

Some Uses of Body in Mobile Multimedia

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Abstract. This paper studies methodic uses of the body in mobile multimedia. Mobile phones has made communication possible regardless of place, but force communication into a narrow channel using voice and text messages. Multimedia phones that make photographs and video calls possible reputedly change this. This argument boils down to old communication research adage: since only a small percentage of information is in language, augmenting mobile phones with a camera makes this technology better than previous mobile phones.

Bodily Practices and Representations

A set of ethnomethodological studies shows how “representations” are inseparable from human action. Any representation – painting, image, scientific graph, video, map, and so forth - organize the viewer’s perceptual field (see Latour 1990) and make work possible in places like scientific and administrative institutions (Heath et al. 2002b). However, even seeing is a practical, methodic activity rather than something organized by representations and our senses only (see Ochs et al. 1994: 152). For example, Heath et al. (2002a) studied Jason Cleverly’s interactive art piece, *Deus Oculi*, which consisted of a Renaissance scene and two false mirrors that were in fact cameras. People who were looking into the mirrors appeared in the painting, which had two faces behind a little door. People discovered the “functionalities of the piece... largely in and through interaction with others, both people accompanying other people and others who happen to be in the same place” (Heath et al. 2002a: 18).

The analysis of *Deus Oculi* shows that seeing requires bodily activity. Less obvious practices have been studied as well. For example, people routinely point things at screens with fingers and other pointing devices, thus highlighting what is important in them (see Heath and Luff 2000: 168-175; see Goodwin 1995: 258; vom Lehn et al.

2001: 196-198; Heath and Luff 2000: 165-168; Goodwin 1994: 622-624). Some of these practices are institutionalized into coding schemes and theoretical constructs, as in police work and airport controllers' work (see Goodwin 1994; Goodwin and Goodwin 1996: 77-79). However, as often there is no such professional basis, as when people browse through their photo albums (Frohlich 2004; Chalfen 1987). In contrast to *Deus Oculi*, people just see gestures, body idiom, and the positioning of bodies in a meaningful fashion because people use them in an orderly fashion (see Goodwin 1981).

Mobile Multimedia as a Site for Bodily Activity¹

This paper takes a close look at the uses of body in mobile multimedia (Picture 1) (Koskinen et al. 2002; Koskinen and Kurvinen 2002, 2005; Scifo 2005; Ling and Julsrud 2005; Okabe and Ito 2004; Kasesniemi et al. 2003). Faces and other bodily are ubiquitous in multimedia messages, and are used in several ways in communication. In industry scenarios and some popular science, the possibility to augment mobile communication with pictures of the "speaker" widens the channel significantly, making interaction more natural than with mere voice and text, as in traditional mobile telephony. This vision mainly deals with video calls.

Video calls are thought to be particularly useful for the hearing impaired (see Kasesniemi et al. 2003). There are people who use such service, but by comparison to text messaging or even multimedia messaging service (MMS), use was still in its infancy. For example, Swedish Television reported early in 2005 that there were slightly over 4000 Swedish users of video calls in October 2004. A recent example of how mobile multimedia technology is becoming ubiquitous comes from London terror attacks in July 2005. The BBC shared footage shot with ordinary camera phones, and at least one video shot with a camera phone from an underground carriage in the Piccadilly line between Russell Square and King's Cross – St. Pancras stations was sent in TV broadcasts all over Europe.

However, in video, activity is tied to sound and words directly, forming a meaningful whole over a sequence of developing images (see Francis and Hart 1996). Often, video is linked to sound. Sound in mobile video can be either "natural," linked to action depicted in video, or an added element that explicates what is going on, typically like omni-knowledgeable narrators in traditional novels but sometimes the explication may transform the meaning of the message.

¹ In this paper, I use the word "body" when people appear in images without identity. When they are identifiable, I talk about "people."



Picture 1. A Mobile Phone with Multimedia Features

Still, although video had not caught up, something similar has been taking place in ordinary multimedia messaging service for several years. Gestures and body positions are critical issues in talk (for example, Goodwin 1981; Kendon **). Much like the cultural environment analyzed in the previous chapter, gesture and the body can be, and is, exploited in mobile multimedia through still images. A recent British-American analysis of the contents of images in mobile multimedia shows that roughly half of images are about people (Kindberg et al. 2004: 5).

Instead of classifying people into groups, this paper follows the ethnomethodological literature and focuses on some *uses* of bodies in multimedia messages. In contrast to early literature on the cyberspace which claimed that people develop alternative, experimental personae for their virtual existence, it is argued instead that – like gift-giving in the following quote – most of these bodily practices are “age-old” practices of ordinary society:

Our belief is that practices such as gift-giving are age-old, “immortal” practices – the “great recurrences of ordinary society”. To some extent these practices shape how we use technologies in our social interactions; we learn

to make use of technologies and technological features that afford our participation in them. Our goal is thus to determine systematic ways in which to uncover the relationship between social practices and the properties – or social affordances – of a technology. Underlying this research is a belief that successful technologies are ones that afford the accomplishment of particular enduring cultural practices. (Taylor and Harper 2002: 446)

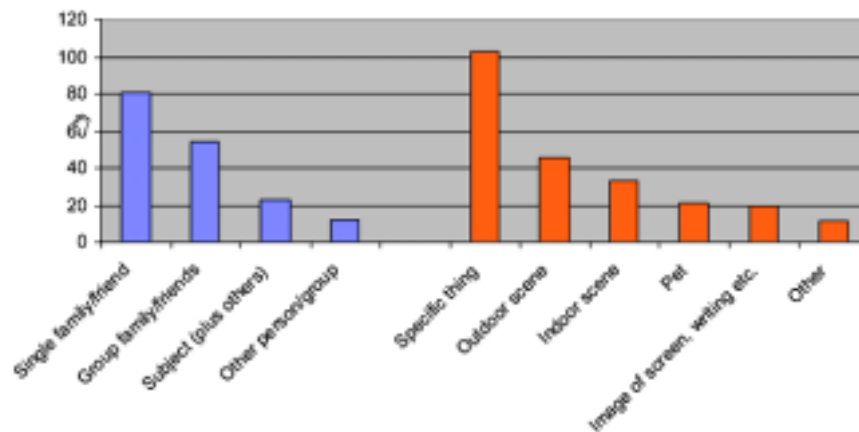


Figure 1. Number of images by category of subject depicted.

For example, Battarbee and Koskinen (2004) have analyzed briefly an example in which a woman sends greetings to friends coming to visit her to her summer home. In the audio track, she sends her greetings to the recipients on behalf of her and her other quests. In picture, she smiles and raises a glass of champagne towards the camera. A welcoming gesture like – a toast, in fact – is a good example of what Taylor and Harper call an “age-old practice” in new media. When a still camera is used, gestures like these are dramatized for the camera, and they are cut off from embodied practice, but that is not the point. This example shows how ordinary actions migrate to the mobile virtual world.

Mobile Image and Radiolinja

Examples for the paper come from two studies, both conducted in Helsinki, Finland. *Mobile Image* (1999-2001) is a study of a mobile phone and a digital camera. *Mobile Multimedia* (Summer 2002) is a study of mobile multimedia. These studies focused on what ordinary people do with visual messages, and produced close to 5000 visual messages.

In *Mobile Image* we gave a Nokia 9110 and a Casio digital camera, connected with an infrared link, to four groups of five people (pilot, male, female, and control groups, the pilot and the control being mixed-gender) for approximately 2-3 months each. Photographing became even more mundane and *ad hoc* than in Maypole. People shot images of their meals, dirty plates in the sink, their home street, and so forth. The University offered access to a computer system for all participants. Messages were collected as e-mail attachments. For ethical reasons, we did not automatize this procedure, but asked participants to send or forward all their messages to the researcher responsible for the project. Groups were selected to saturate technical expertise, access to technology, and gender. Radiolinja provided a free phone service (based on GSM technology) [11].

In *Radiolinja*, we selected three user groups from the Helsinki-based mobile carrier Radiolinja's technology and service pilot. The pilot took place in summer 2002, and lasted about 5 weeks. Each user was given a MMS phone (either Nokia 7650 with an integrated camera or SonyEricsson T68i with a plugin camera). Three mixed-gender groups with 7, 11, and 7 members were studied. Out of the Radiolinja pilot, we selected groups to take into account gender difference, terminal types, and the city-countryside axis. Exact numbers are confidential, but the following figures point the scale of messaging in the pilot. In all, users sent over 4000 messages during the pilot. Over 2000 were unique (the rest being duplicates in group messages, or recycled messages). These data were produced through the Radiolinja system automatically. As in *Mobile Image*, the service was free of charge.

For this paper, I have selected a sample of 539 messages for closer analysis. From group 12, I have analyzed weeks 2 and 3 (345 messages). From group 8, I selected week 4 (194 messages). These weeks were selected randomly.


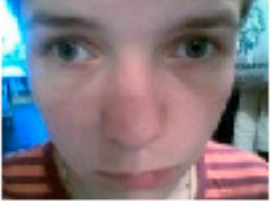




Although these data are complete, participants knew that they were studied, and were informed about the ethical procedures we used. In particular, we told them how our data was produced, promised not to publish pictures without their consent, and promised to change details of images so that it would not be possible to identify them from our publications. In addition, we have followed standard academic and legal practice and have changed all names and details that could identify people or places.

The Phenomenon: A Brief Look

People and bodily activities appear in many roles in mobile multimedia messages. Below is a sample of some of the uses from *Radiolinja*.

- (1) In Example 1, there is a small part of the body, the thumb, turned upwards. A young man has sent a 7-piece visual story about his weekend with his girlfriend. This picture is the final one in which he evaluates the experience.
- (2) Face is the most typical thing to be captured
- (3) Torso is the second most typical thing to be captured
- (4) Sometimes whole bodies appear in images.

- (5) Somehow identifiable group (typically family, old friends (during holiday season) people at work)
- (6) Family categories uses to describe people in images
- (7) Unidentifiable crowd

1	 <p>Text: Overall, a positive experience</p>	2	 <p>I'll be there on 10 o'clock train. I'm feeling pretty bad.</p> <p>03</p>
3	 <p>We're working really hard. Anita's been working for 1h 45 min already.</p> <p>06</p>	4	 <p>It was a hole-in-one, from 175 meters.</p> <p>67</p>
5	 <p>Greetings from Conway's</p> <p>58</p>	6	 <p>Mari and Zoewy at sea.</p> <p>aby MotherB</p>

7	 <p>"Hot" tango in Seinäjoki.</p> <p>45</p>	
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In many cases, people appear just as scenic elements. This is the case in (8) in which Leila is taking a picture of herself drinking wine in a rock festival. There are hundreds of people behind her, but they are not taken up in text or audio (although later in the same evening, she sends a picture of "her old gang" to her recipients). In contrast, in (9), a mass of people in a beach is specifically noted with a simple quantitative description. The beach is close to Helsinki city center, but the number of people on the beach is still noticeable.

Still, as examples show not just how the camera is used to frame bodies, but also that they are practically always situated in a rich material, social, and meaningful environment. These "meanings" here refer to members' own viewing instructions that offer preferred interpretations for images. Typically, they are conveyed in text, although sometimes, sound does this job.

8	 <p>Tadaa! A band operates in the background. Let's get back to your relationships...</p> <p>340</p>	9	 <p>Lots of people on the beach</p> <p>Crowds</p>
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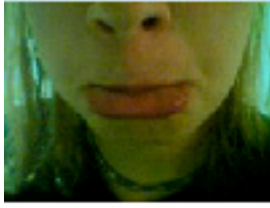

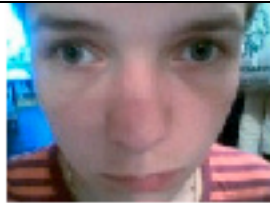
In the following, I will focus on only two uses of bodies in mobile multimedia. Next section looks closer at the expressive uses of the body. The following section looks more closely at how bodies are treated in mobile multimedia messages by members.

The Expressive Uses of the Body and Body Parts

It was noted above that in people often dramatize things for the camera. In practice, this means that they do something – pose to the camera, make gestures, etc. – and capture and share that in their messages. This section looks at three such practices: the uses of face, enhancing expression with “props,” and the uses of space in multimedia messages.



1. The Locus of Expressive Action: the Face

People take lots of pictures of their own face. However, these are far more than self-portraits. Sometimes people simply change the expression on their face and capture that for others to convey something, most typically a specific feeling. This is the case in examples (9) and (10), in which a woman first sends news about her decision concerning her sick gerbil. Her boyfriend responds a few minutes later with a facial expression aimed at showing sorrow. In text, he instructs her about how this expression ought to be understood. (11) provides a case of how a piece of good news is announced. As in the champagne example referred earlier, it is as if the man in (11) is proposing a toast to celebrate the holiday. His joyous facial disposition leaves little doubt about how he experiences his holiday. In contrast, (2) is not (outwardly) dramatized for the camera, but rather, the camera is used as an observational device that provides evidence about Leila’s feeling of being sick. The camera angle is changed to provide a good picture of her weary eyes and pale skin color.



9	<p>You don't need to take care of the gerbil next week. It looks pretty bad now so I take it to the veterinarian. ...I don't know how to get time to him. I don't like the idea of paying five (Euros) for putting it to death.</p> <p>154</p>	10	 <p>Jan is sorry!</p> <p>149/15</p>
11	 <p>My summervaca tion has just star ted</p> <p>NEWvacation</p>	2	 <p>I'll be there on 10 o'clock train. I'm feeling pretty bad.</p> <p>03</p>

Sometimes people index changes in their moods and feelings with a serial descriptive report that make their changing states available. In (12) and (13), Anita reports about her morning to Markku.

Message (12) was sent 5:37 in the morning after a night spent in a nightclub. Again, the message belongs to a series. Anita and Leena had sent him several pictures in the course of the previous evening. They had been out with two girlfriends unknown to Markku, who had heard about one of the (Anne), and asked who she is. In (12), Anita mocks him for his slow wits for not understanding that Anne is shorthand for Ann-Marie. She continues to name other friends in one of the earlier pictures, and then ventures to describe her hangover. She sends two more pictures about feeling bad. As (13) shows, at 9:17 her feeling is getting better.

12	 <p>A redneck you are! AnnMARIE of course... In the middle is Maria and... ((removed)) I've got a bad, sweaty feeling and I feel like I want to throw up... ((removed))</p> <p style="text-align: right;">159</p>	13	 <p>Badam! She's like a new person!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">165</p>
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Also, sometimes facial expressions are used in sequences. This is the case in (14), in which Leena responds to Anita's "passport photo" – a bad-quality, unflattering photo in which she looks ugly – with another ugly pose (15). Anita's message had an indirect evaluation that, for Leena, called forth a sympathetic, soothing response.



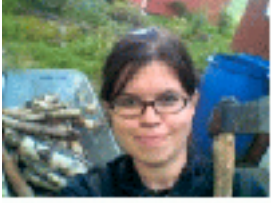

14	 <p>Oh no, do I really look like this?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">276</p>	15	 <p>How about this?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">277</p>
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2. “Props”: Types and Some Methodic Uses

The expressive potential of faces and other parts of bodies can be enhanced with a variety of “props,” some of which people carry around daily. Typically, these “body props” are used methodically to break the natural ways of seeing an image in message. Here the focus is on eyeglasses as expressive devices. We have already seen a conscious use of one prop. In (11), a man toasts to the camera with a beer glass. He could have made his celebratory mood evident in other means as well, but a virtual toast made this task easier. The following collection of four messages shows several other props and how they are used.

- 16 In this message, Anita asks who is “Kauko” Markku referred to in an earlier good night message (later Markku responds that “Kauko” refers to a local rock singer, whom he had been listening to). In visual terms, Anita positions her eyeglasses low to her nose as if she were near-sighted from reading. In text, she uses her glasses to invoke an image of a “professor,” which in the context of a question, strengthens her request to get the answer: professors make questions, and people respond to them of things go in a normal fashion.
- 17 Leena amuses Markku with a picture in which she wears old-fashioned eyeglasses. Her face is shot from below, which makes her cheeks look fatty (compare this to (2) to see how narrow her face actually was). The visual effect is exceptional, which she uses to invoke an image of a Far-Eastern spiritual religion. In his complimentary response, Markku joined her sending a return joke in which he drinks beer because he “has to fulfill his spiritual void that way.”
- 18 Anita holds an axe, which gives her a masculine touch. “Butch” refers to a “masculine” part in a lesbian relationship (the text is in English in original).
- 19 Wearing a funny, old apron makes Leena feel like a housewife. Something in the apron invokes a reference to a “Soviet” housewife – perhaps its color or its shape.

Things around us function like props in the stage. They suggest new lines of action and summon various activities. When in photographs, they may become used methodically to guide recipients to certain interpretations and next actions. These props may be used to transform the meaning of the image. However, they do not seem to work in this way on their own; the sender has to build on them in text (or in audio) to make them specific enough to function as transformative devices.



16	 <p>Prof. asks again: who is Kauko?</p> <p>140</p>	17	 <p>Our spiritual values can be seen both at work and in the leisure time!</p> <p>14</p>
18	 <p><i>Anita goes butch</i></p> <p>219</p>	19	 <p>A soviet romantic little lady at home. Someone can chop up things even here.</p> <p>311</p>

3. Body and Place

The final observation is an extension of the previous one. It relates to that bodies in mobile multimedia never appear in an empty space: they are always situated to certain surroundings, to places rather than spaces void of physical things. Places and surroundings function in many ways like props, but they do other things too. In particular, people may infer places and moods from places. Some places are linked to certain activities. When people hear that someone is in a shopping mall or a bar, they can figure out with good confidence what he is doing there, and also his mindset (see

Drew 1978 for how places and geography functions in talk; a more formal treatment is in Schegloff 1972: 96-106).

The following two messages provide case in point. In 20, Kari sends a picture of a sunny marina to Arne, whom he knows to be still working although it was the height of the vacation season. The message has a hint of teasing, even if indirectly. The main point is the contrast between the inquiry about Arne's state of mind at work, and the pleasant surroundings of the marina that open up in front of Kari's eyes. Life at a marina is slow, unhurried, and the weather in this particular day is also perfect for a relaxed day. In principle, this message opens up several possible ways forward. Arne could answer in several ways, ranging from queries about the marina, the boat, the sea, Kari's activities, etc. However, his reply (21) formulates Kari's message as a tease about his circumstances and mood related to that place (for teases, see Drew 1978; Kurvinen 2003). Pictures is an office with two people immersed in work, sitting by their desks, and their backs turned to Arne. The windows of the office are closed, lights are artificial, and air apparently comes through a machine. The setting is far from pleasant, at least when compared to Kari's.

20	 <p>It's always nice to be at work, isn't it?</p> <p>30</p>	21	 <p>Really nice...</p> <p>31</p>
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This exchange plays not just on the contrast between two kinds of places, but more on what people know about what kinds of activities and moods “belong” to these places. Unlike props, these qualities appear to work in messages without a need to instruct viewers specifically about how to take them.

Bodies in Sequence: The Example of Introductions and Identifications

The final observation of this paper puts bodies to a sequential context. I will analyze two practices only. “Introductions” take place when the sender voluntarily explicates unknown-to-the-recipient people who appear in a message. “Identifications” in contrast are recipient-initiated sequences: then recipients see someone they do not know, they may inquire who that person is. These two practices are responses to a

problem that is typical to mobile multimedia. People and bodies appear constantly in messages; by necessity, some of them are unknown to members.

Sometimes people are singled out from images for much closer analysis. Senders may introduce people, as in Messages (10) and (11). Here Leila introduces two people to Maria. In Message 22, she introduces Anu's husband to her. Message 11 introduces Anu. Several details of these messages show that Leila and Maria have been talking – or texting – about Anu previously. For example, Leila uses Anu's first name without telling any further details about her, thus showing that Leila thinks that Maria does not need more detail to know who she is hanging with (for relationships in talk, see Sacks and Schegloff 1979). I do not have access to these talks. However, Anu had never been mentioned in the *Radiolinja* data previously. The familiar tone, then, is grounded in gossip rather than in Maria's specific wish to learn to know Anu.

22	 <p>Jazz plays hard and it's really nice. The character on the left is Anu's husband.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">40</p>	23	 <p>And Anu.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">41</p>
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Message 22 has a further interesting detail. The picture shows that Anu's husband plays an instrument (guitar). From the text, we learn that the band plays jazz; Anu's husband is a jazz musician. Here the text highlights an element (a man in the image), but a crucial piece of information comes from the image, which does not remain an inactive scenic background, but becomes an active element in the message. As viewers, we learn not only about the names of the people, but also can use the surroundings for a variety of inferences. Mobile multimedia takes communication beyond what one can do with traditional text messages.

People who appear in images may also become more than just bodies by what recipients do. In the following series of seven messages, there is:

- 24 First a message by Markku that opens the series, which is already a response to an earlier message.
- 25 This messages is followed by an identification request by Leena, which is accomplished with a twofold structure: there is a request, and also a picture



of a man which is offered as an exchange item – a “gift” that creates a need to reciprocate (see Berg et al. 2003).

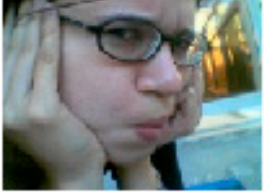
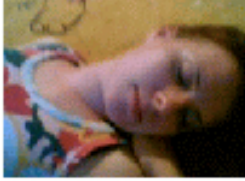

26 When Markku does now respond properly, Leena sends a message that reiterates the request, showing that she holds Markku accountable for sending it. Again, the image provides additional strength to the request, invoking the authority of a “professor,” who tend to have a right to demand replies in due time.

27 Markku responds, but does several additional things in his message. First he shows that he didn’t understand the “professio’s” demand; he also misspells the word professor, making his position less respectful towards her. He then “doubts” the validity of such exchanges before closing the message with a guess about who the man in Leena’s earlier message (#13).

28 The series does not end with this message, which is possibly rude in that it does not show gratitude to Leena’s “exchange.” Instead, Markku makes a stepwise withdrawal from the situation created by his response by conciliating her with two pictures of his cats.

29 Finally, there is a good night message that closes the series effectively. It is a third part in the extended series. It also does several things that call forth closing: first he explains trivia (how hot it is outside), then makes a mystic quote from a rock singer (“Kauko”), adds a cliché about “life as a dream,” and finally sends good night wishes that effectively close talk in nighttime. This message, then, is done using many practices typical to ordinary conversation to close a topic (for cliches, see Drew and Holt 1988).

<p>24</p>	 <p>Ehm, I’m a tourist in Helsinki... Powered by cider...</p>	<p>25</p>	 <p>Exchange! Send a picture of the girl!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">102</p>
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<p>26</p>	 <p>The professor asks, and you are to answer!</p> <p>104</p>	<p>27</p>	 <p>What was the professor asking? In reference to the previous message, here's a picture of the flower girl (even though I'm slightly suspicious about such exchanges ...) Was the man in the picture Mr. Library?</p>
<p>29</p>	<p>((Two pictures of cats, removed.)) Texts: 17.7. 20:28 Markku to Leila Here's a picture of another beauty, for a while. 17.7. 20:44 Markku to Leila And Tane is beautiful as well. A good picture. Tane got interested in a baby's cry outside. Perhaps he's been in a family with children earlier.</p>	<p>29</p>	 <p>There are plants too. Too hot - have to sleep on the floor. Kauko is playing: search, boy, search. Sometimes life is like a dream. Good night.</p> <p>21:02</p>

This example again shows that action in mobile multimedia often borrows its methodic basis from familiar forms of interaction. It is not just methodic uses of the body that are borrowed, but these are furthermore embedded in action in a serial manner.

Discussion

This paper has begun the work of recovering a set of methodic used of the body in mobile multimedia. We have seen that bodies, body parts, and bodies in environment do lots of work in mobile multimedia. In fact, such bodily practices are a *specific* feature in mobile multimedia messaging. They are much less prevalent in mainly textually defined e-mail, not to mention text messaging or traditional mobile phones.

In the first studies of mobile multimedia, the importance of people – in particular, faces – have been noted again and again (see Koskinen et al. 2002; Kindberg et al. 2004). As such, this paper does not question this claim. However, I have tried to take a look at bodies in more detail, in terms of how bodies function in multimedia, and how people use bodies to do things together with each other. The aim has been to begin a “respecification”; it has shown that we have to open the lay notion of “people” and look at specifics of bodies to provide an adequate description of the practical grounds of bodies in mobile virtual domain. People do things with mobile multimedia. However, this does not mean that we can reduce the uses of bodies to notions like communication or even mediated action. It is in and through specifics that people ultimately do whatever they are up to.

Obviously, this paper has not provided a full catalogue of how body works in mobile multimedia. Rather, I have just tried to open up a question, and explore it enough with lots of data in an attempt to arouse curiosity in the ethnomethodological community. Perhaps the most important thing that deserves more attention in the future is the role of text in multimedia messages. The importance of text has been stressed again and again in analysis of graphs, representations, and other visual materials (Ochs et al. 1994; Koskinen et al. 2002). Also, this paper has touched upon the issue in several places, most notably in the case of “props” and “places.” However, even in the final section of the paper, focusing on the body in two ordinary sequences, text has a key role: without it, members could not do what they are doing successfully. Photographs and text are inseparable; how they are intertwined ought to receive more attention in future work.

Bodily practices I have excavated in this paper are typically side issues in imaging. They take place, but are examples of the “seen but unnoticed” quality of action (Garfinkel 1967). The reason for this exercise has been to propose a rich analytic framework for studying images and to present an alternative to content analysis and to what C. Wright Mills (1959) once called “abstract empiricism” in the social sciences. The ultimate aim is to explicate social practices typical to MMS rather than to explain MMS with class position, social standing, or gender. To understand MMS, we need a

research agenda that studies naturally occurring activities in natural settings by following people busy in living their lives.

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