinking about their relationship to hand phones in maintaining "intimate co-present relations" (Ito and Okabe 2005) and the role of context – where the images are displayed and "shared" – in the scripting of their everyday lives.

Introduction: the space in between connection and contact

In South Korea, net and mobile telephonic spaces are helping to "progress" Korean forms of democracy (Kim 2003a, 325). For Korean sociologists Shin Dong Kim (2003) and Haejoang Cho (2004), the rise of a specific type of democracy in South Korea was afforded by, in part, new technologies such as mobile phones. In Seoul one can find two dominant types of youth sociality predicted around technologies – that of the mobile phone being used to 'microcoordinate' (Ling 2004) contact with friends and internet through net communities such as Cyworld's mini hompys (mini home pages/ blogs) and online multiplayer games and their attendant social spaces (i.e. PC bangs [rooms]). This usage of technological spaces is *not* about substituting the virtual with the actual but rather the technologies/ technological spaces function to further connect individuals in the actual. The relevance of the technology is linked intrinsically to maintaining social capital.

As a DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting) and broadband “centre”, South Korea represents a prime source for new mobile and yet remediated (Bolter and Grusin 1999) technologies and hence seemed an appropriate location in which to explore emerging user camera phone practices. From September 2005, the streets of Seoul were coloured with posters advertising for a DMB mobile phone content competition by TU mobile (mobile TV). Utilising the Korean national rainbow-like colours (that are also – coincidentally – similar to a TV test pattern), these ads were clearly converging Korean national identity with its prescient state as “*global DMB centre*”. Here, the role of technology is bound up in the way in which Korea exports itself globally and thus consuming itself locally; the consuming of mobile technologies is the participation in mechanisms bound to explicit and implicit forms of nationalism. The hardware and software components are made in Korea, serviced by Korean telecommunication companies, and with a population of 48 million and conservative estimates of 78% penetration rates, the Korean hand phone success story has taken global centre stage; drawing attention away from the once lorded Japanese DoCoMo *keitai* (mobile phone) IT revolution (Matsuda 2005). However, as researchers such as Yoon (2003) in his research on young Korean usage of mobile phones (‘hand phones’) have noted, the technological is fully entrenched in, and by, the social.ⁱ

In September 2005, Samsung released a camera phone in Korea that would revolutionise the “digital divide” surrounding quality, and thus content, between camera phones and digital cameras. One of the dominant differences in the relationship between the two was that the former was always there, “on hand” (both literally and metaphorically) to capture the trivialities of everyday, unlike the stand alone camera with high resolution that would be brought along purposely to events deemed “special”. The second difference related to the context, the camera phone had “sharing” built into its logic with quick functions such as MMS, blue toothed or uploading to a blog almost instantly, whilst the digital camera would be taken to an often-stationary computer and then uploaded. But the launch of the 8-mega-pixel camera phone represented the meeting of both these worlds. No longer would the camera phone images just be trivial and “fun”, they had the potential to be printed with high resolution, blurring the world between amateur and professional digital photography. Would this signal a change in the function and relationship to the camera phone?ⁱⁱ

It is not hard to feel a state of *déjà vu* when hearing current debates around camera phone practices. Only a decade ago, heated discussion surrounded the relationship between analogue and digital photography; now it seems that a similar dialectic is occurring between camera phone imagery and the ‘stand alone’ digital camera. In ‘The paradoxes of digital photography’ written in early 1990s before the introduction of camera phones, Lev Manovich argues that the “the logic of the digital image” is “paradoxical”, that is, it “radically” breaks “with older modes of visual representation whilst at the same time reinforcing these modes” (2003). As Manovich notes, digital photography is far from erasing the importance of analogue

photography, rather it is further instilling its importance. This leads Manovich to assert that whilst film may disappear, cinema will far from vanish as it “acquires a truly fetishistic status”. We have become obsessed with the ‘real’ that was feed to us via ‘remediated’ analogue photographic representations.

This remediated relationship – that is, what Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe as a non-causal dialogue and revising between old and new media – is intrinsic to the ‘logic’ and co-dependency between analogue and digital image making.ⁱⁱⁱ A digital photograph – whilst differing in technological processes to analogue – draws on the history of seeing and cultural visual codes that has saturated media cultures. For Manovich, one of the dominant modes that highlight the continuing importance of analogue photography is the emphasis of digital photography on modes of realism.^{iv} This is particularly the case with camera phone practices and attendant genres. As a key example of digital storytelling and imagining, camera phone practices are playing into overall themes of digital narration in its search for the “personal” and the “real” through the dominance of genres based on realism. This serves to remind us that the digital is still very in awe of the politics of representation legacy underlying analogue photography and its construction in social occasions, hierarchies and patterns of intimacy (Gye 2005).^v

Fast-forward to now and the current debates surrounding the rise of camera phone practices (or “fast-forwarding photography”) and we see remediated versions of paradoxes that Manovich identified in relation to the analogue/ digital photography divide. Now it is the divide between the digital camera and the camera phone. Up until the last two years, many mobile phone users didn’t have camera phones, and those that did have camera phones spoke about the different relationship between the digital camera similar to the way in which analogue and digital camera were spoken about – the former was low resolution and ubiquitous, and thus used for ‘fun’ and everyday pictures. The latter was taken out for special occasions and, due to its higher resolution, often made into hard copies. *But this has changed.* With camera phones now having the capacity for such high resolution the fun and the serious, the trivial and the sublime are documented and collected by one (mobile) source. This creates a new set of paradoxes that draw from the ones outlined by Manovich over 10 years ago. Most notably, camera phone genres are bound to types of realism that are indicative of the dominant logic of paradoxes Manovich identifies in digital photography. In turn, these new modes of realism have affect on how such notions as gender are naturalized and normalized. As remediated devices, camera phones draw on earlier modes of constructing identity around familial social hierarchies initiated by painting and then vernacular analogue photography. However, there are also some vast differences, most notably in how we organize and distribute the images and how this is inflected by the gender and age of the user as noted by seminal ethnographies of camera phone practices by Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe (2003, 2004, 2005) in Japan and Dong-Hoo Lee in Korea (2005).

Snapshots of *almost* contact

Recently I played the role of the awe-inspired tourist whilst visiting some beautifully picturesque temples and monuments in Korea. However, as is the case for so many people these days, I didn't have enough time to *really* appreciate (and experience) them. Luckily I had my trusty friend, my mobile phone ('hand phone' in Korea), to help "capture" the experiences so I could meditate on and contemplate them at a later date. I was not alone in this – the walls of the temple echoed with a cacophony of camera phone snapshots as others, both young and old, sought to capture their special moments, framed through the miniature and personal canvas of the mobile phone. They too would be contemplating, savouring and sharing these images in a deferred and regulated mode common to contemporary practices of co-presence. Unlike mass media images that bombard us and often make us feel inadequate, we feel these snapshots are fragments/ sequences in our concurrent digital lives. Even though we may replicate some of the gender stereotypes of advertising images, it is now our faces that complete with the growing assemblage of visages. Moreover, our faces come with personal stories; indicative of the increasing pervasiveness of modes of realism. We *know* it's real because we re-live the experience afterwards through the warm glow of the electronic mobile canvas. We have more instantaneous *proof* of the moment – and potential co-present representation/ sharing (via MMS) – than ever before.

It seems impossible to savour a moment without an urge to document. The camera phone has revolutionised everyday practices in so far as it serves to create a discourse of co-presence when experiencing an event. Users simultaneously transport themselves to both the creator and producer, experiencing the moment whilst transferring the present into the past. For example, at music concerts the candle light serenade that once was used by audiences has been replaced by digital glowing rectangles as audience members "direct", film and edit their own MTV clip. Often this will involve the talking-head (head disembodied from body, denoting 'direct address' as used by TV genres) Photoshop self-portrait where users document themselves and friends "at" the event and yet, by the intimate and logistical pragmatics of "immediate" camera phone self-portraiture the head is cropped and disembodied, the background of "the event" rendered into often obscure nothingness, so that the image and the experience need the author/ user to contextualise it. The users are simultaneously experiencing the moment as they also framing it into an autobiographic sequence; making it a practice of presencing and presenting present tense past. *A fast-forwarding present past*. Agency and power become pivotal as an audience suddenly transformed into a group of authors/ directors/ creators. It is the ultimate Duchampian conundrum – mobile media users are deploying artistic gestures that integrally involve the readymade.

It would be easy to become dystopian and argue that the ubiquitous 'power of the now' (Wilhelm 2005)

of the camera phone is destroying a once-unmediated experience of the world; however such a position neglects the fact that intimacy has always been mediated – by language, memories, and gestures (Morse 1998). Such romantic views on intimacy have been dispelled by mobile phone ethnographies; rather place and physical intimacy/ contact is reinforced – not displaced – by the ‘micro-coordinations’ of time schedules (Ling 2004) using hand phones (Yoon 2003, Ito 2002). The practices of representing, re-presenting and sharing experiences and memories through camera phones – either *physically* through the mobile phone whilst with friends at a café or virtually via blogs and so on – has become an important mode of everyday practice for many people at a personal level; in turn, the significance of camera phone practices in revolutionising the agency of the everyday user and their ‘voice’ in mass media has led to many examples whereby users become photojournalists (as witnessed in the recent London bombings and in the Korean ‘citizen’ website), artists, and even media activists.

As a convergent communicative media premised on the logic of gift-giving, the various ways in which camera phone images can be ‘stored’ ‘shared’ and ‘saved’ is, as Ito and Okabe (2004) note, important to how the remediated sociotechnological images are read and contextualized. With the low resolution further giving ‘authenticity’ to the modes of realism ensured in the ‘voice of the people’ aesthetics (reminiscent of the webcam revolution), the camera phone signifies a glimpse into one’s personal world; echoing the debates about new modes of stylized realism that can be witnessed in rise of reality TV programs and documentary genres that utilize the omnipresent god-like fly-the-wall method (Nichols 1992) whereby the ‘unmediated’ is actually, paradoxically, highly mediated. But it is the very personal, miniature and interactive nature of mobile media that also makes it a repository for the logic of hypermedia. One is aware of the ‘miniature’ and ‘personal’ aesthetics and genres of camera phone images that make it impossible to escape the medium and its communicative possibilities. If the camera once represented (problematically) a window onto the world, then the camera phone offers the ultimate romantic realism – a thumbsized “peep-a-boo” vignette onto someone’s personal life.

In the case of seminal research on camera phone practices (in Japan), one can go no further than the work conducted by Mizuko Ito^{vi} and Daisuke Okabe. Having already documented some of the possibilities of camera phone practices – and its implications on image making processes and productions of identity – in Japan (2003, 2005), Ito and Okabe take up this discussion of the need to consider context and content. For Ito and Okabe, the meaningful points of camera phones practices are interwoven with the politics of networks/ contexts, distribution and interactivity. This is best encapsulated as what they succinctly dub the three ‘s’ – saving, sharing and storing; the 3 ‘s’ undoubtedly central in determining possible interpretations, audiences and ongoing exchange/ currency.

These 3 ‘s’ were pivotal in my seminar discussions of camera phone practices with students; many

preferred the second type of sharing modality for editing, narrating and contextualizing their camera phone practices. This is partly due to the dominant site for uploading images – Cyworld mini-hompy – whose architecture allows users to organize material and accessibility according to their relationship to visitors. Unlike sites such as flickr, mini-hompy has various layers (visual, textual and aural) that provide a more in-depth context of the user and their social network. Moreover, there is a clear correlations between online and offline identities in Korea unlike other countries. This sees users often uploading pictures that they deem as “true” to their experiences and feelings of their offline day-to-day activities, rather than an assemble patchwork of images without an obvious narrative.

In the context of Korea, Lee has conducted ethnographic work into the ways in which camera phones both reinforce and yet provide contingencies for female empowerment and new ways of seeing/presenting (2005). As Lee notes, by 2004, mobile phone penetration rates where around 75% with 36.1 million people (Korea’s total population is 48 million) having one or more handsets. Of these handsets 73% of the hand phones sold in 2004 were equipped with built-in digital cameras; by the beginning of 2006 it was virtually impossible to buy a hand phone with the integrated camera.

As Lee notes in her previous study with Sohn (2004), the changing representational codes and accessibility for image making practices and distribution are affording demographics that were previously excluded from the domain, most particularly women. In their study, Lee and Sohn find that women are more ‘active in adopting new multi-media functions of the mobile phone’ and that ‘their willingness to adopt such functions is significantly stronger than men’s’ (2005, 1). Whilst the history of photographic practice and especially female representation in media, has been predominantly structured by what Lee defines as a ‘patriarchal’ society (re-visiting Laura Mulvey’s ‘male gaze’ argument), its recontextualisation through the frame of the mobile phone (and the gendered nature of telephonic history and the gendering of private/ public spheres) sees new emerging modes of self-presentation and identification that both, paradoxically, reinforces, and yet subverts, gendered imagery in mainstream media.^{vii} A new type of gendered realism?

In the light of the changing and remediated nature of camera phone practices on genealogies of personal photographic discourses, such seminal research as Ito’s and Okabe’s in Japan and Lee’s in Korea have sought to identify some of the key motivations and modes of storytelling by specific users. Continuing on from this empirical research, I will now turn to a discussion of a case study of 34 Korean University students conducted from September to December 2005.

Snapshots: an ethnographic case study of Korean university student camera phone practices

The history of the mobile phone has been a history whereby users have shifted their agency from *mere consumers* to *active producers* in the content and associated meanings. This paradigm, highlighted by the rise from 2G (second generation) to 3G (third generation) mobile technologies, has been dubbed by Anita Wilhelm et al., as characterized by the “user as producer” model (2004). This agency of sorts has been clearly enunciated in the difference between the images of user propagated by the industry and the identification and practices of actual users. In the case of Korea with its exported images – consumed globally – as a broadband and DMB mobile technologies “centre”, one can see a different relationship between the global exported image and actual local usage. Whilst advertising images deploying Korean drama stars and personalities are the currency in hand phone images promoted by telecommunication giant, SK, and mega hardware giant such as Samsung promise a high tech and brave new world for co-present intimacy, for many users the hand phone is an essential and yet deeply ambivalent experience. This is particularly the case when one moves outside the 21st century urbanity of Seoul to a more regional area of Chuncheon, 2 hours drive north of Seoul.

During September to December 2005 I worked with 34 university students at Hallym University asking them to analyse and comment on their own hand phone practices. In a series of (three) workshops students worked individually and collaboratively to compare and contrast, I asked students to reflect on their textual, aural and visual uses of the hand phone. In the first presentation students worked individually to analyse their own camera phone images considering notions/ motivations such as Ito’s and Okabe’s 3 “s” – sharing, storing and saving. The second presentation consisted of students working in pairs whereby each partner documented their own camera phone images for a week and then gave their data to their partner for further analysis. In the third and final presentation students documented their hand phone practices for a week and then gave the data to their partner for further analysis. This presentation also included students conducting interviews with partners after analyzing the data to draw more personal meaning from the material.

Students were encouraged to think creatively about how a phone is personalized – including “naming” their hand phone – and how their practices conformed or deviated from conventional or well-documented genres. It should be noted that the gender differences in usage are also linked to age differences, as most of the male students were older than their female counterparts due to doing at least two years of military service before University. The students were asked to consider various factors in their camera phone practices from ‘the what’ (subject/ theme), ‘where’ and ‘why’ they were taken, to

how the images were consumed, shared and stored. Students were also asked to consider the two simultaneously levels to which MMS functions – on both an individual level and a social level. On an individual level many respondents used camera phone images as mementoes (Ito and Okabe 2005), on a social level, they used images to share with others both as a performance of their identity as well as reinforcement of a ‘wishing you were here’ co-presence (Ito 2003, Ling 2004).

In this way, students were asked to consider the multiple dimensions (on both micro and macro, individual and social level) of the “why”, along with the “what” and “how”, of their usage of hand phones modes. As I have noted earlier, camera phone practices are very much predicated on modes of realism that have, as Manovich argues, sought to further romanticize the realm of the ‘real’ underlying analogue photographic practices. Realism, as a genre, makes us focus on the “what” rather than the important “how” and “why” so pivotal to how camera phone images are contextualised.

As Van House et al., noted, the social uses of personal photography fall under three main functions – memory, creating and maintaining relationships and self-expression (2004). In their examination of the conundrum of designing user-driven technologies for users that don’t exist yet (i.e. “projected” users in the future), Van House et al., argue for the need to recognize current “social uses of personal imaging technology” as “not just what people do with current imaging technology, but why” (2004). However, locating the “why” is not as so easily done, with many users answering at the level of the action “rather than the activity level”. This problem was encountered during the workshop where many users neglected to address the three ‘s’ – sharing, storing and saving – as outlined in the brief. This was, in part, a linguistic issue as the workshop was taken in their second language, English; but also an issue to do with preconceptions on my behalf – mainly that these students weren’t necessarily the techno-savvy and early adopters featured in the media images of Seoul’s urban youth.

In the workshop all but 2 students had camera phones. For over 80% of the students their current camera phone was their first. For those recipients, the purchasing of the phone dependent upon the camera phone was not a consideration; many just bought the camera phone because it was hard to buy a phone without a camera. The gender of the recipient did inflect the types of images that were taken, but only marginally. For many of these users, the 3 ‘s’ – sharing, storing and saving – of camera phone images was predominantly via mini-hompy sites and secondly peer to peer hand phones; sites such as flickr barely registering. This had to do with a majority of respondents noting their dissatisfaction with the low resolution of the camera phone and hence it only being used for ‘trivial’ everyday events and moments.

And yet, despite this, the camera phone was a dominant mode for documenting their personal relationships, especially with partners. One male respondent in his mid twenties featured a camera phone

image of his girlfriend as a screen saver on his phone. This featuring of partners on the screen was common amongst the few “coupled” respondents in the seminar. When the aforementioned male respondent discussed this form of digital customization he spoke about it signifying a type of perpetual presence whereby he was reminded of her and to call her when looking at his phone. In turn, this type of coupled customization took many forms – from external customization of the hardware with matching cute characters hanging from both partners’ phones (often bought by the female) to internalized customization (marking of the software) with such features as screen savers and ring tones. The screen saver of the girlfriend functioned in a similar way as an engagement ring; the always visible hand phone on the table with the image of the girlfriend reminding the respondents – and people around him – that he was ‘taken’. Here we see the hand phone customization as an extension of hand/ arm ritualisation – the image of the girlfriend is like an engagement ring, the hanging characters are like a charm bracelet full of mementoes.

However for all respondents, the most ‘telling’ form of personalization was the ‘colourings’; that is, the music tune that replaces the dialing sound that callers hear when ringing someone. Whilst many did not download games and animations but instead used the ones that came with the phone, it was the colouring function that all respondents had customized as it was believed this made the greatest impression to others about the user’s tastes and values.

For most of the respondents, camera phone genres fell into the following: everyday, special occasions/places, friendship/ family, self-portraiture, and favourites. Whilst the categories were often generic, the usage of the 3 ‘s’ was an important distinguishing factor in *how* and *why* respondents took their camera phone images. One of the most enduring aspects of the camera phone usage and categorization was the way in which respondents spoke about it as ‘personal’; thus not only rendering and contextualizing the images in terms of earlier epochs of personal photography but also in terms of a very loose style of ‘documentary’. By documentary, I do not mean the omnipresent ‘god-like’ documentaries that claimed a type of authenticity and objectivity; rather it is a genre that has been hybridized by such TV genres as reality TV and has risen to become a common way of digital storytelling.^{viii}

In a period where documentary can no longer transcend its representational capacity to uncover the ‘real’ but rather, they can only serve to display sets of ideologies that underpin modes of narration and the attendant meaning making processes (Williams 1993), the camera phone, as the new webcam, has much possibility. But, in turn, we must ask what types of authenticity axioms are camera phone participating, and how, in turn, is that re-presenting and transforming ‘everydayness’? In particular, if respondents are speaking about their image making and sharing practices in terms of personal documentaries, isn’t the

sudden possible reappropriation of such images into journalist discourses running risk of transforming the content? In this case, does the user really get empowered or does the user get used? Or does this rise of camera phones as vehicles for democracy for the everyday person suggest that the once imagined divide between journalism and documentary practices (and codes of ethics) has converged?

If this is the case, the only difference is deemed through the individual user and their intended context for image 'sharing' (i.e. flickr, mini-hompy). But these types of sharing are not a mere demonstration of Manuel Castell's notion of "networked individualism"; especially in the case of the salencies of Korean sociality and non-European forms of individualism.^{ix} Following this line of argument we could say that both documentary making and journalism are now subsumed under digital storytelling discourses that are increasingly mobile, peer-to-peer and deeply subjective. And yet within this subjective domain, one can still discern different levels of content between what Ito et., dub "newsworthy" and "ambient intimate co-presence" (2005); two notions that are regulated not only by the individual and their social capital/ network but also dependent on the cultural context (and the attendant relationship to such resources as the Internet). In the case of the workshops, respondents seemed clearly aware of the subjective elements in their mobile digital storytelling techniques, the "newsworthy" and "ambient intimate co-presence" denoted by the way in which they stored and thus 'shared' their mobile data.

In the workshops, the role of modes of realism was overt in the various genres and examples of camera phone imagery. The gendering of the gaze was also a dominant contrast, most notably through the photographic style rather than the actual content. Often male respondent images were taken at a distance, usually at least 1.5 metres, and with the subject firmly in centre frame. This suggests that either the camera phone picture is taken on a timer or there is another person present who has taken the photograph (thus someone else holding the camera phone) for the respondent. This suggestion of camera phone sharing, at least momentarily swapped, would be unheard of in many places (such as Melbourne) where the phone is so much an extension of one's identity and also functioning as a diary and wallet. This mostly male mode of "documenting" was a key example of one of the most enduring documentary modes being utilized, the omnipresent, god-like position (Nichols 1992). Moreover, this gender difference was also subject to age differences with many of the male respondents being at least two years older than their female counterpart due to subscription of compulsory 2- year military service for males.

In case study four, consisting of three male respondents, the camera phone as part of how one becomes both director and subject akin to the jenny cam aesthetics becomes apparent. In this way, the low resolution of the camera phone images gives authenticity, implying a type of self-confessional and deeply personal genre that fills voyeuristic tendencies to witness the 'voice' of the everyday. In a world saturated by glossy and hyper-real images, this type of DIY aesthetics has a growing audience of neo-

realist fans. Combining the *vérité* phoneur aesthetics of case study two with the more open frame and distance as case one, these respondents were very much into the camera phone as postcard, that is, 'I was here' type usage.

Two of the respondents obviously held their phones to 'document' themselves in expressive and playful ways; the use of camera angle, in two of the respondents echoes the fly-on-the-wall documentary style, whilst the third respondent used the camera frame in a much more intimate way to emphasise expressive and humorous gestures. These three respondents did not have 'steady' girlfriends and hence most of their photos revolved around themselves and their predominantly male friends. The contrast – in subject matter and mode of framing – between respondents with and without long-term partners was obvious. Most particularly as the single respondents tended to play to imaginary audiences of their friends (which, depending on whether it was uploaded or not would turn their 'imaginary' into real), respondents with partners seemed to almost exclusively make, take and share photos with their partner.

The role of the camera phone images in reiterating the 'kodak' moment through reinforcing social hierarchies was a key feature in the male respondent images. In case study nine, the two male respondents used the camera phone to mainly document themselves in social and work/ school type situations that often inferred a type of social hierarchy or order. This type of viewing, reflective of how they were contextualizing themselves in the world, was clearly a product of the indoctrination of military school for which some respondents had only recently completed. Here the camera phone continues the legacy of the kodak camera to naturalise power relations.

The gender differences occurred not just in terms of the type of documentary/ mockumentary mode but also the height at which the camera was held. Over 85% of the images taken by male respondents held the camera at either eye height or below; whereas female respondents took almost all pictures of themselves and friends with the camera held above. Moreover, whether the respondent was in a "couple" or "attached" very much influenced not only the subject matter but also the ways in which the images were stored and shared. A key mode of customization for couples was the screen saver functioning as an *engagement ring*; reminding the partner of the constant co-presence of their partner, whilst also signaling out to others that the owner was 'engaged'.

Moreover, the younger female respondents (four aged from 18-20, case study four and five) seemed happy to "perform" gender stereotypes by embracing "girly" customisation from pink phones to "cute" screen savers. In case study two, the two female respondents had taken shots from under a metre suggesting that the respondent was also the photographer and that, in some cases, she was alone. Some of the images were blurry and obviously hastily taken with emphasis on expressing a mood or feeling in

a cinema vérité manner akin to photo booth performativity or quasi (self) paparazzi style. This mode more clearly identifies the ways in which the camera phone can be used as a tool for creating and representing oneself through expressive digital storytelling techniques. The other partner's images featured the same style of vérité phoneur imagery, taking detailed images of food that were obviously shared. Here metaphor is used to convey a sense of friendship, conversation and connection (or loneliness) through the specific meals. In case study five and six, consisting of female pairs, the use of emotion to describe and categorise camera phone practices was overt. Deploying overtly 'feminine' customization from pink colours to cute characters, these two case studies seemed to be 'performing' and playing with gender stereotypes. This is, in part, due to the aforementioned age difference between the genders in the University student cohort.

In case study five, the two female respondents used the categories of 'lovely, 'joy', sadness', 'surprise' and 'tension' to denote their camera phone image genres. With phones overtly customized for a young female (from pink colours to 'cute' characters hanging off the phone to 'pretty' ring tones and camera phone images), these two respondents were aware of the ways in which they were 'performing' (in a Judith Butler sense of gendered performativity) gendered identity through the phone. However, this was done with a hint of irony, as the respondents seemed to be toying with modes of gender performativity as if it were a mask; with one respondent noting that the camera phone function was far from necessary and could be easily lived without.

Another feature of difference in terms of subject matter, along with the 3 'S's was ethnicity. In the class there were two exchange students from the Philippines (a male and female)

And their motivations as well as modes of sharing were vastly contrasted to the local students. For the male Philippine respondent he preferred texts (not just because texting is a dominant practice in the Philippines but also it can help with the language barriers and comprehension) and also takes much more scenic and 'tourist-meets-traveler' type photos of the landscape, meals, and people. His everyday images are taken as if special (due to the unfamiliarity of the Korean everyday for him).^x Unlike the Korean students who predominantly uploaded their images to their mini-hompy site, the Philippine respondent never sends his images via MMS but instead uploaded to multiply.com and imageshank.us to share pictures with his friends and family back home in the Philippines. For the female Philippine exchange student self-dubbed the Sadie Plant 'solitary owl/ calm dove' as she preferred 'company and counsel... non-mediated face-to-face communication' and took and made calls discreetly, making sure she was 'quiet and modest when using the mobile phone'.

The key features of mobile multimodality – personal, ubiquitous, miniature, interactive, pervasive (location aware), and social – translate into gendered aesthetics of performativity. As can be noted by

detailing some key case studies of the mobile media seminar, we can see that gender does configure in various forms – from the *way* in which photos are taken to the *subject matter* and *mode of sharing*. Whilst almost all did not use MMS but preferred the more community-based network of mini-hompy to upload their images, many respondents were far from enamored with their camera phones. The gendering of both genres and modes of performing was overt, most particularly with females using the camera phone to re-present fragments (through details) as opposed to male respondents who were more likely to ‘document’ (and distance) themselves in social contexts that often inferred some type of hierarchy.

Moreover, female respondents not only didn’t participate in the same visual depictions of hierarchical orders but also were more likely to describe and categorise their hand phone practices, and particularly their camera phone genres, in terms of emotions. Here we can see a growing emphasis on what I call the ‘cartographies of personalisation’ (customization) that underlies much of the ‘emotology’ (the semiotics of emoticons) of hand phone practices in general. This growing realm of emotology is linked to the fact that whilst mobile media is growing in its possibilities for creative content and thus for the user to become the producer, such practices are still very much tied to the *social* and *communicative* domains. Whilst one may argue that hand phone practices are about a further fetishisation of the individual,^{xi} when one moves beyond the advertising hype and asks actual users, there is a very different story to be found.

The dominant mode for sharing, storing and saving was via the user’s mini-hompy pages. Whilst half the respondents took on average about three images per week, this would more than often be taken in order to *share* rather than for a self-journal. This is partly due to the fact that as a very social culture, for young Koreans the features of multimodal phones is primarily for communication and sharing. Whilst self-expression was, along with ‘documentation’ of special events/ occasions, the two dominant modes of camera phone use, these were always about a negotiation of the social and ‘remaining ‘true’ to one’s identity on and offline.

In traditional Korean society, ‘chon’ infers a degree of familial distance. A mother would be one chon from her daughter, an uncle would be three “sam” chon from his nephew. The term was repurposed by the highly successful Cyworld’s mini-hompy to infer divisions between friends and non-friends. In the case of the camera phone, once, with its poor low resolution we could say that it was the sam chon of the stand-alone digital camera and its precursor, the analogue camera. But with the increase in resolution quality, along with the ease for the images to be almost immediately uploaded to viewing and sharing repositories such as mini-hompy’s, the camera phone is no longer considered the poorer cousin of the family.

Camera phone images are being used to highlight the significant gestures and moments in everyday life. As the participants of the seminar I conducted at Hallym University in Korea noted, the documentation of everyday images is being used to monumentalise the significance of the once was deemed the 'mundane' and trivial. In this way, camera phone images are articulating the very paradox of the everyday – it is both trivial and sublime.

The hand phone, in this case study, is an extension for social rituals that are predicted on actual contact. Much of the customization operates as an extension of the user's identity – pink, cute phones are used by young females to 'perform' conventional gender roles with a twist. The hand phone screen saver operates as either a charm bracelet to signify moments and memories with friends and family. For 'attached' users it can operate like an extension of the engagement ring; signaling to others the user is taken whilst also reminding the user of the constant co-presence (engagement) of their partner. If Marshall McLuhan's assertion was correct and that media becomes an extension of the body then the mobile phone has become extensions of many body parts. It is an extension of ear and mouth (telephony), eyes (camera phone) whilst also becoming an extension of the hand (texting). It is the context of the hand that many mobile phone researchers have explored; Sadie Plant (2002) identifies the changing role of the thumb as the thumb takes persistence over the index figure.

However what is also noticeable and that was articulated in my case study of Korean university students is that the customization of the phone is very much linked to the social relationships of the user and, in particular, symbolic of intimate relations. Often, users featured their partner as a screen saver on the phone and the hanging accessories were often presents given by their partners. Here customization operates as "presents of presence". In this way, the customization modes were not merely an extension of one's identity and cultural capital but rather about the user's interrelationships. Types of customization signaled a "taken" or "single" label, much like the engagement ring. Ring, ring, why don't you give me a call?

Conclusion: Freeze frame

What we can conclude about current hand phone practices is that they draw and add to the collective consciousness that is media digital cultures. In the face of growing converging mobile media and the pioneer early adopters, everyday users in such techno-savvy places as Seoul are

...serving to remind us that mobile media is primarily about reinforcing sociality and face-to-face contact. For the respondents of the case study, whilst the users demonstrate much agency in performing identity through the hand phone media, it is a performance focused on social networks rather than some exercise in interiorisation and individualism. This leads me to my initial questions about how we can locate the nebulous space of mobile media in contemporary media cultures and its place in experiencing the everyday as no longer a patchwork of passive consumers but an active dynamic model that is continuously contested and negotiated by users.

What we can see is a growing emphasis on the user's choice of *context* informs the *content* and *distribution* of their images into a social network. Whilst the mobile phone globally maybe seen as an example of growing 'individualisation' and a symbol of late capitalism, it is also very much inflected by the local and in the case of Seoul, the social still far outweighs the individual in significance. It is also important to recognize that discourses around intimacy have been historically a gendered preoccupation and that the politics of the personal don't necessarily equate as apolitical. In this way, I argue that the practices of intimacy demonstrated here are deeply embedded in the context of the social – as is witnessed in respondents' preference to sharing, storing and saving on the virtual social community of mini-hompy as opposed to individualised MMS – and that instead of a lack of politics and networking the reserve could be argued. After all, is not the personal political?

I will conclude with a camera phone incident I witnessed the other day whereby two girls were happily sitting together on a park bench soaking in the amber rays on a warm autumn day. Obviously, the special moment had to be "captured" as a memento so out came the souvenir-collector, the hand phone. One friend held the camera phone above in the typical portrait framing mode and the two girls smiled. Then they looked at the photo. It was obviously not a good depiction of the moment. So they deleted and tried again. Once again, they looked – with growing dissatisfaction – at the image and tried again. With each failed attempted the smiles became more and more plastered until, on the tenth try, they unhappily decided to quit and walked off with disappointment as their guide. And yet, this type of mobile performance is not just witnessed in Korea, rather it is a type of snapshot of almost contact that many individuals practice today. Gone are the days when the surprise of moments documented would be delayed and thus re-presented differently through analogue; now there is a demand for instantaneous perfection, no less. This incident of the two friends and their 'failed moment' (failed because it couldn't be documented "correctly") could be seen as a metaphor for the paradoxes that face the 'immediate' practice of camera phone image making as a repository for how we make, delete, re-make, share and store meanings in contemporary everyday culture and how the very agency of the media that has afforded so many everyday users with authorship and creativity, could also be the vehicle for

frustration and disappointment. Like snapshots of almost contact....

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ⁱ The convergence of the mobile phone with the digital camera only further instills the underlying importance of both media in informing modes individual performativity through the frame of the social. As Kwongwon Yoon's ethnographic study of young people's use of mobile phones (hand phones) noted, the mobile phone helps to reinforce physical contact and exchange (2003). In Hjorth's and Heewon Kim's ethnographic study on youth using Cyworld's mini-hompy community, it was found that virtual connecting was always about the *need* and desires to be *connected* on various levels and *never* about *substituting* for the face-to-face contact; thus the co-presence between virtual and actual was inevitably about corporeal relations and connections (2005). In Florence Chee's persuasive ethnography on PC bangs (PC rooms are where youth play online multiplayer games), these spaces are *social spaces* that are viewed as 'third spaces' between home and work (2005). For youth of Korea where most still live at home before getting married, these *third spaces* operate as spaces to connect with other like-minded people.

ⁱⁱ On another level, Samsung, as a Korean electronics company pioneering innovative domestic technologies, has been gaining global attention as symbolic of Korean fast drive into 21st century modernity and "centre" for telecommunications technologies. At the same time as the launch of the high resolution camera phone, Korea was also gaining the attention from the scientific world with the publication of a paper (that was soon deemed as a hoax) that stated that Korean scientists had revolutionised stem-cell research – heralded a new ethically "playing god" chapter akin to the like of film, *Gattaca*. What did these two things have in common? They signified the current driving force of Korea as a centre for innovation and growing cultural capital (as can be witnessed by the ever burgeoning Korean wave); the stem cell breakthrough having much implications on a macro, global scale in terms of how much we can control and reproduce humanity, the other, camera phone sociotechnology having implications on micro-relations and how we could re-present and perform our identity through digital storytelling and its attendant forms of sociality. One promised a view to change genetically how we experience, present and re-present our lives, the other (camera phone innovation) heralded a new relationship in "practicing" and performing our identity to others.

These two seemingly incidental concurrent events had ramifications on the way Korea was being imagined and symbolized globally as centre for technological and scientific innovation were being absorbed both within and outside of Korea; events that not only could be sublimated into nationalism but also a conduit for techno-nationalism and its dependent sibling, technological essentialism. Months later, the scientists and their research would be still taking the heat from the national embarrassment of the hoax, causing great scandal both within and outside Korea. However, unlike the stem cell scandal, Samsung's camera phone was a success and witnessed a new epoch in convergent, mobile, digital visual culture; perhaps demonstrative of a new realm of digital storytelling and "user-as-producer" agencies for the everyday user?

ⁱⁱⁱ For Bolter and Grusin, remediation occurs through a double logic process between ‘immediacy’ and ‘hypermedia’. Immediacy – also dubbed ‘transparency’ – is the process by which media ‘disappear’ leaving the reader with the presence of the thing that is represented; alternatively, hypermedia immerses itself in the processes of mediation making the reader aware of the representational codes and artifact. In a crude definition we could argue that ‘immediacy’ is the practice of Plato's notions of reality and representation where the reader is guided through the media into the content, whereas hypermedia places the reader in the frame of media and its representation luggage. Or, in other words, the former encapsulates the logic of realism whereby the reader forgets the ‘how’ and looks and the ‘what’ whilst the latter is the opposite. In their book, Bolter and Grusin trace the ‘double logic of remediation’ by exploring the parallel genealogies of ‘immediacy’ and ‘remediation’ from contemporary manifestations back to the renaissance.

^{iv} As Manovich identifies, the history of photography is one marked by image making such as montaging that sort to highlight the very mediated and manipulative procedures involved in photography. Manovich goes on to argue that one of the enduring genres of analogue photography – realism – has been fully integrated into digital photography and the attendant simulation effects industry. He suggests that “synthetic photographs are already more realistic than traditional photographs. In fact, they are too real” (2003, 246). For Manovich, the legacy of realism modes is the final paradox of digital photography, “Its images are not inferior to the visual realism of traditional photography. They are perfectly real – all too real” (2003, 248). This baudrillardisque quote resonates with current gaming industry image making and the surrounding media effects arguments. This realism also feeds into contemporary camera phone practices and the rise of the everyday mobile phone user as photo-journalist; the grainy, low resolution images give a type of authenticity that echo the “democratization” arguments around the rise of the webcam and media-for-the-people.

^v The normalizing family function of the Kodak camera genres and modes of presenting self have been continued in camera phone process; the “family” is now symbolic as authors-as-users (“user-as-producers”) sow together a collection of friends as family into normalized role playing (Lee 2005, Gye 2005). An older friend becomes symbolic of the father figure, younger friends become like younger siblings. We chose these metaphoric families – real and imaginary, actual and symbolic and position them in ways to replicate their significance and social standing/ hierarchy. Life’s everyday experiences – like the scopophilic-suffering character Mark in Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* – are rendered into sequences.

^{vi} Ito’s work on co-presence has been seminal in equating for the double logic of mobile virtual media as also *social spaces*. As Ito argues in her ‘Intimate Visual Co-Presence’ paper based on findings from an experimental photo sharing field study conducted in Fall 2003, the fact that camera phone practices are premised on sharing – distinct from paper-based or PC-based sharing – ensures that the type of distinctive “emergent visual sharing modality” that suits the mobile and miniature context. Ito dubs this mode “intimate visual co-presence”, arguing that it is shaped by “the personal, pervasive, and intimate nature of social connections via handheld devices”. Noting two dominant types of uses – uploads to moblogs/ photosharing sites or personal email or MMS, Ito argues that whilst most snap many everyday events they will often only send ‘newsworthy’ images. In particular, by combining image and text in an MMS or email, users can create a performative fiction that dramatizes the moment into a significant gesture, feeling or thought. This type of co-presence differs from texting modalities Ito dubs as “ambient virtual co-presence”; they do not need to be “newsworthy” and instead can be exchanges of “presence information” such as “I’m tired”. Whilst these ambient users

are less selective with the textual imagination they put forth they tend to be more regulatory in the types of images they send and who they send them to. The second type of use – the photo sharing sites – tend to consist of photographic series that are not “necessarily of immediate interest to a specific viewer”.

^{vii} As Lee notes in her ethnography, “when the mobile phone is equipped with a digital camera, it contributes to the mass productions and circulation of digital photography”. Echoing Ito’s and Okabe’s discussion of the three ‘s’ (storing, sharing and saving), Lee identifies that camera phone image making further enunciates questions about analogue photography’s collation with reality and representation that were initiated by digital photography (Mitchell, 1993; Manovich 2003). Being less aggressive with her discussion of Mitchell than the likes of Manovich, Lee argues:

On the one hand, the camera phone that combines mobile communicability with digital photography can accelerate the ontological “crisis” of photography as a medium of recording as discussed by Mitchell, Lister and Manovich. Users can easily edit and distort the photographed images for personal pleasure, and enjoy being the active producers and distributors of those images. On the other hand, users can record the moments of a person’s everyday life and the scenes they witness on the move, making the world in private and public spaces more visible and transparent (2005, 3).

Here again, we return to the discussion of the role of representation/ mediation and the user’s reality. This reality is very much informed by the user’s particular cultural context and the attendant governmental/ socio-economic relationship to virtual digital media. In the case of Korea, the collation between online and offline identity is important and thus, on a micro level, there is an implicit need to be ‘true’ to one’s sense of reality and how one is perceived. This creates a double edged sword whereby often users will re-present themselves as types in the ‘images’ mainstream media provides – performing ‘cute’ or the embodiment of ‘happiness’. This is particularly problematic when it comes to the gendered gaze and, as Lee identifies, female users re-creating themselves in passive roles of their own gaze. The gender history of telephony (Haddon 1995) is further instilled by the Korean advertising industry selling images of the user as being predominantly male (Lee 2005) – despite the actuality – and thus, the camera phone is a repository for the male gaze. Even when the user is female, this gendered frame is present, especially in terms of the user being aware of the ‘sharing’/ ‘exchange’ logic of the media and thus its possible recontextualisation by male viewers. This gendering can also be viewed in terms of the reconfiguring of personal, familial genealogies and thus extending the role of ‘personal, familial collector’ once signified by the Kodak camera.

^{viii} As Bill Nichols argued in his seminal book on documentary, *Domains of documentary* (1992) such notions as “objectivity” and the correlation between ‘objective reality’ and representation have been completely invalidated by movements such as postmodernism. Whilst Nichols argues that “objectivity” in documentary is impossible, documentary maker Errol Morris takes it a step further. Speaking in the context of criticizing American cinema vérité and its pretenses to blur differences between reality and representation, Morris notes the implausibility of the camera ever being a mere ‘window’ to which we view through onto the ‘real’.

As Morris argues,

I believe that cinema vérité set back documentary filmmaking twenty or thirty years. It sees documentary as a sub-species of journalism... There’s no reason why documentaries can’t be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn’t guaranteed by style or expression. It isn’t guaranteed by anything (quoted in Arthur 1993, 127)

^{ix} For a detailed discussion of the rise of individualism and capitalism in Asia, see Chua Beng Huat’s *Consumption in Asia* (2000).

^x For example, he photographed the first meal he was able to order in Korean. Here the camera phone becomes privy to the acquisition and acimation of a new culture and the slow adaptation of its everyday practices from what was once deemed “normal”.

^{xi} As Daniel Palmer persuasively argues in his paper, ‘Mobile Art’, contemporary media culture can be “broadly” defined as “participatory”; in particular through the dominant “modes of address” that “function to blur the line between the production and consumption of imagery” (2005, 4). He notes “that all forms of media participation need to be considered in relation to defining characteristics of contemporary capitalism – namely its user-focused, customised and individuated orientation” (2005, 4). Pointing to the work by Lauren Berlant on the (lack) of politics in modes of intimacy and hence the attraction of such hand phones giants as Nokia to cash in on further interiorizing and internalizing that Palmer sees as little more than performing exhibitionism and narcissism, Palmer makes some valid – and yet not completely relevant in the case of Seoul – points about camera phone practices and their extension of Williams’s notion of “mobile privatization”. Palmer posits, “rather than fundamentally altering the nature of *public* and *private* visuality, mobile phone cameras appear to further privatise experience”, so much so that “the Nokia moment is far more intimate than the Kodak moment, and the mobile phone a further material support for ‘networked individualism’, as Manuel Castells puts it” (2005, 4). But what is missed here is the importance of what Ito and Okabe outlined in their seminal study on camera phone practices – it is the way in which camera phone images are “stored, shared and saved” that makes them much more than mere exhibitionism and narcissism; further serving to remind us that in a period where the growth of intimate discourses is burgeoning, this does not equal with the apolitical.

