

**LIQUID PHOTOGRAPHY?
NARRATIVE AND TECHNOLOGY IN DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC
PRACTICES**

by

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Abstract

This thesis is about emerging changes in photography and imaging related to digitization and how we might approach and understand them, particularly in terms of their impact upon how narratives are constructed. By focusing on the accounts of Queen's University students this thesis examines the new ways of making, storing, distributing, and viewing images that have emerged with digital photography. Additionally, it looks at the cultural conventions of photography (particularly in relation to the documenting and organization of memory) that remain intact and have important implications for the reception of use of new digital technologies and how these are used to construct narratives.

This thesis also looks at the digitization of photography in relation to broader theoretical debates about the dynamics and shifts associated with modernity, postmodernity and 'global information culture'. Contemporary society is often seen as more capitalist, and in many ways, this is an era of increasing uncertainty, fluidity, and fragmentation. This thesis examines the affinity between the supposed 'death of narrative' in social theory and the 'death of photography' in terms of how they relate to the ordinary practices of amateur digital photographers.

Specific focus is given to Bauman's (2000) theory of 'liquid modernity' and how it offers a compelling account of contemporary society, specifically in terms of changes in narrative and how many individuals are faced with developing 'biographical solutions' to systemic problems of increasing uncertainty and fragmentation in the context of globalization and informationalization. In doing so, this thesis aims to address gaps in existing research on digitization that fails to capture the subtleties encountered in the everyday experiences of those engaged in taking the digital turn.

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Chapter 1

A Short Introduction

This thesis is about emerging changes in photography and imaging related to digitization and how we might approach and understand them, particularly in terms of their impact upon how narratives are constructed. These changes are explored in the context of broader social, cultural and technological change in an environment of digitally mediated communication practices. At a general level, it is fair to say that one of the most striking, rapid and unanticipated aspects of the so-called 'digital turn' has been the rise of digital photography. For example, a third of North American homes now own a digital camera (InfoTrends, 2008). It is forecasted that over 43 million digital cameras will be sold in North America in the coming year (Lee, 2008). Digitization has arguably changed the content, production, distribution and exchange of photographic images, especially among amateurs. There is also a sense, in both academic and industry circles, that communications and social relations are increasingly mediated through or accompanied by digital images. As Mike Walsh, international expert on the digital media revolution and a consultant to FijiFilm has stated, "...social networking is making photos the basic currency of social interaction" (Shipton, 2008:13). As an example, Walsh explains that there are over 14 million pictures uploaded onto Facebook everyday totaling over one billion images (Shipton, 2008:13). According to InfoTrends' 2006 report, three billion digital images were shared over email in the U.S. in 2006, 8 billion when including websites, social networks, and MMS (Digital Imaging Lifestyles, 2007). Digital photography is clearly big business, with those film based manufacturers such as Kodak

and Nikon shifting towards the production of digital technologies, and the movement of electronic and computer based manufacturers such as Sony and Panasonic into the digital photography market. There have been significant changes in the photography and imaging market in terms of who the central manufacturers are and what the shape of the industry is, especially the rise of computer software industries in this area. As I will show later in the thesis, the disappearance of film products and services changes what photographers are able to actually do, and furthermore, the increasing range of products which are interrelated have complicated what it means to 'do photography' in contemporary society. Although not the focus of this thesis, this is also a matter of how these products are marketed to consumers – often in terms of 'preserving memories' and how digital allows people to capture every available moment for future recollection.

In a more cultural vein, in terms of the relationship between images and narratives, it seems that we now have a situation of infinite variation rather than infinite reproduction, which may have implications for the notion of 'aura', originality and authorship (Cohen 2003; Manovich 2001). In another way, the mobility of the digital image seems to contrast greatly with the fixity of the photographic image, where digital images can circulate at greater speed and with broader reach (Jenkins 2006; Lash & Lury 2007). Furthermore, while images have always been manipulated, the manipulation of digital images is implied as a defining characteristic of digital photography by many (Mitchell 2001). Each of these observations raises important issues for larger social, economic and political debates about communication, ownership and interpretation (Frosh 2003; Lury 2004). However, while we can see anecdotally and statistically that

there are more images produced and distributed on a larger scale than ever before, we do not necessarily understand how this is occurring in relation to individuals and the ways they engage with digital photography, or what the implications are for theories of image making and distribution or for photography itself. As Cohen (2005) has argued:

While social and technical possibilities for photography multiply widely, there has been a seizure in the critical writing which addresses photography...In the writing about photography... what you get are versions of a debate which never fails, somehow, to center on the status of the Real in relation to photography (883).

Indeed, technical developments in digital imaging in the 1980s and 1990s have led too quickly to claims about the 'death' of photography because digitization had ruptured the supposed link between the image and the real. As Mitchell writes "From the moment of its sesquicentennial in 1989 photography was dead – or, more precisely, radically and permanently displaced" (2001:20). This idea that we have reached a post-photographic era is shared by many others (see Amelunxen et. al.1996). Such a view has been subject to recent critique as this approach to digital photography "rests upon a false assumption about the nature of chemical photography and its essential relation to reality, or overstates the significance of this technological shift" (Wells, 2003: 198). The question of whether digital image making can actually be called 'photography' has a long history in a way, as each novel technical development has been represented as a break with 'real photography' (Lister, 1995; Wells, 2000).

While being cautious about these grander claims for radical change, it is reasonable to say that the technological devices used to do digital photography are very

different from film and may enable different ways of making, storing, distributing, and viewing images. For example, as we shall see, there are changes in the relation between the hand and the eye, the camera and the photographer, and the range of possibilities of image capture (Lury 1998). Many new technologies associated with photography (phones, laptops, web applications, CD's, USB's, and so on) have been manufactured and marketed as better ways of making, storing and sharing images and putting them together extends the parameters of content, storage, use and exchange (Jenkins 2006). But as we shall see it is important to look at how cultural conventions of photography (particularly in relation to the documenting and organization of memory) might remain intact and be important in shaping the reception and uses of these new technologies and how they are used to construct narratives.

Accordingly, in this thesis digital photography is explored by taking into account three dimensions: the photographic image, the technologies of photography, and the practices of photography. I will show how dominant approaches to studying digital photography, and digital technologies in general, tend to emphasize one of these elements at the expense of others; often overplaying the dramatic nature of the shift from film to digital image making. I will argue that it is only by appreciating all three dimensions can we begin to get a sense of what digital photography as an emerging technological and social practice may be.

Furthermore, the digitization of photography must also be understood in terms of broader theoretical debates about the dynamics and shifts associated with modernity, postmodernity and 'global information culture' (Lash 2002). Photography, both as a

medium and a practice, is interrelated with social theories and practices. Just as film photography emerged with, and to some extent reflected positivist notions of reality, digital photography has emerged within a particular social environment. Of course there are many debates concerning the nature of contemporary society and culture, which has equally been seen as an intensified modernity (Beck 1992; Beck et. al. 1994), as postmodernity (Best & Kellner 1991; Jameson, 1991; Lyotard, 1984) or as ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000) among others. All of these positions agree to some extent that contemporary society is ever more capitalist, and that in many ways this is an era of increasing uncertainty, fluidity and fragmentation. Some of this uncertainty has been understood as the ‘death of (grand) narrative’ where the overarching certainty of truth, knowledge, but also the life course, has been fractured by dramatic socio-economic, technological, and cultural change. Accounts of the digitization of photography have most often been understood in terms of such a radical ‘break’ with modern practices, framing digitization as the ‘death of photography’ and contemporary culture as a ‘post-photographic’ era. In the thesis I also want to examine the affinity between the ‘death of narrative’ in social theory and the ‘death of photography’ in terms of how they relate to the ordinary practices of amateur digital photographers. This thesis emphasizes that while much social theory in this area has provided some important ways of thinking about narrative and memory in relation to image making, it has not been able to tell us so much about the detail of digitization in daily life. This thesis aims to pursue this gap in research and explore how the shift from analogue to digital photography is understood and enacted by university students. By looking at how these students have engaged with

and understand digital photography, it is possible to better understand the limits and applicability of both contemporary discussions on photography, as well as to situate the more abstract theories of ‘liquid modernity’ within lived experiences.

Plan of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, following a brief discussion of ‘post’ theories of modernity in relation to narrative, I suggest that Bauman’s theory of ‘liquid modernity’ offers a compelling account of contemporary society, specifically in terms of changes in narrative and how individuals are faced with developing ‘biographical solutions’ to systemic problems of increasing uncertainty and fragmentation. I will outline the main themes of Bauman’s recent work in this area and suggest that they help us to situate some of the concerns of those studying digitization and its impact upon photography. Secondly, I suggest that, in contrast to Bauman, more attention must be paid to the supposed relationship between information technology and these dramatic changes. I outline dominant approaches to theorizing technology in society and argue that technology and society are mutually constituted. In this way, we have to look at how both emerging technologies and the possibilities of narrative construction are intertwined.

In Chapter 3 I show how photography is a pertinent area for the examination of changes in narrative and the notions of uncertainty and forgetting that we find in Bauman’s and others’ work. I begin by exploring aspects of the history of photography as an idea as well as recognizable social practice. I use Manovich’s (2001) and Mitchell’s

(2001) ideas about what digitization is to discuss the implications of the switch from film to digital. This chapter raises questions about how the rather abstract theories of liquid modernity and digital photography play out in the lived experience of young digital photographers.

In Chapter 4 I detail the methodological approach used for the larger empirical sections of the thesis. In so doing, I make reference to problems of how to research technology in everyday life, especially of how to address the multiple forces that come together to shape the everyday experience of, and interaction, with digital photography. Additionally, some of the limits involved in the use of a small and selective sample population are discussed.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I present an analysis of interview material in relation to the key themes of the thesis. In Chapter 5 I focus primarily on the respondents' use of digital imaging technologies. I begin by looking at how the decisions to 'go digital' have been made, along with respondents' actual uses of their digital cameras in relation to the supposed dominant characteristics of digital photography found in the literature. I concentrate here on how these experiences problematize the notion of a clean 'break' and emphasize the complex intermingling between 'old' and 'new' social and technological practices and the narratives that accompany them; leading to rather different and somewhat idiosyncratic trajectories of digital photography. In Chapter 6 I concentrate on how respondents are using digital photography in relation to narrative formation, particularly the different ways of storing and distributing images through scrapbooking and Facebooking. How are digital images organized, stored, viewed and shared? Does the

immediacy and disposability of the digital image change how it is positioned in relation to individual and collective memory? What is the significance of photo-tagging and the publicization of private albums through websites such as Flickr and Facebook? The chapter looks in detail at some of the apparent challenges that come with these new opportunities such as photo ‘tagging’, particularly in terms of ‘ownership’ and ‘authorship’. I show that respondents’ practices entail both increasing efforts to live publicly and maintain extensive private or individual archives of everyday life. In this chapter I discuss how digital photography both reproduces and transforms some of the relationships between photography and individual and collective memory making, both of which relate to issues of mobility in terms of both informational images and the increasing numbers of image capture technologies.

In Chapter 7 I return to examine some of the key themes in Bauman’s theories of liquidity in light of the exploratory interview material. In addition to reflecting further on the interview material, chapter seven raises questions for future research that have emerged from writing this thesis. In particular these are questions about the role that gender might play in the emerging uses and understandings of digital photography and its associations with computerization.

Chapter 2

Narratives and Technologies in Liquid Modernity

Introduction

A great deal has been written about the so-called transition from modernity to postmodernity in terms of technological change and the implications for narrative (Best and Kellner 1991; Lyotard 1984). In this chapter I will discuss some of the important themes relating to both narrative and technology in contemporary society, which have a bearing upon how we might understand the transition from film to digital photography. I will suggest that Bauman's theory of 'liquid modernity' offers a compelling account of contemporary society, specifically in terms of changes in narrative and how many individuals are faced with developing 'biographical solutions' to wider socio-economic problems. Firstly I will situate and outline the main themes of Bauman's recent work in this area and suggest that they help us to situate some of the concerns of those studying digitization and its impact upon photography, especially his central themes of forgetting and uncertainty. Secondly, I will begin to question the role of information technology in bringing about such changes, by looking at debates about the relationships between technology and society in relation to narrative.

There is a long history to the idea that in capitalist modernity individuals are faced with increased uncertainty as a result of disappearing traditions and new institutions, new forms of work and life which are detached from what was seen as 'solid'. As Berman explains:

‘To be modern, I said, is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows’ (Berman 1982: 345-6)

The recent work of Zygmunt Bauman (2000; 2005; 2007) offers an account of current trends which follows this line of thought, and in contrast to his earlier work, does not suggest the same radical break between ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’ that many other contemporary theorists do. Bauman (2000) evaluates the contemporary situation as an *intensification* of certain aspects of modernity, which is producing a range of effects. While social, economic and cultural aspects of modernity have certainly undergone substantial changes, it has not *really* ended. As Smith explains, “it is more accurate to say that postmodernity is a key idea employed by intellectuals trying to cope with the impact of four massive changes in the ‘big picture’ of modernity during the last three decades of the twentieth century” (1999:9). The four changes identified here are: the shrinking nation state, an increased awareness of risk, the end of European imperialism, and the global spread of capitalism. Throughout the thesis such changes are seen as the background to significant changes in the use and understanding of narratives; a condition which, according to Bauman (2000), has resulted in a ‘liquification’ of all aspects of everyday life for particular social groups. How these processes are experienced by different people is not the focus of Bauman’s theory, but in his account it is clear that

liquid modernity results in uncertainty across the population. He also talks about how those with few economic resources will be unable to deal with these problems – becoming labelled as ‘flawed consumers’ – whereas those with higher levels of capital are able to live a ‘liquid modern life’ through increased consumption activities.

Narrative and Narratives

In its simplest form, a narrative presents a series of events as a story from which “...we gain ideas of who we are and an understanding of the world in which we live” (Malpas 2001:4). Meta-narratives present the rules of different discourses that allow us to determine the truth or falsity of a more particular narrative and shape which narratives are legitimate for particular ‘genres of discourse’ (Malpas 2001:5). Grand narratives are narratives which present the history and development of narratives. For example, there might be a grand narrative of ‘progress’ which provides the legitimate grounds for more particular scientific discourses; or a grand narrative of past, present and future which orders the way we think about memory. As Malpas explains:

If meta-narratives give the formal rules for the legitimation of narratives, grand narratives legitimate their contents in relation to an overarching theme or idea... The grand narratives of progress draw together all the narratives and meta-narratives in order to construct a historical, moral and political view of the world in which we live. Together, these three forms of narrative present the world to us, and are the basis from which knowledge, morality, identity, politics and freedom develop (2001:7-8)

Narratives, then, are an essential aspect of how we organize thinking and how we are able to tell stories about who we are. However, it is increasingly thought that ‘grand narratives’ no longer have the power to provide legitimation. There is a longer history to this idea.

Nietzsche was an early forecaster of the coming changes when, in 1888 he declared that ‘nihilism stands at the door’ (Lyon 1999:11). Nihilism in this sense does not mean the total disappearance of any kinds of truth or knowledge, but rather that “...reality is blurred and that establishing truth is not as straightforward as it once seemed” (Lyon, 1999:9). For Nietzsche, nihilism was a safeguard against the ‘old metaphors’, which needed to be revealed as human belief and the opinions of specific social groups rather than universal truths and beliefs (for example, the idea of God). Lyotard’s (1984) work on the emerging problems of legitimation is also significant in questioning the basis of grand narratives. He argued that ‘grand narratives’ have collapsed, and rather than attempting to reconstruct them societies should adopt and embrace the many ‘little narratives’ now enabled to speak; narratives which are formed at a more local level and are more limited in scope. For Lyotard, engaging in such a ‘war on totality’ reveals that “...little narratives are the most inventive way of disseminating, and creating, knowledge, and... they help to break down the monopoly traditionally exercised by grand narratives” (in Sim1998:9). According to Lyotard then, any attempt to create or sustain a grand narrative – an overarching definitive account - therefore involves the use of ‘terror’ and is by definition ‘authoritarian’ (Lyotard 1992:16).

Similar ideas are to be found across what came to be known as postmodern theory. Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction', as a way of interpreting narrative seeks to "...raise persistent questions about our own texts and those of others, to deny that any text is settled or stable" (Sim 1999:18). Thus, the "authors of texts - of any cultural artifacts – cannot impose their own meaning on their texts when they are clearly not their sole product" (1999:18). For Derrida, there is no possibility of grand narrative in this way as meaning itself is a "...fleeting phenomenon, that evaporates almost as soon as it occurs in spoken or written language (or keeps transforming itself into new meanings), rather than something fixed that holds over time for a series of different audiences" (in Sim 1998:6). Less abstractly, as individuals interpret the world around them, multiple narratives are formed (some more individualistic than others), each of which is interpretable in different ways. The meaning of narratives is subject to continual revision.

These ideas have led some to wonder whether we are left in a scenario of endless interpretation and relativism (Best & Kellner 1991). But what is interesting about contemporary narrative is that, despite such challenges, societies continue to adhere to the narrative ideal: "We may mistrust large-scale narratives that attempt to shape society, but our narrative drive persists" (Fulford 1999:7). For instance, despite the recognition that 'history' can be told in many different ways, the drive to archive and record historical accounts and the attempt to order these to describe the past continues to persist. The dilemma of moving between 'grand' or 'relativist' narrative forms is discussed by Baudrillard (2001) in *Impossible Exchange* where he asks "Do we absolutely have to choose between meaning and non-meaning? But the point is precisely that we do not

want to. The absence of meaning is no doubt intolerable, but it would be just as intolerable to see the world assume a definitive meaning” (2001:128). Baudrillard’s ‘remedy’ is often one of ‘play’ where he insists that “if we could accept this meaninglessness of the world, then we could play with forms, appearances and our impulses, without worrying about their ultimate destination” (2001:128). This may be suitable for the intellectual but it seems that for so many reasons, the majority of us may not be able to enjoy such a playful relationship with meaning and truth. What we are left with then, in the wake of the ‘death’ of grand narratives, is narratives existing at the local or individual level. To think about what such narratives might be like I will turn to Bauman’s recent work on the ‘liquification’ of all aspects of contemporary life, resulting in narratives that are temporary, fragmentary, and sometimes, contradictory.

Liquid Modernity, Liquid Life, Liquid Narratives

‘Liquid life’ is a kind of life that tends to be lived in a liquid modern society. ‘Liquid modern’ is a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines... In a liquid modern society, individual achievements cannot be solidified into lasting possessions because, in no time, assets turn into liabilities and abilities into disabilities... Liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty... Among the arts of liquid modern living and the skills needed to practice them, getting rid of things takes precedence over their acquisition. (2005:1-2).

As Bauman argues, the wider condition of ‘liquid modernity’ has produced a way of living that can be characterized as ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2005:1). Such a life has forgetting,

fragmentation, discontinuity, and constant change as its main characteristics. Bauman sees the changing relationship between time and space as an essential cause of this disorientation (2000:8). Free of the traditional time and space boundaries, Bauman says that we are “witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite... It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and ‘progress’” (2000:13). Traditional ties to the nation state, work, and family etc... are supplanted by the demands to be mobile and willing to travel at a moment’s notice. Smith describes this type of living as being ‘rootless’ (1999:150). In a liquid society there are no longer citizens, as the idea of citizenship requires a strong sense of belonging to a particular country with set geographical boundaries, a moral code of behavior, and a political and social ‘destination’ for that society, all of which have been significantly weakened in liquid modernity. Instead, “groups of individuals in scattered pockets everywhere are making deliberate efforts to build worlds for themselves, constructing rules of behavior, erecting value-systems and creating communities” (Smith 1999:148).

“The main appeal of communitarianism,” says Bauman, “is the promise of a safe haven, the dream destination for sailors lost in a turbulent sea of constant, unpredictable and confusing change” (2000:171). A community is easier to built and dismantle at a moment’s notice, particularly online communities. The shift towards communities suggests a very important change in the traditional sources of identity as well. According to Bauman:

If 'modern' implied an industrial, urban, capitalist society, in which socioeconomic class was still the determining feature of people's lives, of their sense of who they were, their identity, 'postmodern' implied a post-industrial, suburban, even post-capitalist social formation in which old, stable points for establishing people's sense of identity had been displaced. Identities in postmodern conditions become more flexible and float around in a state of potential, if not actual, change (Bocock, 1993)

Liquid modernity has seen an intensification of the individualization of modernity. As Bauman explains, "... 'Individualization' consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a task and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side effects) of their performance" (2000:32). Here there are a number of important developments. Identity is increasingly 'external', something worn outside the body, rather than an internal sense of being. One example of the externalization of identity through information explored by Poster (2006) is the phenomenon of 'identity theft'. The idea that identity can be 'stolen' is unique to the contemporary situation and dependent on changes in our understanding and use of technology to construct an individual identity, as well as changes in our conception of what identity is. Poster explains that "consciousness, that interior state of awareness or intentionality is the key to identity" (2006:101), or at least it has been throughout modernity. Starting in the late eighteenth century, identity took on an additional, more external form, one inscribed by "ledgers of governments, insurance companies, workplaces, schools, prisons, the military, and libraries – every institutionalized space in modern urban environments" (Poster, 2006:110). This 'external identity' or "forensic

identity” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995) has become increasingly significant with the changes in technology (such as the Internet, DNA databases, facial recognition software, etc...). As Lash states, “what was previously internal to my mental life is also storable in a distant information database” (2002:16). While identity undoubtedly has always been created and sustained in part by external forces, it is argued that this contemporary external identity has now become more significant and bearing than ever before. This is also partly encouraged by the rising importance of the visual in contemporary society.

According to Rampley “...Western society has become a predominately visual culture, facilitated and probably even initiated by certain technologies” (2005:15). In the early 19th century the human senses (sight in particular) were no longer to be trusted to give an accurate understanding of the world. New technologies such as photography were embraced for their ability to give an objective and truthful account of nature that was free from human subjectivities. For some, in the contemporary world, visual information has in some ways come to stand in for ‘the real’ (Baudrillard 1995; Taylor & Harris 2005). According to Baudrillard, the boundaries between reality and simulation, between art and everyday objects, between public and private spaces have all imploded. However, everything being equally meaningful and significant has the unintentional consequence of making everything in turn, meaningless. For Baudrillard, this has led us into a state of hyperreality in which simulations become indistinguishable from, and even preferred, over reality (Malpas, 2001:24). This is a type of “perfect crime” in which, the loss of traditional narratives has led to a new narrative of undifferentiation and disillusion, of

hyperreality, in which we are even more distanced from reality than before (Baudrillard 1995; Taylor & Harris 2005).

For Bauman (2000; 2007) these shifts in how identity can be formed and the new challenges it brings are often dealt with through forms of consumption. What is particularly interesting to Bauman is that the risks and contradictions of the modern project continue to be produced but in an intensified form, "...it is just the duty and the necessity to cope with them which [have been] individualized" (2000:34). Bauman suggests that *consumption* has become the way of dealing with the uncertainty and constant demands for change encountered in liquid modernity. He explains that "the melting of solids led to the progressive untying of the economy from its traditional, political, ethical and cultural entanglements. It sedimented a new order, defined primarily in economic terms" (2000:4). In the liquid modern world everything, including humans and ideas, are commodified (2005:9). For Bauman, the lifespan of commodities, just like that of information, is short. All things can turn into liabilities and must be easily discarded once their usefulness is expended. The commodification of all aspects of life means that humans suffer the same fate as any other material objects.¹ Once their usefulness has been outlived they are relegated to the garbage heap. It is not surprising, as Bauman points out, that waste management and disposal is now one of the strongest

¹ Relationships, both on a broad and personal level, must, like any commodity, be enjoyed for the moment then discarded at the first sign of decay. Bauman, for example, looks at increasingly high divorce rates. He insists that we enter into all contemporary relationships hesitantly and with a pressing awareness of their temporality and fluid nature; there is always a measuring of risk going on. When a relationship experiences any difficulties, or no longer provides the satisfaction it once did, the partnership splits. Relationship investments are no different than those on the stock market. Investors must always be on the lookout, ready to leave at the first sign of trouble. In both cases, it is the last ones out that suffer the greatest losses.

economic sectors. It is this fear of becoming redundant, or waste, that drives us. Fluidity, mobility, and temporality have become the best defense against becoming waste, a position which Bauman says, is almost inescapable once sentenced.

The fact that everything now has an expiration date means that we are always on the lookout for the next investment, purchase, or necessary upgrade. In a liquid modern world, we are therefore in a constant state of consumerism. As ‘free individuals’, emancipated from the obligations of state, church, relationships, etc., we also become the sole decision makers. As Bauman says, there are “no more great leaders to tell you what to do and release you from the consequences of your doings”. Instead, “...there are only other individuals from which to draw examples of how to go about your life-business, bearing full responsibility for the consequences of investing your trust in this example rather than another” (2000:30). There are two important implications here. First, the fear of being left behind, missing out, or choosing the wrong product or example, means that satisfaction is always temporary, if not forever out of reach, for satisfaction implies stability, having reached a goal, a place to stay, all of which are risks in the liquid modern environment. Second, the disappearance of modern governing institutions in favor of a more ‘democratic’ production of information enabled by new media technologies, means that there has been a significant change in traditional relationships of production and consumption.

As Bauman explains, we are now responsible for producing and choosing our lifestyles, identities, and information. Contemporary individuals bare the responsibility of

constructing their own identities through a multitude of choices and consumption of visual, symbolic tokens. While this identity must be undergoing constant revision and change so as not to become 'waste', it must also be recognizable by others. Failing in either of these aspects runs the risk of being 'left behind' and falling into the ranks of 'the redundant'.

Information and the Lives of Others

Liquid modern culture no longer feels itself to be a culture of learning and accumulating like those cultures recorded in historians' and ethnographers' reports. It seems instead a culture of disengagement, discontinuity and forgetting (Bauman 2005:62)

Digital technologies in particular have played an important role in changing traditional time and space boundaries and are intricately bound up in this liquification. Flew (2005) for example, states that, "the impacts of digitization are both pervasive and cumulative, and are at the core of the growing 'informatization' of society" (2005:9). The informatization of society can mean a number of things. Here informatization means that "...society is marked by both the comparatively faster growth of those sectors associated with the production and distribution of information and communications, and by the generalized use of information technologies (ICT's) in all areas of economic activity" (Flew 2005:9). The computing, telecommunications, and media and information sectors have come together with digitization to produce what Scott Lash calls an 'age of information', an age in which information itself has become a commodity (2002:1).

Information is thought to be radically different from knowledge. Knowledge, or traditional narrative forms, incorporated and required reflection. But, as Lash points out, “information is compressed in time and space. It makes no claim to universality, but is contained in the immediacy of the particular. Information shrinks or compresses meta-narratives to a mere point, a signal, a mere event in time” (2002:1). Information, or liquid narrative as Bauman would call it, is produced quickly and can be shared and transmitted almost instantaneously, or as Baudrillard would say, ‘in real time’. Often, information is forgotten just as fast as it was produced, replaced with more new, more up to date information. Bauman suggests this has led to a lost sense of shared responsibility and common goals. One of the consequences here is that we increasingly seek affirmation through the lives of others constructed on the screen.

The popularity of reality TV has often been explained as a desire to live vicariously, or as a form of voyeurism (Escoffert, 2006). However, the demands of a liquid society suggest that reality TV, and other similar forums, not only offer entertainment, but also provide a necessary and constant stream of new identities and new lifestyles needed to survive in a liquid environment. As Bauman explains:

In a world tightly packed with means yet notoriously unclear about ends, the lessons drawn from chat-shows answer a genuine demand and have undeniable pragmatic value, since I know already that it is up to me and me alone to make (and go on making) the best of my life; and since I also know that whatever resources such an understanding may require can be sought and found only in my own skills, courage and nerve, it is vital to know how other people, forced with similar challenges, cope (2000:68).

In addition to providing examples of how to live, reality TV and similar forums, like Facebook, also present identities and lifestyles that are recognizable. For Bauman, “the search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless” (2000:83). Again, this helps to explain the current interest in reality TV, Facebook, and even Photography. Interestingly, Bauman also adds that, “identities seem fixed and solid only when seen, in a flash, from the outside” (2000:83). There has also been a rise in interest in writing and reading autobiographies, not to mention the growing popularity of genealogical research (Barrington 1997, Conway 1999, Johnson 2001). Library and bookstore shelves are lined with dozens of guides to writing autobiographies, while new Internet databases appear every few months offering various services and information to help users trace their family trees. Each tries to address the problems of how to present a unified self and story under contemporary conditions of liquid narratives.

Technology and Narrative in Liquid Modernity

As discussed above, technology has played an important role in the changes in narrative that characterize modernity and postmodernity. As Lyon states: “The notion that modernity must be rethought, revised or rejected is not unconnected with actual social conditions created in the wake of proliferating computer and screen-centered technologies or the conquests wrought by consumer capitalism” (1999:24). Furthermore, narratives have played an important role in the use and development of technology more generally. As Nye explains,

...tools and machines are far more than objects whose meaning is revealed simply by their purpose. As the great stone circle at Stonehenge reminds us, they are part of a system of meaning, and they express larger sequences of actions and ideas. Ultimately, the meaning of a tool is inseparable from the stories that surround it (2006:3)

A tool not only involves a story about its use, it can also help us to tell different stories. The alphabet, language, printing presses, paintbrushes, camera, and computers are all examples of tools with specific narratives on how to use them. The introduction of each to society also impacted the way(s) in which stories were told, and potentially their subjects. In other words, technology and narrative are not independent of each other; rather they impact upon each other continuously in unpredictable and unanticipated ways. This is why it is difficult to designate between ‘old’ and ‘new’ practices and technologies or, more generally, between modernity and postmodernity.

For this thesis I have identified three dominant theoretical approaches to technology to help show the complex nature of both technology and narrative. While there are other approaches to technology, and advantages and limitations to each, these were chosen to address what I think are the shortcomings of existing research on technology and narrative. The main problem is usually one of technological versus social determinism. As Flew argues, “one of the difficulties that arises in both academic and more popular writing on new media is the dominance of dualistic thinking” (2005:21). Here I will argue that by using a ‘mutual constitution’ approach to technology we can begin to understand the intertwined relationship between the social and technological,

which will be useful in looking at the interrelation between digital photographic technologies and the socially defined ways of using them.

Technological determinism

One approach to technology is to see it as an independent force which has clear effects upon the social world. This approach is also known as ‘technological determinism’. Those who write from this theoretical approach see inevitable technological development as the driving force behind human progress and social development. As Ferguson says, this creates the impression that “the whole history of technological development [has] followed an orderly or rational path, as though today’s world was the precise goal toward which all decisions, made since the beginning of history, were consciously directed” (cited in Staudenmaier, 1985:175). The history of technology starts to resemble the history of science as criticized by Kuhn (1996). The same is done with externalist accounts of technological development and discovery; the early stages of development, in which different technologies, or models were competing for public acceptance, are rarely looked at. Most important, is that the technological determinist position does not look at how cultural decisions and ideologies shaped the outcome of different technologies.

Despite its limitations, it is important to understand more about the origins of the technological determinist position as it has been, and continues to be, a very persuasive and popular approach. Although it is often associated with Francis Bacon and his 1627

book “New Atlantis”, Staudenmaier has traced the approach back to Descartes² (1985:163). With Descartes came the idea of value-free knowledge, or objectivity. Descartes created a reductionist approach to the world, where knowledge was reduced to the minimum observable proofs that could then be built upon. Value-free knowledge implies that there are facts that stand independent in the world, waiting to be recognized or discovered. When applied to science and technology, this translates into having right or wrong knowledge about the world, and proper, inevitable, and objective technological development. Technology can feel out of human control because no one is seen as responsible for how it develops or how it is used. This can become an irresponsible way of looking at technology, where human decisions and cultural choices or ideologies are made invisible.³ Different ways of thinking about technology change the way we use and understand it. Forbes writes,

The Roman Empire was an agglomeration of autarkic production areas which did not suffer from sharp economic crises or from overproduction. Capital was invested in slaves and land, not in costly machinery, since labor was cheap enough in a society that provided bare necessities for the masses and a few luxuries for the elite. Many Romans thought that technology had already fulfilled its task with the limited applications of their time, and this complacency may have contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire” (1968:14).

² Latour (1999) also used Descartes as a founder of the “modern settlement” which had given us the irreconcilable dichotomies between subject and object, man and nature, knowledge and the world outside.

³ The atomic bomb for example.

Here Forbes touches upon two important characteristics in the technological determinist approach: the belief that a civilization's progress and survival is linked to its use of technology, and the requirement of individualistic societies under a "free market".

Marxists and evolutionary socialists have put a great deal of faith in the machine as a force driving social revolution and development (Nye 2006:25). Marx believed that "the mode of production of material life determine[d] the general character of the social, political, and spiritual process of life" (Nye, 2006:22). Not only did the modes of production act as the determinate for a society, Marx believed that they would also lead to the final phases of industrial capitalism, or social revolution. Nye uses the term "technological momentum"⁴ to help explain this reliance and faith in technologies. Once a new technology has been invented it is hard to imagine a time when it did not exist. These technologies are considered to be so appealing that "...most consumers, given the chance, will buy them" (Nye, 2006:18) or use them. This gives certain technologies like the Internet, electricity, the automobile, even digital photography a sense of inevitability and necessity.

The belief that technology is independent has led to the creation of particular images of technology. Technology has been seen as being a destroyer of artistic skills. Here the increasing automation and reliance on mechanical devices leads to a decrease in skills. Marx has written extensively on the replacement of human expertise and skill with factory line production and the resulting sense of alienation from one's work. In some

⁴ Nye borrows this term from Thomas Hughes to look at how, although not an independent force, technology can still exercise a "soft determinism". "Technological momentum" is not inherent in a technology, but is part of a technology's development and successful entrepreneurship (Nye 2006: 52,53).

cases, industrialization has led to more specialized training, but the focus is solely on one aspect of production. In looking at photography in particular, Walter Benjamin (1969 in Arendt,1999) saw mechanical reproduction as destroying the aura of an artwork, although this was seen in a potentially democratic light.

At the extreme end of humankind's technological replacement is the image of the machine as master. Technology becomes "a dictator that controls our lives... technology dictates a schedule that takes away freedom and makes daily life a routine" (Allen et al, 1957:6). This image of technology is one in which the human is degraded; the human becomes the tool of technology (Allen, 1979:37). There is also much discussion about the homogenizing effects of technology. Baudrillard (1995), Scott Lash (2002) and Susan Sontag (1977) are just some of those who have commented on the lack of difference promoted by technology.

Two similar images of technology are, technology as a worker of miracles, and as a precipitator of change. Technology has been seen as enabling unimaginable progress. As Mosco (2004) points out in "The Digital Sublime", grand myths of social inclusion, wealth, and progress have often surrounded new technologies (i.e. radio, railway, and computers). While a number of social factors limit the extent these myths can actually succeed, they reflect a commonly held view of technology as being able to conquer new territory and bring us to a new stage of social development, and do influence future developments and aims of technological invention and innovation. While the "miraculous" achievements of technology are debatable, it is undeniably a precipitator of

change. What distinguishes modern times from previous centuries is the rate and scale at which this change is taking place.

Social Construction of Technology

The social constructionist approach to technology argues that what technologies are invented and how they progress is determined by society. Nye provides two positions that fit into the social constructionist approach: the *internalist*, and the *contextualist*. The *internalist* position focuses on the role of the inventor, "...their competition, their technical difficulties, and their solutions to particular problems" (Nye, 2006:56). Latour (1999) uses the example of historians focusing on Pasteur as the discoverer of yeast. In the history of photography particular importance is paid to Joseph Niepce and Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre as being the inventors of photography, despite the fact that there are writings from much earlier that mention an early photographic process (Batchen, 1997). By focusing on individual inventor(s)⁵, Latour argues that the history of the object is denied (1999:118). Where were ferments before Pasteur? Where was photography before Niepce? The genius of these inventors is celebrated over a more complex analysis of how technologies encounter and emerge from existing social forces. The internalist position also emphasizes the *construction* of a technology or a fact. In many ways it relies on a correspondence theory of truth, in which something either exists or does not.

⁵ While the examples used here are of particular individuals the same can be said of invention **groups**.

The *contextualist* approach looks at how time and place influence the development, discovery, and use of a technology (Nye, 2006:61). Unlike the externalist approach, the use of certain technologies is not inevitable and predictable. Nye gives the examples of the Amish resisting the use of modern automobiles and many ‘conveniences’ and the Japanese Samurai rejecting the use of guns (2006:17-18). While Niepce is seen as the ‘inventor’ of photography, it is also important to note how his discovery depended on the availability of lenses, and certain chemicals. Also, photography as we understand it emerged during the scientific revolution which valued scientific proofs and objectivity. This no doubt has shaped the view of photography and its role as a medium.

A social constructionist approach can be used when looking at issues of surveillance and sustainability. Looking at the social forces and the choices embedded in technologies forces us to take responsibility for the ways they are used. Technology’s role in surveillance has become a popular issue. As David Lyon points out, surveillance fits into our belief that technology means protection and progress (2003:85). Yet, “our radical dependency on technology makes contemporary societies very vulnerable, not only to attack but also to breakdown” (2003:87). Our own technological inventions cannot only be used against us but, by being so heavily dependent on technology, we create a system that can be used to our disadvantage or destruction.

Within this constructivist or realist approach, the difficulty comes when trying to decide whether Pasteur is making up the entity by projecting his prejudices upon it, or whether Pasteur is being influenced and forced to behave in a particular way because of *its* properties? (Latour, 1999:130). The problem is that,

The subject-object dichotomy distribute(s) activity and passivity in such a way that whatever [is] taken by one [is] lost to the other. If Pasteur makes up microbes, that is, invents them, then the microbes are passive. If the microbes “lead Pasteur in his thinking” then it is he who is the passive observer of their activity (Latour, 1999:147).

Neither the determinist, nor the social constructionist approach can take into account the complex relationship that exists between humans and technology, between narrative and technology. As Latour says, “... ‘construction’ is in no way the mere recombination of already existing elements. In the course of the experiment Pasteur and the ferment mutually exchange and enhance their properties” (1999:124). Both Pasteur and the ferment were changed in their encounter, so too were Niepce and photography in theirs. Technology and narrative can then be considered to be ‘mutually constituted’.

Mutual Constitution of Technology and Culture

In taking a mutually constitutive approach to technology and society Grint and Woolgar (1997) state that the two terms ‘social’ and ‘technological’ are not to be thought of as distinct categories:

[W]e need to find a way of ‘taking the technology seriously’ without having to depend upon un-interrogated notions of technical capacity, and to account for the intermingling of technical and social without merely nurturing the view that these are essentially independent variables conjoined through ‘interaction’. We want to avoid, in other words, the impression that either the technical or the social has a discrete impact (1997:25)

The mutual constitution approach to technology sees both technology and society as necessarily changed in their encounter with one another. Society will influence how and which technologies develop, while at the same time, technologies will influence and impact how society develops. Language is an interesting example. Society ‘creates’ languages, and languages in turn ‘create’ societies. Latour looks at technology as being in a status of mediation, “that is, of an occurrence that is neither altogether a cause not altogether a consequence, neither completely a means not completely an end” (1999:153). This approach gives a history to both the subject and the object, and avoids the irreconcilable dichotomies that emerge from the correspondence theory of truth. By seeing technology as both independent of and dependent on society, we gain a much better understanding of their truly complex relationship.

While he uses the term *cultural technologies*, Terry Flew (2005) presents a good example of a mutual constitution approach to technology. Flew argues that technologies should be understood at three levels. First, technologies can be seen as *the tools and artifacts used by humans to transform nature, enable social interaction or extend human capacities* (2005:26). But, as we have seen, a technology must also come with a narrative explaining what it is and how it is to be used. As Flew explains, “...technologies as ‘hardware’ have no social-use value unless accompanied by content or ‘software’, and the content or ‘software’ has an irredeemably social and cultural dimension...” (2005:26). In addition to looking at the physical form of a technology it is equally important to consider their *contexts of use*. Finally, Flew says that we must also consider the systems of knowledge and social meaning that accompany a technology’s

development and use (2005:26). In addition to looking at the three levels proposed by Flew it is important to keep in mind that these are continuously changing. A change in the physical form (for example digitization) should be looked at alongside social changes (in this case the changes in narrative, industry, economy etc...). What has often been absent from existing research is how these changes are perceived and encountered at the everyday level. This is where I see Flew's third level - looking at the systems of knowledge and social meaning - coming in to use. An analysis of technology, and also of narrative, could not be complete without looking at how different technologies are being incorporated into everyday life. As Grint and Woolgar argue, "the limitation placed upon the social aspects of technology, that is, their confinement to the design and implementation process, underestimates the significance of actors' interpretations and uses of the technology" (1997: 21). I think that using the mutual constitution approach would help situate current themes of 'death' and 'crisis', which are found in both postmodern discourse and discussions on photography. It should be noted, however, that in taking this route it may not be possible to identify whether in certain cases one or other appears to be dominant. The mutual constitution approach assumes that technology and society are intertwined such that neither could take precedence or be more influential in a particular situation. So far we have outlined the changing status of narrative in contemporary theory, and have briefly touched on the role of narrative in technology and the importance technology plays in shaping narratives. The next chapter will provide a more detailed application of the mutual constitution approach by looking at the

technological changes of ‘new media’ and the social environment of ‘information’ and ‘liquid modernity’.

Conclusion

This chapter started by presenting Bauman’s recent work as a way to situate some of the concerns of those studying digitization and its impact upon photography. Unlike many contemporary theorists, Bauman does not suggest that a radical break has taken place between ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’. Instead, Bauman sees the contemporary situation as an intensification of certain key elements of modernity. In doing so, Bauman encourages us to explore the many forces that come together to create the present environment of fragmentation and uncertainty. This thesis aims to take this idea further and explore the variety of ways people encounter and cope with this liquid modernity in their everyday lives.

The idea of intensification versus a ‘clean’ break is also relevant for discussions on digital photography. Much research on technology follows an equally dichotomous path as that in discussions of modernity and postmodernity. Technology is typically interpreted as being either deterministic or socially constructed. Again, this leaves little room for exploring the complex and varied ways social and technological forces come together. Using a ‘mutual constitution’ approach to technology – which looks at the technology itself, the social context, and users interpretation and uses of the technology – is similar to Bauman’s approach in that it leaves room to examine the ways in which ‘old’ and ‘new’ practices and narratives come together, or are mutually constituted. This type

of analysis is what is missing from existing theories and discussions on digital photography.

Digital technologies and postmodern discourse have come together to form an environment of fragmentation and constant change in which grand narratives have been replaced by more local and individualistic ones. According to Bauman (2000), people encounter and cope with these important changes in narrative and technology through the consumption of other life examples and symbolic tokens. Individuals now bear all the responsibility for the choices and decisions that they make. This is interesting in two ways. First, it reinforces the importance and relevance of looking at the everyday experiences of liquid modernity and of digital photography. Second, in looking at the individual reactions or practices, we again begin to see both the variety among an apparently homogenous group of people, as well as the similarities. It is this mix of innovation, difference, continuation, and commonality that is suggested by Bauman in insisting that we find individual solutions to systemic problems. Not only does this type of research bring out the subtle details missing from existing projects, but perhaps it also reminds us of the continuances and similarities found in what can appear to be dramatically different situations or environment.

That said, the following chapter looks at the idea of photography, particularly as an analogue and positivist practice to a digital and postmodern one. This acts as a beginning to discussing the complexity that is often overlooked in existing research on photography and digitization. Chapter four then presents the methodology used in this thesis to try and address this gap, particularly by looking at the everyday experiences of

young digital photographers to try and get at the continuances and differences both between analogue and digital practices, and between users, as well as to gain a better sense of the status of narrative and memory in a liquid modern environment.

Chapter 3

Liquid Photography?

Introduction

In Chapter 2 I have argued that Bauman's account of social life in liquid modernity paints a compelling picture of changing narratives in relation to changing technologies. I have also introduced the idea that we cannot simply read changes in narrative or storytelling from apparent changes in technology. Attention must be paid to how the possibilities of narrative construction are mutually constituted alongside technological development. In this chapter I will follow this thread by showing how changes in the development of the technologies of photography have been allied to changes in how society has been conceived in social theory and also in wider society. In other words, the technology of photography and our theories of society have been mutually constituted.

In Bauman's liquid modernity, change and forgetting are essential safeguards to becoming a redundant and thus disposable human being. The need to forget and rewrite social and personal narratives easily and frequently raises interesting questions about the role and status of contemporary photography. Photography has a long history of being used primarily as a form of factual documentation. However, the narratives sustained and built through photography have become a liability. Analogue photography fit well into a positivist, modern environment, but lacks the flexible and disposable qualities necessary to survive in a liquid modern world. While digital photography is often seen as marking the 'death' of photography, I think it is more suiting to discuss digital photography as a

'liquid photography'. To say that we have reached a post-photographic era, just like saying we are post-modern, ignores the continuities in both. While digital photography has not 'killed' photography, it is significantly different from analogue photography. If analogue photography fit well into a positivist environment, perhaps going digital is a necessary shift reflecting the new social demands on photography in a liquid modern world?

In an environment of liquid narratives and information, digital photography seems to be the perfect fit. It erases traditional boundaries of time and space, objective and subjective views, and between consumers and producers. Composed of digital code, digital photographs are easy to manipulate, can be sent and shared almost instantly, and are easy to delete and forget. The staggering number of digital photographs taken and the growing field of photographable moments also reflect Bauman's theory of consumption as a method of coping in uncertain times. As Sontag suggests, taking pictures renders any and all experiences into a familiar and safe "photographable moment" (1977:9, 24). Perceiving photography as a reaction to the uncertainty and collapsing boundaries might explain why the banal is quickly becoming a focus in popular photography (Amelunxen et al, 1996; Cohen, 2005). Calvino presents an extreme that now seems commonplace. He writes, "everything not photographed is lost, as if it never existed, and therefore in order to really live you must photograph as much as you can, you must either live in the most photographable way possible or else consider photographable every moment of your life" (Calvino 1985 cited in Taylor and Harris 2005:90). Not only does photography offer important visual proof of particular lifestyles, but it may be an essential tool in

encountering liquid modernity. Before we can begin to address these questions it is important to have a sense of the history of photography as an idea, a practice, and a technology. In doing so, we begin to see the complexity inherent in photography from its very start, reminding us of the necessary subtlety needed in theorizing not only about photography, but the contemporary situation as well.

To start, the desire that lies at the heart of photography revolves around the preservation of past moments, memories, and identity. As we become an ever more visually orientated society, the role and importance of photography no doubt grows. Yet how to understand and interpret this growth is not altogether clear. Analogue photography, for example, was deeply contested right up until digitization. The debates centered on concerns over whether analogue photography was objective or subjective, whether it was more of a science or an art, and whether there was a significant division between professional and amateur photography. While present discussions center primarily on the difference between film and digital photography, it is interesting to note that these same concerns over the very nature of photography continue. It seems that it is only in hindsight, and in the face of more obvious technical changes that photography, at least analogue photography, seems to gain some stability as a tool and practice.

Photography and Modernity

As Batchen (1997) suggests, the desire to take photographs came long before the actual technological innovation of photography. Victor Burgin argues that "...the origin of photography is identical with the origin of painting, with the origin of any desire for

the image... The origin of the graphic image is in the portrait, and that the origin of the portrait is in the desire for protection against the loss of the object, and the loss of identity” (cited in Batchen, 1997:113). The desire for photography as a means to preserve identity and as a memory aid is also discussed by Liz Wells (2000). Wells explains that there was a growing demand for portraits by the middle-class at the end of the 18th century, a demand which could not be met by portrait painters at the time. This desire promoted the development of the mechanical Physiognotrace and silhouette tracing (Wells, 2000:12). Both Batchen and Wells force us to ask where this desire comes from. As Batchen puts it, “given that a basic knowledge of the existence of light sensitive chemicals had been popularly available since the 1720s, why does the concept of, and desire to, photograph only begin to emerge around 1800 and not before?” (1997:53). One explanation involved the coincidence of the desire to fix an image with the development of Positivism.

As Batchen states, “in one form or another, positivism came to dominate scientific thinking in the mid – and later nineteenth century and continues to inflect attitudes to photography to the present day” (1997:137). Positivism developed in the middle of the 19th century and would later come to dominate British and American philosophy. Most often associated with Auguste Comte, positivism moved away from metaphysics to a more ‘scientific’ approach. Knowledge was now produced through observable and repeatable experiments. Once trusted ways of knowing were cast in doubt because they could no longer be proven through natural, physical, and material proofs. The human sense of perception is an example. “Once regarded as a predictably mechanical means of

reflection around 1800 the eye became instead a troublesome and elusive complex of anatomical relationships” (Batchen, 1997:83). Perception was too subjective a tool and other, more mechanical and objective tools and experiments were required.

While the history of photography generally focuses on technical innovations and photography’s role in the modern quest for knowledge, an equally important debate was taking place that questioned photography as an art. Downplaying this debate allows us to have a simplified understanding of photography that past theorists writing before digitization may not have had. As Batchen explains, “No doubt photography did eventually become a popular metaphor for the possibility of a positivist view of the world. However, at least at the time of photography’s conception, this view remained somewhat confused and contradictory (1997:138)”.

Whether photography is an exercise in personal creativity and expression (an art) or a purely mechanical and objective eye onto the world has been debated from the beginning. Fox Talbot praised photography as ‘the pencil of nature’ free from subjective impressions. Baudelaire, no lover of photography, insisted that it be kept in its place:

Photography must, therefore, return to its true duty which is that of handmaid of the arts and sciences, but their very humble handmaid, like printing and shorthand, which have neither created nor supplemented literature. Let photography quickly enrich the traveler’s album and restore to his eyes the precision his memory may lack; let it adorn the library of the naturalist, magnify microscopic insects, even strengthen, with a few facts, the hypotheses of the astronomer; let it, in short, be the secretary and record-keeper of whomsoever needs absolute material accuracy for professional reasons (Baudelaire, 1859:297 cited in Wells, 2000:13-14).

As visual document photography was quickly incorporated into journalism, criminology, science, sociology, medicine, and just about any other discipline or practice that could benefit from having visual factual documentation. Interestingly, many of those who insisted on the objective character of photography were not immune to applying traditional artistic criteria when evaluating a photograph. Composition, lighting, subject matter, angle, clarity etc., all remained important. Even if you could objectively capture an image you still could not find an objective reader or interpreter of such an image. The shifting and uncertain meaning of a photograph has led some (for example Taylor and Harris 2005; Barthes 1981) to question the benefits of photography as a meaning producer. The undefined method of evaluating photographs and the interesting disconnect a photograph enjoys from its original intent, situation, and subject has led some to refer to photography as a kind of mental pollution (Sontag, 1977:24). Many of these same characteristics that make photography so “well-suited” to a positivist environment also make it an intriguing form of art.

Despite the fact that photography is often seen as requiring little experience or talent in comparison to some of the more traditional forms of art such as painting, it has still become a sort of art with standards, techniques, and innovations of its own. The belief in the camera’s ability to capture an objective reality has acted both as an inspiring challenge to art photographers as well as a naïveté to exploit and play with in more creative terms, often playing on presenting reality the way it is never seen or could not possibly be. Just as the art industry has different standards and tastes on what is art at a particular time, photography as art also has different divisions. Among these include what

Liz Wells (2000) calls “straight photography”. Here the emphasis is on the photographer’s ability to capture an artistic shot with as little manipulation as possible. Value is placed on the subject matter, the composition, lighting etc... all the same qualifications as a painting. Photography as an art is also split in terms of those who put more emphasis on the artist’s ‘vision’ and those who focus more on the technical side of the image. Since its introduction in 1839, photography has undergone various technological innovations, the latest being digitization. As discussed in the following sections, digital photography is sometimes seen as being radically different from analogue photography. For some, going digital has killed the skill and talent necessary in art photography. The cameras are seen as too automatic, the process of development too alienated from the photographer, and the content too easily manipulated or ‘corrected’ later on a screen (Baudrillard 2000; Coulter 2006a,b). Here it is important to note the deterministic overtones to these concerns in which the machine takes over. In addition, art photographs can now be compilations of many photographs. If the photographer can not seem to find the perfect scene he or she is looking for it can now be created by mixing many photographs or even by digital animation. How these new photographs fit into the world of art photography is still being debated (Coulter 2006a, b).

Whether photography should be considered more as a factual document or as a form of art is not the only debate within analogue photography. The distinction between professional and amateur photography is also unclear and has become even more so with digitization. Personal photography has been overlooked until more recently and is generally regarded as being very different and separate from other, perhaps more

professional uses of photography. In 1888 Kodak came up with the slogan “You press the button, we do the rest” and revolutionized photography. Until this time photography was a more restricted practice. Kodak not only came up with a simplified camera, but for the first time the photographer did not need to know anything about the process of development.

Kodak focused its advertisements on preserving family or personal memories, turning ordinary life into something worthy of being photographed and remembered. Keeping with the new consumerism, photography acted as proof of free time, leisure activities, and documented a particular lifestyle (even if framed in a much idealized way). As Allan Sekula insists, “photography is fundamentally related in its normative way of depicting the world to an epistemology and an esthetics that are intrinsic to a system of commodity exchange” (cited in Batchen, 1997:20). As Paul Frosh makes clear, photography has had a significant role both in shaping us as consumers as well as being a tool of promotion and an object of consumption (2003:2). This is one reason that makes amateur photography a particularly interesting place to explore Bauman’s theories of consumption as a way of dealing with the uncertainties of liquid modernity. Photography is not only an easy way to portray a particular lifestyle, but it is easy to use and easy to share. This might be one explanation for the present popularity of photoblogs and photo sharing sites such as Flickr and Facebook. Each of these are examples of the network communities Bauman says have replaced more traditional communities, and their photographs are an easy method for demonstrating allegiance and membership.

The changes in traditional social narratives and sources of identity, in combination with digitization and the ever lowered cost of photography, has shifted research on amateur photography from the family album to a much broader field. It is possible that, for the first time, children and young people find themselves in a position of having more control over their image, often owning their own digital cameras. The disappearance of film has led to a more relaxed attitude over the number of photographs taken and their subject(s). Cheap digital cameras are now being developed specifically for children. Whether these photographs are included in the family album (or whether these family albums still exist) has not yet been studied in sufficient detail. The article “Children as photographers: an analysis of children’s photographic behaviour and intentions at three age levels” by Sharples et al. (2003) is one of the first to look at how child photography may differ from more traditional understandings of personal photography. While many of the changes seen in contemporary photography should not be limited to the digitization of photography, understanding the technical differences between cameras is significant because, what photographs are taken are, in part, influenced and limited by the type(s) of camera(s) used⁶.

Changing Technologies of Photography

Looking at the technological development of photography is important because, just like any technology its development was not inevitable and clear cut. The cameras

⁶ For instance without faster shutter speeds action photography would be impossible.

and processes each shaped the particular development of photography both as an object and a practice. As Michel Frizot explains:

Photography was not invented by one person. Nor was it the result of a single inspired moment of genius. Economic, political, and social circumstances counted just as much as scientific criteria, lucky observations, and the intuition of a few clever men. During a period of two critical years (1839-1840) photography took a decisive path, whose success and survival – which was not achieved straight off – determined its technical future and its field of application. At the end of 1840, the general principles of “photography”, which would be based on the concept of the “negative”, had scarcely been sketched out (1998:23).

Officially it is said that “photography” was invented in 1839 with the introduction of the daguerreotype (Frizot, 1998:15). While Daguerre is recorded as the first to present photography to the public, a more truthful account of the development of photography comes from looking at his work along with that of William Henry Fox Talbot and Hippolyte Bayard. The Daguerreotype provided a better picture but Talbot’s calotype allowed for multiple copies (Frizot, 1998:27). Bayard introduced a paper print process⁷, which due to its exposure time and grainier picture would be forgotten until the Polaroid process (Frizot, 1998:31). The improved version of the calotype⁸ eventually won out over the daguerreotype because of its ability to create multiple and cheaper copies to satisfy the growing demand for self-portraits and a more portable photography (Frizot, 1998:50, 61).

⁷ This process involved obtaining a print without a negative and without development (Frizot, 31).

⁸ For a more detailed explanation of the production of a calotype see Frizot p 61.

Another significant change in the technological process of photography came about in the early 1870s. Richard L. Maddox, an English doctor introduced a new form of dry plates⁹. This technique was further improved upon by Richard Kennet and perfected by Charles Harper Bennett in 1878. As Gautrand explains, this allowed for "...instant pictures (with an exposure time of less than a second) and did away with the need for any kind of tripod or other support, so that the camera could be held in the hand!" (cited in Frizot, 1998:233). The new gelatin-silver bromide process also demanded improvements in camera technology. Faster shutters, viewfinders and portable cameras expanded the range of photographable subjects and the lowered costs of photography allowed more people to pick up a camera.

In 1888 George Eastman came up with the slogan "You press the button, we do the rest" and revolutionized photography. Eastman, dissatisfied that photographers still had to work to develop their own prints started manufacturing a small, box-shaped camera that came to be known as the Kodak. This was a small (16.5 x 9 x 8.3 cm) box with a simple lens and a set exposure of 1/20 of a second (Gautrand cited in Frizot, 1998:238). The Kodak camera had no viewfinder and no exposure counter, sold for 25 dollars and was pre-loaded with a roll of 100 photos (*ibid*:238). For the first time photographers did not have to know anything about the processes of development. When the roll of film was done the camera was sent back to the factory, the prints developed,

⁹ This process consisted of "a warm solution of gelatin was mixed with cadmium bromide and silver nitrate, spread on a glass plate and allowed to dry". To improve the sensitivity of the plates, Bennett "had the idea of maturing the emulsion, keeping it for several days at a temperature of 32 degrees centigrade before washing" (Frizot, 1998: 233). This allowed photographers to take faster pictures of subjects in motion.

and then the camera was reloaded and sent back to the owner along with the developed photographs. Although these cameras could only be used outdoors and despite their technical limitations they were a great success, especially among the middle classes. In 1900 Eastman succeeded in bringing photography to all classes with the introduction of the Brownie camera, which cost only 1 dollar (Frizot 1998:238). Daily life had become a source of photographable moments to be shared with family and friends. One notable innovation that came along with the democratization of photography was the family or personal achieve.

One significant moment in photographic history that is often overlooked is the introduction of color. As Pamela Roberts states, “practically as soon as photography was invented, the race was on for colour” (2007:12). Although there are color photographs as early as 1888 (Frizot, 1998:413), the process was complex and the results closer to art than to a natural view of the world. Popular and preferred methods involved adding color to the photograph by hand-painting directly on the print using oil and watercolors or ground up pigment powders (Roberts, 2007:13). Interestingly, for many years black and white photography was seen as more realistic despite the fact that human perception picks up color (however subjectively). As Frizot puts it:

As the twentieth century progressed, a succession of complicated methods was tried, in an attempt to solve “the problem of color”. These, however, gave results that were very different from the natural appearance of things. As techniques progressed, this discrepancy became more obvious and color photography, paradoxically, acquired artificiality – an uncontrollable “strangeness”... (1998:411).

Although most photography today is in color, black and white photography continues to hold a privileged position among many “professional” photographers (Frizot, 1998:418, *Paper Movies: The Genius of Photography*, 2008). Part of this is because color prints (analogue) remain too difficult to print outside a professional printing lab. Others have made the argument that color distracts from the more important elements of a photograph. Frizot argues that:

There are only two areas in which color has really taken root: amateur photography, which has not been overly concerned to exploit the qualities of the medium, being satisfied with a mimesis of reality; and so-called applied photography (fashion, advertising, industry), which became, through magazines, the chief outlet for color photography (1998:418).

Associating color photography with amateur photography and the world of advertising and consumerism helped forge the boundaries between art photography and mass/popular photography.

The ‘rejection’ of color photography by the art world is particularly relevant to this thesis because digital photography is often thought of in the same manner. Color photography, because of its initial technical limitations reinforced the subjective nature of photography. Color may well have been resisted because it reinforced doubts about the “mirror” truths of photography. Digital imagery, being composed of easily manipulated digits, goes one step further and forces us to reconsider past understandings of both photography as a medium and as a practice.

New Media and the Death of Photography

Technologies have played important roles in our society, some which have dramatically altered the way we live. The question is what makes digitization so different from past technologies? What is it about new media that is so radically different that we are now talking about the collapse of so many boundaries and traditional ways of knowing? First, defining what is new media is almost as difficult as trying to define what is postmodernism. As Terry flew writes, "...the relationship between 'old' and 'new' media is rarely linear, in either their patterns of use or their trajectories of development" (2005: xv). Flew gives the example of a DVD. Compared to a VHS, the DVD appears to be new, yet it does not seem as new when compared to the CD. Thus there are "...new developments within particular media that extend, but do not transform, how that medium operates" (2005:1). Despite the complexity of trying to define New Media, there are some characteristics that are commonly used and agreed upon.

Often, New Media has been equated with the Internet and with digital technologies because of their capacity for convergence (Flew 2005: xv, 2). Such media also tend to be manipulable, networkable, dense (as in being able to store vast amounts of information in small physical spaces), compressible, and impartial (everything can be reduced to a combination of zeros and ones which brings about an equality of all things digitized) (Flew, 2005:3). For some Flew's view of new media is still not specific enough.

In his book *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich (2001) presents five key characteristics that make new media new: numerical representation, modularity,

automation, variability, and transcoding. These characteristics are useful because they present a very clear set of technical definitions that are commonly used to distinguish analogue from digital. These characteristics are also significant in that they are each mutually constituted with the social conditions digital photographers find themselves in.

Like Flew, Manovich agrees that all new media objects are composed of digital code; they are numerical representations (2001:27). Being composed of digital code has two key consequences, the first being that any object can be described mathematically and, second, this means that any new media object can be subject to algorithmic manipulation. Manovich uses the example of applying algorithms to "...automatically remove noise from a photograph, improve its contrast, locate the edges of the shapes, or change its proportions. In short, *media becomes programmable*" (2001:27). It is important to note here that new media objects can also include "old media objects" that have been converted. For example an analogue photograph can be digitized and turned into new media by scanning it into a computer. Another important distinction between digital and analogue photographs¹⁰ is that while analogue photographs are composed of *continuous* coding, digital images are considered *discrete*. They have a predetermined resolution or number of pixels, which is also quantifiable (Manovich, 2001:28). It is argued then that while analogue photographs have a limitless amount of information in them, the digital image has a predetermined limit (this can be seen when a digital image is enlarged to the point where only a grid of boxes is visible). This view of digital images

¹⁰ The focus here is on photography, but this can be applied to other new media objects.

may also reflect broader changes in narrative from grand narratives, to ones that are more local and limited in scope.

A second characteristic of new media is *modularity*. This refers to how new media are easily incorporated into bigger projects yet can still retain their independence. Manovich uses the example of the World Wide Web where photographs, video, and text can all come together on a website yet still remain independent objects. In this way the new media objects can easily be edited or changed without changing the overall structure (2001:30).

The numerical coding and modular structure of new media allows for the *automation* of many operations in the creation, manipulation, and access to media. With automated technologies come automated processes and ways of organizing, storing and accessing new media (Manovich, 2001:35). Digital cameras offer a great example as they often come with software for editing, transferring, organizing and storing pictures. One argument against automation is that users do not truly understand the process of what they are doing and rely too much on the machine(s) to do the work. The interviews conducted for this thesis suggest that while many processes of photography may have become more automated, there are still multiple methods one can use and a variety of skill levels among users. The processes of photography have definitely not disappeared but they have changed with the use of digital cameras. Users, especially those who were more involved with analogue photography before switching over to digital, also seemed

rather aware of the automation of their technologies and expressed mixed feelings towards it¹¹.

Variability is another of Manovich's characteristics and refers to the variable, mutable, and "liquid" character of new media. As Manovich explains, "Instead of identical copies, a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions. And rather than being created completely by a human author, these versions are often in part automatically assembled by a computer" (2001:36). Resizing a digital image in Photoshop, loading images into a pre-set format on a web page, or making a movie on Windows Movie Maker are just three examples of this shared authorship¹². This also ties into Manovich's view of postmodernity and Photoshop. "Rather than assembling more media recordings of reality, culture is now busy reworking, recombining, and analyzing already accumulated media material" (Manovich cited in Flew, 2005:131). Because it is so "variable" the same new media can be reused multiple times and in multiple ways. In terms of photography, the variable character of new media fits into discussions of stock images.

Lastly new media is easy to *transcode*. Because of its numerical composition and processes of automation new media is easily translated into another format. For example a JPG image can be turned into a BMP or a GIF at the click of a button. Text from a Word document can be translated into HTML or PDF without much effort. Simple, automatic conversions can even bridge the differences between MACs and PCs.

¹¹ See Analysis section for more detail.

¹² See Analysis section for other changes in authorship within digital photography and new ways of sharing.

According to Manovich all of these five characteristics together are what make new media significantly different from old media. Again, while I do not feel these are a complete and irrefutable list, Manovich and Flew present an important starting point for our discussion about digital photography.

The Digital Image

If defining analogue photography was difficult, determining what *digital photography is* is even more so. Tom Ang's *Dictionary of Photography and Digital Imaging*, defines the digital image as:

Image which has been produced by transforming a picture into a digital record followed by reconstruction of the picture on computer screen or other visible medium such as print. Process consists of: (a) Image capture: optical image is scanned or captured by regular array (raster) of picture elements (pixels) (b) Translation or transduction: brightness and color values (if recording in color) are evaluated and recorded together with location or address of each pixel (c) Storage: record is kept in electronic form (d) Output: when digital image is required, electronic record is read for its information in order to reconstruct image using output device such as a monitor screen, printer: each pixel in raster is printed or displayed according to brightness values appropriated for it (e) Reconstruction: when digital image is seen, human eye blends brightness or color values into an integrated picture, with more or less detail according to quality of image (2001:98).

Unlike the analogue photograph, the digital photograph does not exist as an image from the moment of its exposure. According to Ang, it exists only as electronic information.

One of the ways in which digital photography is so radically different from analogue photography is that the digital image is composed of binary code. This suggests that there is an irreplaceable materiality to the image. As Mitchell argues, “although a digital image may look just like a photograph when it is published..., it actually differs profoundly from a traditional photograph as does a photograph from a painting. The difference is grounded in fundamental physical characteristics that have logical and cultural consequences” (2001:4). While analogue images are composed of continuous information, digital images are discrete. Digital images are encoded by “uniformly subdividing the picture plane into a finite Cartesian grid of cells (known as pixels) and specifying the intensity of each cell by means of an integer number drawn from some limited range” (Mitchell, 2001:5). As such, it is argued that while an analogue photograph is composed of limitless information, the digital photograph contains a fixed amount.

It is also argued that the digital image always yields perfect reproductions. And yet, as Lunenfeld points out, “the realities of digital practice prove otherwise” (2001:59). Images must be compressed either for storage or transmission. Each time the image is compressed, expanded, or saved as a different file type (a PSD Photoshop file to JPEG for example) it can be mutated and can suffer degradation. One might even say that, “uncompressing digital images does not reproduce them, it rewrites them” (Lunenfeld, 2001:59). In this respect, digital photographs may not be ‘radically’ different from analogue photographs. Screen resolutions, paper textures, printed qualities, and inks used would also imbue originality to each digital image (Amelunxen et al, 1996:21).

Manipulation and The Real

The algorithmic composition of digital images leads to a second radical characteristic of digital photography also identified by Manovich: manipulation and loss of a referent.

For a century and a half photographic evidence seemed unassailably probative... An interlude of false innocence had passed. Today, as we enter the post-photographic era, we must face once again the ineradicable fragility of our ontological distinctions between the imaginary and the real, the tragic elusiveness of the Cartesian dream (Mitchell cited in Bolter and Grusin, 1999:106).

As Mitchell alludes to in the above quote, photography was characterized by a very particular relationship between object and reality. Despite the camera used, or the chemicals involved, the photograph necessarily represented an object, a moment, an individual that had actually existed at a particular moment and time (Amelunxen et al, 1996:14). As we have already seen, photography was hailed as ‘nature’s paintbrush’, free of human intervention. While we have come to realize the impossibility of objectivity in photography, as the photographer must always chose where to point his or her camera, the direct relationship between reality and the photographed representation of it has encountered little opposition until now. With the advent of the digital, “...the photograph has lost the simple relationship to the real that it previously enjoyed” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999:8). Digital photography has put ‘reality’ into question.

Timothy Druckrey has said that once digitized, the photograph has little to do with photographic systems. He believes the digital photograph is missing the essential characteristic of photography “...that it verify something in the world” (Druckrey cited in

Amelunxen et al, 1996:13). Digital photographs are composed of code and often 'processed' by computers, thus they are seen as easily reproduced and easy to manipulate. Thanks to new technologies such as Adobe Photoshop, a photograph no longer has to have any links with the real world. It is this possibility of being altered and manipulated that has caused many to believe that there has been a 'crises' in photography.

The fact that photographs have a long history of manipulation seems completely overlooked in discourses that focus on digital photography as a technological phenomenon. Theorists such as Mitchell, stress that it is the ease of manipulation and the invisibility of alteration that make digitization so radical. Unlike analogue photographs, which were more surface manipulations, now 'manipulators' can go directly into the image, changing its very substance. Also, the availability of image software puts these tools of 'deceit' into anyone's hands. It is uncertain how we can ever trust an image anymore? Here it is important to question who is using this software, how they may be using it and why? What is the amateur or everyday photographer's understanding and involvement with editing software such as Adobe?

The Proliferation of Images

Another significant difference between digital and analogue photography lies in the amount of photographs taken. While flexible films allowed for the institutionalization of photography the popularity of photography was already established. Ten years after the Daguerreotype was revealed to the public, two thousand cameras were sold in Paris

alone (Berner, 1975:11). Berner estimates that, “by 1853, there were ten thousand American Daguerreotypists, and they made three million pictures that year” (1975:12). This trend of taking extraordinary amounts of pictures has only intensified in the digital age. For example, it is estimated that fourteen million pictures are uploaded onto Facebook everyday (Shipton, 2008:13). In some cases, it is argued that photography is not ‘dead’ because there are no more photographs. Rather it is the sheer proliferation of images that has contributed to this ‘death’ (Sontag 1977, Baudrillard 2000, Taylor and Harris2005). This might also be looked at as an innovative technique for the necessary forgetting that is essential to living in the liquid modern world.

Taylor and Harris use the example of photography to look at the distancing effects of media technology (2005:87). In much the same way that quantum physics has introduced uncertainty into the world of science, photography, by being able to reveal ‘realities’ previously unseen by the human eye, has actually created more distance between reality and our understanding of it. The camera does not only reveal a world invisible to the human eye, but the photograph captures a moment, a fragment of the world. It removes the object from its original context and lets it stand independent. For Taylor and Harris, this de-contextualization and de-signification fit perfectly into the present consumer culture. Photography gives a universal equality to all events, objects, and experiences. We become inundated with images sorted only by their aesthetic differences. Photographs as material objects are themselves consumed, and the promote consumption.

Insofar as photography does peel away the dry wrappers of habitual seeing, it creates another habit of seeing: intense

and cool, solicitous and detached; charmed by the insignificant detail, addicted to incongruity. But photographic seeing has to be constantly renewed with new shocks, whether of subject matter or technique, so as to produce the impression of violating ordinary vision. For challenged but the revelations of photographers, seeing tends to accommodate to photographs (Sontag, 1997:98).

Thus, photography promotes the continual consumption of images without any consideration of their conceptual significance. Photography, it is argued, ruins our ability to be interpretive beings, to make connections between events and experiences.

Everything is seen and reduced to a fragment. “Never before has a period known so little about itself” says Kracauer (1995 [1963]:58 cited in Taylor and Harris, 2005:99). This view of photography mirrors social theories of the information age and the overabundance of information and fragmentation that it produces.

Digital photography then can be said to play an important role in the fragmentation inherent in the liquid modern world. As we have also seen, digital photography, in fact photography itself is also seen as being tightly tied to consumption. Photographic equipment and storage devices are needed in the practice of photography, photographs have been sold for profit, and photography has a history of being used to document particular consumer habits and lifestyles. Another important aspect of photography not yet discussed is how the photograph always captures a moment that has passed, which remains true even with the instantaneity of digital photographs.

French theorist Jean Baudrillard holds a particularly unique view of photography, which privileges the object. He believes that it is the object that does all the work, not the subject behind the camera. The object seduces the viewer into taking the picture.

Significant for this thesis is Baudrillard's understanding of why the object wants to be photographed. He writes,

If something wants to be photographed it is precisely because it does not want to yield up its meaning; it does not want to be reflected upon. It wants to be seized directly, violated on the spot, and illuminated in its detail. If something wants to become an image, this is not so as to last, but in order to disappear more effectively (2000:129).

Many photographers and writers on the subject have found photography to be a 'nostalgic' endeavor. Sontag writes, "all photographs are *momento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (1977:15). Christian Metz explores this link between death and photography. He insists that because photography is silent and still, it is more likely to become a fetish; in this case a fetish to preserve time and life (in Squiers 1990). Remarkably, photography is often said to have become an 'obsessive' activity (Calvino cited in Taylor and Harris (2005); Freed (2006)). Precisely when the belief in progress no longer exists, as boundaries collapse, as everything becomes information, and uncertainty proliferates every belief, there are more photographs. Why?

In short, photography has a strange relationship with death and the past, yet also with the preservation of memories and events etc... that make it a very interesting area in which to explore Bauman's theories. Yet, positioning digital photography as the necessary photography for a liquid modern world would be dependent on certain key elements. First, it is necessary to ask what is happening on the ground, in the lives of everyday people in their use and understanding of digital photography? Is photography

still concerned with the preservation of memories and for how long? Are people still making albums, a record of past decisions and lifestyles that could be interpreted as a risk in a liquid modern environment? What are people taking pictures of? If pictures are still being taken of birthday parties, family get-togethers, weddings, and other traditionally photographed events, then digitization may not have changed the practice of photography as radically as Mitchell (2001), for example, suggests.

Digitization has also raised important concerns over ownership and the disappearance of traditional boundaries between producers and consumers, as well as between public and private spheres. Digital photography, as a tool for identity exploration, construction or deconstruction, and affirmation is particularly interesting in this regard. “Personal photographs are made specifically to portray the individual or the group to which they belong as *they would wish to be seen* and as they have chosen to show themselves to one another” (Wells, 2000:121). These personal photographs have typically been displayed in family albums, and shown primarily to close friends and family. Today however, with the new possibilities of the Internet and digital compatibility, personal photographs have the potential of finding wider audiences. Who then is the primary audience for the digital photographs? To what extent are people taking advantage of the opportunity to share their photographs with a ‘world wide’ audience? What types of narratives are being told through the use of digital photography? Does photography continue to be an important tool for creating and sustaining identity?

Online albums and digital scrapbooks return to questions of the materiality of the image. Does the material (digital or analogue, electronically stored data or print) really

matter? It all depends on how the photographs are being used, by whom, and how they are understood. If people are using digital cameras yet are still having all their pictures printed out, then to what extent is digital photography different from previous practices? The fact that some pictures may be printed out while others are used only online might suggest that, despite the proliferation of images, people continue to distinguish between different types of photographs. Also, what is the connection and attachment to digital photographs? Wells (2003) points out that often the family albums are of such importance to people and their sense of identity and history that they are among the top items people insist they would try and save in the case of a fire. Are digital photographs (due to their sheer number, their digital storage, their easy sharing etc...) still so valuable?

Conclusion

This chapter looks at the forever uncertain and changing nature of what *is* a photograph, and what it means to practice photography. Right from the beginning, the idea of what a photograph is, and should be, has been debated. Some view photography as a direct imprint of reality, others see photography as a creative, subjective activity. Despite the initial and continued uncertainty over what is photography, some explanations and practices have come to dominate. The technical side of photography has emerged as one of the most important characteristics of determining what counts as a photograph. This has led current discussions on photography to center around the dichotomy between analogue photography (in which black and white film photography is

the ‘truest’ photography) and digital photography. This overlooks the impact of the many other technological changes photography has undergone including the mass production of photography by Kodak and the introduction of color. Focusing primarily on the technical aspect of photography fails to look at how photography is the result of a mutual constitution. This can be seen when looking at Manovich’s characteristics of new media.

Manovich presents a clear set of technical definitions that characterize new media. Often overlooked is how these technical attributes are mutually constituted with the social conditions digital photographers find themselves in. For example, seeing analogue photography as continuous and digital as discrete and limited reflects more general changes in narrative, from grand narratives to ones that are more local and limited in scope. Modularity, variability and transcoding come into play in an environment of multiple, competing narratives that can be produced simultaneously. This is essential to providing the vast array of choices and lifestyles needed to create and maintain a sense of identity in the absence of more traditional sources. Also, focusing on the potential for manipulation as a key characteristic of digital photography, as well as its automation and easy dissemination reflects greater concerns over finding the ‘truth’, or choosing wisely in an environment of risk, fragmentation, and constant change; of looking for something solid in a liquid world.

What remains missing from this analysis of analogue and digital photography is how these changes are interpreted and encountered in the everyday practice of photography. Mitchell (2001) writes his book “*The Reconfigured Eye*” as though everyone who engages with digital photography necessarily knows about its ‘digital

functions'. While he provides an in-depth look at the many filters, channels, colors, and possibilities for manipulations, Mitchell never looks at who is actually doing this, and for what purpose? For example, despite having all these possibilities of adjustment and manipulation at their disposal, "...the primary newspaper use of this technology in respect to images is in adjusting color and "burning and dodging" as in traditional black-and-white darkroom procedures" (Amelunxen et al, 1996:42). Fashion and advertising industries make more use of these new possibilities for manipulation, but they have a long history of modifying or 'correcting' photographs. Both of these examples questions the impact new digital tools have had on traditional uses of photography. How have these changes been received and in what ways (if any) have they been incorporated into the existing practices and routines of the everyday photographer? While there is so much emphasis on the manipulability of the digital image, the number of people actually engaged with manipulating or altering photographs may be very small. The reception and understanding of digital photographs at the everyday level might show that, in fact, photography has not changed very much.

Much concern is placed on the fact that digital images "...can present a possible world rather than an actual one" (Mitchell, 2001:200). Calyseen insists that a photograph can no longer be looked at any differently that a painting (in Amelunxen et al, 1996:78). However, how important is the 'unaltered' photograph, or the guarantee of authenticity to different users? While the 'truth' of the image is very important to photojournalists, it may not be as essential for Facebook users. It is only in trying to address some of these questions that we can begin to get a more rounded and complete picture of digital

photography. However convincingly digital photography appears to match the liquid modern environment, this is only so in theory. It remains to be seen what it is people are actually doing. What are their reasons for taking up digital photography? How do people use their digital cameras? Is the role of digital photographs and digital photography significantly different from analogue photography? Just because the technical possibilities for instant sharing and manipulation, for example, exist, does not mean that people are necessarily using them. Understanding more about what is involved in taking the digital turn and how it is understood might also help to situate Bauman's theories about liquid modernity in actual lived experience. Overall, it is argued that only in doing so can we begin to see the complexity that, too often, continues to be overlooked when theorizing about the contemporary situation and its digital technologies.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

The key conceptual, substantive and ethical elements of the qualitative interviewing method used in this thesis were structured around that of a larger SSHRC funded project conducted by my supervisor. The larger project aims to map and explore a range of contexts within which digital imaging and photography are emerging as coherent practices. Although the larger research project examines four sample populations: institutional archiving and collation, amateur photographic clubs, university students, and individual households, this thesis focused specifically on students (see sample selection). The interview based material in this thesis has pursued one of these contexts – the university – in terms of attempting to generate some insights into how everyday, or personal digital photography, may be emerging through open-ended interviews. A central element of these interviews has been to simply establish the variety of ways people are adopting and engaging with ‘new’ digital photographic technologies. In this thesis, the interview focus has been on how such engagements relate to the more general themes of memory, narrative, identity, and visual representation, each heavily contested in both social and technological discourses. While there have been significant changes in both narrative and photography, I have suggested that much of the existing research misses the potential variation in each, often stating that there has been a ‘death’ in narrative, or a ‘death’ in photography. Both such positions require some grounding in terms of whether

they have resonance or help us understand the practices of individuals who are actually engaged in taking the digital turn in the case of photography. Clearly, this thesis can offer only a glimpse into what may be some of the dominant and emerging trends and trajectories of digital photographic practices.

The decision to interview students was based on a number of reasons. First, digital camera ownership among eighteen to twenty-four year olds is relatively high, and it is this group that is seen by marketers as more likely to adopt camera-phones and other associated ‘convergent technologies’. Secondly, university life presents a unique environment. Many students find themselves on their own for the first time and away from parental supervision. University in many ways represents the beginning of a transition towards an ‘independent’ life. This is significant because the vast majority of research on personal photography has focused, understandably, around the family album (Spence & Holland 1991; Wells 2003). But what happens when students move away from the home in relation to narrative construction? Other points of interest include how images are used to capture and communicate campus ‘events’, how they can be used to establish and maintain new social ties, and how images might be used to mediate values such as ‘trust’, ‘belonging’, ‘identity’, ‘memory’, and so on. Thirdly, digital photography has been increasingly marketed to a younger audience, more so than film photography ever was (for example Disney has a ‘children’s digital camera’ on the market). There are many reasons for this, but other research has shown that, within the household, digital cameras are much more likely to be used by children than film cameras, and that households now contain many cameras (Shove et. al. 2007). But it is not clear how

(digital) photography is used by those leaving home to create and document their memories (if that is what they are doing), and for these reasons students are a particularly interesting group to study.

The Interviews

The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews is well documented as one of the best methods for achieving the level of detail necessary for an analysis of people's everyday practices while still being able to address a number of key thematic questions (see Denzin, 2003). In enabling participants to elaborate at length on a particular theme, or introduce a novel direction, and be as descriptive as possible, such a method is particularly suitable for exploratory research. This is especially true perhaps in this case, where it is precisely the speed and potential novelty of an emerging set of technological practices that is to be explored. Some of this would arguably be missed through a more structured or broader scoped technique such as structured interviewing or surveys. Also, there are discrepancies between data that would be captured through purely textual means and the same individual's explanatory accounts that often come to light in an interview situation. For example, while some respondents used the social networking site 'Facebook' for image related purposes, the discussions of how and why, and the variety of such discussions could not have been captured through a more quantitative or numerical picture of Facebook using students. Similarly, some of the detail I managed to

generate about relations between film and digital would have been difficult to capture through other means.

The aim for this thesis was to recruit and interview eight Queen's University undergraduate students as part of a larger purposive and snowball sample of 20 for the wider project. While aiming for a sample which corresponds to the undergraduate demographic, this was not central to the very small sample of eight needed for this thesis. Recruitment for this kind of interviewing is difficult and has become more so partly to the sheer numbers of requests from academics but also the market research sector (Savage and Burrows, 2007). Students were recruited in three ways: poster advertisements around the main campus; through undergraduate classes; and through 'snowballing'. In terms of gender, the sample consisted primarily of female students. The participants varied in age from twenty to twenty-nine years old, most being in their early twenties. Of the eight participants, only two were male. This was not purposive and was simply an outcome of participants' availability. As the issue of the gendered aspects of photography and digitization were not organizing themes of the thesis, the impact of gender in the practice of digital photography remains an interesting area for further research.

The interviews were conducted on the Queen's main campus in quiet study rooms. Each of the interviews lasted approximately one hour. A digital recorder was used to record the interviews, which were then transcribed. A key aspect of the interviews was the focus on the material objects and the ways in which interviews talked about them and showed aspects of them; participants were also asked to bring in their digital cameras and

laptops (if they had them). During the interview, participants were encouraged to show their cameras and images (subject to privacy). This was part of a set of additional cues in the interview schedule (see Appendix) to observe the participants' familiarity with their camera(s) (including its different functions), as well as their ease with the different technologies involved with digital photography. Only one participant did not bring a camera to the interview because it was forgotten at home on the bureau.

Having argued previously that in order to understand the detail, discontinuity or continuity of digital photography we have to explore *changing* images, technologies and practices, the interview guidelines tried to incorporate this in a number of ways. First, respondents were asked to explain their story of 'going digital'. Here participants were asked questions about their camera. For example, participants were asked how and why they chose that particular camera, and some aspects that they liked and disliked about it. Things like size, brand, and accessories bought with the camera were taken into account. Participants were also asked what kind of engagement they had with film photography and why, or how, they made the decision to 'go digital'. Here I was also looking for how prior photographic narratives may continue to shape new engagements, and how technological and social factors come together to shape the participants use and understanding of digital photography. In addition, participants were asked what they typically used their camera for, and what they considered to be 'photographable' subjects. Here the focus was on the varied ways in which digital cameras differed from film cameras as they are actually used.

To get a sense of participants' engagement with the apparently definitive 'manipulation' and 'instantaneity' of digital cameras, respondents were asked where they did most of their editing (if any), for example on the camera, on the computer, or somewhere else. They were also asked what types of software(s) they used. Questions surrounding the storage and distribution of digital photographs offered a glimpse into the materiality of digital images, their value, and how participants understood these digital images as distinctive or indistinctive in relation to film. For example, not all photographs were equally valued. Some appeared on Facebook, some remained on PC hard drives, and others were backed up on external hard drives. These types of questions would be useful in looking at the status of meaning in a digital and image inundated environment. Questions about storage methods and display would be useful in looking at changes in archiving and could point to differences in the type of personal narratives kept through photographs and which of these are shared and with whom. Additional questions surrounding the use, production, and sharing of digital images would also help to explore whether digital photography does actually destabilize key distinctions between production and consumption, and what types of changes might be occurring between private and public domains and 'events'. Together these questions provided a richer set of ideas about the variability and diversity among the participants and their engagements with photography. All of the questions required participants to discuss different types of narrative: of photography, representation, identity, insecurity, and so on.

Limitations

The small number of participants has clear limitations for the scope of the findings. The purpose of this empirical part of the thesis is therefore not to construct a definitive account of digital photographic practice. It is to shed new light on emerging tendencies in order to question some of the grander claims made in theory, and to provide starting points for further research and analysis. In terms of the actual interviews, it was not always possible to extend the interview beyond one hour and this was occasionally frustrating where it was clear to me that more time would have produced an even richer account. As many participants said, photography is such a huge topic that the discussions could easily go over an hour if there were no other constraints on people's time. Similarly, many interesting points were only discussed after the recorder was turned off and the interview 'over'. In another way, there are inherent problems in trying to gain access to everyday life in terms of the boundaries of privacy and intimacy, and the fact that people are often simply reserved when asked, for example, about whether they took photographs just for themselves. In that, participants often expressed a shyness and self-consciousness. Thus, participants were more reserved in discussing certain aspects of their engagement with photography. For example, it was noticeable that few respondents mentioned taking their own self-portrait with their camera, and yet anecdotally we see that the self-portrait is 'everywhere' on Facebook, a fact that many participants did bring up in relation to what others may be doing. Either these eight students simply did not take self-portraits, or the idea was less conventional and more intimidating to discuss. Finally, it is important to note that many of the findings here might have been quite different in

relation to other groups of people. Most obviously, most of these students (though not all) do not have a long history of doing film photography, which may change the ways in which they approach digital photography.

Analysis

Once transcribed, the interviews were analyzed according to the key themes of the thesis: narratives, images, and technologies in terms of how these relate to the move from film to digital photography. I used the following broad questions as a way of beginning to organize the interview data more systematically:

- How have digital cameras and related technologies become attached to particular practices such as image sharing, storage and display?
- How have film and digital photography been distinguished in the interviews?
- Are digital cameras replacing film cameras or do they exist side by side?
- What are the most common ‘problems’ associated with digital photography? What kinds of ‘solutions’ are proposed by interviewees?
- What are the most significant factors in shaping how digital cameras were adopted and used?
- Are the uses of digital cameras discussed in terms of memory and narrative? In what ways?
- Do interviewees talk about producing and controlling all aspects of image making?
- How are digital images selected and interpreted?
- What is the range of situations where digital cameras are used? Has this changed?

Chapter 5

Taking the Digital Turn

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I showed how technical shifts in photography have always produced discussions about the changing relationship between photographic images and the ‘reality’ they are supposed to capture. This has been upfront in discussions about shifts from film to digital, which have often been portrayed as the ‘end’ or the ‘death’ of photography. In this chapter I will suggest that the shift from film to digital is, in reality, enacted by those doing photography and that, at its simplest, ‘taking the digital turn’ involves and means many different things. The interview material presented here sheds some light on this diversity even among a small number of people. The varied rationales for and understandings of ‘going digital’ ask us to reconsider the dominate accounts of digital photography and the extent to which digitization itself – as the conversion of analogue processes into digital ones - impacts or changes existing practices and beliefs. For example, can digital photography be considered ‘new media’ in the ways that Manovich (2001) and others suggest when it is perceived and practiced by users in a rather conventional form? By looking at what it means to take the digital turn among the student community we begin to see the unfolding mix of convention and innovation that makes up digital photography. Although the so-called digital turn can be looked at in a number of ways, I have constructed five categories which emerged in each of the interviews that seemed in some ways to define the shifts: new materials, instantaneity,

manipulation, production and consumption, and photographic content. I will discuss each of these in turn

New Materials

Taking the digital turn inevitably means adopting new materials such as cameras, software, storage devices, computers, and so on. In this section I describe how interviewees responded to the proliferation of new technologies associated with digital photography, going on to discuss how the acquisition itself needs to be understood in relation to ideas about what image making and sharing is for. For some these are welcomed changes and a chance to engage more ‘creatively’ with photography. Others feel pressured into adopting these new materials and insist photography – as a distinctive way of producing images - had suffered a loss once it goes digital. The respondents interviewed were divided on their decision to go digital, often describing a mix of changing technology and a desire for more pictures and more technical features as the deciding factors. The choice of camera seemed particularly important to the users’ senses of, and engagement with photography. As Hannah explains: “I think I would think of digital photography a lot more if I went out and saw different models and which worked best for me rather than just a hand me down”. Often, the reaction to both the digital camera and digital photography was framed by respondents’ previous practice of photography. Respondents who had owned film SLR cameras, and had often developed their own photographs, expressed more dissatisfaction with the digital ‘point and shoot’

cameras. Those who had a more limited engagement with photography before going digital often expressed excitement over the new features on their digital cameras, but also often insisted that they liked the pre-set settings and automatic detection. As Laura put it, “I like the point and shoot and you can change the exposure a little bit, you can turn the flash on and off, but it’s not ridiculously complicated”. In fact, despite the variety of features, settings and accessories available, respondents tended to focus around only a handful of important camera characteristics. One of these was the size of the camera.

Size often played an important role in initially choosing a camera. For Hannah, Crystal, and Jason, the decision to go digital was influenced by the easy portability or mobility of digital cameras. All bought their particular cameras before extensive traveling. Crystal chose the same camera as her sister before embarking on a trip to Europe; Jason bought both his SLR camera and his Lumix point and shoot before leaving on his different trips. He explains that the SLR was great for his more artistic shots while temporarily living in the U.K., and his point and shoot was small enough to be carried on his cycling trip across Canada. Yet, not everyone was as excited with their decision to go digital. Hannah states that she was really against going digital for a long time. She explained that, “...at some point I guess I kind of gave in to the idea that ... especially when I was traveling, this was the choice, the only option that I thought was most accessible”. However, she adds that overall her decision to go digital was based on a sense of inevitable and external technological change:

I remember buying a black and white film and not being pleased with the results. And he [her father] was like, you can’t really expect anything better, that film’s being sitting there for so long, it’s not like they’re making more film

canisters. They've stopped pretty much. And so when you buy it at the drugstore...like it should not have that long a shelf life but it has now. As soon as I heard that I was like, why spend money on that when it's not going to produce what I want?

Previously Hannah had also developed her own photographs in the darkroom. However she explains that the darkroom in Kingston had been closed down and was not going to re-open. For Hannah, this quite literal disappearance and replacement of film canisters and other film related necessities with new digital materials was an important factor in her decision to go digital.

In addition to the size of the camera, many respondents said they were motivated to make the switch because of the many new features offered by digital cameras. Laura insists she really wanted a camera with a zoom function. Since going digital she has enjoyed playing with other settings such as 'night'. Julie also wanted a camera with a zoom. She describes her decision to go digital as a 'snap decision': "I went out and bought a camera on a whim, like this camera, I went to Black's and it was like a demo model, just so that I could take pictures of flowers." The video option also attracted a fair bit of attention and was most often used to capture moments that could not easily be captured or expressed through still photography. These included loons out on the lake, a medieval dinner jousting tournament, dance recitals, skateboarding tricks and promotion, and a bus ride backwards up a cliff. The methods for distributing or sharing these videos were significant in determining their usefulness in the first place. Erin, who was on exchange at Queen's at the time of our interview and considered herself a 'blogger', said that she is not very fond of using the video option because it is very difficult to send these

to her friends because they are such large files. Danielle on the other hand, a keen user of Facebook, really liked the video option and said it would be easy to share and upload them. She added that these videos are "...what makes it really fun memories, when you can look back and go that's hilarious and like, you can see it. Seeing it is one thing, but like hearing it, that's so much more". Jason also liked being able to take and share his videos through various blogging sites and Google Video. Laura on the other hand felt these videos were great as personal memories and did not have to be distributed in this way. Julie also mentioned how making the videos could become a bonding experience with others. Alex, with his interest in photojournalism, expressed the most distain for the convergence between photography and video:

"I'm starting to get really bitter I guess you could say, about working in this kind of field for awhile. Because I don't really want to get into video and I don't really want to get into making movies. I'm not a movie maker, I'm a picture maker".

While the traditional film companies such as Eastman Kodak have all had to adjust (successfully or not) to the new digital market, the respondents still indicated a strong brand preference, the number one being Canon.¹³ Erin's present camera is a Sony. She said she picked the Sony for its aesthetics, "because Canon was a bit more bulky and I prefer things that [are] slim". She says she regrets her choice now and wishes she had gone with the Canon. "Canon is easier to use. This one requires you to change the settings a bit. That you have to be sure what you're going to take and I feel Canon has a

better image quality”. Erin adds that as soon as she gets back to Singapore she has plans to buy a new Canon. Julie describes herself as a Canon fan because they are easy to use and give good quality pictures. “Canon was just...like it’s a solid brand, people produce good photos. People are always happy with it. I like the way the cameras work. I never got one back [during her experience working at Black’s photo store in Kingston].” Alex also has a Canon SLR camera. He says that the brand preference also exists in photojournalism where there are two main kinds of brands or companies that make cameras, Nikon and Canon, which are known for their durability and speed.

While important, the camera was not the only item needed in order to engage in digital photography. The respondents, to varying degrees, were aware of the vast range of accessories that came with the decision to go digital. Together respondents mentioned specialized batteries and chargers, computers, camera cases (including an underwater case), flashes, and lenses. Erin mentions receiving a mini tripod with her camera but says she does not know when she would ever use it. Alex bought some studio lights to further explore his interest in portraiture. Jason mentions using Bluetooth technology to move his pictures wirelessly as well as using his family’s digital projector for slideshows. Built in SD card readers were also very popular.

Another key issue here is how the digital format of the pictures also requires new methods of storage. Respondents all made some mention of backing up their pictures on the computer’s hard drive, CDs, DVDs, and/or external hard drives. A number of

¹³ Five out of the eight respondents owned a Canon. Of those that did not, two owned a Sony (one of which was planning to go back to Canon) and the last respondent did not mention the brand of camera. One respondent who owned a Canon also owned a Lumix Panasonic camera.

different software programs were also used for transferring, sharing, organizing, and editing pictures. Over half of the respondents owned a version of Adobe Photoshop. Alex describes Adobe (along with a program called Photo Mechanic) as being “as essential as the camera”. All software programs were not equally valued. In fact, respondents seemed to want to keep their use of different software programs to a minimum. “I hate all those things that come with the camera,” says Jason. “All that software, I just hate it”. Another example is Erin who says she got the Sony ‘uploader’ with her camera purchase but refused to use it. “I didn’t use that because I didn’t want too many programs on my computer and because this (the software that came on her laptop) works fine”. Despite the many software programs out there, the only additional ones mentioned by the respondents were Thumbs, i-photo, and Photo Mechanic, all ‘photo browsing’ programs.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the new technologies of digital photography have the potential to bring almost all aspects of photography into the hands of the amateur photographer. In other words, it is possible to assemble a range of new materials such that doing photography might now be considered privatized. How these technologies are put together and how this shapes the production, storage and sharing of digital images is important here. Editing software programs allow people to edit their own pictures, and smaller, better quality and even mobile printers allow them to print from home or on the move. Respondents however expressed varying views on printing from home. Erin has printed pictures both at a shop kiosk and on her home printer, which came with a built in card reader. Hannah has also printed some pictures out on her mother’s printer. For the most part however, printing out your own photographs was considered too expensive and

unnecessary now that albums tend to be digital. “I don’t really think photo printers are worth a whole lot,” Jason explained. “I printed some, like through the printer in the past, but I didn’t really like them”. Similarly, Crystal says she sends her photographs off to be printed. “It would be too expensive to print them yourself and the quality just isn’t as good”.

Interestingly, all respondents agreed that along with the new materials of digital photography comes a new set of skills. Danielle describes her first encounter with a digital camera as ‘weird’, and says that even after two years she is still learning how to work the different features of her camera. Many of the respondents expressed an interest in learning more about the technical aspects of their cameras. For the most part the respondents learned this new set of skills by experimenting and through friends. As Alex points out, this new skill set is not necessarily more difficult to learn. The number of programs and features now available, combined with the conveniences of digital photography has opened the doors for a more ‘creative engagement’ with photography. As the respondents felt freer to take pictures they expressed a new interest in learning about photography, its techniques, and what else could be done with an image. The acquisition of new technologies clearly open up alternative possibilities of image making and sharing, while not telling us much about the variety of actual uses or how they come to be as they are.

Instantaneity

As Manovich (2001) points out, ‘instantaneity’ is a central principle of new media. For digital photography this means instant pictures, instant corrections, instant deleting, and instant sharing. This had often been discussed in terms of how we live in ‘real time’, and that this no longer gives us time to reflect and be critical of what we see in front of us (Bauman 2007; Lash 2002). The interviews conducted revealed a range of views about and practices of the instantaneity of digital photography. Jason’s response was particularly interesting. He was fascinated by the camera’s ability to both ‘speed up’ and ‘slow down’ time. Despite the perceived relation between photography and reality, photography, even with its instantaneous capabilities, always reveals a “*momento mori*”, and often reveals snapshots of the world the way we never see it with our own eyes. Jason mentions examples of freezing a second in time, but also using long exposures that end up capturing a sequence of ‘time passing’. Jason used this technique to photograph the façade from the Acropolis in the British Museum, London. The people who were moving are just a blur, while the façade shows up perfectly clear. Here Jason raises doubts about the possibility of having ‘instant pictures’ while also hinting at a fascination with suspense and slowness; an appreciation that, while seemingly challenged by digital technologies, may also be preserved through its ‘absence’.

Laura best captured the strange contradiction between wanting ‘instant pictures’, yet missing the ‘waiting period’ of film photographs as they are developed elsewhere:

“There is the excitement of getting your pictures back and seeing them, which I don’t get anymore, which I kind of miss, I’m not going to lie. Although I do like seeing the pictures immediately, I do like not seeing the pictures also”

For Hannah, despite her reluctance to go digital, what was seen as the ‘convenience’ of instantaneity was hard to pass up:

It seems like more of a hassle cause you just throw them on your computer you can see them right away and share them right away. Whereas, you know, you have to wait till you finish the roll, wait for developing, pay for it...I totally understand why it's being phased out in that sense, that it's a lot more of an effort, but it's strange that it's satisfying enough to see it on just your screen.

Alex adds that going digital and being instantaneous is the nature of the industry that he works in. While Alex speaks more specifically about journalism, this sentiment was reflected in the majority of the interviews. It may be tempting to say that social and technological pressures to ‘speed things up’ are the root cause here and are unavoidable, yet respondents had unique ways of engaging with and sometimes resisting these. For example, Alex continues to use his film camera for his ‘personal photographs’ and Hannah accumulates a large number of images before sharing them. For the most part, the instantaneity of digital photography was not discussed in terms of wanting to speed up the process. The idea of instant pictures was rather taken for granted and lost within a list of other factors that made going digital a beneficial choice. This was particularly apparent when talking about LCD screens and viewfinders. For example, Erin was so used to seeing the instant picture of the back of her camera she did not even notice that she did not have a viewfinder until our interview.

The differences in cost emerged as an important rationale in accounting for the benefit and appeal of instant pictures. “It seemed like more of an investment before,”

Julie explains. “You know, cause you’d be paying more money with film and I just don’t want to waste my film.... Now, because it’s so easy to take pictures, I would just do whatever and take pictures”. Similarly, Crystal said, “I don’t have to pay for film and I don’t have to print them. And yet I can have tones of pictures of things that I would never have”. Danielle and Laura also mentioned how digital photography freed them from ‘worrying about the cost of film’ and ‘choosing their pictures carefully’. Again, without the concern for the cost of film and developing, most respondents felt they could engage with image making and sharing photography in quite different ways.

For example, the instantaneity of digital photography was viewed as safeguard against disappointing photographs. Crystal recounted this past experience with a film camera:

...We went to New York with our high school class, the grad trip. And every picture that I took, every picture that my sister took, came out awful. Every single one of them...we have a picture of the statue of liberty and her head looks like a giant green ball of blur. So with the digital camera you can look at it, you can have tones of pictures.

Alex says that being able to instantly correct or retake a photograph is why digital photography has become indispensable to photojournalism, which demands speed and efficiency in the editorial process. Yet, while Alex admits he feels this has made his work better, it also destroys the ‘science’ and skill behind taking a good photograph:

Nowadays I find that the learning curve with digital is different and, it’s like people will take a picture and then they’ll... I’m just talking about professional or semi-professionals, or people who use SLRs, they’ll take a picture and then they’ll look at the back of the camera and

they'll say, oh it's too dark, and then they'll adjust the shutter. But I don't think that they're thinking, like fundamentally thinking about why, like what they're doing, like how they're manipulating the light. They're just kind of looking at it in a very aesthetic basis or whatever, but they're not really understanding that technical theory behind it. So that's something that film helps you learn... Like I know it's more expensive and stuff, but you know, photography's never been a cheap thing to get into.

Here Alex reflects fears that automation and digitization 'destroy' or co-opt valuable skills of the trade. As discussed in Chapter 3, this is a common and recurring theme within discourses on photography. Bourdieu (1991) argued that this fear is a way of keeping the prestige of 'good photography' among the professionals, which Alex makes specific reference to. Yet, from another angle, as we have seen digital photography has done anything but diminish the interest in photographic technique. It seems that new skills have emerged rather than a simple disappearance of skill or 'de-skilling'. All respondents made some indication of wanting to learn more about their cameras and about photography (both theory and technique). Respondents also made numerous mentions of the new disappointments or 'technical disasters' with digital photography. Everything from apartment fires, computer failures, memory card corruptions, and the uncertain future of storage devices such as CDs and DVDs. In other words, for the interviewees' digital photography and its instantaneity seemed to solve one set of problems associated with lack of skill but created others, which require ongoing learning.

Instantaneity may be a taken for granted feature by users, but it arguably has had profound effects on the conventional practice of photography. The instantaneity of digital photography has had significant implications for the production and consumption of

photographs and has changed the range of photographable subjects and moments. Before discussing this however, it is important to look at how instantaneity has also played a key role in relation to the notion of ‘manipulation’. As discussed previously, it is this that has most often led to claims of the ‘death of photography’ (Mitchell 2001).

Manipulation

The potential for manipulation within digital photography is perhaps the most obvious and discussed feature of going digital. The most important aspect of a photograph, that it represents an actual subject or event, can be challenged through digital manipulation. While technological theorists (such as William Mitchell) speculate about the possibilities of deception implied by the technology, the interviews conducted for this thesis reveal a rather limited engagement with manipulation, and a conventional understanding of its uses. Again, while the *potential* of manipulation is so prominent in new media, people appear to engage with it in very different ways, suggesting that there is an unacknowledged or understated diversity in the practice of digital manipulation.

It is worth reiterating firstly that photography has never existed without the possibility or the practice of manipulation. Although Mitchell (2001) focuses on the digital image itself, the five types of manipulation he presents can apply to both analogue and digital technologies. The first form of manipulation is *denotation and existence*. Photographs denote objects, persons, or events about which something may then be said (Mitchell 2001:195). Often taken as proof that something exists, photographs can easily fool us. For example, photographs have been used as proof that the Loch Ness monster,

UFO's, or fairies actually exist. A less dramatic example is given by Wells in relation to personal photography, in which she explores how the poor in the early 20th century often chose photographs of themselves that depicted a lifestyle and comfort above that of their ordinary lives (2000:136-141).

A second type of manipulation is *insertion*. In a studio portrait Walt Whitman is photographed with a fake butterfly perched on his finger. As Mitchell says, the photograph "...told the truth – at least about some things – but did not restrict itself to nothing but the truth" (2001:196). While it may have been more a statement about Whitman's personality, it is still an example of the types of manipulation possible within analogue photography. *Effacements and elisions* are the third type of manipulation. Undesirable objects and/or people have been erased from photographs. One of the more famous examples is Trotsky being erased from a photograph of Lenin giving a speech from 1920. If people and objects can be erased, they can also be *substituted*. An example comes from the United States in which the heads of early political figures were substituted and rearranged so that different individuals could appear as though they had been photographed together. This is similar to Mitchell's last form of manipulation: *Anachronistic Assemblage*. Photographs can be used to show what did happen, for example, that a meeting did take place. However, they can also be used to show events that did not take place. An early example is a photograph from 1890 of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec painting a portrait of his 'double' who sits posing on the stool beside him.

Again, despite the increased potential to manipulate an image, stemming from the aforementioned privatization of the whole process, the respondents did little more than edit the most basic components like shadows, contrast, and redeye. Those who were more familiar with Adobe software sometimes added borders to their images, or would make a collage of them, but did little to alter the actual content. Often, the more manipulated photographs remained in the respondents' personal collections. Julie for example, said she once pasted her face in the photographs of some celebrities just for fun. She was going to put them up on Facebook but then decided against it. Crystal says she and her sister sometimes make magazines or advertisements on the computer. But says:

That's not something you usually print and show people because it's not, I don't know, I would feel kind of awkward showing people, like 'here, look, here's me airbrushed...'. So it's not something I'd put in an album that I'd want to show people. That would be something that I keep on my computer, and just for fun show it to the people that helped make it or something like that.

Jason practiced the most extreme manipulation when he erased a father from an image he had taken in an Abbey.

I've got a couple pictures, like I've got one that I thought it would look a lot better, it sounds horrible, if a certain person weren't in it. Um, and that's because it was like two kids in this ruined abbey, and they were like running through the abbey and I thought it looked really cool, but then their dad was like half stepping out from behind a pillar. And I thought that just kind of ruined it. So I just kind of took him out. I kind of took pieces from all the other parts of the picture and just kind of rebuilt a column instead of him. So I thought that made the picture better.

Danielle was perhaps most enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by programs such as Adobe Photoshop. She feels like being able to manipulate the photo can make it '100 times better':

Well you can take away blemishes, you can take away redest, like you can... like I even heard there's a new camera that you can click on the person and make them skinnier so that they look thinner than they actually are, which is sort of like deceiving but kind of good in a way. Because if people don't actually see you really recently then you could like trick them to think that you're a lot thinner than you are.

When asked whether she was concerned about the deception Danielle replied:

Well... I mean it's not really representing your true self if you're able to make someone skinner. I would be more interested in taking away blemishes and small stuff like that, like... or like I think you can even smooth out a wrinkle a little bit. So like that would be something I think would be kind of fun.

In each of these examples the respondents were aware of the manipulations they could perform, but appeared uninterested in changing the content of their photographs in any radical way. While Alex said photojournalists have to adhere to a strict practice of editing, it would seem that, despite the absence of such standards, all the respondents felt the presence of a similar 'code'. At the level of technical possibilities, and of abstract theory, reality may be increasingly problematized, but these everyday photographers were working hard to keep their images close to the 'truth'. The skill needed for more radical manipulations was also a factor. While some respondents seemed interested in taking courses or experimenting to learn more, most felt it was not really important. "I

haven't had the time," Laura explains. And "I wouldn't go out and buy the software. It's not that important to me". Julie says she cannot be bothered, "it's not that high on my priority list". Taking the lead from Jason who was more interested in the artistic quality of his photograph, we might consider whether the manipulations offered by digital photography are taken up more by the 'artistic photographer' than the everyday one.

Production and Consumption

...when we were kids we'd always [go to] professional photographers, you'd go to the wooden looking stage set or whatever it was and you'd get the picture taken... And then the photographer would write on them in gold pen, I always thought that looked really stupid, she's signing me?... Family photography now is like ... an in house production (Jason).

The comment above reflects an important change taking place with digitization. Digital photography is often seen as radically changing the traditional relationship between producers and consumers, between artists and audience. Amateur digital photographers can now produce and consume their own images. Thanks to the new materials and the instantaneity of digital photography, the whole process of taking, developing, and sharing photographs can all be done in a private or individualized setting. Although this seems to follow a trend first introduced by Kodak and its slogan "you press the button and we do the rest", it is now intensified. Respondents were aware of these changes in authorship.

The proliferation of digital cameras, and the 'freedom' to photograph that comes with them, has led to an almost infinite supply of images; any event attended, any

unusual, or even usual occasion, has been captured by the camera. Many of the respondents said that they worry less about some of their pictures because they are easy to replace. Respondents also felt less pressure to carry around their own cameras or take their own pictures. Laura for example says, “It’s [her camera] just bulky, so I don’t take it when I go out with my friends in Kingston. A lot of my friends have smaller...cameras. So they take pictures and I get them off Facebook rather than taking my big camera.” Now that everyone has a camera, Laura mentions that only using one can also save time: “Because sometimes there will be three or four of us posing in a picture and it’s just, instead of having... instead of having to use 3 or 4 cameras, we use one camera”. For Crystal, who says she hates having to carry a purse, the proliferation of cameras meant she did not have to worry about losing those memories:

I go to parties now and about everyone I know, I mean it’s the whole war of the cameras, you go to these events and everyone’s got one. Which is why, most of the time, you’re like, I’m pretty safe if I don’t bring mine. I’ll just go on Facebook the next day and find the pictures of me, or from my friends, or... But even the cell phones have one now.

While Crystal is thrilled not to have to bring her own camera, others like Danielle have gained a new kind of responsibility. Danielle says she has unintentionally become the Queen’s cheerleading cameraperson.

Everyone knows that I always have my camera, that I’m going to like capture the moment... then I take those pictures and put them on Facebook and tag everyone so that they have the pictures of themselves. So they know that even if they don’t bring their camera, chances are I’ll probably bring mine...And one time when I actually forgot it, they’re like, “What, you don’t have your camera!” and it was like a big shock.

Overall, respondents did not seem to mind who took the picture, just that there was one taken. For example, respondents mentioned getting photographs from other people's computers. Although Hannah says she does this less often now that she has her own camera, this is a trend that is likely to continue, if not grow. Many of the respondents mentioned passing pictures over CDs, e-mail, Facebook, and memory cards. Laura says these pictures capture a more complete picture or "story" by showing the event from different angles or capturing a different moment. There is of course one exception to this. As Erin explains, she does not care who takes the picture unless it is a very good picture or one that is hard to capture (her example was a picture of the northern lights). These special pictures would be a source of pride for the author, and would be saved in multiple locations.

Digitization and Web 2.0 applications have also arguably blurred the distinction between professional and amateur photographers. For example, Erin uploads some of her photographs to a blog dedicated to photography. She says, "People can just come in and, usually it's more professional photographers, who give you tips on how you can improve your photography". Jason seemed fascinated by this shift and excited by the possibilities.

He says that this is:

...an interesting place to be in because anyone can create art... anyone can create art, but also, like the best art is also more accessible to people than it's ever been before... Anyone can look at the best art and anyone can look at their own participation in the creation of art, or pictures, or whatever right... In that way it's become very equalitarian.

The interviews also suggest that more amateur photographers are thinking of selling their images or using them in more ‘professional’ ways. Going back to Erin, she said that she was still considering making a career in photography. Similarly, Julie was using her photographs to document and sell the jewelry she made. Jason has been considering getting involved in i-stock photo, a stock image site that buys and sells amateur photographs.

The idea of stock images has been growing in popularity. Not only are more amateur photographers getting involved in the production of these images, but the very idea of keeping ‘stock images’ seems to be spreading into ‘everyday’ photography. More than one respondent mentioned that the instantaneity and new materials of digital photography has enabled them to build and keep their own bank of stock images. Many respondents explained that part of their hesitation towards deleting images was based on the possibility that they may ‘need them later’ or that a purpose for them, such as scrapbooking or card making, may appear in the future: “...[Y]ou never know when you might need the photographs again,” Erin explains, “Like, if let’s say in a year’s time I want to do an album for my exchange friends about the trip... then I would probably need some of those. Like I wouldn’t know when I need the photographs, but somehow I would need it someday”. Although this possibility existed within film photography, the instantaneity and new materials of digital photography seems to afford and ‘encourage’ everyday photographers to take more pictures and, more importantly, to take, and keep pictures of a greater variety.

Photographic Content

A major aspect of the debate about going digital is whether digitization has actually changed the subject of photographs and/or the act of taking pictures? In his work on photography as a practice Bourdieu (1991) insisted that what was remarkable about photography was that, despite the inherent possibility of taking pictures of literally ‘anything’, most people actually take much the same pictures revolving around ‘family events’, scenic shots, and so on, such that there are some powerful conventions around subject matter. The interviews here however show that these conventions are undergoing some changes and that the subject and act of taking pictures is also changing. Part of this has to do with changes in the technology, and part of it has to do with the respondents changing relationship to the images they make.

First, the instantaneity of digital photography means not only reduced costs, but has opened the possibility of taking more pictures, and more *casual* pictures. Many of the respondents said that, being free of the costs of film and developing, they were inspired to capture less conventional ways of seeing the world. Despite the fact that digital cameras are not necessarily cheap, for the respondents the ability to take pictures without worrying about the cost of development, combined with the falling prices of memory cards, made digital cameras a more economical choice. Here it is important to consider this alongside the sample population. As University students all of the respondents owned a computer (either a desktop or laptop or both). Although this may be an additional cost to someone else who is thinking of making the transition to digital, the students interviewed for this project did not associate the cost of the computer with the cost of

going digital. Nor did they associate any of the costs for CDs, external harddrives, or DVDs with the overall cost of owning a digital camera. This is most likely explained by the multiple activities the computer is used for including homework assignments, computer games, surfing the Internet, and music files. Similarly, storage devices may not necessarily have been bought with the intent to backup images.

Whether owning a digital camera is cheaper or not, most respondents insisted that the new digital camera had a significant change on the content of their image making. “Before I think it was just kind of the cost,” says Crystal. “Like none of us had digital cameras so it was like, why have my own camera when we’re only going to take a special picture cause it’s film and it’s going to cost to develop. So there was no need to have a billion cameras cause you weren’t taking a billion pictures on your own. It was usually more posed pictures”. Similarly Danielle insisted: “You just have more opportunities to practice and kind of get a different perspective from your environment because you’re not so worried about how much it’s going to cost”. Being able to take endless snapshots for “free” also often lead to an individual collection of photographs that, for the first time, went beyond the very selective and traditional photographic moments.

Often, the respondents expressed a more relaxed and creative engagement with photography. Hannah for example said:

...When it comes to picture 24 or 23 on my canister and my friend’s like “take a photo of this” and I’m like, that’s not really worth what I want, you know what I mean. Like I don’t want that to be, not like the last photo, but I don’t want that to be the end of my film because two minutes later something great could happen...

Danielle expressed a similar attitude when talking about her summer job as a camp counselor. "...When I had film I was a lot more selective of what pictures I was going to take because you know you only have like 24 to 27 pictures on one roll of film. So when you go to take a picture you're like, okay, I only have 8 left, is this worth going down to 7...?" She adds that now she does not have to think so much about what is the 'best' picture to take, which has allowed her to be more creative:

...I never used to take like more abstract, like interesting pictures because you don't want to... you're so concerned with wasting film that you almost just like save it. Save your film for like people pictures or like events that are really meaningful... But because I had the digital camera I was kind of just like being more creative and seeing what I could make into a beautiful picture. So I was like using my environment more to kind of capture a different scene than just plain old people pictures. So... I think that's good in that sense.

Often, in describing their picture taking, respondents expressed both a novel and a traditional view of what photography should be. Hannah, for example, suggests that amateur photography has moved beyond the traditional, special event photographs found in family albums. She describes a new standard for "good" pictures¹⁴:

My dad, he doesn't have to disturb anyone. Whereas my mom will come along and make sure everyone's sitting nicely. You know you don't want to see a whole photo album of everyone facing the camera, that's going to get tiresome after awhile. She does take photos at family events, she just gets her little camera, and it's the same every time. ... I look at my dad's photos and it's like, this is smart, you did stuff where no one knew what you were

¹⁴ While this more relaxed photography may appear new, respondents also mentioned having examples of such photography already in their family albums suggesting that the practice may not be that new, but the appreciation and interest in these "natural" photographs has *increased* with digital photography.

doing, and you got better results. Whereas my mom... people look nice and happy but it's just no as exciting".

Erin, Julie, Crystal and Jason, who claimed to prefer the more "natural" shots, shared this interest in less 'posed' photographs. Jason says whenever he and his family get together they take a family portrait. He and his youngest sister now push to have the less posed family portrait as the one that makes it to the family album. Laura was another interesting example. Although she says she takes most of her pictures while traveling, she says she sometimes wishes she had more pictures of everyday life and activities. Her solution was to take "travel trips" of everyday life. "I'll designate a day where I'm like, I'm going to capture everyday life today," she says. "It was really nice when I was homesick to have those pictures. I did the same thing when I was in Israel, I designated a day and I went on campus and took a bunch of random pictures of my campus". While respondents expressed this interest in capturing everyday life, they also still engaged in the more "traditional" practice of photography.

While the number of photographs taken has dramatically increased, the subjects of these photographs remained relatively unchanged. Special events, "memorable" moments, picture of friends and family get-togethers, concerts, and travel trips still topped the list of subjects most photographed. "It sort of has to be like an event," says Hannah. "There are other times for bringing it when I'm just going to someone's house for dinner. But it seems to be a little bit more like out of the ordinary I'll bring it". Laura explains, "When you're traveling you know that this is a memory that you're building. When you're going about your everyday life, it's your everyday life. You don't think of it

as a memory, as a special event”. No matter what they were photographing, one interesting feature that all respondents talked about was the camera flash.

Respondents all expressed a frustration and almost disdain for the flash. In some cases, the flash was only really useful when photographing posed people. For Erin, the flash seemed to ruin the photograph, especially when trying to capture a “natural” picture. “I’ll turn the flash off ALL the time, ALL the time. I hate the flash!” Julie insists. Not only does the flash wash everything out according to Julie and Danielle, but it was also said to remove dimension and movement from the photograph by preventing some of the blur that comes from movement. Laura recounts a story of photographing a church in Poland:

We were in this church and um, if you took pictures with the flash everything was really dark and the colors were off and you couldn’t... it didn’t look right. But if you turn the flash off you got the church the way it was supposed to be. The way it looked to my eye.

For respondents, capturing more “natural” photographs sometimes meant nothing more than being able to photograph the different lighting situations they were in. While this seems to be only a minor change, the important role of light in photography suggests that the hatred of the flash could reflect bigger changes in both the understanding and practice of photography. Unfortunately such an exploration remains outside the limits of this thesis, but deserves further research.

When asked what has contributed to this shift in photographable subjects respondents were unsure if changing technology was the sole cause. Most of the respondents had had a limited engagement with film photography. Even those such as

Alex, who had previously had access to a darkroom, admitted that they had been working now with digital photography longer than with film. Many of the respondents felt that age played an equal, and in some cases more important role in their present photography than did the technological changes. Laura explained, “I’d say the subject matter has changed a little bit but I think it’s more influenced by age. As I get older I’m interested in different things. Like I wouldn’t have a picture of my housemates back when I had my film camera because I didn’t have housemates, I lived at home”. Similarly Danielle said, “I guess I also just know myself better now just cause I’m older and I’ve had more experiences... Just having this, I can keep track of the things I want to keep track of if I think it’s worthy enough. I definitely didn’t feel the same with my film camera. Cause it wasn’t as easy, it was a much harder process”. Danielle goes on to say how, when she was younger, she was reliant on her parents to help buy and develop the film. Now however, she says that she is independent and living on her own and does not “...really have to wait for someone else to make it happen”. Danielle also mentioned how the experience of living away from home for the first time presented new opportunities and interests in photography. “Basically your social network and your life is here in Kingston. So it’s like, yeah, you’re in school, but there’s so much else going on that you want to have that. You want to capture that”. Again, keeping the sample population in mind, respondents often found themselves in charge of their own “life albums” now that they were on their own for the first time.

The fact that respondents found themselves taking more photographs was partly due to their new environment. Susan Sontag (1977) argues that people take pictures to

make the unfamiliar less threatening and strange. While respondents expressed little fear in face of their new environment, many did agree that they took more pictures of new experiences and events. Erin took her camera everywhere with her because she was on exchange. However, she says that back home in Singapore, she really only takes her camera out for special trips, or for more “traditional” events like birthdays. Laura explained how the type of photographs she took changed depending on the number of times she had been to a particular place while traveling. “The first time I went I took very touristy type pictures. The second time I went I took pictures based more on... more like what ... aesthetically shows off the area.” Often their familiarity with an environment or experience brought out respondents’ creative experimentation with photography and their cameras. In some cases it also helped re-establish or sustain the distinction between “everyday” photography and more “artistic” photography.

Despite theories of collapsing boundaries, particularly between art and the everyday, respondents expressed very traditional views on what made a “good” photograph. Respondents also appeared to have clear distinctions between the multiple types of photography they engaged in, from artistic, to blog photos, to documentary “diary” type photographs. Pictures were judged according to typical ascetical criteria. The picture had to be in focus, “properly” lit, well framed, and it had to convey its particular message well. Jason for instance says that a good photograph has to be “true to the idea of a photograph”. It has to capture something. He says:

...the lighting and the focus and everything have to be working in harmony to try and convey what it is the image, like the mood or the feeling, or the thing, some aspect of the thing that it’s trying to convey... If you’re going for

something happy then it should be bright, ... there should be lots of balance and composition, like it should be clearly composed... Or if you're trying to get one thing but you've got all like this extraneous stuff, so it takes away from the focus of the picture.

The evaluation criteria for an image fit well into respondents' practices of manipulation. Both followed more "traditional" understandings of what makes a "good" photograph: simple, 'realistic' representation of an experience, event, or subject.

The connection between photography and art went beyond aesthetic criteria. As seen earlier, many of the respondents felt they were being more creative with their photography. In addition, some respondents were uploading their photographs to photographic websites to get feedback and exposure from other "artistic" or "professional" photographers. Perhaps most surprising was that two out of 8 respondents mentioned taking photographs not for the photograph itself, but rather with the intention of painting them later. Laura explains, "I walk around thinking that would be a really nice picture, like that would be a really nice painting... My mom's an artist and I actually took a bunch of pictures when I was in Israel specifically because they would make really nice paintings if she ever wanted to paint them". Laura also mentioned playing with her camera to capture some abstract patterns and lighting. "And that I do see as a form of art" she says, but adds that she is not ready to think of putting those photographs in a show or anything. Julie also had the intention of painting many of her photographs of flowers.

I took them because I wanted to... it's funny because I took them because I wanted to, because I paint, and I thought it would be a...oh I'll take these pictures of flowers and then I can paint off of what I... The thing is I haven't really painted anything but I've done a lot of Photoshop... It

hasn't been analogue... I've taken some things and like turned them into profile pictures or something like that, but I haven't used it in the way I originally intended.

The respondents' photographs and their understanding of these photographs also remind us of the intertwined and mutual constitution of digital technology with sets of social and cultural values, and to some extent skill and judgement. How the respondents chose to use their cameras was often based not only on previous use, but also on the specific situation they were in. Respondents' involvement in photojournalism, art classes, and botany, just to mention a few, influenced their practice of photography. The continued presence of "traditional" subjects and evaluation criteria despite the technological changes remind us that social narratives and understandings of technologies do not change simply because a technology does. The interviews support the argument that social and technological narratives are coming together in unpredictable ways that are always undergoing new changes and vary among even the smallest group of people. While this chapter has focused upon the relationships between changing technologies and the ways in which people understand and tell stories about them, I will now turn to the question of how these engagements relate to narratives in the broader sense of memory making and sharing in liquid modernity.

Chapter 6

Narrative Orders and Orderings

Introduction

The key issue in Chapter 5 was one of how people actually take the digital turn in relation to prior engagements with photography and the new technical possibilities opened up by a range of new materials. I have argued that seen from this angle ‘digital photography’ is at the very least a diverse practice, incorporating a range of technologies, which might be assembled and used in quite different ways, and that people’s understandings of what they are doing and why seem to be quite different. The significance of this is simply to raise questions about the supposed character of digital photography as read off the technical attributes of digitization (that it is defined by instantaneous, manipulative, temporary characteristics). In this chapter I will explore this in more detail by paying closer attention to what people are doing with images or photographs and whether this marks digital photography as radically different from film. Following the concerns about the relationship between narrative and technology in liquid modernity, this chapter explores the different narratives emerging alongside and through respondents’ use of images.

What emerges from the interviews is a considerable contrast to Bauman’s notion that ‘forgetting’ has become an essential feature of individual conduct in the liquid

modern society.¹⁵ These photographers were quite clear about the necessity of making and preserving memories and *not* forgetting. Even so, some of the methods used to create and maintain these memories and narratives are arguably rather different from the conventions of memory making in modernity; particularly the rise of ‘scrapbooking’ and ‘facebooking’ as popular alternatives to the traditional ‘family album’. Unlike the family album, which typically represents a linear history of the family, scrapbooks tend to be organized around non-linear *themes* such as vacations, birthdays, and other events. Of course, scrapbooks are still constructing and presenting narratives, but these narratives are more like ‘information’, lacking a particular chronological order or ‘grand narrative’, which imposes the story from the outside. The scrapbook also fits into an environment of ‘convergence’; its pages an eclectic mix of photographs, diary, and decorative souvenirs.

In addition to new outlets for and possibilities of narrative formation, the interviewees revealed some concerns about the ‘increasing surveillance’ surrounding them, which they often, paradoxically, willingly participated in. For example, while digital photography often involved respondents’ participation in an increasingly public visual and online setting, at the same time respondents expressed an ever more ‘private’ attitude towards many of their photographs; while a huge number of photographs filled the pages on Facebook, Flickr and online blogs, an even larger number of images remained hidden in simultaneously growing personal collections. Again, this may suggest that aside from the sheer number of images, some aspects of digital photography are not so different from film photography. The interview material presented here reveals an

¹⁵ This is not to say that Bauman is simply wrong, but to raise doubts about the usefulness of such general

interesting set of exchanges between new and old narrative traditions that force us to think carefully about the supplanting of the continuous by the discontinuous in dominant accounts of photography, technology, and postmodernity.

Unwilling to forget: Order, Memory, and the Experience of Photography

All respondents were clear in expressing the view that (digital) photography continues to be an important means of ‘documenting memories’. The memories captured by the digital camera were backed up on external storage devices and preserved in growing ‘digital albums’. For many, the digital album was far more practical, as it was not only cheap (no developing costs, no need for physical albums, etc.), but was also ‘space efficient’. The automatic forms of image ordering built into software programs was mostly seen as a ‘bonus’ for digital album organization. Respondents rarely renamed their photographs, preferring instead to keep the automatically given name; most often images were stored in automatically created folders with the date as its title. As Laura insisted, the order is *extremely* important to maintain. Respondents often referred to themselves as ‘packrats’ when explaining their compulsion to keep practically every photograph they had taken. For Laura it was a “psychological thing”, a revolt against earlier experiences as a child in which she had been forced to throw things out. For Alex it was a reference guide of his work experience, for others it was just about keeping ‘the most accurate memories’. “It’s really kind of brilliant,” says Crystal. “...[Y]ou can create a world now, it’s not just still one picture, one picture there. You can have tones of

theorizing when we consider how they are encountered in everyday life.

pictures and show so much more, like here's my life in pictures". While the photographs were important, part of the compulsion to keep them was the experience that took place *while photographing*.

Jeff Berner (1975) talks about photography like an adventure, a visual adventure. It is not just about capturing a moment; it is about the experience of photography itself. The proliferation of cameras at events has, in some ways, come to change the event. As Crystal says, the camera can be a form of entertainment; making pictures can be an activity or event itself. While some respondents enjoyed creating their own photo shoot opportunities, for most, what made an image so special, was the process of taking them that only the photographers knew about. Julie for example talks about her boyfriend's first time canoeing:

He'd never been on a lake in a canoe, like I had to go and buy him a lifejacket because he would not get into the canoe without a lifejacket. I took pictures of him in his lifejacket in the canoe... He was excited, I was excited that he came and that I could share that part of my life with him.

Julie added that she lost her camera on the way home from the lake. "I've never been so upset about pictures than like when I thought I lost that camera," she explains. "And it wasn't the camera, like I didn't care about the camera, it was the pictures". For Julie, those lake pictures had taken on a special meaning; they were not only documents of a moment, but also documents of an experience. Jason had a similar story of photographs taken on the railroad while in the U.K. He and a friend went out on photo walks together with the purpose of taking pictures and challenging one another to take better photographs. But as Jason explains, it was not just about getting the picture.

[I] think it's neat because when you're out doing that kind of stuff, I mean regardless of whether you're out there to specifically record your experiences, you get all these other things you can't capture on the film right. So when we were down taking pictures of railway tracks it was like the way... we went and we were hiding just off the side of the tracks. We probably shouldn't be anyway but because we were waiting for the train to go by so we could take pictures of it as it left. It was really neat because late at night when everything's silent and then all of a sudden you hear the tracks singing, as the train approaches they vibrate. You can't capture that on film, but it's really cool. We wouldn't have gotten that if we hadn't been out there to take pictures. And then we got in trouble with the cops. You know, what are you doing on the train tracks at 11 o'clock at night? Anyway, it was pretty funny.

The meaning of the images made it easy for respondents to sort through their photographs. Unlike theories of 'unmanageable' images and meaning being 'lost' in the mundane repetition of events and the ubiquitous recording of everyday life (e.g. Taylor & Harris 2005), respondents appeared in control of their photos and selective in their meanings; a photograph taken at the bar for example, was not as valuable as the photographs taken at the lake. Scrapbooking provided another example of respondents being highly selective and organized in their picture taking and their narrative organization.

Scrapbooking

Although critical of the power of photography to simply represent the world objectively, respondents were still heavily tied to the storytelling potential of photographs and worked hard to make their narrative(s) legitimate and maintainable. One of the ways

respondents did this was through ‘scrapbooking’. Although scrapbooking is not new it seems to have undergone a dramatic revival in the last few years partly because of new media technologies such as digital cameras. According to the scrapbooking website *My Creative Memory*:

...29% of U.S. households have tried scrapbooking and 13.5 million people or 12% of households, completed at least one creative memories project. Those homes with children under the age of 6 were 80% above average in their scrapbooking activities. The leading theme for creating memories is recording family history, with vacations, babies and children, gift albums, and family events such as birthdays, holidays, and wedding close behind (Scrapbooking Statistics)¹⁶.

Scrapbooking has gained enough popularity to warrant a comparison to golf. While one in four U.S. households have someone who plays golf, one in three have someone engaged in scrapbooking (Scrapbooking Statistics). Scrapbookers are 98% female, 85% Caucasian, and 63% are married with children living at home (Scrapbooking Fact Sheet). Most current research being done on scrapbooking has to do with women and the scrapbook as a place to work out contemporary femininity and family. In this way the scrapbook is not any different from the traditional family album, which constructs an idealized account of family life (Demos 2007, Downs 2007). The interviews for this thesis reveal a different use for the scrapbook, and an alternative narrative to those of the family album.

First, as the respondents were students they are at a time of starting to create their own personal albums away from the family household. Second, digital cameras are now

being aimed at a younger and younger population. For example, Fisher-Price now has a camera out that is made for preschoolers to use. Disney has also introduced their *Disney Pix Click* camera for children, which is designed around Disney themes and even comes with editing software that includes Disney theme decorations.

In the interviews conducted, Danielle provided the best example of scrapbooking. Danielle explained that she would only do something with her photographs if she had enough of them to make a substantial section in her scrapbook. Keeping a scrapbook also motivated her at times to take pictures of certain subjects - she used the example of photographing family members - so that none of the sections 'lagged behind' the others. Although the scrapbook seems very similar to the traditional photo album, there are some important differences. Scrapbooks tend to be organized thematically rather than chronologically. Unlike albums, scrapbooks are composed of photographs as well as printed media, memorabilia, and decorative stickers, buttons, borders etc. According to the Scrapbooking Fact Sheet, scrapbooking sales in 2003 were estimated to be \$2.5 billion. The PMA Marketing Research survey on scrapbooking revealed that in 2005, 13.5 million people had completed a scrapbook project. In addition, 35% of digital camera owners have started a scrapbook project. The most common reason for scrapbooking is said to be the preservation of memories (The Worldwide Community of Imaging Associations). Scrapbooks can also be digital. In some ways these are very similar to blogs. The difference being that blogs typically involve more writing¹⁷ and tend to be created for online viewing. Erin's blog was like an online journal of what she did while at

¹⁶ These statistics are from a 2005 survey.

Queens. Her photographs were used to add to her 'story'. In her interview, Crystal mentions a more playful approach to storytelling that borders on scrapbooking, blogging, and art. More at ease with Adobe Photoshop, Crystal and her sister have taken pictures to create playful magazines, film posters, and advertisements. These are just some examples of the narrative potential being explored through digital photography.

Web 2.0 and Image Networking

Web 2.0 applications provided another area in which respondents could exchange and build narratives through the increased distribution of their images. Web 2.0, loosely defined, is a "...second upgraded version of the web that is more open, collaborative, and participatory" (O'Reilly 2005 cited in Beer and Burrows 2007). According to Lenhardt and Madden (2005), the applications of web 2.0 have become "...an embedded and routine part of contemporary everyday life, particularly for young people" (in Beer and Burrows 2007). MSN, Facebook, blogging sites, You Tube... these are the applications of web 2.0. Beer and Burrows (2007) explain that these are:

Dynamic matrices of information through which people observe others, expand the network, make new 'friends', edit and update content, blog, remix, post, respond, share files, exhibit, tag and so on. This has been described as an online 'participatory culture' (Jenkins *et al.*, 2006) where users are increasingly involved in *creating* web content as well as *consuming* it.

Over the last year or so, the term Web 2.0 has moved rapidly into popular and academic discourse, with various newspaper, journal, blog and magazine articles, radio, Youtube

¹⁷ However, there are blogs that are purely composed of photographs, which are gaining in popularity.

and TV programmes, and so on. For some the notion that Web 2.0 represents an ‘upgraded’ and ‘improved’ version of the Web, a more interactive and participatory update where the user sets the agenda, is important. While some of this relies upon an idea of technological progress that I questioned in Chapter 2, we can see in some of the interviews that there is a shift toward more user generated content. Having said that, while the opportunities are there, and sites such as Facebook and You Tube appear to be thriving, the respondents interviewed expressed surprising reluctance and hesitation towards participating in them to some degree.

Laura and Danielle were both ‘pressured’ into creating a Facebook account. Danielle’s account was actually made for her by the same friend who made a “make Danielle join Facebook” group, which filled her email with notices from Facebook. Alex said he now found Facebook ‘useless’ and had lost interest in it. Hannah refused to get an account saying “it’s just like this alternate universe that I don’t want to be a part of... It’s like this fake surreal way of making relationships, but they’re always backed up by the fact like, oh, I just want to see people’s photos, like I just need to see what they’re doing”. Julie had just deleted her account the day before our interview after breaking up with her boyfriend. She says she had put some albums up, mostly narrative albums like a trip to the dentist. She added that, “the people that tend to take pictures of other people tend to be keen on sharing them. It’s like a status thing, like a popularity contest”. The vast number of photographs on Facebook was both a source of confusion and disdain: “Like you go through a 100 different photos of the same person smiling with different people, but doing the exact same thing. Like why? What is the purpose of that kind of

photo is what I'm wondering" says Alex. "I mean, is it just like... like somebody's kind of vanity, or is it just to say like they were here...?" Similarly, Laura says she only puts up a couple pictures saying that, "people who put up like 300 photos and expect everyone to look through them, it's ridiculous. Who has time for that!?"

It was not just the number of pictures that turned many of the respondents off of Facebook. As Jason explains:

Facebook I think is too networked for me. There's too much possibility for information to come across... I see Facebook as a really great way to connect and make sure that I've got everyone's email address correct and telephone numbers correct and I think it's a good way to send people notes back and forth. But I don't buy into the piles of photos and the piles of videos.

Crystal says that while she enjoys posting some pictures from her travels, she is careful about what images she puts up. Usually she checks with the people in the photograph to see if they do not mind the picture being posted. She adds that overall, she does not post much on her Facebook account because "everyone in my class can access that file, and I don't really want to be seen by too many people".

Respondents were also engaged in blogging, posting images on Flickr, and producing and maintaining their own websites. However, despite these engagements with these Web 2.0 opportunities, enthusiasm was again limited. Some respondents had posted images on Flickr at one point or another, mostly for artistic feedback. In most cases though, participation was irregular and most respondents said they had not posted anything for some time. Erin was the most avid blogger. Blogging offered her a way to keep in touch with family and friends back in Singapore, but overall she did not

particularly like blogging. It is useful while on exchange, but when she returns home she says that she will probably not do it. Julie and Alex both had their own websites, but mostly for commercial purposes: Julie to communicate with her jewelry customers, and Alex to advertise his work in photojournalism. Although their engagement with web 2.0 was rather limited, respondents were not immune to some of the consequences and challenges of being involved in online communities. In this area, the most interesting and significant issues are the relationships between ‘tagging’ and ‘ownership’, and dealing with the demands for a public online profile while at the same time keeping personal memories private.

Tagging and Ownership

The possibilities of creating, sharing and consuming offered by Web 2.0 have raised important questions about ownership and authorship. Since most respondents talked about tagging in the social networking site Facebook, this section will focus on that particular site and phenomena. With the proliferation of digital cameras someone is always there to capture the event. Respondents were aware of the possibility of being captured in embarrassing situations or having ‘unflattering’ pictures posted of them on the Web. Tagging emerged as way of owning, or disowning, photographs. The right to place a tag on a particular photograph belonged to the photographer. Respondents said that, in the end, they had little control over what images of them ended up on Facebook. The most that they could do was ask for the picture to be removed or they could ‘un-tag’ themselves. Jason, for instance, said he was not tagged in any photographs. He explained

that he removed any tagged images and refuses to tag anyone in his photos. “I’m sure there’s lots of pictures of me out there. But my thing is that I don’t want people to be able to see a picture, click on it and go to my profile. That kind of creeps me out”. Laura said that there are more pictures of her tagged on other people’s pages than she has posted of herself on Facebook. For her tagging is something that she only does occasionally and primarily so that the other people in the photograph can have a copy of it. Crystal also said she did not tag people in her photographs. “So you actually have to go into my site and click on that file before you could see yourself,” she explains.

Overall, tagging emerged as an interesting mode of surveillance for respondents. Pictures that they had not even known had been taken suddenly appeared in their list of tagged images. Tagging was received with mixed emotion because respondents’ profile images were not entirely under their control. By posting an image of someone and tagging them in it, the tagger was at times asserting a kind of ownership over that image and the people photographed. This is significant in a visual environment in which images have a strong influence on self-perception. As Alex explained:

I guess we are very vain and self-obsessed sometimes and we put a lot of meaning in photographs... such that they really kind of have this kind of fundamental impact on our consciousness and our sense of identity. I guess when people see photos of themselves that aren’t too flattering we tend to react poorly to them, negatively, rather than just brush them off.

Respondents described an interesting reaction to deal with the importance of personal image in an uncontrolled environment. Respondents were not only more cautious about what images were tagged and linked to their public profiles, but also more selective in the

images that they posted of themselves and of others. The fact that anyone and everyone can access Facebook was a deterrent in some ways to posting negative images of others. The act could easily be returned in a kind of online war of images.

Another point of interest brought up by respondents was using ‘originality’ as a form of ownership. With so many cameras at a single event many of the pictures on Facebook were seen as redundant. This quest to ‘be original’ in the face of such ubiquity was also seen in all of the respondents’ personal photographs. Trying to find new ways of seeing was a way to ‘own an image’. As Hannah explained, everyone could now have a photograph of himself or herself at the great wall in China. In that way neither the photograph nor the experience could be thought of as truly unique:

I didn’t print a photo of me on the great wall because I wanted to be a little more unique and not so distinctive where I was... Like myself I just don’t want it to be that obvious and that everyone can relate to it. You know I kind of want to keep the individualism behind it.

Hannah added that she finds her music (on her iPod) is ‘more personalized’ now than her photographs. She says, “I feel like everyone sort of has the same photos”. As seen earlier this has changed the roles of authorship in which the photographer is not necessarily as important. It does not matter who took the picture so long as someone took one. The lack of importance over who took the picture lessens the ability to claim it, or own the photograph. Again, it was only by photographing something in a unique way or capturing an original or personal subject that respondents could feel that those photographs belonged to them. In some ways the absence of an author was also an absence of responsibility for the content and subject of the images posted up on Facebook. This gave

an extra challenge to respondents who must now constantly be monitoring their online profiles.

Parallel Personal Archives

The proliferation of cameras and the opportunities offered by digitization and Web 2.0 have emerged in tandem with an increase in other parallel personal archives for respondents. Personal accounts of everyday life have undergone the same ‘informatisation’ as other narratives. A family barbeque can now have multiple representations of the event being captured simultaneously. Although this is not particularly new, as neighbors and family members have always kept their own albums with their own photographs of different events and people, that may not necessarily portray the same ‘reality’ as another album. Yet the sheer number of pictures taken, alongside the expanding field of photographable moments, and the quite novel opportunities to share and store images have intensified all these previous possibilities. Respondents did not seem overly concerned about this, for them it was a security measure against *not* having those memories documented, as well as a way to ‘fill in the gaps’ of their own account. Here we think again of Calvino who presents the photographic extreme that now seems commonplace: “Everything not photographed is lost, as if it never existed, and therefore in order to really live you must photograph as much as you can, you must either live in the most photographable way possible or else consider photographable every moment of you life” (cited in Taylor and Harris, 2005: 90).

In this way, the interviews conducted had an undercurrent of a ‘fear of forgetting’ which ties into Bauman’s (2000) account of uncertainty but at the same time questions the notion that individuals need to discard memory at a moment’s notice. Respondents’ reactions to the clear multiplicity of narratives surrounding them also contradicted fears of people being overwhelmed by information and different accounts. Respondents seemed instead, to have a strong sense of self and personal narrative in which all the other narratives and accounts were incorporated into. This was also true of the ways in which they thought of and used digital technologies. Often these were incorporated into and mixed with pre-existing engagements with image making and sharing, leading each respondent to have a different and somewhat idiosyncratic engagement with and understanding of digital photography.

Crystal raised an interesting point regarding the production of parallel personal archives. With the opportunities provided by Web 2.0 and the easy sharing of digital photographs one might assume that it would be easy to see, or get a hold of other archives. Yet for Crystal this was not the case. She says that now that every member of her family has a digital camera and their own computer, it is harder than ever to track down pictures of oneself, or to get pictures of a specific event. In her case, while everyone was taking pictures they were not particularly keen on making these personal archives *public*. Crystal’s experience is unlikely to be unique one. The family album may be disappearing but it seems to be replaced by proliferating personal digital albums, or collections of images. This collection of images has been referred to as our personal bank of stock images. The existence of these parallel personal archives was both beneficial and

a hindrance to creating and sustaining a personal archive and narrative. While the additional accounts and images were useful in constructing respondents' own archives, the lack of accessibility and control over them was both a source of frustration, and occasionally, an obstacle to the new responsibility of image management.

Living Publicly, Privatizing Memory

Having a public profile is a necessity for today's student. All of the respondents, with the exception of Hannah, had a profile on Facebook, despite many of them not wanting to get involved with the online community. Access to information about events and pictures from outings and shows were only available to those with a Facebook account. All of the respondents also had at least one email account through Queen's University, and many had additional emails accounts such as gmail or hotmail. Public profiles were seen to be as essential as cell phones and email; It was expected by respondents' peers. The interviews reveal a mix of responses towards these demands of living in an increasingly visual and surveyed society. While many traditionally 'private' moments are photographed and shared on public sites, even more everyday occurrences are photographed and stored in private archives.

The respondents in many ways had become their own public relations manager. This involved creating and monitoring a public profile, a task that was taken very seriously. The proliferation of cameras has taught respondents to be critical of images and their ability to 'accurately' and objectively represent their subjects. This turned out to be a strange mix of "vanity", as Alex called it, with a very present awareness of the

fragmentary and subjective nature of the camera. Despite this awareness of the subjective nature of photography, the relationship between image and identity was still strong.

Respondents made numerous mentions of having friends who would refuse to have a bad picture of them taken, and also worked hard to manage their own Facebook profiles and the types of images circulating of them. At times the requests to delete unflattering pictures were unappreciated and/or ignored. Hannah says,

You'll take a photo and immediately there's someone who's like 'give it to me, I need to see'. Like I need to look at it right away, and if they don't like it, take it again, or if they don't like it, delete it. I won't do that, I would never delete someone else's photos of me, and I would never delete someone's photo that I have of them... I mean there are unflattering photos of everybody. It's not like that's what you really look like, it's not the end of the world.

Hannah adds that since she does not have Facebook, her friends should not feel concerned that she would post them online. However this does not seem to deter them from demanding that the photos be deleted, which Hannah says "after awhile it gets frustrating. It's like you look that way at the moment, big deal, everyone has their odd moments". Despite her relaxed attitude, part of Hannah's reasoning for not getting a Facebook account was the stress of having to constantly monitor her profile. Having unflattering images was fine, so long as they stayed in her personal achieve.

Once they had a Facebook account, respondents were in charge of creating and maintaining their particular public image. Here Danielle provided the best example.

While Danielle now uses Facebook regularly, partly because she has become the main

photographer for her cheerleading events, she still keeps a watchful eye on what images end up on her profile. Danielle explains:

Well like there are some people that I have on Facebook that are from camp, so they're younger, like I have 'Emma' on Facebook who's like 10, I have her siblings on Facebook, and like there are some pictures there that I don't really want her to see. Not because I'm like drinking or anything like that, cause I don't put those kinds of pictures up, I don't think that's a good way to represent myself and like who I am...

The power of the public image remained significant. Julie, who had just broken up with her boyfriend, deactivated her account just before our interview because she felt Facebook seemed to offer both an escape and a pre-constructed identity that was too easy to slip back into. "Actually they give a list of things," Julie explained as a reason for closing her account. "I chose other and put "I don't know who I am anymore. I think I'm going to try and find out, but I'm going to start in real life first. Thanks for the good times". " Julie went on to explain that:

The thing is what happened with that, having your best friend of two years just cutting you out, it causes a lot of like... I don't know, like a lot of questioning like... I have to work some things out and like... With Facebook you have... it is like a constructed identity. It's like this is who you are, this is how people see you, and I just wanted to cut all that out and I didn't want to have to... I didn't want to fall back on alternative personalities or anything like that.... It's easier to be that person and not acknowledge the actual problems that you have. So I thought that Facebook might prove to be like a distraction.

For Julie Facebook helped sustain a particular public identity, but proved to be a problem when that identity collapsed outside the virtual environment. In her interview, Facebook

came across as an artificial realm, “a status thing, like a popularity contest” in which image was given precedence and identity tightly linked to these images, despite awareness of the artificial nature of photography.

Alex expressed the most frustration and curiosity over the constant concern over self-image.

There’s a lot of people out there who will delete photos of themselves or others because, for instance they look bad or it’s an embarrassing situation or something like that. I don’t do that. That’s kind of like censorship or something. Whenever someone asks me to do that, I kind of sort of tell them to fuck off. You wouldn’t believe how many times, like let’s say you go on assignment as like a working photographer and... let’s say you take a picture or whatever and someone comes up and says I’d appreciate it if you delete that, and I’ll be like I’d appreciate it if you’d leave me alone. I don’t bend to people like that...

As a photojournalist, Alex has the privilege of often being behind the camera instead of its focus. However, he admits that, in the end he is probably just like everyone else, deleting many of the unflattering pictures of himself.

Respondents’ awareness of the photograph’s limited ability to capture a person or event, yet continued reliance on it to capture and document their own lives and activities, mirrors a trend also found in literary autobiography. Guides for writing an autobiography address this concern for truth in a contemporary fashion. What is continuously stressed is that being able to arrive at the truthful account of one’s life is not important. Rather the story of one’s life according to the autobiographer, the story that best describes how they experienced things is what people should write about. Authors (for example Rugg 1997) of these autobiography guides also insist that feelings towards events and periods in our

lives will change over time. Rather than worry about this fluctuating reality, writers are encouraged to go with it, getting the story out is more important than the 'truth'.

These findings (both in the interviews and in literature) support the idea that local narrative truths are more accepted in organizing stories than any kind of grand narrative. Again, this does not mean that there is an overwhelming number of narratives or truths in rampant relativism as Taylor and Harris (among others) have suggested. The respondents interviewed all presented detailed ways of organizing and making sense of their photographs. Not all photographs had the same value, and significantly nor did they all share the same fate. Some photographs were stored without much thought onto CDs, DVDs, or external harddrives, others were instantly shared on Facebook, blogs, and through email, 'special' moments were often kept in additional folders and/or printed and displayed in frames, albums, or scrapbooks, and some photographs were only seen by a very select number of people, namely relationship partners. In short, digitization and Web 2.0 have created new narratives possibilities. Each of the respondents engaged in these possibilities in different ways, each combining their own existing conventions with the new technologies. Respondents were aware of the changing nature of ownership and, even as they participated in these activities, expressed a desire to better understand what was going on. Respondents' status as young adults, often away from home for the first time, made the creation of their own albums almost inevitable. Yet this trend is seen among teens and even children. The ever more elaborate personal archive is an unexpected turn enabled primarily because of digital photography. Respondents were mixed on what to do with the multiple versions and accounts of events circulating around

them. While it added to their own archive of images, it also presented a new (and often daunting) task of constantly monitoring their own public image. In addition, it seems that while burdened by others' constant concern over self-image, none of the respondents managed to escape it either.

Alex touches on another potentially interesting question with his term "the grip and grin". When questioned about the types of photography he engages in, Alex said:

You mean like everyday photos, like party photos, you and your group of friends smiling for the camera? I don't take them but I would say that whenever, or when someone has a point and shoot and they put it in my face, my immediate reaction is to grab the person next to me and smile and put on this huge grin.

It is this instant reaction to the sight of a camera that is interesting. The 'grip and grin' seems to hide as much as it reveals about the individuals in the picture. Perhaps this is one aspect the respondents often found so puzzling in their use of and hesitation towards Facebook? Like the mirror, a photograph seems to represent an individual that is far more complete, stable, and unified than the person ever feels. This "grip and grin" secrecy also raises doubts over the extent that we are ever more public. New surveillance techniques and new ways of posting our lives seem to carry with them inherent ways of remaining undisclosed and private. Here, again, additional research is clearly needed in developing these questions further.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout this thesis it has been argued that much of current theorizing and discussion, both on social theory and photographic practice, is based on largely speculative assumptions about what effects digitization will have. Rarely is the personal account or experience of such changes taken into account, resulting in sometimes excessively abstract theories that miss the subtle variations found “on the ground”. This thesis has provided an example of the overlooked by looking at the theorist Zygmunt Bauman’s ideas of liquidity in relation to digital photography. My main concern was that there are interesting questions to be explored, which come out of the theories of contemporary society as a society of ‘liquidity’ and uncertainty that have implications for how we think about autobiography, memory, and narrative. Not only do current discussions on digital photography mirror many of the concerns found in postmodern discourse, but, throughout the ages, photography has also played a central role in the creation and maintenance of personal and social narratives, making it a good area in which to explore Bauman’s theories. The previous chapters have revealed the variety, and complexity of adopting and using digital technologies, which suggest that Bauman’s liquidity (encouraged through digitization) is experienced and encountered in a similarly complex manner.

Liquid Photography Revisited

While the characteristics of digital photography appear to make it the perfect adaptation to a liquid modern world, the interviews suggest that a more variable exchange is taking place. This variety is present even within a small and relatively homogenous group – in terms of levels of economic resources and social background. It is worth stressing here that individuals with different resources, in different locations, and at different moments in their life course, may have quite different engagements with digital photography. I think that those with children, those living in family households, those using cameras for work purposes, and so on, might talk differently about how they took the digital turn. This is probably especially true in the case of where images go – it is perhaps less likely that older photographers have such an engagement with social networking sites, and then we might see more traditional methods of storage and display remaining much more prominent.

The respondents interviewed identified numerous motivations for taking the digital turn, some willingly adopted this change, others felt forced into it. While all the respondents expressed awareness that digital photography was different from film photography, at the same time, their accounts show how much has stayed the same. Although the number of images and potentially photographic situations have increased dramatically, respondents revealed a practice and understanding of photography that was remarkably consistent with traditional conventions of visual representation and film photography. Special occasions, travel trips, and social events were still the main occasions to bring a camera. Despite being able to share these pictures with a growing

online audience, respondents continued to share their photographs primarily with family and close friends. The exception was for the more 'artistic' photographs. Many of the respondents insisted that using a digital camera had enabled them to feel more creative with their picture taking. The ability to take hundreds of images without worrying about the cost of development, encouraged respondents to experiment with new ways of seeing and improving their photographing abilities. It was these types of photographs that were often uploaded to sharing sites such as Flickr in hopes of obtaining 'professional' feedback and advice on how to improve.

Speaking very generally, what we see within Web 2.0 is the large scale broadcasting of the mundane and the ordinary. This seems to be to do with people using everyday experiences to generate visual content, and sometimes of the private becoming public (Beer & Burrows, 2007). What was particularly surprising from the interviews was respondents' overall attitude towards the popular sharing venues such as Facebook and Flickr. Respondents appeared to have joined more because of the social pressure and need to have an online profile rather than because of the 'exciting' sharing and viewing potential. The reluctance was partly due to an awareness of unwanted surveillance, but also an awareness of the, perhaps, redundant quality of their images. Sharing may be the top reason why people take photographs (Digital Imaging Lifestyles, 2007), but the interviews reveal a frustration with the image saturation encountered on many online sites. "Who looks at all of those images?" and, "who wants to see a hundred pictures of you and your boyfriend smiling" were questions that expressed this confusion over the desire to share so many photographs. Interestingly, the vast number of pictures was

welcomed in private collections. This suggests that, while respondents were interested in building up their own bank of personal images and memories, the audience for these images remains selective and limited. Part of the appeal of Facebook was not only to see what friends were doing, but also to collect pictures of yourself that other cameras and photographers had captured.

Another surprise was the extent, and understanding, of the shifting relations between production and consumption. Respondents were eager to produce their own images, either for digital albums, school projects, or family frames etc. The reduced costs of taking and producing digital images has allowed for amateurs to practice and keep shooting until they get the images that they were looking for, also always allowing for the potential surprise photo. Now that everyone and anyone can take ‘good photographs’, the role and importance of the author, or photographer, is diminished. Respondents often did not appear to care who took the photograph, so long as one was taken. One way of reasserting claim over a photograph, and being able to feel some accomplishment in being its producer, was in being able to take hard to capture photographs. One respondent mentioned getting a picture of the northern lights as an example. Another way of laying claim to one’s images was to purposely take photographs that were not ‘typical’ photographs. This has broadened the category of photographable subjects to include the ‘behind the scenes’ moments of everyday life. Respondents also mentioned trying to take photographs while on vacation that did not automatically reveal where they were taken. Interestingly, the uniqueness of a photograph did not always necessarily have to come from the image itself. More than one respondent mentioned how the experience of taking

the pictures was what really made the photographs special and irreplaceable. The experience of doing, or practicing photography is an interesting subject for future research, especially among younger photographers.

Overall, the interviews reveal a variety of ways of engaging with digital photography. Each example revealed an interesting mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ practices. The motivation for going digital, and the engagement with digital photography was influenced by previous experiences and understandings of film photography. This complicates the idea of a ‘liquid photography’. Liquid photography ignores the continuation of many traditional practices and conventions of film photography expressed during the interviews. One of the most important of these was the continued reliance on photographs (digital or analogue) to preserve memories, and the rather unshaken faith in its ability to ‘accurately’ represent an event or subject. Respondents also expressed little interest in many, or most of the manipulation possibilities, often using only the most basic image adjustments like color balance, and lighting curves.

Liquid Narratives Revisited

While respondents were clear that they continued to use photographs as a way of preserving memories, there were subtle changes in how these narratives were stored, shared, and told. New narrative possibilities are emerging with digital photography and its relationship with ‘Web 2.0’ applications such as Facebook and Flickr, but there is also renewed involvement with other established practices such as ‘scrapbooking’. Narrative

is far from being absent in the lives of these respondents. Rather, the focus has shifted from constructing whole ‘grand’ narratives to local theme based ones. Digital images were often stored and organized according to different events and time periods. Facebook and tagging ordered images according to the individuals or the event depicted. Scrapbooks, organized by different themes such as birthdays and family were also finding renewed popularity. These new narratives fit into a liquid modern environment in which image and the fragment are dominant.

For the most part, respondents’ presentation of their photographs showed no distinction between one event and another. However, respondents recognized the value of some pictures over others. To them, not all of the pictures were equal. Again, this had much to do with the experience of taking those images, and their particular content. This suggests that, while theorists like Taylor and Harris (2005) who fear an inundation of images and a disappearance of meaning, may appear correct, when it comes to how these hundreds of images are perceived in respondents everyday lives, Roland Barthes (1981) and his notion of *punctum* and *studium* may have more to say. Digitization and the ‘informatisation’ of society may have created numerous, sometimes contradictory narratives, but, at least for the respondents interviewed, they were not overwhelmed. Often the numerous, or contradictory narratives were all absorbed into, and mixed with existing accounts, or beliefs. Many of the new narratives possibilities also fit into an environment of convergence. The scrapbook, for example, presented a mix of photographs, diary, and decorative stickers, buttons, and souvenirs. Online profiles combined images with text, audio, and sometimes video.

In this regard Bauman's (2007) idea of a 'confessional society' provides some telling insights. He suggests that:

The teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are simply apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society – a society notorious for effacing the boundary which separated the private from the public, for making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private, and for wiping away from public communication anything that resists being reduced to private confidences, together with those who refuse to confide them. (Bauman, 2007: 3)

For Bauman there is an *art* to living and succeeding in this confessional society, with those who are able and willing to participate in public demonstrations of their private worlds forming a kind of *in-crowd*. Those unable and unwilling to fulfill this obligation to confess are left behind, excluded, derided, pushed into a variegated and heterogeneous 'underclass' of 'failed consumers' (Bauman, 2007:123-124). Bauman's approach, in its focus on the private becoming public, speaks to the rise of user generated image based content. But as we have seen people do not broadcast everything about themselves. Parts of the private will inevitably remain private. We can see that Bauman's vision depicts consumers as 'avidly and enthusiastically putting on display their qualities in the hope of capturing attention and possibly also gaining the recognition and approval required to stay in the game of socializing' (Bauman, 2007:6). Here individual agents take on a dual role:

... the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are *themselves*... They are, simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*. They are, at the same time, the

merchandise and the marketing agents, the goods and their travelling salespeople (Bauman, 2007:6)

While Bauman's idea of 'liquidity' may have been slightly misleading, as it suggests a more *overt* forgetting and fragmentation than that experienced by the interviewed respondents, overall, this term helps to get at the complex intermingling between 'old' and 'new' social and technological practices taking place in a digital environment. This approach differs from most existing research, which tends to overstate the differences between digital and analogue, or postmodernity and modernity, often resulting in a dichotomous situation. Knowing more about the diverse ways of engaging with and practicing photography could lead to more diverse products and services.

In addition to suggesting a more rounded approach to studying the impact and adoption of digital technologies, writing this thesis has raised many questions for future research. In particular these are questions about the role that gender might play in the emerging uses and understandings of digital photography and its associations with computerization. For example, many of the female respondents mentioned how taking photographs was similar to keeping a diary. Diary writing has been primarily a female activity, which, according to Barbara Crowther (1999) helps to give females a sense that their lives are important. In what ways then could digital photography be a place for working out identity, accepting and challenging social stereotypes and expectations, etc? For example, has photography and its manipulation possibilities promoted a more unrealistic ideal women, do women now feel even more pressure to look good in photographs? Or has digital photography and its related editing software and at home

editing programs, raised awareness over the artificial nature of photographs and how easy they are to manipulate? Does this in some way lessen the pressure on women when they, not only know about, but also can participate in the same digital manipulations as professional advertising agencies?

Among the respondents, the females also reported taking more pictures of people, while the two males focused more on abstract, object centered photographs. Obviously this sample size is too small to make any assumptions, but it would be interesting to see what, if any, differences exist between male and female photography. Again, I would be interested to see what young people are doing in particular, as this is often seen as a time of identity creation. Articles, such as *Differences in Actual and Perceived Online Skills: The Role of Gender* by Hargittai and Shafer (2006) also suggest that gender plays a role in the use and adoption of different technologies. How might this impact upon women's adoption of digital photography, which demands a fair use of computers, software programs, and other related technologies? The relation between identity and photography remains a significant interest. We live in an increasingly visual society, in which photographs have come to document, and occasionally challenge our memories and perceptions of ourselves. What happens when we are surrounded by cameras, and have the ability to take and store millions of photographs?

All in all, what is most evident at the end of this thesis is that digitization and photography continue to be experienced and practiced in a variety of ways. The interviews conducted for this thesis reveal an interesting mixture of the solid and liquid, of remembering and preserving with forgetting and fragmentation, of the material and

immaterial, of the public and private. Future research should work to better capture this complexity in order to provide a more accurate and complete picture of digitization and photographic practices in the contemporary environment. Only then can theory begin to explain the complex phenomena of digital photography that has been expressed through the interviews with these Queen's University students. With that said of course, amateur photography has always been a very mixed set of practices.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Topics to be Covered	Additional Cues and Probes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify myself - Explain the nature of the study (why I'm here and what we're going to do) - Sign Consent form - Agree to use of tape recorder - Who are you? Age? Where are you from, what are you studying, what year are you in, where do you live in Kingston, etc... 	
The Story of "Going Digital"	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask to see the camera(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observe ease handling the camera - What images are stored in the camera at present? - Did they use or try out cameras prior to their own purchase? Use friends' or neighbors'? Use them at school or work?
First Contacts with Digital Photography?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you get into photography? - The acquisition of the first digital camera? - What camera? - How did you come to have it? - Who made the decision to buy? - What prompted them to get it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N.B. Was camera a gift? Was it part of a bundle of equipment? - Price, features, design, advice, brand? - What accessories would you like to purchase in the future? - Difficulties with film photography? Perceived new benefits of digital? Need for a new camera? A replacement of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If they had a choice, how did they decide which camera to obtain? - Why this camera vs. others? - What accessories have you purchased? - Why change from film? - How did you learn to use the camera? - Did it live up to your expectations? - Who was/ were the intended user(s) or owner(s) of the camera, and who actually uses or owns it now? - What would you say is a 'typical use for your digital camera? 	<p>or complementary to film photography?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which features did you learn first? - Was it easy? - Where did you get help or advice? - Manual? - Websites? Courses? Magazines? Friends and family? - Do you now feel confident with the technology? - What were your initial ideas? - What new discoveries or unanticipated developments occurred? - Did you make a good decision?
<p>Digital Camera</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you give me a 'tour' or demonstration of the camera, possibly including one or two sample photos? - What are some commonly used features? - What do you use the LCD screen for? (framing shots, editing, sharing, etc?) - What settings do you use? (manual vs. auto, resolution/compression, flash etc?) - If manual is used, which? (white balance, exposure etc?) - Do you do anything to pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the most frustrating thing about the digital camera? - Can you think of a problem you have had with the camera and explain how you solved it?

<p>while on the camera? (delete, alter, annotate etc?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why would you adjust settings on the camera, and why would you do this afterwards? - How do you feel about the look and feel of the camera? - Is it comfortable to hold and use? - Does it look the way you'd ideally like your camera to look? - Is the camera easy to use? - What are some things you like or don't like about the camera? 	
<p>Film Photography</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who took film photos, with what equipment, for what purposes? - How were film photos stored? - Who developed, organized, and did things with film photos? - What did people take pictures of? - How (and by whom) are photos stored and organized, and selected for uses like albums or framing? - To whom and why were photos given as gifts? In what relationships? - By whom, when, and how were (and are) film prints viewed? For what purposes? - What aspects of these patterns have changed since going digital? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When would you throw a photograph away? - What is different? - Who uses it? - How is the camera used? - Number of photographs taken? - Types of photos taken? - When is the camera used? - Why the camera is used? - Can you think of an example of something new and unusual that you have done with the camera? - Has use of video changed since the arrival of the digital camera?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When and why do people still use film? (ask for examples or stories) - What would you choose to use digital for? - Do you think you use the digital camera differently from a film camera? - Did/do you use video? What for? How does it relate to still photography? (e.g. used for different purposes?) 	
Digital Photos: Hard Copies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When, how, by whom and why prints are made from digital photos? - Where are they stored and displayed? - Why are some framed, other taped to the refrigerator, etc? - If there are none or very few printed or around why? - Have some been given away? If so by whom, why, and in what relationships? - By whom, when, and how are these photos viewed? - Are they seen as being equal in quality to film prints? Does that matter? - How would they evaluate the process and end-results of printing? - Ask about the most important event or occasion in the past 3 months at which photos were taken? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note where and in what format they exist (framed or not, on photo paper or not, in the same spaces as film prints or not, etc) - What makes a photo printable? - How do you decide which photos to print? - Have people used methods other than printing from the computer (at store, over internet etc?) - Are they thrown away? - Are they printed in other formats (calendars, invites etc?) - Is it seen as expensive and/or time consuming to print them?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the event, and why was it important? - Which were digital and which film? - What has been done with them since? (digital prints, film reprints, email, gifts?) - How important are these photos to you (vs. the event?) 	
Digital Photos: Soft Copies and the Computer Space	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We want to see and understand the photo-world inside the computer (or associated storage like CD-ROMs). - Once you are looking at the photos, ask to see recent photos, special or favorite photos, photos that have been manipulated, photos that have been emailed etc... - Do you use the software provided with the camera? If not, why? - What's the point of having unprinted digital photos? (asked to provoke a reaction) - Who is responsible for getting the photos from the camera to the computer? How do you do this? - Do you feel organized/ in control of your photos? - Who files the images? - How do you feel about the permanence of your pictures? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kinds of photos are they taking? (Subject matter, settings, etc) - Do you worry about losing digital photos? - Through technical problems? - Through theft of computer? - Do you worry about long-term (e.g. 20 years) storage of images? - Are CDs reliable? - Are prints an archiving option? - Are inkjet prints adequate? - What problems have you encountered with the hardware and software? How did you solve it?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you back up? How? Why? Why not? - Do you keep photo files in multiple locations? If so, why? - Do you keep photos separated by who took them? (different people within the household, or those they took vs those they've received from others) - How do you name photos? Who names them? - How do you find particular photos (a favorite or recent one?) - What software do you use to view photos? - - By whom, when, and how are computer-based photos viewed? How often? - Who sees them directly on the computer? 	
Manipulation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What software do you use to manipulate photos? (Solicit examples) - Do you manipulate digital photos on the computer (e.g. cropping, adjusting contrast, adding effects? Who does this? What kinds of manipulations do you do? Why? - What software do you use to email photos? (Solicit examples of sent photos) - When, why and with whom would you send/exchange images by email? Do you store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengths and weaknesses of manipulation? - Better quality end-product? - Control?, Fun? - Do you file, view, manipulate digital photos alone or together with other members of the household? - How did you learn? - Where did you get help and advice? Manual? Course? Website? Magazine? Friends and/or family?

<p>them? Do you print them out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What software do you use to print photos? - What other kinds of computer-based things do you do with photos? (Slideshows, web uploads etc?) 	
<p>Other</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you encouraged/ helped others (friends or family) to get into digital photography? - Would you see digital photography as eventually completely taking over from the film photography? - Anything else they would like to add? - Anything we should have asked? 	
<p>Thank you</p>	