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► **To cite this version:**

Gaby David. The panorama between mobile visual platforms is a sentimental bond. Ubiquity: the Journal of pervasive Media, 2013, 2 (1), pp.146-163. 10.1386/ubiq.2.1.146_1 . hal-01911505

HAL Id: hal-01911505

<https://hal.science/hal-01911505>

Submitted on 5 Feb 2020

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EHSS

The panorama between mobile visual platforms is a sentimental bond

Abstract

1. *Technically, mobile images belong to the 'point-and-shoot' tradition. In this scheme, mobile visual applications have facilitated changes in both the aesthetic qualities of mobile images and their effortless sharing.*
2. *This mobile technology has developed hand-in-hand with its many different imaginable uses; for instance,*
3. *mobile modalities allowing families and friends to communicate enable the formation of strong audio-visual bonds. This type of 'mobile visual habitus' is created through various sharing channels and can activate creativity, affection and social networks. Taking into account the intimacy involved in the use of mobile visual apps, this article seeks to shed light on aspects of this everyday affective mobile visual usage. How does mobile technology change our relationships with our own mobile visualities, our strong ties (i.e., bonds with friends and family), and thus our own audio-visual private history construction and those of our loved ones?*
4. *As this question is overly broad, no exact answer or position can be determined. Nevertheless, through*

Keywords

affection
bonds
intimacy
mobile photo
mobile video
sharing
visual apps

1. The term 'mediascape' implies the recognition that landscapes can be defined as 'mediated places' through technologies in general. This term stems from a video art exhibition sponsored by Deutsche Telekom at the Guggenheim Museum's Soho Galleries in New York in 1996; this exhibition explored the work of international artists dealing with changes in media technologies and the aesthetics of video art (Frohne et al. 1996). Within the academic discourse, 'mediascape' is normally referenced in connection to Arjun Appadurai's discussion in *Modernity at Large* (1996: 35).

2. The original definition of the sociological term *dispositif* was introduced in Michel Foucault, 'Le jeu de Michel Foucault', in 1977. See Chapter 11 in Michel Foucault and C. Gordon's 'The confession of the flesh':

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of

micro-social networking examples, I intend to analyse how usage of mobile visual apps will continue to change, influencing and enlarging possible methods of communication and engagement through and with private mobile images. These overarching practices will definitely continue to have an increasing impact in connection with broader cultural and social changes.

Introduction

The most important audio-visual recording device developed in recent years has most likely been the mobile phone. Representing only the tip of the iceberg of what mobile phone culture is, changing and influencing on the vernacular image proliferation and circulation, mobile phones and, by extension mobile images, provide evidence of our need to carry with us representations of that which makes us who we are: our symbolic selves, our past and our connections to others, our symbolic selves. (I would like to clarify that I have purposefully decided to use 'we' here, as I definitely include myself in this population that relies on mobiles not only for communication but also for other daily activities as well.) Many of the mediated affections, daily relationships and other interactions we engage in – 'our favorite music, all our e-mails, today's newspaper, endless entertainment and of course a phone', as an iPhone ad claimed in 2007 – are made tangible and easily accessible through this cultural object.

Nowadays, the mobile phone can no longer be seen as a closed communication tool, but must instead be analysed and comprehended as 'a portal that opens into many other spaces' (Goggin 2012), a 'convergent hyper-medium' (Lee 2012), 'Universes of reference' (Chesher 2012: 98), or even as a 'new media object' that serves (like all new media) to transform elements of culture and cultural theory into an open source (Manovich 2001: 333). It has thus also been transformed into a tool for constructing culture in a broader sense, not merely as an object of discourse or even an object used for discourse, but also through the mobile personal self-issues, reflexivity, social thought and new awarenesses of the self (the *I*) and the collective (the *we*) that it unleashes and embodies (Caron and Caronia 2007). This idea could also be understood in connection to the claims Marshall McLuhan has expressed regarding the typewriter: namely, that it 'is a means of transcribing thought, not expressing it' (McLuhan 1974, as cited in McLuhan et al. 1997: 289). Thus, the mobile is not an agent in itself, but rather a cultural object that materializes many human expressions.

As with all cultural moments, sciences, technologies and habits, mobile images are the products of their contexts, and are created and perceived together with all the discourses that intersect and inform the meanings attributed to them. It is within this fruitful image landscape that mobile films, videos and photos form part of a mobile mediascape¹ – a 'mobilescape' that belongs and participates in a wider corpus of other *dispositifs*² (Foucault 1994) and imagery, such as newspapers, magazines, television, mobile film festivals, the Internet and social networks, as well as contributing to collective social identity constructions.

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1. When studying mobile visual habits such as taking photos or videos, questioning this *habitus* remains
 2. a crucial aspect. To obtain a principled point of reference, I cite the concept of habitus as used by Marcel
 3. Mauss, by Norbert Elias and by Pierre Bourdieu. In Mauss' classic paper 'Les Techniques du corps'
 4. (1936), he brought up habitus as the acts of performance that define how a specific culture does certain
 5. things (such as swimming, eating, running, climbing, etc.), and that uniquely identify different cultures
 6. as such. In 1939, in *The Civilizing Process*, Elias interpreted the concept more in terms of etiquette, as the
 7. self-restraining social manners and forms that are internalized and auto-imposed. In the 1970s and
 8. 1980s, the concept was considered by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who expanded the defini-
 9. tions of Mauss and Elias to include experiences as well, not only organic or mental dispositions, but also
 10. the unconscious mental schemes of perceptions and actions that condition our behaviour.

11.
 12. Like Bourdieu, both Elias and Mauss used habitus as a way of discussing embodied subjectiv-
 13. ity, 'practical knowledge' as Bourdieu calls it, but Bourdieu's distinctive contribution was to
 14. treat habitus as itself stratified across a society (as opposed to Elias and Mauss, who tended
 15. to think of habitus as stratified across different societies or epochs).

(Sterne 2003: 370)

16.
 17.
 18. To relate these various interpretations to the field of mobile studies the ensemble of mobile phone
 19. habits (in the sense expressed by Mauss and Elias) that people exhibit, including telephoning, play-
 20. ing games, listening to music, texting and videotaping, could be generalized and more precisely
 21. referred to as 'mobile habitus' (in a Bourdieusian sense). Even more specifically, within this mobile
 22. habitus, I will refer to mobile imaging habits as behaviours that change and evolve hand-in-hand
 23. with various technological changes and needs, but that still remain somehow characteristic of the
 24. large majority of smartphone users. These usages (or this mobile visual habitus) are per se intrinsi-
 25. cally fluid, flexible and spontaneous, continuously evolving with new mobile technologies, mobile
 26. social networking (in which individuals converse and connect with one another through mobile
 27. phones and/or tablets) and mobile apps – and obviously within and among the rest of the social
 28. visualities. Thus, since mobile visual habitus is a concept in motion that changes at a constant and
 29. almost imperceptible rate, it tends to often escape the attention of scholars.

30. Thus, it is important to observe the patterns of participation and changes exhibited in these habits,
 31. whether in image creation, consumption or sharing processes. Mobile photography and mobile video
 32. recording (or mobile visual habitus, collectively) have an impact not only on millions of people but also
 33. on large sums of money. Forecasts and indicators in the telecommunications industries predict that this
 34. growth will continue. There are many economic and technological reasons explaining the market pene-
 35. tration of new mobile visual applications. However, emotional motives matter as well, although they are
 36. often omitted or pushed into the background. Undertaking a self-reflexive approach, this article seeks to

discourses,
 institutions,
 architectural
 forms, regulatory
 decisions, laws,
 administrative
 measures,
 scientific
 statements,
 philosophical,
 moral and
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 propositions—in
 short, the said
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 the apparatus. The
 apparatus itself
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 relations that can
 be established
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 elements.

(1980)

describe and to reflect on some of the underlying affective motives explaining why mobile phones and apps are used as audio-visual recording and private sharing devices. Other types of sharing options (such as blogging, online news, personal sites and torrents) are beyond the scope of this article.

A tour of selected photo and video apps

I subscribe to the opinion that 'the imagery of our generation will not be defined with a single filter – it will overlay multiple sounds and images, an over-stimulating mishmash of audio and visual' (Eler 2012); I also believe that in the future, new generations will rely on audio-visual mnemonic materials to an increasing extent. As proof of this trend, in April 2012 Facebook acquired Instagram for one billion dollars, creating one of the most extensive mobile social-networking partnerships. However, one could enquire: What was it that Facebook really bought, and more importantly, why? Instagram, a mobile photo app and also a sharing platform, provides a service whereby still digital photos can easily be modified (using set filter options) and then shared. Its strength is that it combines photography, mobility and social networking. Users not only upload photos but also comment on them and can even create new links. At the time of the company's acquisition, more than one billion mobile photos had already been uploaded, with five million new photos being uploaded each day (Renardson 2012). However, 37 per cent of Instagram's users have never uploaded a single photo, and only 5 per cent of them have more than 50 pictures. By April 2012, Instagram had more than 30 million registered users. Amazingly, the acquisition of the two-year-old company for US\$1 billion meant that its value was higher than that of the *New York Times*, a 161-year-old company that (based on its April 2012 closing price on the New York Stock Exchange) was valued at US\$946 million.

Other theories and web rumours have speculated that the reason for such an expensive acquisition could be Prinstagram, a printing project that seeks to shift the trend back to printed photos, as nostalgia or perhaps a return to the roots of old-school photography. Through Prinstagram, physical prints in different options (ranging from mini-books and mini-prints to posters, photo books and calendars) are created directly from Instagram photos. There are currently additional printing options and objects (such as the Instagram Socialmatic camera) scheduled to be released as early as mid-2013, and products geared towards both online and physical sharing are also being proposed and launched in the market. Were these plans to make online photos more physical, more material and more profitable as prints the real reason that Facebook bought Instagram? Only time will tell. From a business perspective, this Facebook move is a win-win situation. On the one hand, Instagram achieves higher penetration thanks to the Facebook users who have hurried to download the app; on the other hand, by acquiring the free mobile photo-sharing application, Facebook continues to remain the largest online photo host. Additionally, many other 'grams' and 'Instas' have popped up as satellites, as if 'gram' and 'insta' were new verbs, prefixes or suffixes. For example, the new services being offered include

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1. Statigram (which provides statistics) and Followgram (which creates a 'vanity list' of followers); both of these 'grams' are especially useful for branding, web analytics and customer engagement systems.

2. The underlying issues facing boutique photo-sharing apps can be identified as relating to how one should present oneself in a competition for publicity. How can one be heard but still avoid the pitfalls of marketing, narcissism and morality? How can one best succeed through these new communication apps? For instance, since most campaigns are used to sell a product, how can a collective project or an amusing but educational health campaign be publicized?

3. This last question was at issue in the case of Boobstagram a project founded by Julien GLT and Lionel Pourtau, a sociologist. Boobstagram is a site where (female) users post and share photos, mostly of their own breasts in bras or in skimpy clothing. In the 'About' page it is explained that the site is not about showing breasts online, but rather about fighting against and raising awareness of the risk of breast cancer. 'We cannot all become doctors or surgeons. But we can all take part in prevention, for ourselves, for our friends and family and for others', the French creators of the site claim. How? 'By targeting young people, those who are most comfortable with new technologies and most comfortable with unconventional messages'. Audacious and original, educational and intended to promote preventative medicine, one can only hope their objectives will be fulfilled. Thus, when we say that Facebook bought Instagram, we should also clarify the fact that Facebook 'bought' many other apps and satellite start-up businesses that came attached to Instagram, including unusual sites like Boobstagram. Being a sharing platform, Facebook acquired Instagram primarily as a shutter and strong photographic component of a larger photographic *dispositif*.

4. Another important thing to bear in mind when considering an app – visual, audio-visual or any other type – is the need to compare it to other similar and related options available on the market. As of December 2012, the number of mobile photo applications was vast, and I will not seek to perform an exhaustive comparison here. Nevertheless, there is one photo app I find stands out from the rest: Pick. Originating from Japan, Pick is clearly a direct descendant of the well-known 'Purikura photo aesthetic tradition', in which stamps, frames and words are added to images.³ As with Instagram's eighteen filter options, in Pick, 22 filters can be applied to modify users' photos; in addition this free Japanese app offers 111 photo frames and many different amusing stamps (as counted in December 2012 and verified in January 2013). On top of all that, drawing and writing on the mobile photos is possible as well. By offering these modes of appropriation, Pick allows users to modify their photos, enabling them to weave feelings from, within and towards the image. In this way, the mobile photo can more easily be used as a message in itself and not merely as an illustration of a textual message. With an app like Pick, there is no longer the need to transform an SMS into an MMS (in the sense of adding an image to a text message or a caption to an image); here, the image itself can be turned into the message, and the text (should there be any) can be written on the photo. As a result, the two aspects operate as one inseparable sign.

3. For more on Purikura and its social functions, see Richard Chalphen and Mai Muri (2004).

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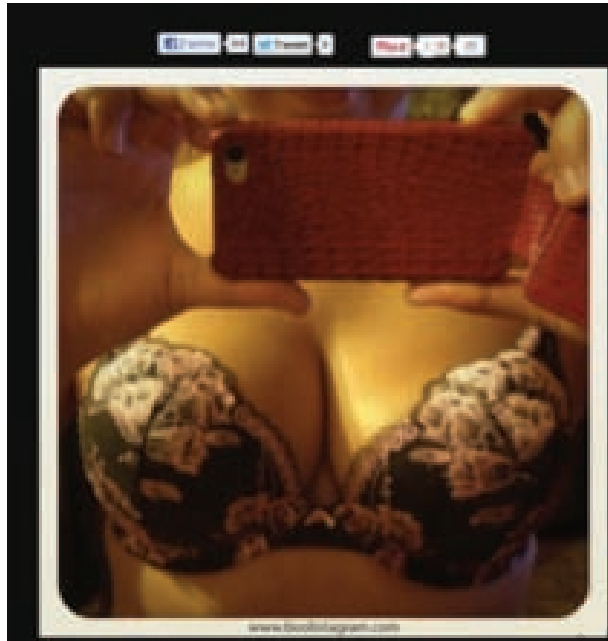


Figure 1: Screenshot taken from Boobstagram.



Figure 2: Screenshots taken from two different Pick users.



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1. As of December 2012, due to cultural differences, Pick had not really penetrated the international market the way Instagram has. What works well in some countries might not be readily
2. adopted in the rest of the world. However, by February 2013, the company's home page had been
3. transformed, and signs point to Pick's expansion into a more international market. If your friends
4. are already using Instagram, however, you would clearly be more prone to be active on that site,
5. even though Pick might technically offer more functionality (as of February 2013). As with the
6. consumption of any cultural commodity, it is the possibility of socialization that drives our participatory
7. decisions.

8. In Everett M. Rogers' description of the processes of diffusion, adaptation and appropriation of
9. innovations for social change, one of his first remarks is that the quality that makes any innovation
10. spread successfully is its improvement on the idea or the innovation that it supersedes – improvements
11. that can be economic or based on social prestige, convenience or satisfaction (Rogers 1983).
12. Furthermore, most of the time, new technologies mimic and relate to previously known forms. This
13. factor of connecting the old with the new facilitates the acceptance of new ideas and mitigates the
14. impact of the new innovation (Bolter and Grusin 1999). With respect to mobile innovations and
15. mobile apps, some are more entrenched in common usage than others. In marketing, such apps are
16. referred to as 'killer apps'. These are apps that seem to be so essential or desirable that they define
17. the core value of a larger technology. In the case of mobile applications, the most significant example
18. of a killer app is the code that allows the transmission of SMS messages. Photo-sharing apps are
19. not yet killer apps, but the use of the embedded camera, combined with apps that enable quick
20. photo editing and instant-messaging apps, might soon extend their influence and utilization. In the
21. next mobile generation, it is expected that the killer applications will be those that allow P2P file
22. sharing, instant messaging and e-commerce.

23. In 2012, the sharing of mobile photos is generally comfortable, easy and quick. It should be
24. noted that mobile visual exchange does not always proceed without obstacles. Sometimes the person
25. receiving the image does not have a handset capable of reading images properly, and then the visual
26. dialogue is quickly cut off. However, when it is possible, photo sharing can be accomplished very
27. rapidly, with only a couple of finger taps and clicks. There is no need for cables, keys, Bluetooth,
28. downloads or any intermediary software applications; sometimes not even a password is required.
29. The ease of acquiring and using the apps is also important to take into account, as it can have a great
30. impact. For example, in Instagram, unless you sign up for an account, it is impossible to see images
31. from the site on your mobile: a heart shape icon appears on top of the images, stopping you from
32. visualizing them properly and compelling you to join the site. In addition, as most sites do now,
33. Instagram prompts you to register by offering the option to log in through either your Facebook or
34. Twitter account. This blends and integrates the apps into the larger ecology of social networks,
35. which are above all the display and exhibition spaces of private iconic production. The possibility to
36.

change, alter and opacify the photo using the range of different filters and effects has also influenced its success (Palmer 2012; Gunthert 2012). 1.

If we empirically compare the growth in the use of mobile photos to the introduction of mobile video applications and their use, it appears that video has grown more slowly than the photo apps but in quite a similar way. For instance, one example of a mobile-based live video-sharing website is Qik. Launched in its alpha version in December 2007 and in public beta in July 2008, Qik was the first mobile video service to support Facebook Connect (in April 2009). In January 2011, Skype bought Qik for the sum of 100 million dollars. 2.

I have been using Qik and following its growth since its launch. However, it was not until late 2011 that the videos I had posted in the past were easily shareable with my other social networks. Until that point, they were latent images waiting to be shared and viewed. Currently, the videos on Qik can easily be posted to and shared via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and many other social network sites (see Figure 3 below). This cross-media business deal (or transmedia, using Henry Jenkins' (2006) definition) was also important because it continued to connect this mobile video platform to well-known Internet social-networking and communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. 3.

As seen in the photo app boom (2010–2012), and because visual apps are under constant development, it is likely that in the near future a 'mobile video turn' might soon enable mobile videos to achieve more popular impact, fame and global penetration. However, as Richard MacManus, the founder and editor-in-chief of ReadWriteWeb claims (2012), 'the video is only half of the equation. The other half is socializing it'. The will and need to share must be there and somehow be implemented. Collective social mobile video experiences are being created, with innovation emerging from artistic projects and from more militant collaborative projects involving multiple cameras. This transformation from the iPhone to the 'wePhone' and the 'we-cam' will offer new possibilities in filming and recording participatory phenomena (Miles 2012). 4.

Among the mobile video-sharing platforms launched in 2012, three are especially worthy of mention: Socialcam, Viddy and Klip. In 2013, while I am writing this article, Vine and other short six-second-video-sharing platforms are seeing light. But, when faced with the choice of which video app to adopt, with plenty to choose from, many of the factors contributing to the decision boil down to where your friends and family are. I was already using Qik, and because none of my contacts were active in any of these mobile video platforms, I did not really have the need or urge to participate in any of them. I do take videos sometimes, but I share them only with my family scattered throughout the world. Every Friday, we exchange photos, videos and messages through an app called WhatsApp. 5.

For the photos I share in WhatsApp, I use images from my iPhone gallery. Sometimes I use other photo-editing apps to modify an image before sending it through WhatsApp. For videos, 6.

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Figure 3: Screenshot of Qik's mobile sharing possibilities, 2012.

I use the embedded video-camera function on my mobile phone, without editing. The difference in the mobile visual habitus between the editing of mobile photos and the lack of editing of mobile videos is based on the fact that mobile video-sharing apps allow (as of 2012) only short videos to be sent. Given this limitation on file size, the length of the mobile videos we take and share through WhatsApp must be less than about a minute long; therefore, the videos do not require much editing. WhatsApp is a cross-platform mobile messaging application that costs 99 cents to download; after downloading, all exchanged messages are free. In relationships in which the 'absence-presence' (Gergen 2002) factor matters a great deal, the ease of use for image and audio-visual sharing is key. Furthermore, it seems that the most important thing is joining the platform, app or means of sharing that your loved ones use. Family app packages and group offers should therefore be taken into account.

Moreover, in my own decision on what to use, the possibility of having a closed, private image-exchange group (photos and videos together in one app) was crucial as well. I have created two groups: one with my immediate family of four, and a larger one with seven of my relatives. In my opinion (as of 2012), WhatsApp is one of the best apps and instant messaging platforms for sharing messages, pictures, audio notes and video messages with a private group of people, allowing all participants to be in the loop. Being able to create small closed groups to comment on, discuss and share pictures and videos, while trying to safeguard privacy, addresses the need for a private place to re-affirm strong personal ties.

Let us review the process a mobile photo might undergo from its production to its posting within a private circle. First, the photo can be shot either with the camera app that comes embedded in the mobile device or with any other photo app the user might have previously downloaded. Second, photo filters can be applied and the image can be aesthetically altered, changed and edited. It can then be sent either through private MMS or private e-mail or posted to Facebook, Twitter or any other social-networking site. It could also be shared in a more private sphere through WhatsApp or any other similar service; for instance, Kik, another instant-messaging app for mobile devices. But between these two mobile instant-messaging apps are two main differences. Kik is free and WhatsApp is not. In addition, Kik's messenger uses a username (pseudonym) instead of a phone number, allowing more privacy than other forms of text messaging. In all of these sharing steps, the images might be commented on or modified again as well. With regard to mobile videos, the sharing chain is somewhat similar, with the primary difference that mobile video platforms also have a live streaming option. This enables users to film for longer than one minute and to share the mobile video by simply sharing the live-stream link.

What makes these apps so successful? Is it merely a trend? Is it the fact that they are free or offer a user-friendly service? Is it their marketing or advertising campaigns? Or does their popularity spread through word of mouth? Probably all of the above factors play a role. To answer the first of

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Figure 4: Screenshot of WhatsApp from my personal mobile phone.

these complex questions, it might help to quote Don Draper, the advertising executive and main character of the American television series, *Mad Men* (Weiner, 2007). In the last episode of the first season, called *The Wheel*, Don gives a memorable presentation as he pitches 'The Carousel for Kodak' to his clients, representatives from the Kodak film company:

Well, technology is a glittering lure. But there's the rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash, if they have a sentimental bond with the product.

(YouTube n.d.)

Creating this affective link or 'emotional capital' (Jenkins 2006: 68-69) is an important business strategy and represents one of the goals of most advertisements. However, this capital must be activated. Consequently, in a touching scene, Don continues his presentation by relating the Carousel product to the importance of nostalgia. His words resonate with the feelings we project onto any beloved object, anything that has emotional power:

[...] a deeper bond with the product: nostalgia. It's delicate ... but potent. [...] in Greek, 'nostalgia' literally means 'the pain from an old wound'. It's a twinge in your heart, far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn't a spaceship. It's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It's not called the Wheel. It's called a Carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. Around and around, and back home again... to a place where we know we are loved.

(Draper 2007)

Apart from the ritual of gathering people together for a special slide screening, what else differentiates the Carousel and Instagram? One of the main differences between the Kodak Carousel's wheel and Instagram's image feed is that the analog photography reel can be understood more in terms of nostalgia about the past, whereas the moment in time to which mobile photographs transport the viewer is controversial. One could theorize that Instagram's filters link us to moments in the past (Bartholeyns 2012), or they could be interpreted using a 'tomorrow's photography' approach (Gunthert 2012). I follow the latter interpretation, adding that it is precisely Instagram's infinite reel *dispositif* that projects its users into a near future to come, at the same time demonstrating that the present is the most ephemeral moment in time.

Instagram's carousel or photo feed neither stops nor repeats its combinations. It is as though the present had one foot in the future and another in the past. In this yesterday/now/almost-future, we expect the next photo to continue the feed. Because Instagram's feed is an infinite collection of mobile photos that rolls out as soon as the photos are shared – and, most importantly, because the

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1. reel never stops – there is no moment when the lights turn on and we ‘come back’ to the room and
2. reality around us. Our mobile images are seen on the go, are carried with us and can be invoked and
3. viewed whenever desired. They are not a 24-slide carousel that is put away and only seen once in a
4. blue moon. These sequences of synchronic and separate images depict a multitude of events gath-
5. ered in one app, in one handset and one specific moment in time. It should also be noted that it is
6. very rare that two people will have exactly the same contacts, and thus no two handsets will have
7. the same Instagram photo reel; as a result, unlike the Kodak Carousel, the experience is perceived
8. more individually than collectively.

9. Thanks to popular image production, the quantity of mobile photos is greater than it has ever
10. been. Moreover, as mobile tools facilitate the recording and display of everyday life, mobile images
11. have become another commodity to be both produced and consumed at increasing rates. It seems as
12. though the more often and the faster we create these mobile images, the faster we go through them;
13. this mobile image production and consumption underscores the ephemerality of the moments of
14. our lives and our drive to register them. Mobile photography is developing into a commodity model,
15. and what was previously a marginal behaviour is becoming a mainstream practice.

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18. **Conclusion: Mobiles as hybrid visual memo pads**

19. In an article entitled ‘A note upon the “Mystic Writing Pad”’, Sigmund Freud (1925) discusses
20. different ways of improving mnemonic functions; that is, skills of memorizing and remembering.
21. The first method discussed is note-taking on a writing surface that will preserve intact any note
22. made on it for an indefinite length of time (e.g. a sheet of paper). This procedure has a certain
23. advantage, as it provides a ‘permanent-trace’, but it also has two distinct disadvantages. The first
24. drawback is that once the writing surface is full, it cannot be written on again; the second is that the
25. personal interest towards it might disappear and the trace might therefore lose its value. A parallel
26. could be drawn with analog photo cameras: once the photo film has been used up, there is no
27. longer any possibility to record information. The photos will be printed and tangible, but will even-
28. tually lose relevancy. The second mnemonic procedure discussed is the use of surfaces that can be
29. written on more than once and are therefore more receptive. These could include a slate, a piece of
30. clay or a whiteboard, objects that are erasable and allow notes to be inscribed again and again. The
31. disadvantage here is that no permanent trace of the information will remain. An analogy can be
32. made between such objects and digital cameras and their digital images. Since there is no need for
33. film, once the memory card is full, photos can be erased and recording can continue indefinitely. In
34. the last part of his article, Freud continues his analysis by referring to a ‘Mystic Writing Pad’, a
35. hybrid between the two mnemonic procedures. On such a pad, traces could either be erased or read
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4. This key question stems from Maurizio Ferraris' article 'Where are you? Mobile ontology' (2006).

under the proper light. Freud compares the appearance – disappearance of celluloid and its wax-paper cover 'with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception' (1925: 211), in a comparison between our mental apparatus and its perceptive functions. Could we relate the 'Mystic Writing Pad' to taking photos with one's mobile phone?⁴ Often, these visual mobile apps function as mystic pads, as places where one can reference old images not explicitly saved by the user, but rather in the site's cloud storage. (Cloud storage services allow the virtual storage of data, videos, images and music and remote online backup.) The mobile device functions in this hybrid fashion: mobile images can be either stored or erased. Should the handset run out of memory space, requiring the user to erase mobile images, logging into any of these sites would enable the user to find the lost images again. At the moment (2012), the number of mobile photos and videos one can upload to these sites is infinite and usage is free of charge. However, nothing ensures that a 'pro' subscription will not be proposed in the future, as has already happened with the well-known image-and-video-hosting site Flickr. Flickr's Pro account proposes for an annual fee of \$24.95 unlimited storage, ad-free browsing and access to account statistics, among other benefits. If these smaller sites are not acquired by one of the Internet giants, it might be the case that more branding or the increased use of advertisements will be the economic model for the survival of these apps.

With market penetration of smartphones already changing the world – from how we shop and how we keep ourselves entertained to how we navigate the world – contact with personal mobile images will occur even more on an increasingly frequent basis. Whether through mobile photos or mobile videos, the adoption of mobile visual apps is connected to the increase in the global and mobile way of life that enables more mobile image creation and circulation. As they are easy to use, mobile visual apps are used frequently and by large numbers of people. The possibility of sublimating these mobile images with multiple filters and esthetical changes and the almost effortless sharing of these mediated moments and experiences, provides evidence of how important and dear these artefacts are to us.

However, the focus should be placed on interpersonal links rather than the images as independent entities. For example, when one has a robust relationship or a strong tie with the person who posts a photo, regardless of what exactly the image itself portrays (or whether or not it is a beautiful photo), a conversation is usually triggered, and thus the affective link is involved and somehow nurtured. When weaker ties are involved, this process is less frequent, but might also take place. By viewing photos, in only a few minutes many different atmospheres and aesthetic styles from diverse people and therefore locations and entire universes can be visited, 'liked' and commented on. Looking at, zipping through, commenting on, reading comments and 'liking' the mobile images of far-away friends, relatives or even various weak contacts can be a daily reward we offer to ourselves.

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1. The basis of mobile social-networking sites is that they activate and heavily rely on sentimental
2. bonds, affections, family ties and the creation and maintenance of friendships.
3. To create a more affective, bonded and collective 'countervisuality or right to look' (in Mirzoeff's
4. words (2011)), it is important to continue investigating and analysing this participatory sharing of
5. private visual mobile experiences, not only in weak but also in strong ties. These downloadable
6. memories and mobile image sites alter the relationships we have with our friends and the strong ties
7. of family, and also play a significant role in how we relate to our own mobile images. Visual mobile
8. social-networking sites are facilitating changes in the ways we create and speak about mobile images.
9. When these sites are used on a regular basis, the visual skills activated can influence the perception
10. of the audio-visual private history construction of our own families and friends, and consequently
11. have an effect on the wider mobile culture.

12. All screenshots were taken by the author between November 2012 and February 2013.

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