Photography's Album



An autoethnography on mediating time
with smartphones, Kodaks and camera obscuras

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Captured images draw the visual presence of what has been into the now, and so create sites of mourning where the past returns as the presence of absence. With an eye to photography as a haunting medium, this thesis asks how images in the networked smartphone ecology work to deny or intuit the medium's capacity for returning history to the present. Every twenty-four hours just under four-hundred million shots are uploaded live to Facebook and Instagram, accentuating that networkers are "here and now," even as a vast repository of data accumulates social media's everyday records of departed experience. In this environment of photographic abundance, what are the modes of remembrance and presencing which show the medium to be a correspondence between what is, and what has been?

This research seeks to reunite smartphone photography with the theories of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes whose imaginative exchanges with images illuminate photographs as encounters with loss. 'Photography's Album' posits that the medium's online ecology still has the power to return personal experience through the presence of absence, and that this temporal dynamic is constitutive of the liveness of networked photographic practice. Where new memory studies and communication network studies suggest that photography's networked immediacy outstrips any prior association with mourning, this study suggests that contemporary techno-social forms of the medium are in fact used to negotiate the continual disappearance of present experience, and the affective re-emergence of memories. To this end the thesis develops a notion of photography's temporal dynamic as the co-existence of loss with emergence, and adopts Henri Bergson's notion of duration to underscore the coalescence of the past within the mediated present.

The album genre is deployed to form a non-chronological constellation of images and writing, where personal family photographs are placed in correspondence with historically renowned shots. Via this fragmentary creative form, the work cuts across different manifestations of the medium, and reveals that any photograph has the potential to be known again, beyond the technological affordances of its moment of capture. The autoethnographic "I" is used to problematise boundaries between self and other as these images entangle lives and stories. The thesis and its photographic writing create an act of return, one that reimagines the medium's relationship with personal mourning, not as a static embalming of the past, but as a generative reminder of the durational forces which constitute each present instant.

An Introduction

In Five Parts

I: Setting the Scene

II: The Field

III: Methodology and Ethics

IV: Aesthetics

V: Chapter Outlines

PART I: Setting the Scene

Photographing Bodies



Image 1: An iPhone case references Louis Daguerre.

I'm browsing the internet for a new smartphone case when I stumble upon a familiar image from photography's history: the first human figures caught in the camera's gaze. The renowned shot of the Boulevard du Temple, captured by Louis Daguerre in 1838, is now printed on a protective plastic cover for the i-Phone 6. A smooth elliptical shape cuts out a patch of the photograph's morning sky and makes room for the minute camera lens and flash. The iconic symbol of the Apple brand penetrates the urban scenery from a hundred and seventy years ago.

This daguerreotype is taken from the rooftop of a tall building and depicts what appears to be an empty city street. Stone walls and buildings rise from the ground with steady permanence. Letters on shop windows are outlined sharply beneath a magnifying gaze. Light has cast bold details on a layer of silver nitrate, and sustained the image of non-living forms and shadows. Yet the imprint of a city crowd has vanished. This photographed boulevard is full of unseen people whose presence glimmers through their apparent absence.

It takes roughly thirty minutes for the slow exposure of a daguerreotype to keep the trace of light, so transient movements cannot leave a lasting impression. Bodies have been bleached from view, left only to the imagination: businessmen and shopkeepers, the town crier and street sweeper. Women in crinoline skirts carrying baskets of groceries, and top-hatted men emerging from blackened cabbies. Horses pounding cobblestones, pet dogs close at children's heels. Now and then, the faint dust of bodies visually assembles. There's the man in the middle, standing still with one shoe raised to be polished for a franc. And a few metres away, a gentleman on a bench, flipping through the local paper. Almost two hundred years after their faint traces appeared in this daguerreotype, cities have become photographing networks.

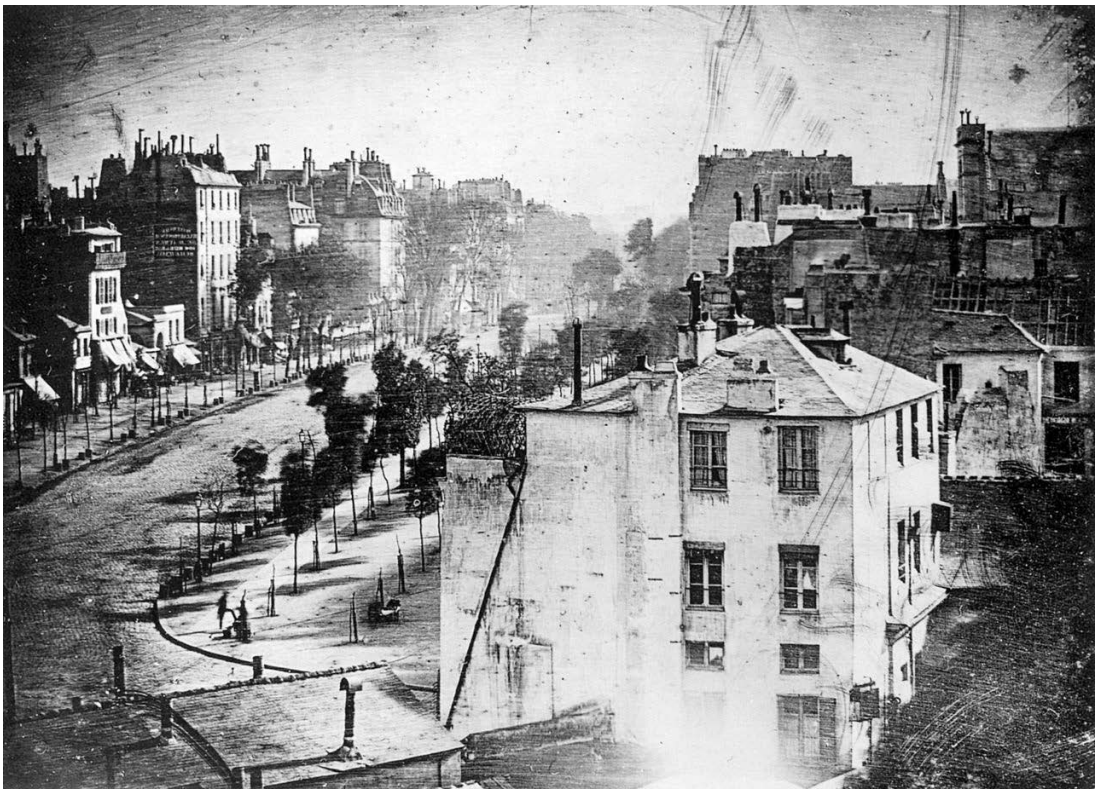


Image 2:

Boulevard du Temple

Louis Daguerre, 1838

These populated spaces are penetrated by the gazes of prosthetic cameras, which no longer grasp at the haunting outlines of nearly invisible bodies, but catch the figures of billions of networkers. The new photographing city is made of flash-lit presence.

On March 13th 2013, a composite image of two very different crowds appears on my Instagram feed. A mass of watchful figures gather in St Peter's Square for Pope Francis's inauguration, and the Vatican becomes a phosphorescent ocean of glimmering smart media photography. Hundreds of bodies raise their arms high in the air to capture the ceremony in flashes, and upload it live to social media. This portrait of photography accumulates viral force when it is uploaded side-by-side with a gathering captured at the same site, eight years earlier, for the funeral of Pope John Paul II. The spectators in this contrasting shot are markedly untouched by the starry punctuations of photographic devices. The cool electronic light of smartphones and tablets forms isolated specks in an otherwise dark scene. NBC news posts this "before/after" shot with the attached comment: "What a difference 8 years makes."

This double-image of dark and light gains traction because of the clarity with which it captures the role of smartphone photography in day-to-day living. The presence of this medium has become strikingly enmeshed with lived experiences of banalities, ceremonies, minutiae and moments of note. Vernacular shots of people's lives cross multiple interfaces, intermingle with fluid photographic genres, and are encountered in the interstices between screens and bodies. There are approximately two billion smartphones in use worldwide (Statista 2017), and every twenty-four hours just under four hundred million shots are uploaded live to Facebook and Instagram (Aslam 2017). The live displays of networked photographs generate an atmosphere of almost instant accessibility, in which everyone, everywhere, seems part of a photographic world that captures experience-as-image. The convergence of mobile phones, online networks, and digital cameras, has created a photographic language of heightened presence and immediacy, in which each photograph uploaded on Instagram and Facebook is spatio-temporally situated: its digital data is dated according to clock and calendar time, and geographically located from satellites that circle about the Earth. A single image leads multiple lives as information, and flits



Image 3:

NBC News posts a composite image

of the Vatican on March 13th, 2013

through numerous computer interfaces across different time zones, no longer indexically bound to material surfaces made of paper or silver halides. Networked photography is disseminated amongst strangers and friends, to shore up presence in the moment, and as a reiterated visual declaration: "I am here, right now."

I swipe past the Instagram shot of the Vatican crowd, and my finger leaves a faint imprint on the glass. This portrait of luminous photographing bodies seems an eon away from the invisible figures of Daguerre's empty Paris. The ubiquity and liveness of smartphone photography appears to have undone the medium's relationship with disappearance and loss, which once made itself known through a daguerreotype's spectral evocations of forgotten figures. The latter's ghostly intimations remind me of how I first came to know photography as absence: through family images.

In my parents' rambling attic, on the top floor of a block of small apartments, are the scraps and analogue memorabilia of our lives. Dust falls swiftly here, and now and again possums find a way into the awnings. Somewhere among an accumulation of large plastic boxes:

A toddler dances
with a straw-haired
rag doll.

A nine-year-old girl leaps
barefoot across the soft floor
of a springtime park.

A baby clutches at green grapes,
cross-eyed with the anticipation
of their sweet juice.

Over time, photography has secreted its traces of our illnesses, deaths, births, joys, and mundane habits. The medium inscribes our relational history with the losses time sweeps up in its wake, and forges talismanic connections with our past. I have

used our photos in processes of meaning-making drawn from the ashes of trauma. They have helped me to honestly acknowledge the mortality of loved ones, and to enter half-imagined intimations of infant memory. This is the medium through which I've mourned seismic changes in our family landscape. As photography has converged with mobile devices and online platforms, another relational understanding of the medium has developed; with my phone I snatch at fragmentary moments on my morning commute; I upload solitary moments in our sequestered back garden; or watch the photographed world slip beneath my finger on glass.

It's 2006, two years after Facebook's first emergence online, and a realisation is slowly dawning on me: vernacular photographic encounters are almost impossible without a profile on the social media site. "Could you give me a copy of that photo we took together last week?" My question is regularly returned with the flat comment: "It's on Facebook." I sign up to the service in 2009, simply to experience those photographs which loved ones will no longer share in gifted envelopes, or emailed files. Over time, I sense the accumulation of family photos in the attic has steadily slowed, and I find myself interacting daily with a different form of mediating ecology, where the family shot cross-pollinates with product advertisements, artistic photographic experiments, pop culture memes, and news images. I see strangers' photographs everyday, where once they were confined to the private circles of close friends and relatives. Access to moments of note comes with the flotsam and jetsam of daily uploaded streams: coffee cups on messy tables, bare feet in the sand, street signs and sunsets and painted nails.

Such fleeting apparitions cross the surface of my perception with a pleasurable slipperiness. On Instagram, I follow Esther the wonder pig. She's a large hog, regularly photographed lounging ecstatically on her owners' blanketed couch. Next to her, in the live stream:

> a foot tattooed with the thin outline of a rabbit;
>
> some sweaty soccer players run for a muddied ball;
>
> a tanned woman in sunglasses flings her arm about the shoulders of a copper Walt Disney;
>
> a young mother blows a toy whistle at her peach-skinned baby.

In this live experience, photos have the ease of conversational chit-chat, or casually glanced distractions. My photographic language is changing. Like new media researcher Joanne Garde-Hansen, I feel a challenge to reconcile this mediated environment of plenitude with the memory of family analogue photo albums, imaginatively tethered to departed moments of personal history: "The ubiquity of mobile phone and digital camera images and their multiple displays on my computer screen, taggable and shareable, does not suggest loss at all… I do not notice the 'longing' that family photograph albums of… childhood [convey]" (Garde-Hansen 2011, p.136). Integral to such intimate encounters with private photo albums is a sense of the singularity of the photographed moment: the once-only flash of a moment which can never be relived in original form but leaves behind its footprint. This is the photographic ontology described by Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes, who imaginatively endow the analogue medium with the haunting capacity to illuminate absent moments and figures from the past.

In the rush of hundreds of photographs that slip across my smartphone screen, I begin to question how photography as absence could potentially be experienced in this multitudinous environment. Parallel to this, other scholars are also keen to explore how the network's rush of images effects each photo's capacity to evoke a departed moment in time. "This inexhaustible stream makes it difficult to develop an intimate relationship with a single image," write Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis. "The assurance of infinite scopic pleasure online encourages a restless, continual search in which the present image, exciting as it is, is only a cover for the next, potentially more promising and thrilling" (2008, p.22). The plenitude of images that constantly accumulates on server storage has been variously described as a kind of excess, with writers evoking it as a "smear" (Orange 2013, p.221) of information, a cacophony transformed into "white noise" (Rubinstein & Sluis 2008, p.23), or a "tsunami" in which we are "drowning in… too much stuff" (Lister 2014, p.16). The image of photography is being academically positioned as a space that empties itself of meaning through overload.

In contrast, this thesis took root from a search for an intimate relationship with smartphone photographs. My desire is to know how current networked practices both draw upon a medium's history, and continue to respond to photography as an experience of re-presented absence. In a series of creative experiments, I place my

family photos in dialogue with networked smartphone practices, and discover how photography still depends on absence in order to affectively appear. Photography remains the medium through which the past is rendered present as images, which, as Susan Sontag has aptly observed, "testify to time's relentless melt" (2001, p.15). The subject of any photograph, even the most seemingly banal, is on the brink of some unforeseeable and inevitable change, and can be singularly re-encountered in unpredictable ways.

For this reason, my thesis aligns with Geoffrey Batchen's call for further investigation of "vernacular" photography, those everyday images which inform understandings of social relations, and the knowledge of time past and present. These are "the photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum or the academy" (Batchen 2002, p. 57). Often neglected in photography studies, these photos are apparently mundane on the surface. They are generally not technically or compositionally sophisticated, and yet they have a vital role to play in how time is experienced as continual flux, always resituating the remembered moment in the light of each new present.

In response to vernacular photography's relationship with change, I have written an autoethnography which self-reflexively draws upon my situated position as researcher, and attends to processes of remembrance and imagination bound up in affective images. Through creative research practice, I unravel how photographs act as sites of interchange between socio-cultural, personal and historical forces, all infused with the particularities of the moment of looking.

Still Lives

Despite its apparent stillness, a photograph "is never fixed, but made in each viewing circumstance" (Drucker 2010, p.23), and is continually re-experienced across shifting photographic manifestations. Personal images are repurposed, reinterpreted, and reframed over time. Past iterations of vernacular practice assert themselves in the ever-changing present and the medium continues to snap at the continual flux of experience, which is always becoming other in what philosopher Henri Bergson

terms duration: the ceaseless movement of non-chronological time which holds the co-existence of the past with the present.

Duration is an understanding of temporality wherein any second of experience is entangled with its past, present and future. This theory suggests that the perpetual liquid movements of time reveal existence to be always becoming, never frozen in one state. This thesis has drawn extensively from Bergson's writings, including *Time and Free Will (1889)*, *Matter and Memory (1896)*, and *Creative Evolution (1907)*, where various understandings of time as pure change are developed through metaphoric imagery and phenomenological frameworks. To adapt these works to the current context of networked photography, this research touches upon various contemporary interpretations of Bergson's philosophies. There are references to Gilles Deleuze, David Sutton and Elizabeth Grosz, who lend insights to the ways photography creates the intuition of time as becoming. I gesture to their studies as touchstones and secondary support material that helps consolidate the album's main focus on Bergson's writing and theories. This melange of research has helped to develop a writing venture into the experiential qualities of photographic encounters as they intersect with memory, the present, and the many socio-historical forms of the medium.

I have explored the ways photographs enter the endless flux of becoming to craft a non-chronological history of a medium, where many techno-social manifestations of vernacular images are seen in correspondence with one another, rather than divided into the linear categories of "new" and "old." Photographs have affective potentiality beyond their original techno-social context. This non-traditional thesis thus uses the notion of becoming to create its fragmentary constellation of images which flare up from different phases of the medium's history and form generative correspondences.

This is a strategy deployed to de-familiarise the medium as it appears today, and to counteract any conception of smartphone photography as distinctly separate from its past. "Photography develops with us… in response to us" (Silverman 2015, p.12), and also in response to the sensed departure of fleeting moments and existences. The medium that reveals the transience of experience is used to produce socio-cultural and personal relationships with moments no longer present. This non-linear experiment shows that despite continual techno-social change, photography

continues to be used to intuit or deny awareness of time's ceaseless movements, and has done so since the earliest scientific experiments for fixing the light of a passing instant. I write my way into the smartphone practices of photography to reveal the ways this medium is used to make memories, to feel presence in the moment, and to stretch consciousness into the unknown future.

Since the beginning of this research, Facebook and Instagram displays have altered. Updated smartphones have entered the market, and new apps have been created to share and display vernacular photos in different ways. The importance of creatively critiquing the passing phase of smartphone photography is to attune to its enmeshed existence in people's lives and everyday experiences, and to understand how its repertoire of practices and images resonate with the medium's histories of conceptualising time. Vernacular photography is intimately caught up in ways of seeing and knowing the world, such that it not only represents images of lived experience, but is constitutive of experience itself. Continuities and dissonances in photography's history allow me to approach the current networked ecology, not just as a brief phase in rapidly changing technological forces, but as an iteration of how this medium symbiotically melds with experiential knowledge.

'Photography's Album' may be of topical interest, but it also aligns with trajectories that carry through photography's many incarnations. As Ross Gibson writes:

> We need to apprehend the past. Otherwise, we won't be able to align ourselves to historical momentum. Without doing this we won't be able to divine the continuous tendencies that are making us as they persist out of the past and into the present (2006, para. 8).

Networked photographs slip swiftly out of the live stream and into oblivion, remaining in computerised memory somewhere in a server farm; that is, until digital decay or company downfall renders the information defunct. As signatures of day-to-day existence these photos enact their own disappearance as they vanish from the feed, and take a precarious position in cyberspace as data-based records of lives lived and memories that cannot be known. What will these billions of photographs become?



Image 4:
Facebook's video, *2017 is here*

"We hope that you enjoyed your video of meaningful moments from 2016, and we're looking forward to the moments you'll share in 2017. From all of us at Facebook, we wish you a great year!"

PART II: The Field

A Site of Emergence

I am not alone in seeking a historical perspective of networked photography that traverses past and present media forms. 'Photography's Album' arises in a time of ongoing academic discussions about how to epistemologically frame current practices of the networked medium. Batchen calls for a "new history" of photography which will unsettle boundaries between what are considered old and new practices of the medium (Batchen 2002, 1999). The need to reassess the relationship between networked photographs and their analogue history is also raised by media theorist Andrew Hoskins. He writes that recent techno-social development is only…

> 'new' in that its continually emergent state, shaped and understood through the metaphors, media and technologies of the day, but simultaneously these same media and discourses reflexively shape a reassessment of… remembering (and forgetting) under these conditions (Hoskins 2000, p. 74).

When framed in this way, the quest for new knowledge of the latest photographic practices requires continual reassessment of how recent media forms correlate with photography's histories of mediating experience. This quest will remain topical and current as the medium develops, even as the understanding of photography's history keeps an eye upon the remote past.

A need for historically informed research on networked photography is one way of answering Martin Lister's recent call for a "new media ecology." He states that new modes of inquiry are needed to account for the complex pattern of relations between networkers, images, and re-appropriations of historical photographic forms (Lister 2014, p.16). "We need to rethink photography, and now is the moment to do it," comes the reiterated encouragement of Mette Sandbye and Jonas Larsen, who opine that "the newness of digital photography relates not only to the digitization of images; but to media convergence and new performances of sociality, memory, history and identity" (Larsen & Sandbye 2014, p.xx). This can be sought through an inquiry into how memory and history were socially performed through analogue phases of the medium.

Academic research into the role of vernacular images in online and offline environments is relatively recent, yet in a short space of time a substantial body of literature has accumulated on the subject. Current research on the medium is just as

multifarious and dynamic as the many forms of photography, and it traverses disciplines from sociology and anthropology, to media archaeology, philosophical theories, and neuro-psychological analysis. The forms of knowledge circulating around smartphone photography are founded predominantly on qualitative observations of cultural communities and technological infrastructures.

Social scientists have gathered research on consumer behaviour and data patterns in order to determine the social grammar and interactive functions of networked photographic information (Ito 2005; Kindberg *et al.* 2005a, 2005b; Gye 2007). Extending from their sociological approaches is the recent spate of work in the field of Human Computer Interaction, which examines consumer needs in relation to the storage, retrieval and dispersion of vernacular photos (Sarvas & Frohlich 2011; O'Hara *et al.* 2012; House *et al.* 2004; Van House 2009; Van House *et al.* 2005). These approaches to knowledge are given alternative expression through the creative media practices of visual ethnographers. Artistic media experimentations are combined with the studies of select social groups in order to explore the technological affordances and design systems of networked communications (Pink *et al.* 2016; Hjorth 2016; Shanks & Svabo 2014; Villi 2014; Keep 2014; Berry & Schleser 2014).

The above scholarly projects run parallel to the concerns of this thesis, but do not directly intersect with the themes of memory, forgetting and imagination that are experientially explored in 'Photography's Album'. The thesis does share some of these themes with work in the area of new memory studies, which is an offshoot of the broader disciplines of new media studies and digital communication studies. Writers such as Andrew Hoskins and Jose van Dijck are concerned with the ways networked media ecologies produce and reflect socio-cultural conceptions of memory and record keeping. Their multidisciplinary investigations have explored mediated memories in fluid and active cyberspace as a complex interchange between texts, producers and audiences, where digital artefacts such as photographs both produce and reflect cultural conceptions of the past as a place of return. The approach of new memory studies tends towards the discipline of neuro-psychology to understand personal experiences stirred by different documents and files.

While this approach is very different to the situated autoethnography practiced here, I do share concern about many of the problematics introduced in the work of van

Dijck and Hoskins. They both question how "media tools mold our process of remembering and vice versa", and how "remembrance affect[s] the way we deploy media devices" (Dijck 2007, p.2). In examining these problematics, new memory studies produce a nuanced understanding that mediations of experience are embroiled with acts of forgetting, and that instant data is not entirely about the direct presence of the here and now. Andrew Hoskins, Joanna Garde-Hansen and Anna Reading recognise that "the instantaneity and temporality of social network environments disguise their potential as mediatised ghosts to haunt participants far beyond the life-stage of their online social networking" (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins & Reading 2009, p.6). The language used here indicates how the concerns of this field are strikingly reminiscent of philosophies of analogue photography which predate the emergence of the internet. And yet photography has not been the main focus of new memory studies, which has a wide-ranging interest that canvases home videos, computer games, music files and blogs.

Analogue photography theories are, for the most part, placed in an uneasy dialogue with the theories of networked ecology of smart media, as though research that emerged before digital technology were some estranged distant relative, uninvited to current explorations of the medium. Rubinstein and Sluis note the tendency of recent scholarly work to sidestep philosophies of photography that emphasise the medium's relationship with absence: "Whilst references to the canon of critical writing on photography may appear in the occasional footnote, it is still remarkable that the new wave of works on photography can do without the persistent questions about representation that fascinated writers on photography for decades"(Rubinstein & Sluis 2008, p.10). Others in the field of digital communications add strength to this notion, and claim a split has formed between philosophies of analogue photography, and the temporal structures of data-coded snaps in live networks.

Constant visual flows in cyberspace are seen to undo the pastness of the photographic medium. Mette Sandbye reviews Roland Barthes' statement that every photograph posits "this-has-been," and counters it by stating the live stream is a constant replenishment of "this-is-now" (Sandbye 2012). Joanna Zylinksa and Sarah Kember seek "to wrest photography away from its long-standing association with mummification and death, and to show its multifarious and all-encompassing activity," or its liveness (Zylinska 2016, p.16). The real-time of the internet

continually dispenses with history as it rushes the present into the foreground. For Mikko Villi, the networked shot now evidences spatial separation between mediated locations, and no longer acts as the marker of a temporal divide: it "forms a connection between there-now and here-now, instead of mediating the there-then to here-now" (Villi 2015, p.9). These works approach the temporal eidos of a medium as one of instantaneity and global presence; and yet I am not entirely prepared to relinquish photography's relationship with the loss and disappearance of passing time. This thesis is an opportunity to reunite smartphone photography with philosophies of the medium which pre-date the internet, and which endow vernacular images with the electrifying and invisible presence of absence.

Re-presenting Absence



Image 5: My stored album of memories on the iPhone 4

Photographs speak to the ceaselessness of time that will continue to be photographed as generations live and die, all leaving behind images of their existence. Captured moments are struck with the dumbfounding force of a historical gaze: a photograph is overlaid with the beholder's knowledge of what transpired after the click of the shutter. In the tinted portrait of my baby uncle, I read the death that touched his body in old age; in the picture of my parents' clasped and freckled hands, I read the fifty years of matted history they share; in the image of myself as a smiling young girl, is the hidden trace of an ambivalent loss that severed family ties.

I realize that photography has struck me with a form of magical thinking, as a spectral and ambivalent testimony to past experiences that the medium neither forgets nor returns. Long ago, I entered into what Roland Barthes calls the "madness" of photography, the hallucination of something that "on the one hand… is not there", but on the other "it has indeed been" (Barthes 1981, p.115). Through poetic and personal critique, he writes of imaginative photographic encounters that

rest on a non-chronological and multiplicitous temporality, in which one can read "at the same time, this will be and this has been" (Barthes 1981, p.96). This co-existence of past with present and future is also threaded through the philosophies Walter Benjamin brought to the study of photography.

While the work of these two authors is by no means completely aligned, theoretical correspondences arise in their studies of photography's interplay with absence. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), Benjamin recognises the multiplicity of non-linear time which sparks in the instantaneity of a snapshot: "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised, and is never seen again" (Benjamin 1982b, p. 257). The evanescence inscribed in such photographic language is lent to images in his possession, through which he discovers photography is touched by bereavement or disappearance (Cadava 1998). Forms and figures which appear as images are caught up in the medium's illuminating gaze, through which the past permeates and informs the present. The writing of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) chimes with the pathos of Benjamin's imaginative exchanges with a medium; both capture the medium's haunting ability to present the beholder with an electrifyingly immediate sense of the lost past.

The emphasis for both philosophers is on experiential exchanges between people and images that enable a potent dialogue between past and present. Their intimate descriptions of encounters with particular photos reveal "the perceptual, imaginative and affective activity of the viewer" (Yacavone 2012, p.5) which is infused with socio-cultural knowledge and personal memory. As Kathrin Yacavone puts it, both writers describe photographic encounters as forms of singularity, being "a contingent meeting of the specific image, the individual viewer and the unique referent" (2012, p.92). This dynamic interaction between image and beholder is where the magical thinking of photography develops, belonging neither to the image or the individual alone, but to a relational exchange between the two. The wounding singularity of an image is, "what I add to the photograph but what is nonetheless already there" (Barthes 1981, p.55).

The Singular Photograph

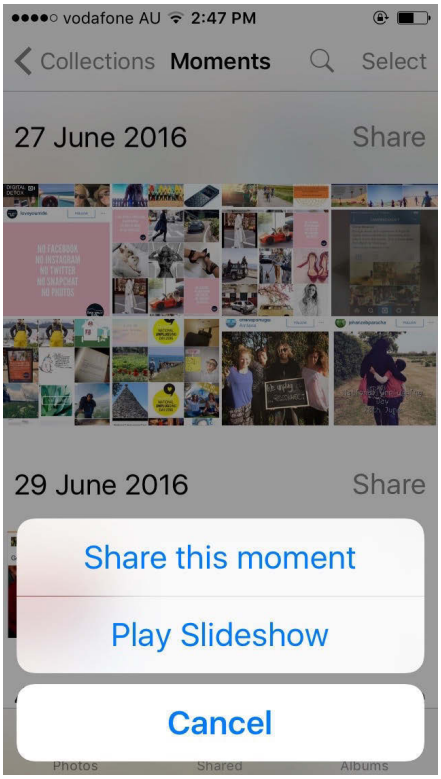


Image 6: The iPhone's option for "Sharing Moments"

For Roland Barthes, photography's singularity, its *eidos*, arises through his mother's Winter Garden photograph. He uses this image as a site of expansion into the realm of others' pictures, and from one photo, a portrait of photography develops. In a gaze at his mother's childhood, he unravels photography's complex interweaving of past, present and future, and sees not only her death and birth, but also his own beginnings and endings, stitched into the temporal fabric of a single captured shot. "I…decided to 'derive' all Photography (its 'nature') from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me, and to take it somehow as a guide for my last investigation. All the world's photographs formed a Labyrinth. I knew at the centre of this Labyrinth I would find nothing but this sole picture" (Barthes 1981, p. 73). *Camera Lucida* thus allows intensely personal and socio-historical shots to resonate with one another as representations that seal the departure of experience.

The integration of the personal with the socio-cultural also appears in Benjamin's descriptions of photographs, in which the arresting image of the past is caught in a web of historical associations that surpass individual recollections through anamnesis. Experience is "in collective existence as well as private life," he writes. "It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data" (Benjamin 1982a, p.153). With a poesis that weaves involuntary and voluntary memory together into cultural critique, Benjamin finds himself compelled to respond to early daguerreotypes, and portraits from the cartes des visites studios of the late nineteenth century. He gravitates towards young Franz Kafka's portrait, and grasps onto the 'infinite sadness' of the child's stare, which resonates in him as a form of personal recognition, as well as a mark from the medium's history. He tunes into the affect of singularity when he writes the beholder "feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the

character in the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may rediscover it" (Benjamin 1972a, p.7). This is the wounding affect of being seized by the light of a personal moment of history.

Photography today rarely receives such a personal and historical form of poetic attentiveness. While autoethnographic writing can still be found in studies of analogue images (Kuhn 2002; Hirsch 1997; Guyas 2007; Wigoder 2001; Schutt & Berry 2011 et al.), the networked medium is more regularly broached through analytical and traditional scholarship, which makes use of objective data to calculate tendencies in online behaviour and photographic content. This thesis seizes on an opportunity to know the experience of smartphone photography in a different way: through an autoethnography that seeks the singular "spark of contingency" in the now of online snapshots. 'Photography's Album' looks for a generative knowledge that mutually de-familiarises both the photographic philosophies of analogue images, and current understandings of new media ecologies. The theories of Benjamin and Barthes are situated in a dynamic interplay with current everyday uses of the medium, and this enables different affective encounters with smartphone photography to emerge.

This venture requires a writing-as-research that self-reflexively performs acts of memory and imagination. The kinds of experiential realities that Benjamin and Barthes draw from photography,

> are clearly not wholly capturable in any traditionally detached, objective and impersonal scholarly account… They call, instead, for a highly personal, even autobiographical, engagement with the medium and its potentials, one that proceeds by way of specific images and specific responses to them (Yacavone 2012, p.92).

Such non-traditional research doesn't draw its strength from the personal strains of writing, but uses the experiential as a conduit for understanding socio-cultural imaginings of a medium.

My task is to give myself over to encounters with photographs in live streams, rather than document the networked information in fixed mathematical calculations based

on computerized data and algorithms. In the spirit of Ross Gibson's work, I want to "infiltrate the experience" of browsing Facebook and Instagram; to become "not only a witnessing participant but also a diviner, someone who begins to distil some brittle definitions about the tendencies that are pushing through [this] system" (2010, p.9). To do so, I need a methodology that emphasises my situated involvement in a subject of study that is intimately ingrained in my day-to-day life.

PART III: Methodology & Ethics

Oneself as Another

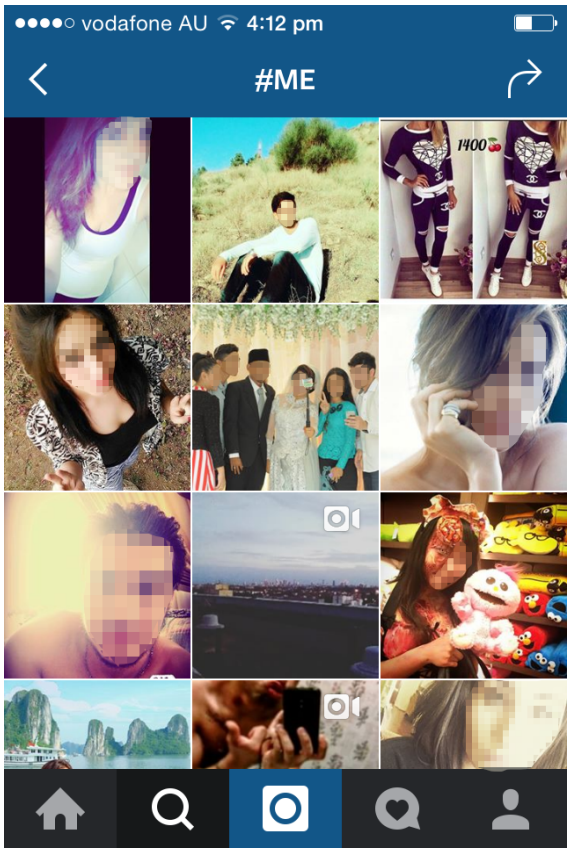


Image 7: Instagram images hashtagged "Me"

In the burgeoning studies on the networked ecology of photography, autoethnography remains markedly underdeveloped. 'Photography's Album' responds to this gap in research, and deploys this non-traditional methodology to engage with photographs at the interstices of self, culture and writing. Autoethnography allows the socio-cultural moment to articulate itself through a writing that dissolves clear boundaries between self and other, where the researcher's voice is embroiled in the life-worlds described. I view myself as a testing ground or case study, (re)productive of the very phenomenon I observe with emotive attention. The critical tools needed to do this are an assemblage of auto (biography), ethnos (culture), and graphy (writing), which can be drawn together with different degrees of harmony and resonance. These three elements fluctuate, throw themselves together with alternating forces, actively tune themselves to resonate with different frequencies of photographic experiences, and draw implications from a visual dialogue between image and text.

The "I" which writes these pages, draws close to what is termed evocative autoethnography (as per Carolyn Ellis, Laurel Richardson, Tony E. Adams, Arthur Bochner, see *Handbook of Autoethnography* [2013]). This creative practice uses poesis, narrative and vignette to form a fragmentary constellation of the subject of study. As Ellis explains:

> Concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language (Ellis 1999, p.673).

Thus the reading and the writing of this thesis involves an unfolding of all these interrelating forces, wherein different relationships with photographs are stimulated as the work moves from moment to moment.

Autoethnography's ambivalent "I" responds to the photograph's strange doubling of self-image. In pictures of myself, an uncanny affect takes hold, where the familiar becomes foreign. I see myself anew, from the outside, embedded in the changing climate of photography. The photograph is the "advent of self as other, a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" (Barthes 1981, p.35). This remains the case in smartphone photography, where that little word "me", so often scribbled on the back of analogue photos (Dillion 2004, see also Whalen 2002), has now become a popular hashtag, appearing in 324,340,414 Instagram shots to date (June 2017). "Me" has many different faces, photographs and mediating experiences. Autoethnography echoes the medium's continuing portrayal of self-as-other, and has the capacity to draw out affective qualities in relational photographic exchange. This methodology asks the researcher to remain conscious of how cultural practices write through them, and are reproduced through the act of writing.

Distant Closeness

A productive relationship between personal storytelling and cultural critique generates a kind of intimate distance, where narratives gathered from lived experience engage in what Katrina Schlunke and Anne Brewster term a "plethora of 'I's" (Schlunke & Brewster 2005, p.394). In this case, the voice speaks to the photographic encounters of many, some of whom lived in another historical period to myself. The autoethnographic voice is thus an "appeal to the specifics of [a] project", as well as a means to "get free of oneself" (Schlunke & Brewster 2005, p.394). It is a creative mode that 'wants to turn and touch its listeners and readers and wants to feel their touch back" (Schlunke & Brewster 2005, p.394). In other words, autoethnography isn't an act of navel gazing, but is practiced here as a site of encounter between readers, images, and writing.

I work with personal photographs that make me raw, and one particular image in this thesis carries a strong sting, but this project is not a confiding space for private history. I don't use personal disclosure here in a confessional mode, to expunge myself of memories; I write with photographs that carry a personal affective resonance to productively expose the haunting capacity of any vernacular image. The vulnerability of some of the images in this album opens the wound the medium can become, when contemplated in a singular light. New ways of knowing the vernacular networked medium are discovered when research is imbued with the energy of mourning, once so prominent in the work of analogue critics. Photography can be re-imagined when it is stung with intimate memory, and is reunited with the theme of bereavement found in the work of Benjamin and Barthes.

Autoethnographers Gregory Ulmer and Norman Denzin articulate the subtle ways in which a correlation of the personal and the socio-historical can emerge in creative research influenced by photographic ways of knowing and being. They state the project begins

> with personal history, with the sting of childhood memory, with an event that lingers and remains in the person's life story. This is the space where biography intersects with history, politics and culture. Autoethnography re-tells and re-performs these life experiences as they intersect in these sites. The life story becomes an invention, a re-presentation, an historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualised in the

> spaces and understandings of the story…In bringing the past into the autobiographical present, I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it. History becomes a montage, moments quoted out of context…Thus are revealed hidden features of the present as well as those of the past (Denzin 2013, p.29).

The careful wording of this passage resonates with my intentions for this project, which likewise begins with a sharp sting from my childhood, and enfolds personal images into a fragmentary history of the photographic medium. 'Photography's Album' darts between different photographic manifestations, creating a montage of singular photographic moments, juxtaposed to reveal the entanglement of lives and images across time.



Image 8: Instagram selfie tagged "camera-flash"

Writing of Others

The family of 'Photography's Album' are bodies touched by photographic experience across history, all caught in the ambivalent absences presented in personally mediated moments. As the photos, lives and stories of others are enfolded in this autoethnographic venture, the album becomes a "joint unfolding of biography and history" (Hoskins 2009, p.95), breaking the bounds of my own private experience to explore the plural selves photography captures.

There are risks that come with traversing this vast territory of photographed lives. In the interstices between street observations and screen-based experiences I find myself caught in an ambiguous relationship with the private and public. I write as a stranger among strangers, an observer and participant in a virtual crowd. My phone takes me to foreign places. In a single afternoon, Instagram photos float across glass and show:

a woman in Brazil who photographs street fashion;

an Italian man who shoots distant figures walking into the horizon's vanishing point;

a cat owner in Los Angeles who makes portraits of her pet in tiaras.

Their pictures are public and they have uploaded them according to personalised settings which enable all networkers to see their profiles. Some internet research would treat this online space as akin to a public street, where behaviour is out in the open and offers itself up for documentation (see Shilton & Sayles 2016). And yet, as Helen Nissembaum astutely observes, the intentions behind social media uploads are often formed by an ambivalent form of "privacy in public" (Nissembaum, 1998). Social media sites are complex arenas of communicative exchange in which the boundaries around communicative acts become porous, and accessible information that appears open to all audiences may in fact be sensitive material from the personal lives of networkers (see Eynon, Fry & Schroeder, 2017). Would social media users consent to see their online uploads appear in this particular research context?

Over the course of my research I have gathered hundreds of publicised photographs from Instagram and Facebook, each of which has appeared in a live and transient conglomeration of multiple images on the social media services' home page displays. For each screenshot taken of Instagram's Explore page I am presented with twelve to fifteen photographs, many from users in different countries around the world. Other researchers using social media data have noted the logistical challenges of gathering informed consent for such large-scale data sets, particularly when sourced from networkers from different nations and dialects (see Shilton and Sayles 2016). This dilemma is just one small consideration in the many complexities of ethical digital research, but it begs the question: is it possible to incorporate data from social media sites without the direct consultation of each and every user involved?

Some researchers suggest that academic work with extensive publicised data is justifiable as long as the scholar ensures the identities of individuals remain

anonymous. Haimson, Andalibi and Pater state that "A person's face and name should not be used without permission" (2016, para.5), and to this end I have adopted strategies to protect users' anonymity. All facial features and user names have been blurred. In the context of this particular thesis, I consider this visual strategy the most fitting way to respectfully maintain the privacy of others, and ensure that no images directly expose networkers' or particular social groups to unwanted public attention.

I am very much aware that working with others' online images remains an ethically ambivalent form of research, and that there are mixed opinions on academic codes of conduct for such endeavours. Technology moves faster than institutional efforts to determine the best ethical response to internet content, such as photographs. Scholarly and legal institutions still grapple with the best way of approaching copyright issues, modes of open academic practice, and the respectful use of information on the border between public and private. Careful research into this area has heightened my sense of the slippery nature of photographs in cyberspace, which can very swiftly cross media platforms and be seen by a vast and unintended audience. It has also made me acutely aware of the ways photographs transgress boundaries around self and other, not only on social media sites but in the much smaller network of the family home.

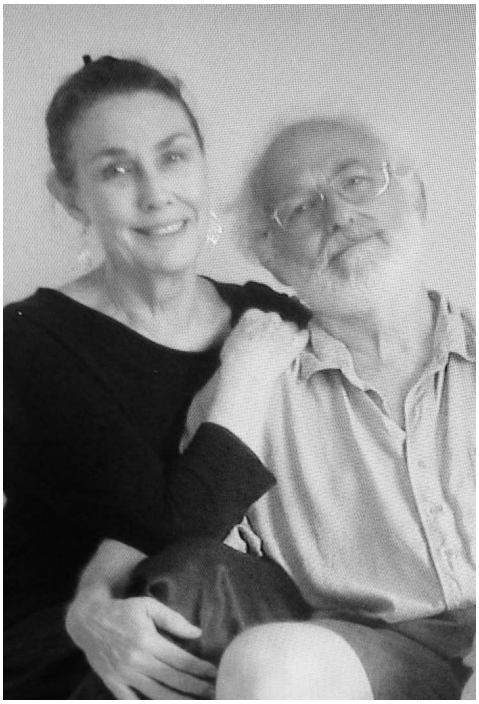


Image 9: A portrait of my parents

Family in the Lens

Within these pages are photographs that have wounding affects, not only for me, but also for many members of my family. How does one determine who owns a photograph? It is not as simple as asking who took the shot, or who was captured in the image. The memories and associative emotions entangled in photographs belong to many, and as such, I cannot point to any one photograph and say that it is mine alone. A photograph with only me in the frame can have a profound impact in others' lives, and likewise

pictures of others have implications for myself.

In this way photographic images share some of the complexities of writing about experience, for they are representational forms which cannot be divided like property, and like much non-fiction writing, their public dissemination raises concerns around ethics and consent. When it comes to autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis reminds me that the writer inevitably engages with the stories of intimate others, and the approach to relating any shared experiences must be done with sensitivity and care (Ellis 2016). She writes, "this is the most important ethical problem in this kind of research. Because now we're not just talking about faceless, nameless, unidentifiable subjects - if we ever were. Your intimates are identifiable individuals with names" (Ellis 1999, p.681). I draw close to intimate stories of memory and personal relationships that are shared and contested by the people I love. The stings of remembrance and grief that I encounter in family photos belong to many people, and in many different ways. The dead of my family are in this book, as are some ambivalent losses that still have profound impact on our lives.

For a long time now, I've been intensely invested in questions around the ethics of writing about trauma and memory, and have devoted much research to how narratives or creative representations of one's own experiences will cross paths with the stories of others. My creative honours thesis in 2009 was a discussion of the ethics of fiction that sources inspiration from others' wounding pasts (and for this I turned to the work of John Paul Eakin, and his books *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves [1999]* and *The Ethics of Life Writing [2004]*). The honours thesis came about because a close family friend decided to use her intimate knowledge of our family's painful past to write a novel. This experience, and the resulting thesis, taught me that a series of delicate choices arise when an act of representation draws from the lived reality of loss or mourning. When it comes to photographs the challenges of a writer-researcher's engagement with memory become even more complex, as the indexical content of the image comes with the powerful sense that something of the subject is captured by the medium.

My parents and I have had extensive discussions around this thesis in which we have turned to our shared vulnerabilities. I have deliberated with them on how I can

respectfully write about our history in order to show photography's capacity to haunt the present with absent things and people. In the early stages of this thesis I had determined not to engage with family experiences, but as my studies evolved, it became clear that without this engagement with my own history (which is also theirs), the autoethnographic work could not truly grapple with the eidos of photography as absence.

Images of the past are the raw and tender experiences that give photography its non-linear historical gaze. Moments of loss, disappearance, joy in passing: they all awaken the photograph's ability to make a rip in time and render poignant discontinuities perceptible. I could sidestep these stories to escape the pain that comes with them, and in this way avoid attending to the past that stirs memories for my relatives. I have chosen not to do this. Instead, I am working with my parents to better understand our shared, mediated history, and thus towards more intimate knowledge of photography's potentialities. I have shared drafts with them, and together we have discussed the writing of chapters that draw upon their images and personal experiences to ensure that nothing appears which they would wish to keep private. This approach follows the lead of Laurel Richardson, who suggests that writing the way through autoethnographic portraits, the researcher should include "everything and everyone" (Richardson 2010, p.36). My parents are my collaborators in this project. Without them, this text would not exist. Their different accounts of photographic experience shed light on nuanced ways a medium has filtered family and public life across decades.



Image 10: A selfie on a quiet night

Self-exposure

"Is there such a thing as being too vulnerable for one's own good, when doing autoethnography?" asks Chatam-Carpenter (2010, p.6). This question has arisen more than once as I've undertaken this project. I use the lacerations of memory as openings into theory and culture, and some amount of pain is inevitable. But then these qualities of feeling are the ephemeral yet sluicing matter of my research. I want to "embrace vulnerabilities with purpose, make contributions to existing scholarship, and comment on/critique culture and cultural practices" (Ellis, Adams & Jones 2013, p.25). Personal images, vignettes and narratives are here to incite others' own imaginative responses with photography, and to create a space in which text, photographs, and memories can align in singular ways for each reader.

As a venture into the wounding capacity of photographs, the album creates what Kathleen Stewart describes as a "reaction to loss and excess (which) can do many things. It can turn the stomach. It can set off a flight of thought" (2013, p.660). These visceral and motivational affects have been part of the process of this creative research, particularly in the first chapter where I reveal a seemingly everyday image of myself to be a photograph taken at a time of childhood trauma. The exploration of photography's haunting capacities here brings to light a time marked by abuse. However, as Stewart explains in her description of autoethnography, material of this sort is used critically, and as an invitation to form new knowledge and understanding of the field of study (Stewart 2013).

The reader's response to this album becomes part of the research text, which is never complete in and of itself, but forms a dialogue. We are positioned in the photographic medium and it is positioned in us. We are bodies that photograph, and are photographed. Through this interactive relationship, readers, writer, text, and images work to…

> create particular and contingent knowledges and ways of being in the world that honour story, artfulness, emotions, and the body; to treat experience and individuals with responsibility and care; and to compel all who do, see, and listen to this work to make room for difference, complexity and change (Ellis, Adams & Jones 2013, p.25).

The work of mourning so integral to the writing of Benjamin and Barthes, is adapted here to respectfully tend to the histories photography powerfully manifests, while also rediscovering the past anew, as a site of potentialities.

PART IV: Aesthetics

Writing as wandering

From this situated autoethnographic position, I approach the billions of photographs pouring through social media every day. Daily online shots are like a crowd in and of themselves, made up of glimpsed faces and a populated rush, which I experience from within its fluctuating pulse. I wander through these online/offline mediations, where boundaries blur between personal and public photographic experiences. Autoethnography enables me to wend my way instinctually, and with feeling, through the vast and fleeting photographs that slip by on my phone, or in the environment around me. I take note of these moments glimpsed in the street but I am not an outside observer. I am a participant: a smartphone user with a Facebook and Instagram account.

On a city bus, three teenage girls
sit in a row, and cram close together
to snap a joint selfie.
One points sardonically at her own face,
the other two pout.

In front of me, another passenger slides
idly through her Instagram feed,
where a fleet of strangers' faces
are lit momentarily
and disappear.

On a Wednesday afternoon,
I snap and upload a dragonfly
that hangs on a thorny rose in my garden.
Its effervescent wings and skeletal framework
get 14 likes.

Another posted picture,
from the night before New Year's Eve 2016,
on a top-floor balcony,
where the lights of a city night drip
through a misty glass of champagne.

The writing pools into photographic vignettes such as these, to enact the affects of live-streamed images, and impulsive snaps at everyday minutiae. I seize on the instantaneity of the point-and-shoot gesture, which is so easily enabled by the prosthesis of smartphone technology. The short-lived immediacy of these repetitive written vignettes works to echo the fleeting photographic conglomerations on my smartphone screen. Contextual gatherings of photos arise in my Instagram and Facebook accounts, based on algorithms generated from my specific user history; no other phone will display the same photographic formations, so I take screenshots from these two platforms, knowing the live displays I catch are lost as soon as captured. These preserved snatches at the twenty-four hour feed are regularly worked into this album in written as well a photographic form. This creates a form of writing-as-research used "to describe something's qualities, trajectories, and duration or…to follow how things accrue or how they lose steam" (Stewart 2013, p.661).

Writing that simulates the pace of live and prosthetic photos works to reveal tensions in the current networked ecology: photographic experience oscillates between a sense of monotony and immediacy, where my attention is arrested in small pauses, or is scattered by the fluidity of the live. The stream of twenty-four hour photos is encountered in contradictory ways, being both a continuous output of apparent sameness (each image much alike), and a repeated iteration of every unique instant (each shot is distinctly its own). The dance between singularity and repetition is worked into the qualities of fragmentary writing, which slides between attentive focus on isolated images, and a surface skimming of consecutive shots.

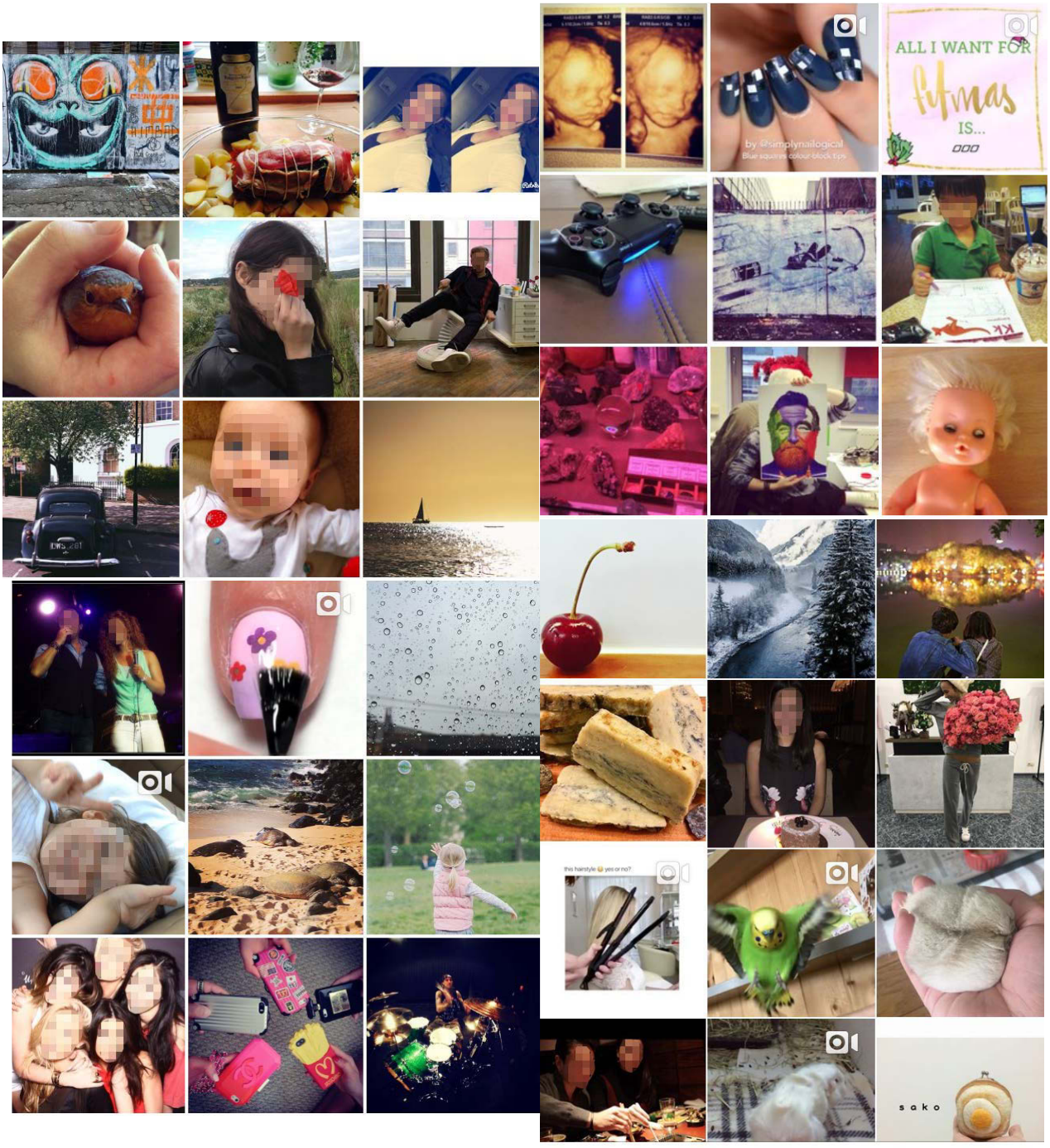
The live feed produces adrenaline hits of information, which keep the user pinned to the instant. An uplifting electronic note chimes on my phone as Instagram notifies me of social interactions with my photographs:

> Alex Lonergan liked your photo.
>
> Nidhi Prakash just posted an image for the first time in a long while.

These updates hit like little sparks of electricity, like a present continuously recharged. Then again, the endlessness of photographic output can be experienced through a kind of inertia or ennui, where each now is much the same as the one before, predictable or apparently uniform because of its involvement in the vernacular, where repeated takes of people's meals, friends, pets, apartment views, and city walks become forgettable. The aesthetics of such vernacular snapshots are simulated in the images and text of this album, where quick-fire grabs at passing moments illuminate the desire to catch the moment: skewed framing, jarring composition, and flashlit overexposures indicate the longing to fix the now, before it disappears in the swift melt of change.

Image 11:

A compilation of screenshots from Instagram's Explore page



Vernacular Aesthetics

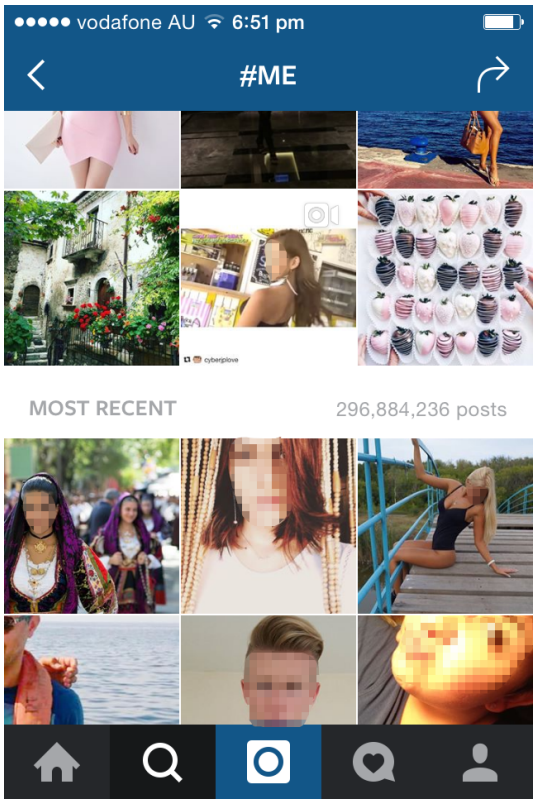


Image 12: Instagram shots tagged as "Me"

This situated wandering is a visual language, which integrates the medium and my writing in a hybrid form. Photographs and text form a correspondence on the page, as the work wanders through a myriad of onscreen and off-screen mediations. The aesthetics of this thesis is a mode of text-image interplay which engages with converged genres, media forms, and photographic pasts, all of which assemble in the experience of vernacular photos on Facebook and Instagram. In my encounters with personal images, these social media sites expose me to an intermingling of everyday photos with videos, ads, memes, article links, and written posts. This fluid exchange of image types is replicated in the aesthetics of the thesis, where pictures from family photo collections cross paths with screenshots of social media apps, online uploads of historical photographs, written comments from networkers, and advertising displays. The conventions of the analogue photographic album are purposefully disrupted as I situate the photos of relatives and friends in visual dialogue with new media interfaces. The concept of the family album as a sealed book, seen only by close social circles, is challenged and de-familiarised by the everyday stop-and-start distractions of Facebook and Instagram.

The intention here is to echo social media's foray into multi-media space. Facebook's home page presents me with a stream of disparate content:

a photograph of a terrier squashed by its owner's embrace;

a written post lamenting the heat of a 40-degree day;

an advert for 'Glenworth Valley Outdoor Adventures';

a couple's joint selfie on their one-year anniversary;

an article on the medicinal properties of marijuana.

The album genre is swept up in these live displays, as automated messages deliver a form of nostalgic narrative. "You have a memory from two years ago," says my notification system. Old photographs return via the website's algorithmic presentations, and robotically arranged photographic slides of my personal history arise in tandem with the ephemera of networked media.

Facebook's subsidiary company Instagram is also a conglomeration of photographic genres, all stitched together in a seamless patchwork on the platform's Explore page. Here, vernacular images of daily existence seamlessly fuse with product placements, celebrity profiles, and memes. In one live page, I come across:

A small television screen paused on a Seinfeld scene

New Nike shoes on adolescent feet

Young parents nurse a newborn

Raucous friends in a pub celebrate the win of their football team

Compared with its parent company, there is minimal text on this website to distract from the photographic content, but on closer investigation of different images, chunks of text emerge in the form of networker's reveries and stories.

The Album is Transfigured



Image 13: Facebook's "Friend's Anniversary" slideshow displays my photos as though they were physical objects

The album genre has a strange half-life on these two platforms, both of which find ways to evoke and disrupt photographic practices from various analogue manifestations of the medium. The interface of writing and imagery which appears in 'Photography's Album' is used here as a "'space-clearing' strategy which enables the dialogisation, the hybridisation and the relativisation of knowledges. It

foregrounds and problematises in very productive ways the conventions of the genres it involves" (Brewster 1995, p.90). In this case, the genres of the album and the networked photograph are deliberately questioned, unanchored from fixed and certain meanings, and shown to permeate one another in the daily practices of ubiquitous smartphone media.

The traditional analogue photo album has well-worn pages, touched and turned by the people captured within. These banal yet potent texts are tributes to the singular photographic encounter. Personally resonant shots are ceremonially placed in the material object of a book, and so signified as important to the person who "albumises" them. Elizabeth Edwards regards albums as "memory texts" (1999, p. 233), that function to "reinforce networks and identity built on the memory to which they relate, positioning individuals *vis à vis* the group, linking past, present and perhaps implying a future" (Edwards 1999, p.233). Photographs chosen for storage are thus singled out for ritual observation and careful attention; enshrined as images struck by the correlations between disparate moments in time. The physical nature of these books is such that the number of photos chosen is finite, and stops with the final page. Choices need to be made, about which photo to place where, and how the contextual assemblage of images will pluck the memories and lives of many. This personally significant exchange with vernacular images has an interesting role to play today, when smartphone image supplies seem infinite, and moments spent with individual photographs are usually brief, and unrepeated.

The narrative composition, aesthetics and structuring of albums has not been completely eradicated in the networked ecology, where it persists in digital simulations of material polaroids, in the ordering of images in Facebook 'albums', and in the scrapbook style of Instagram profile pages. The after-life of the album is present in the photographic memory texts of today, yet it has been put in motion, divorced from the private and material object of one closed book, and is often organised through automated algorithmic displays (rather than the careful choices of an individual). In this context, the ceremonial act of albumising is a form of intervention into the fluid and multiplicitous photographies online that seem to defy singular encounters.



Image 14:
The analogue family album.
Leafing through pages of my father's childhood.

Non-Chronological Material Histories



Image 15: Facebook posts a notice of photography's anniversary

Each now of networked photography sparks some connection between disparate moments in the medium's history. As this thesis scatters images and writing from different phases of photography, it establishes what I term the aesthetics of the flash, a poetics derived from Benjamin's description of historical knowledge; "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or that what is present casts its light on what is past; rather…what has been comes together in a flash" (Benjamin 2002a p.462). I'm struck by one of these little sparks on August 19th, 2016, when Facebook posts a notification above the home page of every user: "Celebrating 177 years of photography." There are no photographs attached to this anniversary notice, only basic cartoon images of people and animals. They break the confines of polaroid frames to reach out to one another: a dog sticks his head out of a photo to lick the ice cream of a little girl in an adjacent shot. A woman leans out of a night-time shot to link arms with a man photographed in full sun. "Today is world photo day," it reads. "Here's to new images that give us new perspective on the world, bringing us closer together." The date they've selected as photography's birthday is the popularly accepted beginning of the medium: the year 1839, when Daguerre publically announces his invention, the daguerreotype. "I have seized the light! I have ceased its flight!" (Daguerre 1839). This Facebook announcement stays visible in the feed for a few hours, and then is gone, swept away by a tide of other luminous images.

I catch a spark of connection between Daguerre's proclamation of his discovery, and the array of fleeting photographs that glow in the glassy screen of my smartphone: some material qualities and metaphorical constructs have remained present throughout different incarnations of the medium. "Regardless of technological change," writes Jai McKenzie, "light is a constant defining characteristic of photomedia intrinsically coupled with space and time to form explicit light-based structures and experiences" (McKenzie 2014, p.1). The prosthetic phone, with its

bright liquid crystal display (LCD) of vernacular photos, continues to evoke many material metaphors which have long been foundational to photographic ways of seeing and knowing the world.

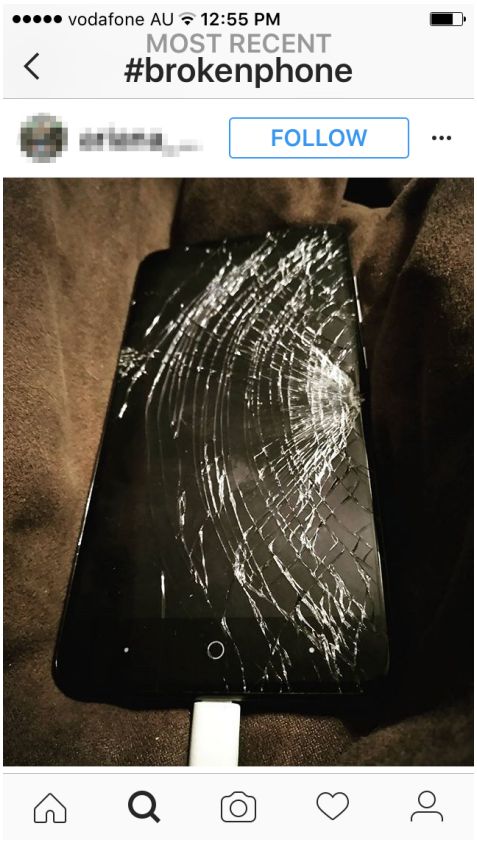


Image 16: Instagram shot tagged "broken phone"

I have chosen to follow these metaphors, cultivating a poesis out of recurrent imaginings of the medium's non-human properties. This is a choice to disrupt the notion that smartphone photography is experienced mainly through immaterial and ephemeral data, divorced from matter. While photographs are no longer indexically bound to discrete material surfaces, the daily exchange with smartphone and computer screens subtly evokes many material qualities from analogue histories. As Heidi Rae Cooley asks, "is the experience of vision merely a diminished spectatorial scrolling, in which strings of images unfurl in front of us, framed for us but inaccessible to us? Is it not possible, even likely, that people engage practices of vision in a more material way?" (Cooley 2004, p.135). This likelihood informs my own exchange with the networked medium; I want to feel my way through smartphone photography's material imaginings, to entwine photographic forms with living, feeling bodies (and with bodies of memory). 'Photography's Album' engages with the fact that "Remembrance is a happening that is experienced through the body and in relation to vision" (Cooley 2004, p.149), and thus singular photographic encounters occur at the interstices between the imagined and the material.

The writing that follows is an interplay between the visual, the physical and the virtual, as I work with the affective resonances of language and remembrance via thematically arranged chapters: 'Glass', 'Shadow', 'Light', and 'Air'. These physical properties have long been interwoven in conceptual understandings of photography (see Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire* [1999] and *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* [2004]), and are here rediscovered in smartphone practices, where

embodied intimacies with personal images and media oscillate between the data-based and the tangible. There are parallels between the handheld object of the smartphone and the daguerreotype's status as "the mirror with a memory" (Oliver Wendell Holmes 1859); correlations arise between photography as "the art of fixing a shadow" (Henry Fox Talbot 1837) and networked photographs as the traces of remote others. Benjamin's descriptions of the "strange fog"(Benjamin 1972a, p.5) or mist that permeates photography can be repurposed, to evoke the live currents through which images float. And of course, light, the essential element of photography, can be experienced as the burning impact of a singular photograph, which wounds from somewhere amidst the constant luminescence online.

PART V: Chapter Outlines

The opening chapter, 'Photo-graphia', is about the ambivalent evidence an image gives of experience, and the ethics of writing about personal photos. It begins with a seemingly mundane shot from my personal history, and opens the way for other vernacular shots to haunt the present with the non-visible residue of memory. Any apparently benign image in the online stream could one day become a testament that wounds with trauma or mourning. Photos in the live feed will never tell me the secrets to which they testify. The power of the potent image does not lie in the visual content it displays, or in its attendant online data. The force of a sluicing photograph rests in its status as a spectral trace of departed time: what Jacques Derrida calls the apparition of something absent (2012). When exposed to hundreds of strangers' photographs, my role is to be mindful that unseen truths could linger in any picture. There are many temptations that arise in my process of light-writing: to rescue photographs from history by blaring them in a present light; to solve them with the glaring flash of a detective's crime-scene photo; or to illuminate some truth buried within, and so expose their secrets. But what would an ethical light-writing look like? I wish to write about smartphone images in an ambivalent light, where the presence they announce is wrought with unseen testimonies. A photograph of my younger self, taken in a time of trauma, begins this form of light-writing. I don't seek a brightness

that steals the unknown from the photograph, but look instead for a light that burns darkly; that promises there are hidden spectres in this medium.

'Glass' is where I reflect on photography as the medium that stores a lifetime of recorded experience. The medium once known as the "mirror with a memory," has a history with autobiographical impulse: the desire to keep self-image and recorded experience preserved for posterity. Glass screens froze the first momento mori images, as intimate daguerreotypes that confronted mortality. Now, glass screens sit in the palm of the hand and stream endlessly shifting snapshots of the everyday. In this chapter I take an honest look at my father's relationship with his photographs, as he builds an analogue album for posterity, and comes to terms with his own mortality. I reflect on how Facebook and Instagram respond to desires for a preserved record of a life lived. These platforms gesture to (and disrupt) photography as a means of posterity, via features such as the Timeline, Memorial Profiles, and Instagram 'stories'. I start a dialogue between these cyber-forms of photography and my father's personal images. This experiment reveals how the online motions of photography can open a sense of Henri Bergson's concept of duration: time that ceaselessly uncoils birth and death in tandem with life. For networkers, such intimacy with mortality is evaded through an emphasis on the everyday; and yet the on-and-on of the everyday is precisely where mortality inscribes itself. More and more personal images move unfixed beneath glass screens, and in their restless motion, reveal the long-term secretion of births and deaths reflected by photography. In the relentless slippage of live moments, smartphone photography is the mirror-with-a-memory which both forgets and remembers all the faces it sees.

The next chapter, 'Shadow', turns to the social connectivity of smartphone photography. Here I discuss how the live image is constituted by the desire for co-presence, while simultaneously founded on the visible absence of others. Photography tugs at a longing for closeness across a distance (spatial or temporal). Images of my mother's childhood catch a little girl's need for the witnessing gaze of another. In the absence of a mother or father to take her picture, her portrait is snapped by passing strangers. The missing figures of her parents weigh strongly in these shots, and speak to the longing for a returned look to affirm presence in time. The desire to be photographically witnessed manifests in the smartphone era, where photographs put distant bodies in relation to one another; they are virtual

correspondences to anchor subjects in the moment. Facebook and Instagram stage interpersonal connections by marketing instant photographic closeness, and the ideal of a globalised medium that everyone can share. This image of the networked scene echoes with the earliest fantasies and inventions of a socially networked photography: from the first dreams of sending portraits through telegraph wires, through to the cartes des visites of the late 1800s. In the midst of a networked scene that declares communal presence in the moment, my mother and I return to the images of her childhood, and seek out a different relationship with the presence lit by photography. We create a captured moment that lingers with the absence of the other it desires.

From here, the thesis begins to focus more closely on the non-human qualities of the photograph. 'Air' is about the sensed exchange between mortal bodies and earthy things, where the photograph evokes the viewer's entanglement in duration. I follow this auratic encounter through a portrait of my grandmother, whose figure merges with the landscape of her image. In her visual slippage into non-human elements, I sense a "peculiar weave of space and time" (Benjamin 1972a, p.20) in which other living forms and objects partake in one another's presence. The theories of Walter Benjamin and Henri Bergson are here brought into dialogue to reveal how the durational existences of many forms coincide. Smartphone photography appears far removed from such an imaginative exchange with other dureés. Online, the sweetened strains of nostalgia are preferred, as a pleasurable indulgence in a past never too distant, perhaps even non-existent. This is the affect of Facebook's slideshow "A Look Back," and Instagram's "retro" filters. Yet in these automated and sugary photographic configurations, reminders of the deeper recesses of duration arise unexpectedly. The impersonal quality of automated information sometimes returns the beholder to objects and life-forms far beyond the sentiment of a contained personal narrative. Data enables seemingly disparate things to pool together onscreen: bodies and objects, textures and animals. I situate my grandmother's portrait in this live context, as one photograph amongst many. In the feed, her image coincides with the presence of other things, all living, dying or decaying in the unfurling of duration.

In the final chapter of 'Photography's Album', I come full circle, and return to the question of how a singular image can wound from amidst billions of seemingly repetitive images in cyberspace. 'Light' explores how Roland Barthes' punctum of

time emerges in the context of smartphone photography. Here I look at one of the most repeated tropes of smartphone photography: the sunset photo. On the one hand, this image exemplifies the punctum: it is the light of something witnessed on the brink of departure. It is a volatile star that burns with the duality of life and death, an image wrought with the *eidos*: "this will be and this has been" (Barthes 1981). Then again, in online databanks, it becomes the repetitive pattern of the studium, in which banal recurrence keeps photography in a comforting glow. How does the sharp light of a wounding moment in time penetrate this online photographic landscape? Does overexposure to this digital luminosity numb me to the possibility of one searing image? Barthes reminds me that the beholder has some choice in how they relate to photography's light: either as the "mad" shot of something burning with loss, or a "tame" image in which I bask in sameness. I venture into how this choice might play out on the luminous screen of the smartphone, where photography's light glows in a movement of live data. In the influx of pictures on an LCD screen, I discover how the deathly shock of a photographic punctum exists in tandem with the predictable and soothing glow of the live.

The Vitality of Mourning

This album begins with a particular wounding photograph taken at a time of trauma, and so embarks on a discussion around how traces of mourning and loss can be understood in dynamic and creative ways. The image of a past grievance has the potential to be readapted within the present, and this is because it is captured in a fragmentary glance that highlights the endless change of duration. Photography presents an image that is completely still, yet pregnant with the many moments that accumulate around its future and past. As such, photographs open the way for personal reinterpretation of memory, and also for continually renewed perspectives on the medium's history, which likewise is never still or fixed.

As Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska posit, "we need to see the ontology of photography as predominantly that of becoming" (2012, p. 77), wherein any single photo has the potentiality to evolve in personal meaning-making, and the medium is understood as an ever-changing techno-social practice that infiltrates everyday living. In their recent work, *Mediation as Vital Process* (2012), they view the networked

ecology as enacting "a process of differentiation and life-making" (Kember & Zylinska 2012, p.72), and akin to this description, 'Photography's Album' acknowledges the life-making affects of online movements. However, my research suggests that the vital processes of networked photography are not "contrary to [the medium's] more typical association with the passage of time and death" (Kember & Zylinska 2012, p.72).

This thesis proposes that photography, in all its practices and forms, is co-constituted by vitality and death, where gestures of presencing are simultaneously mediations of absence. Each transient image in the feed is a dual articulation of the instant as a live now, and a moment lost. Photographs uploaded on the internet are a contradictory manifestation of preservation and liveness: they vanish from the feed, yet remain stored in cyberspace, and thus resonate with the Bergsonian notion articulated by Deleuze, in which "the past coexists with the present that it has been…at each moment time splits itself into present and past, present that passes and past which is preserved" (Deleuze 2013, p.85). Duration conceptually captures a duality, in which photography enfolds vitality and deathliness in the same temporal continuum, and in the case of this thesis, opens the way for the analogue philosophies of absence to be rediscovered in a live networked ecology. The loss and bereavement which Benjamin and Barthes found in singular photographs is re-engaged in this thesis, as part of the vitality of a medium that is always grasping at the ceaselessness of becoming.

In the process of always-becoming-other, this work of mourning doesn't consign painful photographs to the grave; it re-energises them with the invigorating spark that begins new knowledge. Autoethnographer Annette Kuhn reflects upon the unpredictable life of images in her work on family photos and memory making: "These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, re-making, making sense of, our selves – now. There can be no last word about my photograph, about any photograph" (Kuhn 2002, p.19). Thus the writing of personal and family history in these pages isn't presented as a fixed image of the past. That would be to presume that the past is frozen in place, chained to a chronological order which doesn't facilitate the creative regeneration of new meanings drawn from history. Counter to this, a productive work of mourning enables the past to shift in the imaginative movements of memory and perception, which honour the experiences that have marked both the self and the photograph, and forge new relational

connections between the past and the present. This is akin to Benjamin's belief that "to articulate the past…does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'…it means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 1982b, 257), and in that rush of remembrance, discover how the present sheds new light on what has come to pass.

The album begins with such a moment of danger: a photograph of my younger self, a digital snap from 1998, which testifies to trauma. It freezes my image, but the memories evoked are not frozen over. The picture alights as a work of mourning from which writing begins, and which may "turn the stomach" or "set of a flight of thought" (Stewart 2013, p.660). This is writing that can embrace the life-forces of deathly encounters, where "mourning is… affirmation" (Derrida 1995, p.143). A single shot acts as a spark from which a constellation of other photographs in the medium's history begin to disperse, all productively engaged with the generative loss that make this thesis, and every photograph, possible.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.

- *T.S. Eliot (1971)*

Photo Graphia

The Odd Face



Fragments from an image to come.

The photograph is of a girl. She sits at a window framing the outside sky. Her body is on the cusp between childhood and adolescence. There is the glimmer of what she will look like as a woman, but her body is still caught in the awkwardness of girlhood. She looks into the camera with eyes that have seen something, but looked away. The surface of a smile creeps across her lips. This is a photograph of an odd face. The expression slips between what she wants the camera to see, and what the camera sees in her. She is not smiling, and yet she is - ever so faintly. Her long hair is pulled back from her angular face, and her white freckled skin shows up pale against the black of her polo neck. Pale face and hands framed sharply by her winter clothes. She leans against the window frame, rests her head on her hand. There is some strange softness in her look, a person retreating inwards to a quiet vanishing point. What is trapped in her yielding eyes, in that smile that doesn't smile?

That girl is me. She is my ghost, the haunting trace of who I was at age twelve. To you, she would simply be the photograph of a young teen. An ordinary photo. Unremarkable. For me, her image stops time at the point where brutal changes in lived experience altered my family irrevocably. The bare bones of the matter are that the girl with the odd face was being sexually abused, by a man who became very close to our family. That is to say, I was being abused. This image, shot one day after a harrowing night, marks the moment when our family photos change. Relatives disappear from future albums because they can't face the reality of the girl in the portrait. No bodies are left behind in this family grief; there has been no funeral or ceremony to mark what has passed. People do not bring flowers, or say those now well-rehearsed words: "I am sorry for your loss." All we have are images to testify that I was once the girl in that picture, and that we were once a family of many. I visit my mother and father, and the present continues to wash over the history concealed

in photographs in their attic. Seemingly banal Kodak prints of familiar family scenes. Shots of picnics, and holidays, of camping trips and Christmases. For years, the portrait of me at the window full of sky was kept stored in an unopened plastic box. It was not a picture for revisiting, nor was it one to destroy. Rather it existed in a liminal space, kept as something unseen yet still preserved for future sight. Now I take it out and review it for this project.

Shock in the Lens



The girl in the portrait prepares herself to be photographed by her mother. She has instructions: "look away from me, and when I tell you, look into the camera." She rests her head on her arms, looks away, looks back, and she is a picture. The shutter goes off, a small fragment of time is snatched away from its lived happening. She is seared onto paper a few times in this way, as her mother likes to take sequential shots, "Just to get the one which will be most truthful," she says. "Pretend I'm not here." Or, "Look into the lens as though it were a tunnel, and you could see something at the far end." In this process, the odd face becomes visually repeated, in slightly different poses. One of the versions of her image is a particularly strange revenant, with the look of someone struck dumb in a flashlight. She stares head on into the camera like a creature pinned in shock.

The picture is taken in the day, without a flash, and yet she looks as though a severe light has burnt onto her retina. She infiltrates this present moment of writing through her unnerving stare. There is flammable memory here. I light up a photograph that has been dark for years. This image and the state of shock it reveals have become one for me, just as silhouettes of trees become part of the lightning that emblazons them. When she looks at me from nineteen years ago, something of her fear sparks in me now.

Miriam Bratu Hansen draws on Benjamin's writing when she says, "What is illuminated by the flash and thus photographically preserved in memory is [not] the content of the message [or photo] but an image of our 'deeper self', separate from and outside our waking, everyday self, which 'rests in another place and is touched by shock'" (Hansen 2008, p. 347). This shock is propelled into being "as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match" (Benjamin 1979a, p. 343). In this photographic encounter, a past bursts into the now. This portrait can never return without its magnesium memories. It lights up what cannot exist solely in the photograph, nor in the memories it holds, but in a chemical reaction between both.

The Flash



The flash destroys as it illuminates, it leaves ashes in its wake. It is simultaneously the rush of flames, something vibrantly alive and yet deathly. This combustible charge rips subjects' images out of darkness, and leaves an afterimage dancing on eyelids. It carries a violent and abrasive element in its forceful immediacy. The aesthetics of the flash are well situated to depict experiences in which lives are stunned with a forceful change, photos like the odd face. She flares up and departs, returns and disappears. I write her with stops and starts, answering her apparition as it interrupts my present with spectral force. "Look away from me. Now look back." She appears always by appearing again, but never arises for the first time, as an original. I grasp at the unreachable, at my evasive photo, which is the presence of a hidden abuse.

I delete that word several times and then reinstate it on the keyboard… "abuse." The sentence is cut back to: "the presence of a hidden... " The phrase is incomplete. I change it back, then delete the ugly word again. The hidden… the hidden what? The defining word seeks to conceal itself, to avoid being struck by the illumination of writing. Then I pin the word down on the white page… I've caught it, a rabbit

stunned in the spotlight. Abuse. There it is, I've got it now, now I can shoot. Take a photograph. Aim. Fire. Watch it go up in a charge of light. "Look away from me. Now, look back."

This flash of light begins a different way of seeing, knowing (and not knowing) the images of everyday experience that flood billions of smartphone screens. I want to de-familiarise the shots that populate the twenty-four feed of social media, and to honour the invisible stories that are present. To do this, I wend my way through the different forms of evidence that photography grants, and discover the impossibility of rescuing any single image from its disappearance into lost time. My encounter with the odd face leads me to discover a different approach to the past of photography, to creatively incorporate it into an understanding of how the medium haunts the present through spectral traces. Derrida's work on hauntology opens the way for this meditation on the unseen testimonies of photographs. A networked past is coagulating in the databases of social media platforms, with each profile user uploading images that each have the capacity to haunt. They accumulate in perpetuity, sometimes forgotten, although always potent because of their ability to return anew in times to come.

From One Photo, Many

The odd face flashes with a lightning-like immediacy that could open cracks in time, through which things past and present converge. This is the energy that ignites a generative constellation of photos scattered across history. Some are of strangers, some of family. A non-chronological history of the medium starts to dart between moments. This order of time is where "the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, leap-like or crack-like [*sprunghaft*]" (Benjamin 2006, p.148). Images send pulses through one another depending on how they are held together in a context. The flash sparks in one photo, and darts between the surrounding others, its energy pulled between multiple points of attraction. This is the beginning of a constellation of moments from photography's history.

Pieces of Me



The portraits of the odd face appear as fragments on the page. I give little glances at a picture that is not whole. In small squares of faded colour, the intimation of a body appears. A body in pieces. In one indistinct block of image, there is what seems to be an open eye, in another the frizz of hair that bristles close to her cheek. Perhaps that one is the shell of her ear. Then again, they could be formless apparitions that go no further than a series of pixelated colour schemes and textures, which gesture not to the content of the image, but to photography itself. The medium makes itself apparent, and unsettles some longing to make sense of the visual encounter, to pin it into some locatable meaning or truth.

These fragments are here to evoke the desires I've encountered in my study of smartphone photography. When I explore the smattering of images disseminated through Facebook and Instagram, I am propelled to experience a singular image amidst the plethora of captured moments. I have looked for this singular image through a detective impulse, with a quest for evidence. Sometimes my writing provokes a need to rescue one solitary shot from the mass stored in cyberspace. But often my gaze simply slides off the surface of these accumulated pictures, and the impression I'm left with is a smattering of coloured squares: the fragments of Instagram, or the passing images of Facebook. They empty themselves of content in my distracted look and I can only see the vague impression of the medium itself; its pixels and shadings passing swiftly before my eyes. Nothing leaves an afterimage and I can't feel any flash of shock.

This response is formed through exposure to the seeming banality of the networked image. In their vastness and abundance smartphone photographs on Facebook and Instagram may suggest an overwhelming repetition of the innocuous or shots without the ability to wound. The same image tropes repeat, displaying glances at the anything-whatever. Michelle Orange epitomises the sentiment that this photographic

landscape is becoming a junkyard: "For every personal photo disseminated through some form of media, dozens more are the result of pure reflex and languish until giga-space is needed for more like them. The act of shooting, not necessarily its smeared result, is now in many ways the point of photography, which has become more medium than message" (Orange 2013, p. 221). Each day, billions of smartphone lenses fire off at trivial details of the day, snatching at the anything-whatever that offers itself up to the photographer. At first glance, I understand Orange's dismissal of uploaded photographic ephemera. Many photographs on Facebook and Instagram pass me by without the magnesium flash:

> The cork from an empty bottle of champagne;
>
> a woman's figure leaping down some shadowed stairs;
>
> a pile of books neatly stacked against a clean white wall;
>
> a motorbike parked next to a gnarled tree;
>
> a bunch of artichokes,
>
> and a basket of generous blueberry muffins.

I will never know the meaning of these images for their takers, or for those included in the shot. They don't resonate, but leave me waiting, full of curiosity, for some affective pulse. My urge to keep looking rests on the knowledge that any photograph, regardless of its surface mundanity, can carry a magnesium memory. If they are not already lit with the shock of memory, these photographs can become ghostly in the future when new knowledge of the past comes to the surface. My mother takes a photo of me in the winter of 1998 and at the time of its taking, it appears to her (and anyone else looking at it) as simply a photo of a girl sitting by a window. She is completely unaware that she has photographed her daughter in a time of trauma. No one knows that in a few months' time this picture will carry new meaning: it will ignite and become a flash-lit instant that shocks with the burning visibility of the invisible, the presence of a hidden abuse.

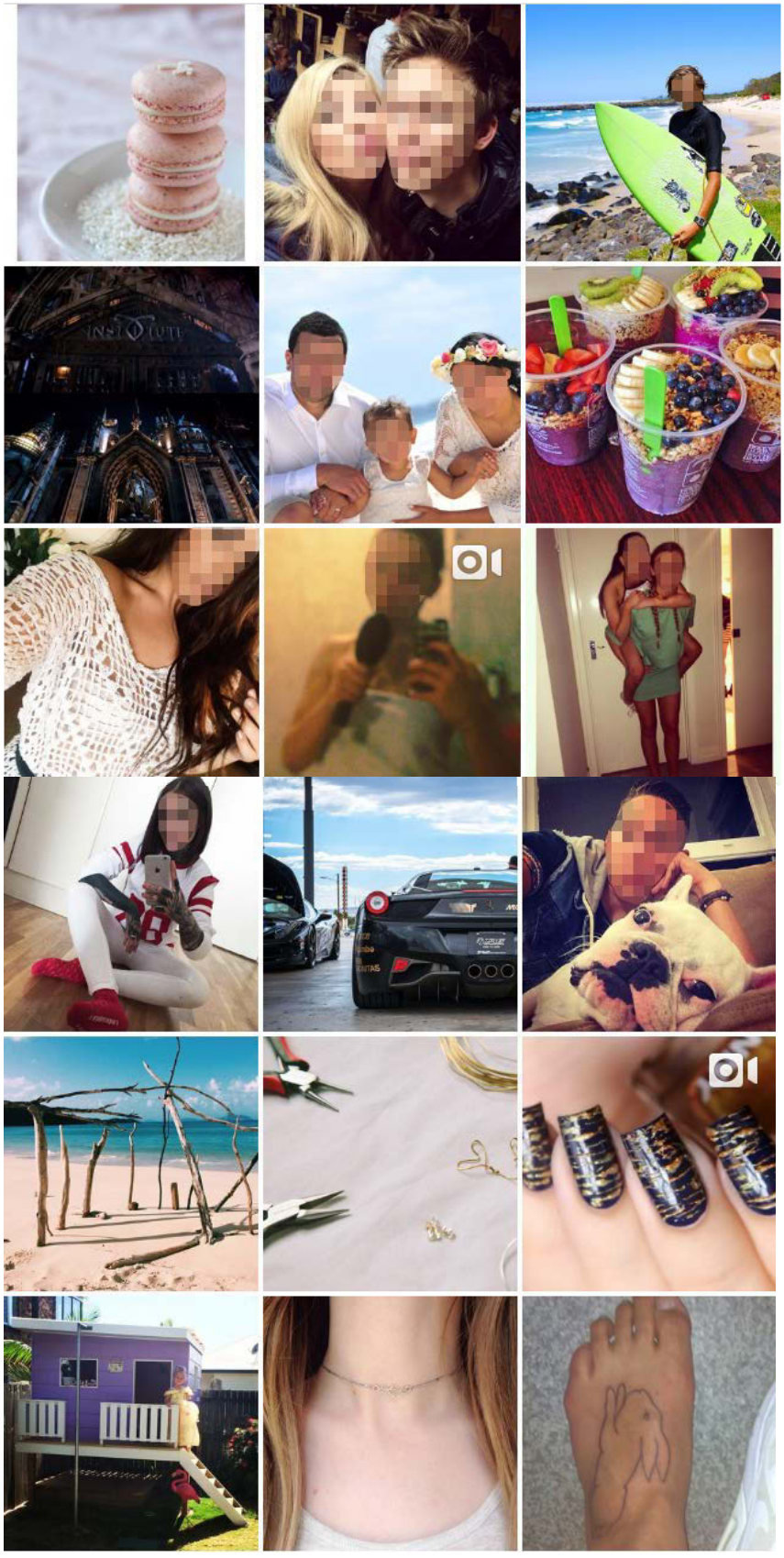


Image 17: Compilation of other people's photos on Instagram Explore

On Facebook or Instagram, this portrait would obtain a form of invisibility. It would be "liked." Networked connections would comment on how similar or different I looked to the way I photograph now. It would be only one small image in the passing of a day, amongst pictures of cityscapes and daily trivia, pop culture memes and still life snaps. It would look like just another picture of just another girl. That is all.

But the odd face is a signature of the medium's double-dance with concealment and revelation and a reminder to tread carefully with the unknown memories of others' photographs. This writing experiment is a response to the past other, to every photographed body. I start to look at other seemingly banal snaps online that may carry weight I cannot feel. As I browse through Instagram, I encounter images I see but cannot know:

> A girl in her underpants stands side-on to a mirror. She grabs the flesh of her belly with one hand as she takes her selfie with the other;
>
> a silver haired old woman slowly descends a staircase with her walking stick slowly extended before her,
>
> and a man sits with his back to the camera, in the glow of a fireplace. He wears a jumper knitted with the clumsy outlines of reindeers.

There are similar banal images on my own Facebook and Instagram profile pages. They were of no real import at the time I took them. Simple still life studies:

> A photograph of a hallway table decorated with a fossil ammonite;
>
> a shot of someone's fine-boned hands around a steaming cup of hot chocolate.

As these images flare up in the present, they have become something new, something charged. These are the traces of a broken relationship. As with any still image they resist complete closure or finality yet seem to arrest time as if the moment were cut off from change. A visual trace of a moment in time could be volatile, or it could mark



.



Images 18, 19 & 20:
Three photos sent to Jason Lazarus for the 'Too Hard to Keep' archive.



a poignant joy that passed. It could carry the lingering aftermath of a crime. Changed knowledge of the past has the potential to one day send an electric pulse through photographs uploaded on the web, regardless of the visual content.

A series of such potent yet mundane shots has been curated by Florida born artist Jason Lazarus, who draws together anonymous vernacular images in his project *Too Hard to Keep* (Lazarus 2010a). The content of this archive has been contributed by people who experience an ambivalent relationship with photographs that wound: the subjects and owners of these pictures neither wish to keep or lose what has been caught on camera. The archive thus opens an intermediary possibility for relating to such charged photos, and creates "a repository for …images so that they may exist without being destroyed" (Lazarus 2010b, para.4). I browse the anonymous contributions to this strange archive, where moments are displayed without explanatory stories and thus float in a state of dissociation from the memories that haunt them. There are many familiar image types in the collection:

> blurred shots of messy bedrooms, and concert crowds;
>
> of friends linked arm in arm at a dimly lit party,
>
> and couples laughing in a rainy city street.

For the most part, there is no way of determining what potency these banal snaps have for the owners who have now disinherited them. Now and again, the loss inscribed in the photo speaks more boldly through the content in the frame:

> a deceased cat on a vet's surgical table;
>
> a woman's selfie in which dark purple bruises ring her eyes;
>
> and then there's the close-up of a tiny, stillborn's hand.

But these more evidentiary marks of mourning are rarities amongst a collection of everyday minutiae, much of which is caught on smartphones and documents momentary snatches at what must have seemed quite ordinary. In the case of such digital shots, Lazarus has asked participants "to delete their copies (both on personal drives and any copies living on cloud storage)" (Lazarus 2010b, para. 9), so that the only remaining access to the image is via the *Too Hard to Keep* archive.

I have included some of the pictures from the archive here, as an evocation of others' photographed revenants and as archetypal examples of what is termed the "vernacular": that genre of photography which documents daily life, often without a strong eye for the aesthetic, but with the intent to catch a moment in everyday existence. The examples displayed throughout this chapter act as "an open invitation to see more than meets the eye" (Batchen 2005, p.74). I think about this bizarre collection, and about the odd face, as I begin to look for what cannot be seen in others' networked photographs.

Seemingly unimportant shots have the potential to awaken singular experience, precisely because of their impenetrable blankness. Indeed, for Batchen, "The more banal the photograph, the greater its capacity to induce us to exercise our imaginations" (Batchen 2005, p.74). *Too Hard to Keep* lends credence to this sentiment, where apparently uneventful shots have initiated a strikingly singular experience in the beholder. These shots work to reveal how online photographs are not concrete or tangible evidence of the moments they illuminate, but something far more elusive and electrifying. They are traces that testify *there are ghosts here*.

Ghosts in a Medium



I call the odd face portrait my ghost as well as my photograph, and in so doing, evoke photography as the ghostly medium that returns her. What is a ghost? Neither object nor subject, but "thing-like". Derrida questions the unstable ontology of ghosts when he writes *Spectres of Marx* (2012). He draws upon the famous haunting scene of Hamlet to meditate on the question of the revenant, the othered trace of the past that continually returns. The ghost of the King of Denmark haunts his son to give voice to a family trauma which remains concealed yet omnipresent. This figure is like a photograph in that it paradoxically presents the non-present. It speaks of that which is past yet still heavy in the air.

This hallucinatory thing, the King, has no clear origin, because it exists as something always re-presented but never purely presented. It comes only by coming again, by returning as a trace of something other. It is outside of the time that it references (the murder that it testifies to), and it is outside of the moment it arises. "King is a thing," writes Derrida. "Thing is the King, precisely where he separates from his body, which, however, does not leave him" (Derrida 2012, p.8). Likewise the odd face separates herself from her body, yet it doesn't leave her. She is cut off from herself in the click of the shutter. She is nineteen years ago, and she is a photographic trace that returns, but never comes back. The spectral apparition "disappear[s] right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the spectre. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as the re-apparition of the departed" (Derrida 2012, p.5). Gone but not gone, a ghost appears only because it is already marked with its own departure.

Becoming Spectral

Before the camera, the girl lit with shock enters a space of duplication where image and event seem to depart from one another. She is a picture, floating outside of herself as she imagines what the lens sees. This is the moment in photographic mediation when the portrait-sitter becomes aware of themself as a trace that lasts beyond the given instant. Barthes describes this haunting sensation when posing for his portrait. He cannot stop making himself ready to be an image that survives beyond death, and so enters a nebulous nowhere-space. "Neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre" (Barthes 1981, p.13). The photographed body seems to dislocate from itself.

In this photographic mediation the girl becomes the spectral subject of an image, but there is another haunting layer here. Even without the camera, this girl relates to the world around her in a photographic state, through a lens of removal and distance. She peels away from her reality in order to survive. She is the picture of dissociation. In 1998, I began to see myself as dissociated from my own experiences, unable to confront the threats that disrupted the familiar. In this photograph, I was already

becoming other, “the girl”, not “I”, but “she”. Ghostly and haunted even before the camera was raised to catch her. The strange smile caught by the camera is odd, because it’s the apostrophe of someone already divorced from herself. Time is out of joint, in both the mediation, and the experience it mediates.

Pre-Emptive Loss



Before any photograph is taken, haunting has begun. The instant I press the button on my camera, I mark that which is already lost. The ghostly present is constantly departing, returning in our mediated records as that which never appears in its first form. The camera articulates that impossible statement: “This is happening now.” The hunger for immediacy is highly visible in today’s cityscapes. I catch passers-by in busy streets, rushing to upload photographed moments, as though the “real-time” of the network will sustain the instant which just slipped past. As soon as the artificial sound of a camera shutter clicks, the moment has gone, leaving behind its digital afterglow.

At a dinner gathering,
a friend photographs the group around the table,
and busies herself with uploading the image
as quickly as possible.

At the zoo, a spectator
at the elephant enclosure
stops looking at the animals
she has just photographed, and
focuses on posting her shot.

Strangers snap

at the glow of shop window displays,

at the graffiti on a crumbling wall,

at the hush of twilight over a body of water.

This quick grasping at experience doesn't prevent the moment from fleeing in the very act of its mediation. Hauntology refers to this "disjointure in the very presence of the present...[a] sort of non-contemporaneity of the present time with itself" (Derrida 2012, p. 29). What appears in the lens is the disappearance of a moment. These traces are "not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site - erasure belongs to its structure" (Derrida 1982, p. 24). Right now can never be lived as right now, only sought through the making of its re-presentation, its image. Yet photography incessantly pursues the capture of the instant in the hope of evading a haunting experience. The medium continually seeks to pin down the moment and to make it graspable, so that it will not become something deathly as it fades away.

It's 1816 and Nicephore Niépce, a French inventor, writes to his sister to tell her of his quest to pin the light down. For the next eight years, he trials photographic experiments on paper coated with silver chloride, then copper plates coated in bitumen. He's not the only photographic pioneer struggling with the transience of light traces. Daguerre, Talbot and Wedgewood are also seeking some form of entrapping the ghostliness of light. A myriad of their tested surfaces register life-like impressions for a brief second, but these traces exhale into nothingness, consumed by the very solar energy which imprinted them. A committee of scientific pioneers is put together to resolve this dilemma of the photographic image, and they become known as "The Fading Committee" (Reilly *et al.* 1988).

Even once the fading problem has been fixed, photography is still not cured of its relationship with hauntology. Reproduced portraits become an affordable option for the masses, with cartes des visites and jewellery portraits, but the ghostliness of the

present is still embroiled in the desire for photographs. J.H. Fitzgibbon of Missouri is a portrait artist working in photo miniatures in 1852, and the advertising slogan for his studio summons the non-contemporaneity of the now: "Secure the shadow ere the substance fade" (Fitzgibbon 1981). Photography evokes the very disappearance of that it wishes to hold fast.

It's 2015, and the Vivid light show is live on Sydney Harbour. A dense crowd raises a blinking array of glowing smartphones in front of the Opera House. They snap at the shifting light patterns projected on the building's tiled sails, seeking to imprison something fixed from the night's restless and luminous displays. Each shot of the shifting light display is uploaded to the live stream, where a visual mantra repeats: "I am here." A testimony of presence in the instant, through dated and timed data. The now is continually asserted, as photographed subjects seek to evade Barthes' diagnosis of "becoming spectre."

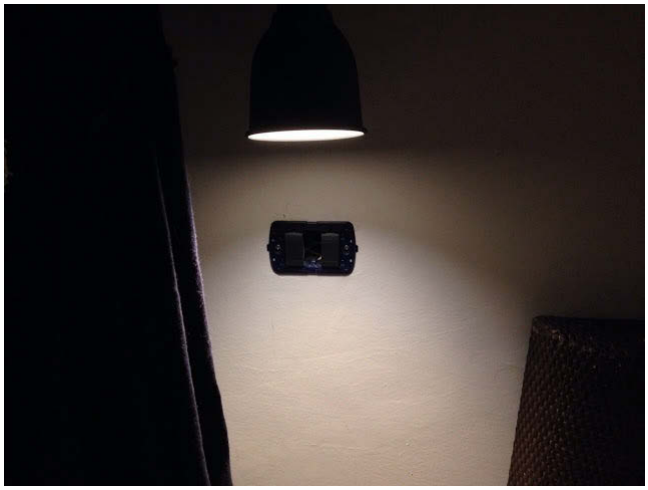
Flashlit Evidence

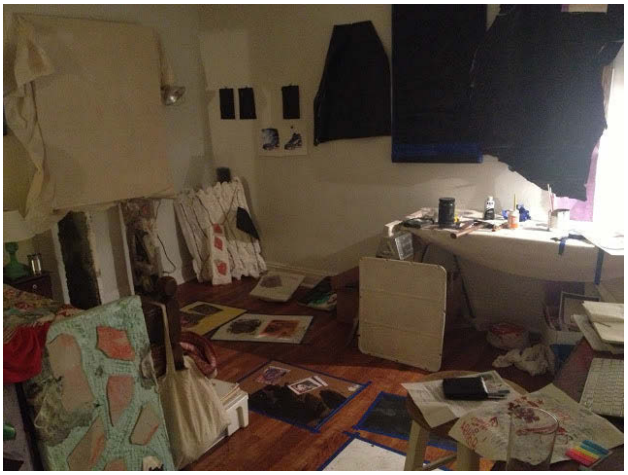


When the pastness of an image *is* acknowledged, a different impulse takes over: the compulsive search for evidence. I try to garner some truths from the images in the live stream to testify to the now that departed. The disappeared instant must have left behind some indexical imprint of how it came to pass. The medium has often been treated as a witness of objective truths, or as a bright light that catches happenings with glaring precision. In its early phases, it is described as "the pencil of nature," the technology with a precise and revelatory eye for depicting lived reality. The camera's ability to mechanically retain the finer details of its view makes it seem more reliable than the human witness. The medium has come to have a long-standing relationship with the concept of objective evidence, testimony or proof.

Images 21, 22, 23 & 24:
Photos sent to Jason Lazarus
for the *Too Hard to Keep* archive









In 1882, a court of law in the state of Georgia proclaims photographs are superior to oral testimonies on crimes: "We cannot conceive of a more impartial and truthful witness than the sun, as its light stamps and seals the similitude of the wound on the photograph put before the jury; it would be more accurate than the memory of witnesses, and as the object of all evidence is to show truth, why should not this dumb witness show it?" (L. Mnookin, citing Franklin vs. State of Georgia 2013, p.18). The wound referenced here is literal – cuts and bruises to the body, shown photographically to reveal the aftermath of an attack. Mediated sunlight is considered sufficient to expose what is hidden in the past. A photographed trace takes viewers back to the origins of a crime, to its beginning, where it can be seen clearly at the source. This is light in a Western order of knowledge, as the all-revealing energy that banishes unknown elements in the dark. Nothing is left to secrecy.

Five years after the court case in Georgia, the notion of expository light takes on a new quality. In 1887, two German men, Adolf Miethe and Johannes Gaedicke, come up with a potent flammable combination of magnesium powder, potassium chlorate and antimony sulphide, and thus the material for the camera-flash is born (Miles 2009, p. 149). Photography's new evidentiary light burns up in approximately one-fortieth of a second as it rushes into dark spaces. The sound of the igniting magnesium tears through shadows once concealed from the camera's gaze. The medium "stamps and seals the simultude" of wounds, no longer with the radiating warmth of the sun, but with an artificial and blinding creation that smells like gunpowder.

The weapon-like invention of the flash reinforces the notion of photography as accurate witness. The testimony of the photograph is now increased to maximum intensity and energy. This new blinding force enters crime scenes with the aim of rendering all things visible. Melissa Miles describes the metaphorical qualities of the technology as brutally instrusive, as "images are seized from… victims, often against their will, in an act of personal intrustion that startles and renders them vulnerable" (Miles 2005, p.151). This is one way the truth can be sought through piercing light, where despite all the costs, the camera's flash will deliver detailed answers to a detective's case. What needs to be seen, shall be seen.

Some traditional academic texts carry the same intense drive as the camera flash: to expose answers and drive the unknowns with a searching gaze. The Western conception of light as the great truth-teller implies that the more intense the glare, the more the past becomes discoverable to the beholder. Can the photograph of the odd face be known in such a way, as a clue back into her history? Can any banal photograph be discovered through this approach to knowledge, where everything is perceived as accessible because it has been illuminated brightly?

The Light of Knowing

The online streams of personal photographs generate a feeling of constant accessibility to a world lit up photographically. The data feed on social media platforms gives a sense of all-encompassing luminosity. Twenty-four hours are flash lit from camera lenses around the world via billions of perspectives across the span of a day. Katrina Sluis and Daniel Rubinstein lend a perspective on this networked scene as everything illuminated: "everything, every moment, every location is registered… We can now truly say that we can see everything, we know everything; information is ubiquitous" (Rubinstein & Sluis 2008, p. 242). Photographs are drop-pinned on maps, their time and date archived automatically, and their uploaders attach descriptive terms to indexically frame the content of the image. Accessed online data is depicted as an accurate resource, reliable enough to show everything at any given instant.

The Scholar and the Ghost



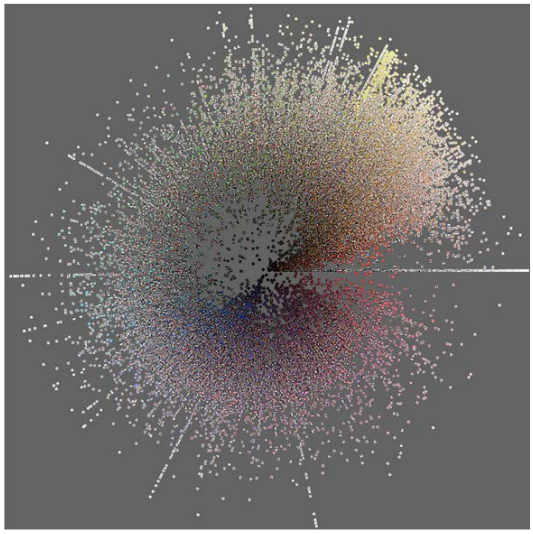
In the glow of the computer screen and the smartphone it is very possible to forget the absences and darknesses that haunt photography. Photographic information appears without limits, and most attempts to analyse it wish to structure it into knowable evidence. Recent research projects seek a revelatory light on the subject of the image through data visualisation, cultural analytics and qualitative research

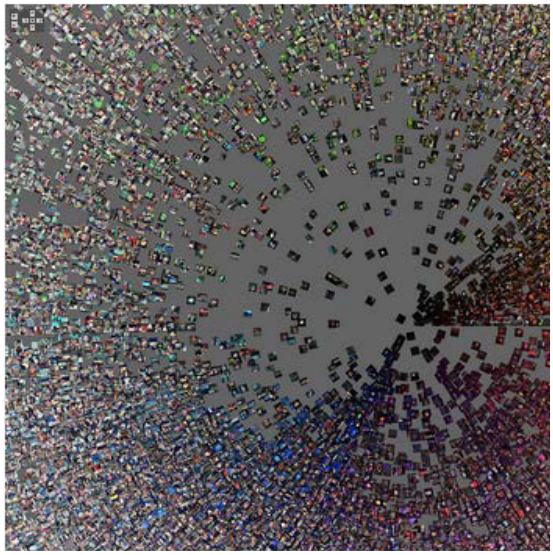
practices that respond to a field of abundant stored information. The subject matter of Instagram shots has been analysed according to indexical labels (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati 2014); networker's profiles have been incorporated into participant surveys (Ryan & Xenos 2011; Sheldon & Bryant 2016); and computational interpretations of metadata have displayed the broad patterns of online flows (Hochman & Manovich 2013; Manovich 2003).

I come across an example of the latter in the use of data visualisation graphs to document thousands of photographs uploaded to Instagram (Manovich, Hochman & Chow 2013). These appear in computer generated patterns. A smattering of colours curves in wave formation against a dull grey background. Grains of light pool into a shape that appears frozen mid-flight, complete and uninterrupted: a structure visible and knowable in its entirety. After staring at it for some time, it becomes an unreadable mesh of grains. Nothing to see. The same as the experience I sometimes encounter in my slippery gaze across browsed images of strangers' uploaded lives. But somewhere in those infinitesimally small pinpricks of coloured light are people's memories, their mornings and nights, their ways of visually marking passing life. These images will not reveal anything to a truth-seeking impulse. Photography's integration with calculable computer information doesn't render personal images more knowable and classifiable as records of lived time. Somewhere in these graphs are photos such as the odd face.

Her photograph doesn't shed light on truth, but is a witness to things that can't be put in plain sight. It gives the strangest testament to past experiences, because what it reveals isn't there. Annette Kuhn describes this in her work *Family Secrets* (2002), where she reframes the detective impulse that sometimes attends photography studies. She writes that photographs are…

> to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of a crime. Evidence of this sort…can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of. A photograph can certainly throw you off the scent. You will get nowhere, for instance, by taking a magnifying glass to it to get a closer look: you will see only patches of light and dark, an unreadable mesh of grains. The image yields nothing to that sort of scrutiny, it simply disappears (Kuhn 2002, p.13).





Images 25, 26 & 27: Screenshots from 'Phototrails', an interactive metadata map of Instagram



Her approach grants the image a different form of evidentiary power where what is offered up in the writing is the luminous strangeness of a ghostly apparition. The camera flash is reinterpreted here, not as a way to know experience in its totality but as the conditions for the magnesium-charged shock Benjamin describes. Rather than something that stamps and seals the wound, this is a startling confrontation with trauma which blinds as much as it illuminates. The subject caught in the flash becomes hauntingly pale yet bright.

The aesthetics of the flash is thus the opportunity to write-with-light, not as an expository element, but as a means of attending to the memories that touch the image with shock. I could have chosen to enter strangers' online photographs the way a detective enters a crime scene; with a burning flash intended to explain away hidden meanings. This would be the approach of a scholar who believes "looking is sufficient" (Derrida 2006, p.11) and that gathered information will deliver a body of knowledge in full. It would also be a mode of inquiry that does not allow for haunting. "A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts," writes Derrida

> nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between… the living and the non-living, being and non-being, in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity (Derrida 2012, p.12).

Haunting cannot transpire in such a search for definitive truth because the dead have been exorcised; they have been solved. There is no more need to speak to them because the evidence has been addressed. This epistemology gives the past a finality, a death without the possibility of returning in the light of a new present.

It is understandable that academics would go looking for flash-lit evidence rather than spectres amongst the well-lit and accessible photos stored on the internet. Data seems to be a way of uncovering the facts of the image and its conditions of emergence. But under this epistemology, the mercurial memories of vernacular photographs are buried. There is no attempt to speak to photography's ghosts, and personal images can become mummified in a fixed meaning, showing only what they show and containing nothing more. From this standpoint the girl in my photograph speaks of nothing at all. She's just a girl startled by a flash.

The photograph of the odd face is a silent witness. I could not use this image as proof of abuse or as a means of reaching back to the origins of crime. It is a crime scene without explanatory traces. The photo is a wound without a mark, and yet it marks me. Nine years after her picture is taken, the girl is a twenty-one year-old woman who takes her story to the police. They ask her for any objects she may have that were part of the scene of the crime. Clothes, sheets. Anything. Perhaps, under the scrutiny of lab equipment, evidence will appear. A skirt and a bath towel are sealed in plastic and sent off for analysis. Nothing is found under the glare of a bright lab light. The strength of her testimony is enough to convict the perpetrator, and put his name on a list of identified offenders. But there are no evidentiary wounds to see in clear sight.

I have no desire to place the odd face under the brutality of an all-revealing, expository glare. Such a brutal approach would chase off the ghost of the photograph. Instead, with the aesthetics of the flash I take into account that light (from the sun or camera flash) is not a simple tool for seeing truth but a paradoxical force which illuminates more questions than answers. Such ambivalent knowledge is enabling because it doesn't seek a final destination. This is not about closing the case and forcing my ghost to leave.

For myself, and for the odd face, I seek a past that is enabled to return in a productive exchange with the present. I use this medium as a way of speaking to ghosts so that the photograph, and the experience caught within it, might become something new. Evidence through this mode of engagement is not a final destination, a definitive answer to what was in the past. The past can return as a changeable light that flares up differently with its every apparition in an unfolding present (and keeps its darkness).

Seeing Blindly



Research that speaks to ghosts has been done before. A particular study comes to mind, one that follows photographs of empty rooms in suburban homes. Drafts murmur through half open windows, and dust settles on everyday objects untouched for days. In his project *Life After Wartime*, writer-researcher Ross Gibson works with a collection of images, all taken of Sydney spaces in the wake of crimes. The images show nothing directly in themselves, but they become piercing fragments of time seen through a lightning affect. "When I began researching the crime-scene photographs," says Gibson, "I had an inkling I was looking at rooms and streets that were somehow in shock" (Gibson 2009, p.20). Some darker thing is shown through using the photographs via a writing that illuminates. These images have become unforgettable, despite the fact that they are visually unremarkable. Despite the fact that there are no visible wounds to see and explain the past away.

To see these photographs, to feel them engrave themselves with brilliance on the mind's eye, the writer needs to stay attuned to the potentiality of an image. Wait for the spectrality in an image to send some shiver of light through understanding. Gibson writes:

> What transfixes me is the way many of the images flare like a struck match, and then glare almost hurtfully for a time before dimming down either to luminance or banality. I'm talking slightly metaphorically here - about the affect in the pictures… But I'm being literal too, insofar as the viewer really does feel something scorching, a burning surge of anxious energy plus a kind of glandular scald. The flare ignites on the surface of the image but radiates into the viewer's nervous system (Gibson 2009, p.20).

The surface of a photograph can speak of the depth of things below. Like the empty rooms Gibson found in crime scene photographs, the girl by the window is testimony of a shock that is invisible.

I wonder if the landscape of photographs online could become like these empty rooms. By this I don't mean to imply criminal histories are hidden in these daily

ephemera, but I begin to feel that they are a form of mystery. Instead of skimming over the surface of people's everyday pictures, I could come to see them like the remnants left in the wake of happenings. Like many of the objects depicted in Gibson's found crime photos, they are seemingly benign: cups of tea and shoes; books on a bed and a pen on a notepad. Things that people have touched and now emanate something of an unknown story. In this light, the patchworks and streams of photographs gain something from their apparent blandness. They are secrets that lead my searching gaze onward.

To respect whatever stories may be here, I feel out other ways of seeing them. The verb "to see" begins to take on a different nuance from its usually ocular description. Rather than direct contact with an experience, this form of seeing is like an after-image: the imprint of strong light that lingers on the retina. Distinct forms distort, the outlines of shapes begin to blur, and something impresses itself behind closed eyes, coloured by the viewer's own blood. I want to respond to the spectres that may be dormant here, even if I do not know their name or nature. This is the almost impossible venture where I must "do what is necessary: speak to the spectre" (Derrida 2012, p.11). The elusiveness of this task begins with saying something incredulous, that there are ghosts here. I have seen them in my own photographs. They will doubtless appear in others' images, so I have an ethical obligation to respond to them. Can I say what form they take, or where they appear? No. Like the King's ghost in Hamlet, they are nothing visible. There is only one thing to say: "I have seen nothing" (Derrida 2012, p.5), yet the fact that I have seen it is without doubt.

I start this new way of seeing by choosing to disrupt the evidence of the photographs I find. I blur the faces of strangers' faces who appear in screenshots throughout this thesis. This is a visual strategy in my work with photography as hauntology. The spectre is "an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything… it is nothing that can be seen when one speaks of it" (Derrida 2012, p. 5). The spectre is present here, in the facelessness of these faces, which are seen somewhere betwixt and between, and reveal themselves through their own lack of presence. Each face becomes an unknown. This aesthetic choice is also an ethical one, and a way of respecting the experiences that

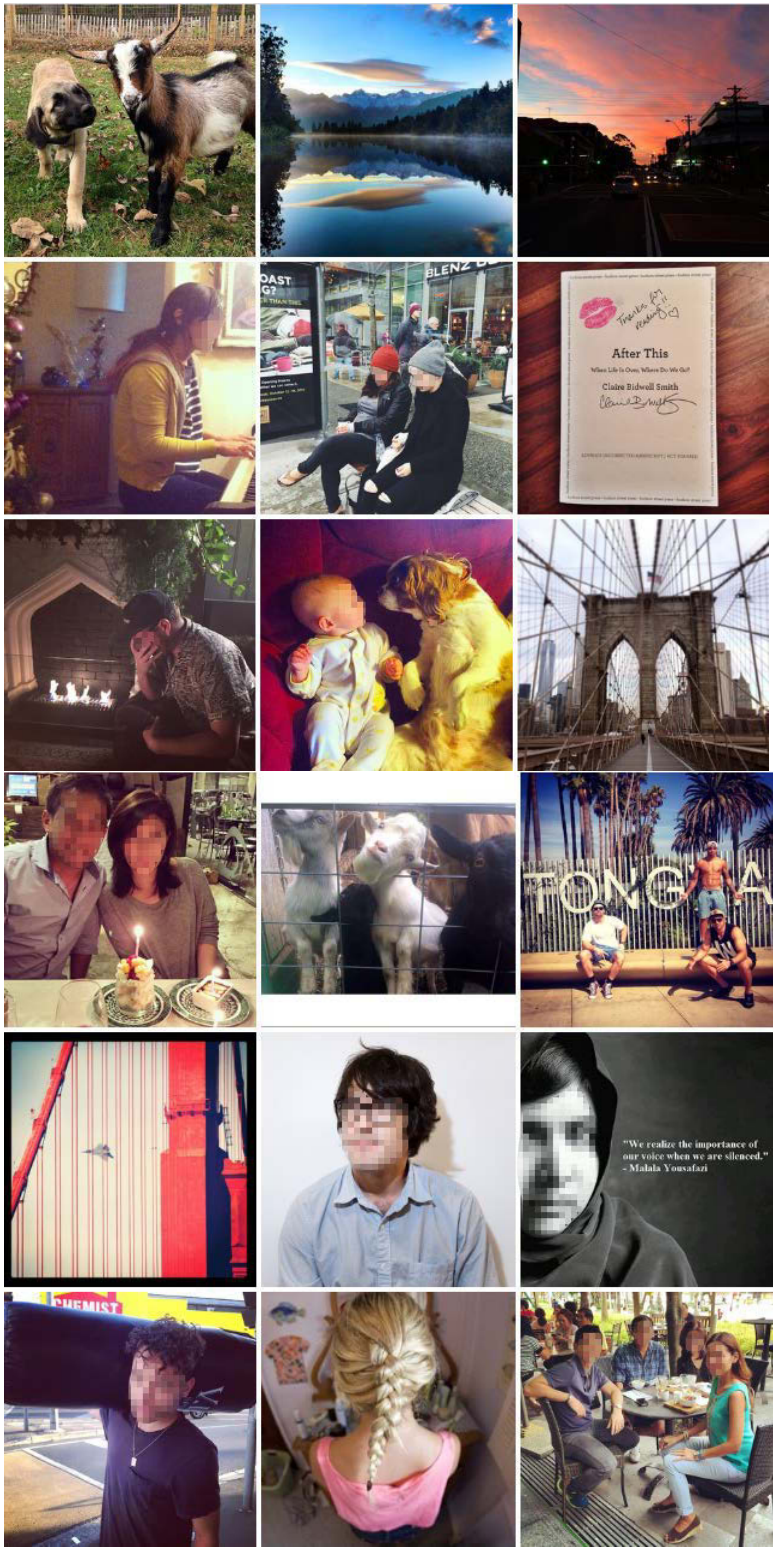


Image 28: Compilation of other people's photographs from Instagram Explore

haunt these photographs, and I'm unsure of what memory-material I'm using. No one would be able to name my odd face portrait as the picture of abuse. Likewise, I can't name others' photographs with full knowledge of their personal undercurrents. I cannot know which images are pressure points in strangers' lives. And I am looking for a light-writing that will not expose complete knowledge, but works with ambivalence, unfixed meaning, and the potency of unknowns. Thus the deliberate masking of these images endows each photograph with magical thinking, a kind of power. It becomes strange again, rather than simply banal. It keeps the viewer in the mystery that attends traces of lost time. The gaze with another can't be fulfilled here, there is no meeting of eyes. There is instead the sense that what is held by the photograph still looks at the beholder. This is reflective of my sense that as I write my way through photographs I do not have complete influence over the evidence I use: the evidence has power over me.

The ghost "looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there." Derrida calls this uni-directional gaze "the visor effect" (Derrida 2012, p.6). Hamlet's father, the spectral apparition of the King of Denmark, returns to haunt the present in a full suit of armour. The visor across his face acts to block a continual flow of dialogue between father and son, between past and present. At times it is raised and the King's face is visible to the living. When it is lowered, only the ghost has the ability to look at the present, but the living have no access to the spectre. I read vernacular photographs as such gazes from the past that likewise shield themselves from plain sight. Invisible meanings in mundane shots call me to relate to things I cannot see. The blurred faces that appear in this album may be struck by a photographed secret such as the odd face, and while I remain unable to view them clearly, they still regard me in my ignorance, with an unknown call to responsibility.

This sense of responsibility sometimes teeters on another researcher's impulse: the desire to rescue things from lost time. Walter Benjamin's angel of history is the icon of this desire. With his face turned toward the past, the angel watches wreckage pile upon wreckage. Irretrievable time forms an accumulative mountain of debris. But he is unable to rescue any one moment from its crushing amalgamation into the homogenous mass of rubbish; his wings are caught in the violence of a storm that blows him backwards, into the future (Benjamin 1982b, p. 257).

This angel is evocative of the desire for retrieval inherent in the photographic encounter. The indexical image of the past excites the hope of keeping what can't be kept: that original instant, in its singular composition. It is a hallucinatory presence of absence that stirs the dream of restoration. Barthes feels this wishful offering in a photograph of his mother as a little girl, captured in a leafy glasshouse. He calls this the Winter Garden portrait, which he revisits after his mother's death, and which offers him an imaginary recovery of her life. "There she is!" he exclaims on first glance. "She's really there, at last she is there!" (Barthes 1981, p. 99). In a time of mourning, the promise of the departed's return is tantalizing. "I believe that by enlarging the detail [in her photo]… I will finally reach my mother's very being," muses Barthes. "I decompose, I enlarge… in order to have time to know at last" (Barthes 1981, p. 99). The photograph becomes that hopeful mirage which suggests ghosts can be brought back, not as spectral forms, but as some revitalised being, brought back to life. He writes: "The photograph justifies this desire, even if it does not satisfy it: I can have the fond hope of discovering truth only because Photography's noeme is precisely that-has-been and because I live in the illusion that it suffices to clean the surface of the image in order to accede to what is behind" (Barthes 1981, p. 100). The very fact this desire cannot be satisfied is what keeps the medium tied to a productive relationship, revolving around a past that will always remain past, yet inserts itself in the present. The angel of history "would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 1982b, p. 257). The angel wants to fix things.

Save the Image



The call to rescue images of lost time loops through photography's history, beginning with the use of the word "fix". It's 1833, and photographic practitioner William Fox Talbot, sits on the shores of Lake Como with a camera obscura. The cumbersome

pre-photographic device sheds the image of the landscape onto a mirror, which casts its reflection on a piece of paper, tacked to the back of a sturdy darkened box. An illuminated and ephemeral trace cast by light makes a live stencil of the scenery. Talbot calls the hallucinations of this instrument "fairy pictures, creations of a moment, destined… rapidly to fade away… how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed on paper!" (cited in Batchen 1999, p.85). To fix: to repair what is broken. The ultimate act of redemption.

Practices of redemption now revolve around the integration of mobile phones, internet technology and personal photos. The act of rescue here revolves around not bringing the past back to life, but in keeping the present alive. The intimate prosthetic device of the smartphone readily captures anything and everything at hand. A woman on a city bus takes out her phone to snap her new shoes, nestled in a box of tissue paper. Two girls walk down King St, arm in arm, and stop to catch a joint selfie in front of the Townie hotel. These photos are to shore up present happenings. When a recording lens is always close to the body, any given moment can be snatched from the unstoppable melting of time.

The fear of losing the past is no longer at the forefront of these photographic practices, because the server will automatically save the image. Everything is kept on the cloud. A decline in photographic printing suggests the online network is less concerned with a photograph's disappearance or loss. The world-wide web as a way of outsourcing the act of rescue. An image can always be retrieved from the interminable archive, so the material copy of a photo is less and less prominent. The reliance on the computer system results in fewer and fewer printed versions of vernacular photographs.

From time to time, the database enacts resurrection, by calling up images stored in the server. From a vast reservoir of visual information, memories rise up in automated algorithms. Photographs are re-displayed on Facebook profile pages at the anniversary of their uploading. Images are resummoned with the platform's instructive line: "You have a memory." The function of outsourced memory is the promise to stop photographs from disappearing into oblivion. They are returned.

Yet none of these methods do fix the ghost in photography, so there remains a strong desire to mediate experience in ways that prevent haunting, or resurrect spectres. Photographs, online or analogue, testify to the very impossibility of redemption. They shed light on what is gone. A productive circle of desire then propels photographers to catch the now, or pull back the past, even though it has already departed.

An Impossible Act

When the act of rescue reveals its own impossibility, then encounters with photography's ghosts are enabled. I enter an exchange with the image of the odd face anew, in the knowledge that I cannot fix what is past. The medium then begins to echo with the myth of Orpheus, a story of impossible rescue. The Gods take pity on this poet, who grieves for the death of his wife, Eurydice. He can retrieve her from the underworld, on the condition that he promises not to look at her before they reach the sunlight. Of course, he can't resist a glance at her face. Just as they are about to reach the light of the living world, he turns to see her, and in that moment, she is lost to him a second time. She returns to the darkness of death from which he tried to free her.

Like Orpheus, photographic practice leads to the discovery that the disappearing object can't be brought to restorative light; the gaze into the light of the past inevitably draws the beholder into the darkness of its departure. Yet the temptation is so strong to reach the figure on the brink of being swallowed by shadow. Barthes succumbs to this desire in front of the Winter Garden photograph, where he becomes "a bad dreamer who vainly holds out his arms towards the possession of the image" (Barthes 1981, p.100). This is the way I too look back upon the image of the odd face: as a bad dreamer who can't fix her, or retrieve her from history before time wrought its scars. When I turn to look at her, her absence burns stronger. She disappears, and her disappearance reveals itself in the ambivalent light of the photo. Rather than an act of rescue or restoration then, this work then becomes something else: it becomes the gaze of Orpheus, and turns back to see the lost past, enflamed and unreachable.

Why Look Back?



In the darkness of the underworld, Eurydice must appear a deathly spectre one wouldn't wish to see. Yet her partner feels compelled to see her there, in the dark. Hamlet also feels drawn to follow his father's ghost, to speak with it, although it would also appear an uncanny apparition touched with the ugliness of death. There is a strong temptation to look away from the image that implicates the viewer in its own demise.

For years it was easier for me to avoid the photo of the odd face. It pressed on sore wounds, so I travelled away from her gaze. She was kept sealed in that plastic box to deny her absence a hold on the present. But on some plane of memory, she is still very much here in her absence. The woman who writes these words has something of that child in her. This girl's gaze is a call of responsibility towards the past, as that which is neither obliterated nor sustained. When Derrida writes that the "spectral someone other looks at us, we feel ourselves being looked at by it", he describes the exchange with ghosts through the French verb, "me regarde," which has the double meaning of "looks at me" and "concerns me" (Derrida 2012, p.6).

The eyes of this girl concern me.

"I was here," she says. "Do not pretend that I do not exist. Look at me."

Her calls to responsibility are echoed in *Orpheus and Eurydice* the opera, composed by Christoph Willibald Gluck in 1762. In this version, Eurydice remains unaware of the conditions placed on her release. She doesn't know why her lover won't meet her eye. "Look at me," she begs. Her haunting plea is impossible to ignore. This is the ghostly other who "asks me to respond or be responsible" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p.138), to turn and face her in the dark. To ignore this spectral call would be to block out the non-presence constitutive of presence itself, and to deny the past its ability to return in new forms.

Ambivalent Light



It is a delicate balancing act, to enable a photograph's ghosts to return, yet acknowledge they are not rescued. The task calls for a particular relationship with light-writing. It is not the blaze of a crime-scene photo, the testimonial light of a truth-claim, or the illumination of a rescued moment brought back into the light. I am writing with an illuminated darkness, embroiled in an ambivalent relationship with what is normally understood by the notion of light. The writing of an image then needs to carefully enfold light with dark, so these are not confined to binary opposition, but are known as mutually sustaining forces.

A socio-historical look at the medium's relationship with light gives some sense of what this writing could become. Photography is founded on a synthesis of shadow and illumination, where the seen and the unseen fuse around the representation of a moment in time. Light-writing is only possible because the photographic image works in unison with shadow. A negative renders dark things light, and light things dark. An image develops only in the dim conditions of the dark room. Any excess of light in the camera lens banishes photographs to invisibility. The act of illumination requires an appreciation of shadow, of that which can never be seen directly, and yet is foundational to the image's appearance.

Amongst the writings of early practitioners, one description of the medium stands out for its brush with absence. Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the reproducible negative, struggles over whether to describe this new art as writing with light or darkness. After years of word-experiments, he settles on this description for publication:

> The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary… may be fixed forever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy… we may… arrest it there and in the space of a single minute fix it there so firmly as to be no more capable of change" (cited in Batchen 1999, p.91).

"To fix a shadow" suggests there are spaces that the light of photography doesn't touch, there are recesses it cannot reach or penetrate.

Dark Writing



Writing with light must also show these shadows. When photographs flare up in this text they will also create imprints of darkness, voids where writing cannot go directly. Negative spaces arise that would not be visible without the writing that reveals them. This chapter is a hybrid of light that reveals and conceals, and as such it responds to Melissa Miles' description of photography as "dark-writing". She writes, "Photography's conquest of darkness must never be seen to be absolute. Darkness must not be viewed as the opposite of light but as the constitutive disavowal by which light's value as a productive… clarifying photographic agent is reproduced" (Miles 2008, p. 64). So the darkness or haunting within the photographs presented in this album is constitutive of that which it illuminates.

The act of writing then becomes as spectral as the photographs it draws upon. As soon as a word imprints itself, it emblazons what is absent. Each trace upon this page is reflective of the photographic impulse. When I hold the smartphone lens up to the light, or work through words on the page, the same charge is sparking my actions; I am predicting disappearance before it has come to pass. I'm sensing that the images I encounter daily on Facebook and Instagram are lit up in the instant of their retreat. So I write them down or add my own photograph to the stream, not to rescue them, but to permit them the energy of potentiality.

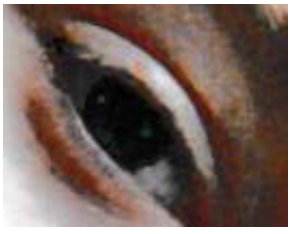
A Constellation

As I draw these photographic moments together into a fragmentary constellation, it dawns on me that this light-writing has affinities with stars. In his reflections on Benjamin's constellations, Eduardo Cadava writes:

> Starlight appears only in its withdrawal. Like the photograph that presents what is no longer there, starlight names the trace of a celestial body that has long since vanished. The star is always a kind of ruin. That its light is never identical to itself, is never revealed as such, means that it is always inhabited by a certain distance or darkness (1998, p.13).

This is what makes any photograph a form of haunting and bereavement. The image that flares up in this chapter "belongs to the afterlife of the photographed. It is permanently inflamed by the instantaneous flash of death" (Cadava 1998, p.13). This flash of death is lit brightly in the picture of the odd face where, at a traumatic threshold, the bereavement of photography exposes itself. Photographs are small flares that puncture history, that pierce the invisible presence of loss and death that surrounds them and suspends them like stars in an inky sky. They cannot burn brightly without dark matter. Every now and again, that dark matter appears to be threatening. My wish to illuminate the unseen matter in a photograph has stirred anxiety within me.

Fearing the Ghost



I have been fearful of incorporating the image of the odd face into my present. If I held her too close, I would become overpowered by her otherness, to the point where I'd lose the writing self I am now. She would be the sole writer, working from her place of trauma. That is the risk in beginning this album with a photo of a girl entangled in secrets. Derrida's question resounds: "What does it mean to follow a ghost? And what if this came down to being followed by it, always, persecuted

perhaps by the very chase we are leading?" (Derrida 2012, p.10). The sight of this photo used to grip my stomach with nauseous energy. My throat would clamp with an icy heat. I have been scared to relive some form of destruction, to create the second death of the girl that I was, just as the glance back at Eurydice pulls her back into a relived death.

Then my constellation of images would begin to be overcome by the darkness that inhabits it. It would be an abyss that gapes with an all-encompassing grief. The light-writing would then be what philosopher Maurice Blanchot terms the writing of the disaster, where there would be nothing but a gaping wound. He paints an image of this devouring dark with the image of another child sitting at a window full of sky. Outside it is daylight, but the child sees emptiness in the blue above, "plain daylight without depth" (Blanchot 1995, p.72).

> What happens then: the sky, the same sky, suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing (as though the pane had broken) such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein - so lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond… He says nothing. He will live henceforth in the secret (Blanchot 1995, p.72).

Blanchot's disaster makes a sky that, as writer Helene Cixous puts it, means "des-astres": without stars (Cixous 1991, p. 20). The catastrophic loss is complete. It takes hold of the boy and plunges him into a silent passivity which is full of feeling but without words.

A New Mourning



But this has not happened with the girl by my window full of sky. If it had, this page would be as blank as Blanchot's starless abyss. When I look at my old portrait now, I realise it is not a threat, but a space from which to create. "The thing [spectre] works, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, the

'spirit of the spirit' is work" (Derrida 2012, p.9). My role here, and hers, are far from passive; she speaks through me, and I through her, without one or the other taking complete sway over the work. I don't wish to complete Orpheus' impossible quest, and take her ghost into the light of total restoration and presence. Nor do I need to cling to the fate of sky without stars and live henceforth in the secret. This would be to resign myself to a form of mourning that doesn't evolve over time. Instead, my ghost works with me in this text of "semi-mourning" (Derrida 1995, p.143). She can stay in her darkened past while I illuminate her brightly in my writing. This way, she will not overpower the present, but she will inhabit it, as I allow her to speak; to remain present as my ghost, my photo-graphia, my dark writing. As long as there remains such an open encounter with her ghostliness, creativity emerges. She is my gift, not a threat. We are the closest of strangers.

Solarisation

I thought about leaving the photographs of the odd face out of this text, to create an absent space in which the reader could inscribe their own illuminated ghosts. But I want to feel the flare around her absent figure. So I have decided to include her in these pages, not just in fragments but as a whole. I ask myself what Orpheus saw when he turned to look back at Eurydice in the shadow of Hades. The story would read differently if her image in the dark had a force of its own, if it glowed like an afterimage scorched in shut eyes.

Novelist Gail Jones incorporates the story of Eurydice in her study on grieving, and she queries how the image of this myth might be ethically adapted: "Writing must somewhere include the lost woman abolished to shadows, the woman who, as Foucault puts it beautifully in his essay on Blanchot, carries all her power 'in the promise of a face'" (Jones 1998, p.143). "I was here," says the portrait of a girl by the window. "Do not pretend I do not exist."

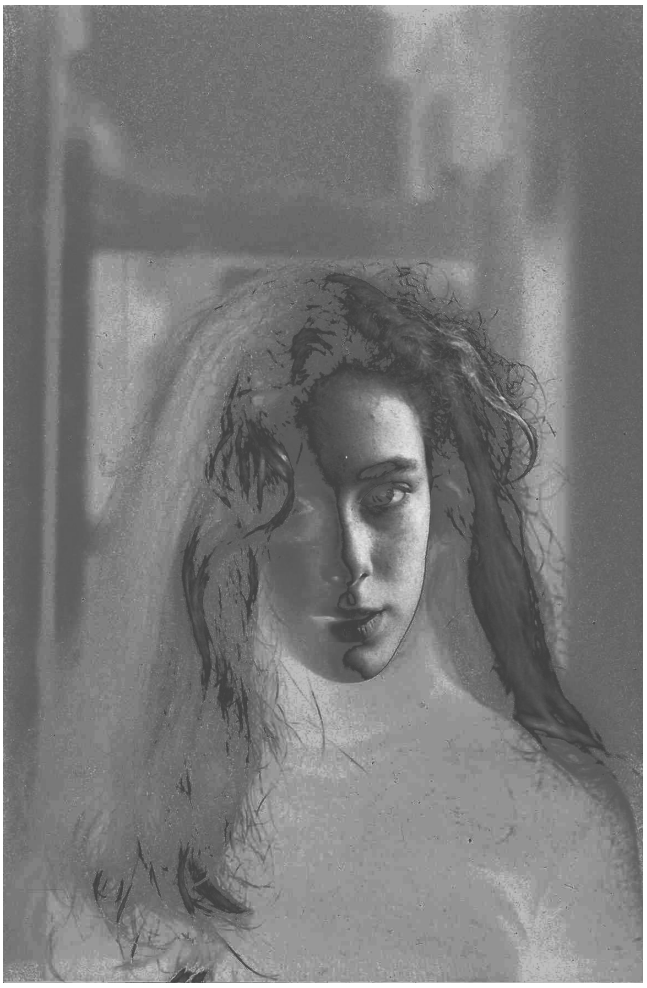
I have responded to her call by looking for a photographic technique in which dark appears light, and the light shines darkly. I have solarized her, so I can both say farewell, and see her return inflamed by her own disappearance in time. This

photographic technique involves overexposing the image to light while it is developing in the darkroom.

> Like lens flare, solarisation is a process in which an excess of light works to destabilize photographic form and presence. The result of the exposure of a developing photograph to an extra flash of light, solarisation produces various abstract effects in the negative which interrupt light's transference of the 'real' onto the photographic emulsion. Paradoxical dark highlights and luminous shadows corrupt solarized photographs and immerse their objects in shifting seas of light and shade, and positive and negative (Miles 2005, p. 345).

In this form, I don't consign ghosts to the shadows. I resonate with Gail Jones' response to Blanchot's child by a window. She writes: "I am not quite prepared to relinquish communion with stars. But do wonder how one might achieve the starry text…in grief…I suppose there must be somewhere a metaphysics of the asterix, some sparky exclamation at the very fact of existence" (Jones 1998, p.149). A call for starry writing. The photograph is not a surrender to loss, but its brightly shining affirmation.

A strange haunting affirmation. The burning flares of photographs in this researched constellation could not exist without their interplay with such dark matter. By telling this particular story of the personal photograph, I invite the reader of this album to step into the space between each illuminated image that appears, and to use these dark gaps to consider the intimate and culturally inflected ways their own personal photographs spark. At a time when online photography seems to illuminate experience from every corner, I argue that this medium is not made powerful by simulating all-encompassing presence. Personal images have potency because of the absences that burn through them. This thesis begins with an invitation from my ghost: to look at the unseen in photography through a dark and piercing light.



Images 29 & 30: The odd face



Glass



Image 31: my uncle Craig's portrait in front of the family mirror

Family Reflections

A large mahogany mirror has been in the family since the time of my great, great grandmother. Or perhaps longer. It has been passed down through the generations to the point where its origins are hazy. The glass is gradually aging to a faint off-gold. It sits flush against the lounge room wall of my parents' apartment. One night I catch my father doing a little dance of whimsy in front of it. He flaps his arms like a caricature bat and swans about the room, now and then leaping in time to music playing on some BBC wildlife documentary. It's a moment meant for his eyes alone, he doesn't know I've seen him through the half-open door.

A few years later, I learn how he and his two younger brothers used to do rodent impressions together; a dance to frighten and surprise. Three lanky children running around their Adelaide home, stomping sand from Largs Bay all over the floor. This mirror would have seen their boyish reflections dart after one another on rampages through the room, the smell of salty beach water in their wake. Now there is only one boy left. He secretly re-lives these boyish moments in front of a looking glass that once held all three siblings.

So many eyes have returned their own glances in this reflective surface. The movements of deceased relatives have slid through like liquid sand; unrecorded, irretrievable. Transient family history could not be trapped within, but did the looking glass catch some vulnerability, some intimacy? Was there more dancing in front of this looking glass? Close inspection of the skin, or nakedness and experimentations with clothes? Did the mirror watch people peer at teeth, brush hair and blow out candles? I project the past into a glass void, where they looked at lumps in the body, attempted to see themselves from behind, squeezed pimples, and stretched to get the blood flowing through their limbs. In dream-reflections there were couples who kissed, and plump babies raised high into the air, still too young to see themselves. These private interactions are beyond reach. The mirror never tells. Life and death flutter across it, and nothing is retained. It continues to reflect the

enduring present that comes its way, and departs. I watch my reflection, just moments after dad's little dance, and think about how my passing has left no imprint. A little glimmer of moving light.

Mirror with a Memory

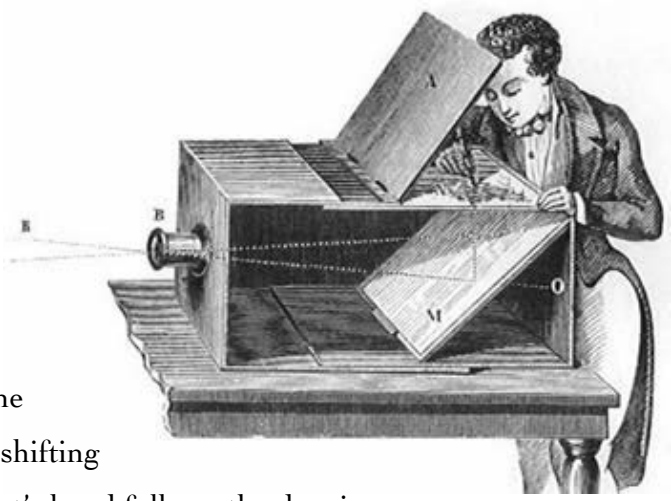


Image 32: The portable camera obscura, sketched by Adolphe Ganot in 1860

In the late 1700s, this reflective glimmer entrances the draftsmen who use the camera obscura to trace projected images. Light travels inside the camera's eye into a dark wooden box, from where an angled mirror reflects the sunbeam and sheds a copy of the shifting scenery onto blank paper. The artist's hand follows the dancing images gifted by the looking glass. The relationship between time and the mirror image undergoes a profound questioning as these unfixed, moving images entice practitioners with the dream of holding the image still. From the 1800s, scholars interested in the mirror's depiction of the self are forced "to incorporate within their work both the unpredictability of the flesh and the exigencies of time" (Batchen 1999, p.84). The transience of these mirrored images is what feeds the desire for a fixed image, and in 1839 this is realized in the object of the daguerreotype.

The language of mirrors sinks deeper into popular metaphors of photography. It's 1859 when Oliver Wendell Holmes, a doctor and amateur photographer, muses on the daguerreotype. The image of a moment is suspended in a layer of silver nitrate, housed in glass. He calls this invention, "a mirror with a memory." His now famous expression enshrines the medium as a miraculous suspension of self-image; an unwavering glance into the looking glass that isn't perturbed by change or continuity, but holds one's doppelganger in perfect stillness and detail. Time, frozen in glass, reflects the mortality of those captured. These are fixed images that will outlast the bodies they portray. Many daguerreotypes are called memento-mori. In Latin, this directly translates to "remember you will die." A daguerreotype photograph is thus an

"emblem of mortality, such as a skull, that reminds people of the inevitability of death" (*Brewster's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 2009, p.857).

Philosophies of analogue photography have sustained this relationship with mortality, as scholars inscribe the medium in words such as death, mourning and disappearance (Barthes 1981; Bazin 2005; Cadava 1998; Batchen 1999; Derrida 2003). For some new media researchers, these forms of temporal understanding no longer apply to the smartphone era. Joanna Zylinksa and Sarah Kember seek "to wrest photography away from its long-standing association with mummification and death, and to show its multifarious and all-encompassing activity," its liveness (Zylinska 2016, p.16; see also Kember & Zylinska 2012). Mette Sandbye posits that photography no longer belongs to the realm of the disappeared past: the image's testimony that this-has-been is irrelevant to a live stream which constantly reiterates, "This-is-now" (Larsen & Sandbye 2014). For these academics, the real-time of cyberspace takes precedence over the medium's memento-mori ontology. The oppositional structure of a binary begins to take shape: life-not-death, present-not-past.

As I look at my reflection in my great, great grandmother's mirror, I know photography continues to confront fears and desires around self-image that dissipates. Vernacular photography has returned to a glass form like the daguerreotype: the smartphone sits neatly in the hand, a smooth and breakable object across which a live stream glimmers. The imaginary of the mirror-with-a-memory has re-manifested. Today, images of millions of lifetimes surface and vanish as networkers stream photos of the living, dying present. The fleetingness of live uploads entwines with the autobiographical impulse of the traditional photo album. Images of everydayness are infiltrated with some sense of mortality as they slip out of the screen with each live update. Smartphone photography is a hybrid of the preservational and the transient, and in this way it draws out different forms of memorialisation and displays of the departing present.

Scanning the Body

My father sits in front of the computer screen and tinkers with scanned shots of decaying analogue pictures. The computer restores images worn away by the oxygen and rust of years. He wipes away little marks that stain the faces of loved ones, and

portraits of himself. Somewhere within that same computer are the MRI images that came one week after his body was scanned at the hospital. From within a claustrophobic white tunnel, penetrating cameras looked beneath skin, making hundreds of slices of internal organs and bones. Visual laser cuts formed an animation of muscles and ligaments, the totality of his body summed up like an organic machine. He called me in to his study to look at the results onscreen.

Mercurial white shapes emerged from black. Dead coral, hidden and revealed by a dark breathing ocean. At first, it was just a skeletal Rorschach; abstract forms aglow within the outline of a body. But slowly the kaleidoscope began to form shapes with mental labels, like “fingertip,” “rib cage,” “brain,” “eye socket,” “lungs.” And nestled in his groin, two misty round strangers that had no name, that didn’t belong. Would they shrink, or grow? He stared at the moving world within his computerised body, sliding the cursor over layers of tissue and blood.

The Craft of Albums

The illness lingers like a shadow. Every now and then doctors tell us it could take its final toll. "Possibly in the next six months or so." The warning has been sounded three times since those images were made. That was six years ago. Each time the foretelling of the end has passed and everything stays in suspension. A recurring conversation plays out between my father and me. "How was your day?" I ask. "I don't know…nothing really happened," he says. "Nothing always happens."

I remind him that he started putting together his personal photo album around the time of the MRI scan. “I didn’t link the two directly at the time…but yes.” It’s a personal ritual that anchors his history through narrative order. The grounded nature of this photographic process is an antidote to mortal prognosis. The level of protein in his blood goes up and down; an end draws closer when numbers rise. When they decrease, he comes back to the present. In the meantime, he positions himself in a photographed bloodline. Images of selfhood are shored up for posterity, and he has the privileged position of author. He directs and crafts the flow of images: leaves some things out, or adds multiple shots from specific moments in time. This is his rite

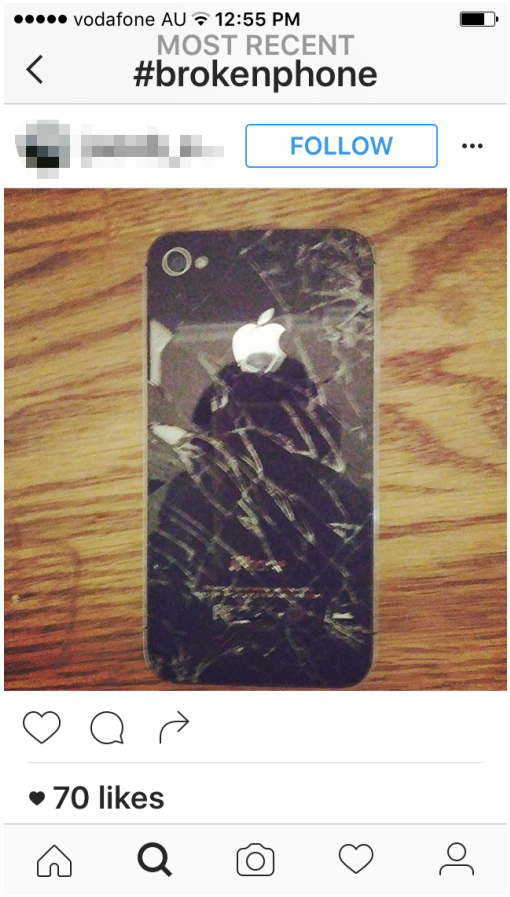


Image 33: a reflection caught on Instagram, tagged as “broken phone”



Image 34:
a portrait caught in the reflective glare of a daguerreotype

of passage, his crafting of a photographic story, and it carries a sense of chronological build-up:

His mother as a young woman,
clowning around on a sandy beach
with girl cousins the same age.

My grandfather
holding her tight as she
deliberately goes limp
in his arms.

Time reels forward to studio wedding photos,

their honeymoon on a large cruise boat,

And then comes my baby father.

Amateur shots
taken around an Adelaide home,
play amongst the lavender in the garden.

The birth of two brothers;

The family dog Ginger.

Lanky adolescence.
Freckle-spotted boys pull faces
to avoid the camera's penetrating gaze.

My mother,
a young girl with
60's mascara.

My parents' pas-de-deux
in the dance class where they met.

The order of the album is soothing, reassuring and edifying writes Bourdieu. Its chronological order confirms the unified present from a structured past. The family album "has all the clarity of a faithfully visited gravestone" (Bourdieu 1996, p.30). Comforting, but also created to be there long after the subject is gone: a monument or tomb. Photographs are both reassuring and disconcerting in their relationship with life and death. The subject starts at nothing, the time before life, and returns to nothing at the end, when life has wrung itself out. The book closes.

Retain and Release

Dad's album stops just a few pages after my parents' small ceremony at a wedding registry office. The signature fashion of floral embroidered cotton and flared pants. Mum's yellow peasant-dress. A very small gathering of friends and relatives in a light city drizzle. This is followed by a few photos of a fishing trawler in the making. It's the early husk of a boat my uncle Kym designed.

I was expecting to see more to the story, in Dad's photographs of early fatherhood, and his thirty-five years of work at ABC radio. But for a long time he kept his ventures into later photographed years very private, perhaps because this first album stirred disagreements between him and my mother. They relay fragments of their arguments about his commemorative ritual, and what should be kept, what should be forgotten. Dad has used elephant glue to stick the collection into the black pages of a new Henzo book. "You shouldn't have used that," says mum. "Now you won't ever be able to take anything out if you need to." His narrative selection has a tenacious grip. The only way to re-order or edit things would be to cut the book apart. The story is fixed in place, and this fixity disturbs my mother. She doesn't want a monument to history, but a form of release. For her, it is not as simple as a question of forgetting, but of letting things rest. To let the dust fall. Her relationship with these photographs is one of mourning, and so she hides some of them before dad has an opportunity to glue them in his book. They are too sore, and like a person in grief, she has taken them out of plain sight. The gesture recalls certain customs around death: the Jewish tradition of covering mirrors with cloth, or the belief of some

Image 35: a page from my father's album. Photographs of my parents placed beneath the fine-paper protective sheet of the Henzo book.



Indigenous Australian communities that pictures of the deceased should be kept out of sight. Her ceremony of forgetting puts a stop to dad's ritual of remembrance. Their acts of preservation and release form an impasse in the analogue context. Yet I wonder if the smartphone era could accommodate both their needs: to be a ceremony that both commemorates the past, and allows time slide into history. I tell dad, "we could finish your album, if you want. But in a new space." In an online form that would be private, and of a different temporal order to his material book. In the complexities of internet time, it is possible to pause for a ceremony that doesn't stay still in glass, but deliberately undoes itself in the ceaseless movements of change.



Image 36: Screenshot from the promotional video for Instagram new "stories" app

Instant Stories

It's 2016 when Instagram introduces a new application within their platform. Instastories is designed to respond to a recent pattern in networker's behaviour. Instagrammers frequently delete personal photos which they feel aren't gaining enough online traction. A certain number of likes and comments validates the preservation of an image in a profiler's archive, and without this social validation, hundreds of photos have been erased shortly after their online appearance. The company recognizes this desire for photographic production and withdrawal, (Constine, 2016) and in response, replicates a system used by another social media site: Snapchat. As with this popular application, Instastories allows the possibility for photographs and videos to be displayed within a single day, before they disappear from view. This multi-media form is designed as a ritual of forgetting, where photographs aren't frozen in fixed position, but fall away with the twenty-four hour season. Instastories are disposable material, they catch the anything whatever of the day, shifting between city traffic jams, feet on bubble-gum-spotted pavement, underground subways of artificial lighting. These are not the broader narrative sequences of lifetimes glued into material albums, but the little tales people normally share when asked, "How was your day?" The small things that draw attention

between one night's sleep and another, but leave no lasting impression behind. The transient structure of Instastories is here going to be re-imagined and de-familiarised, as I bring it into correspondence with the photographs my father keeps for posterity. We are not going to use it to "share whatever", but to craft a dissipating album.

Time Storied Differently

I ask dad to show me some of the photos that didn't make it into his album. He takes me through scanned images on his desktop, pausing now and then at ones that pluck some invisible chord. I write brief dot points of any shots which resonate with him and try to follow the emotive trajectory of his improvised wanderings. I'll use my iPhone later to photograph a little sequence of onscreen displays. "I like this one," he says, as he opens an image of:

his boyhood brothers
running across Largs Bay

Baby brother Craig is trotting
with an imaginary friend,
Bess the horse.

Middle brother Kym is
grasping dad's hand
as they race parallel
to the horizon.

Together, all three
sail a toy ship
across dry sands

Then there's uncle Craig as a young man in his early twenties, sitting in front of that same family mirror, eyes coloured with light-blue shyness. This picture catches him only a short time before the accident at the diamond mine, when a faulty electrical chord stops his watch and his heart in an instant.

Dad slides over a shot of
a mottled hand, nestled
in white cotton sheets.
The shell of his middle brother Kym,
on the day of his final breath.

There's a portrait of my mother
at twenty-six, on her overseas trip
to meet her father
for the very first time.

A glance at my young father
clowning around with the theatre crew
at Sydney University.
Victoriana comedy and Shakespeare.

Uncle Kym, the grey-haired man
unfolding the pages of my father's new album.
A vacant stare at family faces,
hollowed out by dementia.
A lost look.

"Is this what you need?" dad asks. "That depends on what *you* need," I say. "What is important for you to show." His reflection is cast on the computer screen: a white-bearded face washes over pictures of younger days. I catch photographs which make his eyes crinkle, shift the way he sits, or invite him to voice tiny details of remembered scenery. "Oh, this one…" he murmurs, and breathes heavily. I note these images down but not in an overtly calculated way.

"We're not going in chronological order…does that matter?" No. I tell him the Instastory is a different order of narrative. The word story is misleading, as the sequences of the app aren't stored. They're fleeting, put together in the passing moment. What we make doesn't need to be carefully calculated as linear narrative, but as the assemblage of emotive notes assembled in the unpredictable instant. Small beads of time are suspended together, before their connective string breaks. The tang of long-term reminiscence is not part of this photographic ceremony, but it is still a ritual. An enactment that ties moments in time together, but then allows the entire story to re-immerse itself with the constant disappearance of the live. He looks nonplussed and bemused at the foreign nature of this narrative without posterity. "What are you going to do with these disappearing images?" That is something that will unfold in the happening. The instantaneity of the smartphone will correlate with his personal archive in some as yet unknown way. I'm testing a tension that exists in smartphone photography: a push and pull between story as storage, and the constantly displayed present that washes story into oblivion. I first notice this contradictory force between preservation and forgetting in what Facebook calls the Timeline.

The Timeline



Image 37: The baby avatar that sits at the beginning of my Facebook Timeline

A symptom of early Facebook feeds is that photographs of the past are not retained on profile pages. The focus is on the most recent postings, and in the words of Sam Lessin, Vice President of Product Management, "the more important stuff slips off the page. The photos of your graduation get replaced by updates about what you had for breakfast" (Lessin 2011, para.4). CEO and founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, describes this continual movement of the live page as information and personal records "falling off a cliff." (Zucherberg, 2011)

The Timeline is designed as the antidote to this sense of continual dissipation. This autobiographical and storytelling feature first appears in 2011, as the company re-fashions what the material photo album once promised: a way to "collect all your best moments in a single place" (Johnson 2011, para.1). My first interaction with my own photographic thread doesn't cure the sense of time falling off a precipice. I start at the top of my page, with the most recent shot: a glaringly lit plate of oily chicken dumplings, next to a plastic cup of white wine. A night out with friends in Chinatown. At the bottom of the image, a pixelated thin blue line starts to course down the webpage, down to the next captured instant of my networked life, and the next. I spiral down with this blue thread from one image to another. I slide down the scroll bar until I reach what looks like the end of the page. A myriad of stored photos spring out of nothingness, and the scroll marker darts to the top, as though I hadn't moved at all. It is as though all my searching had returned me to a continually reasserted beginning. This is Sisyphus' venture: forced to repeat the same action without change, constantly falling back to the beginning when I came so close to the end. The blue thread spins and spins, like a spool unravelling when dropped, and tumbling without cessation. Endless photos appear, building towards an impossible arrival at the distant start. I know the thread is cut at the beginning of me, at my birth date. Somewhere at the bottom of this blue line sits an androgynous blue baby icon. "1985 - you are born."

After forty minutes of unravelling my Timeline, I eventually reach the bottom where a baby avatar sits in a little white nappy. There are no photos to go with this documented starting point. The thread is empty of images between babyhood and the age of twenty, when I first joined Facebook. Unchartered distance. My timeline floats in some foetal space until networked photographs started appearing.

The cumulative effect of my downward journey is that all my photos have been placed in visual equivalence. Chinatown dumplings and pictures of graduation are part of the same line of continuance. This isn't an album of my "best moments." Every upload unrolls with the same frequency along the spool of my archive, and one photo blurs into the next. This is what Victor Burgin describes as the revolutionary shift in photography, where the slipperiness of onscreen images turns "every photograph on the Web into a potential frame in a boundless film" (Burgin 2011, p.

186). The only way to create at a moment of note will stand out from the boundless cascade is by using the "Life Event" function.

Moments of Note

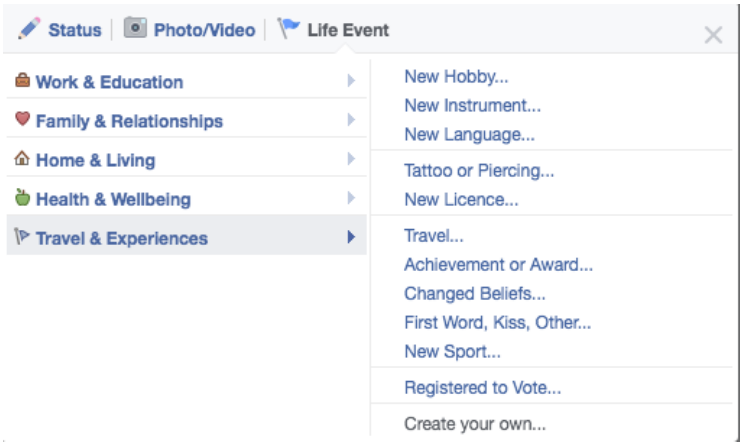


Image 38: Facebook's listed options for creating different "Life Events"

I can retrospectively distinguish narrative moments from casual snaps by flagging old photographs as eventful. Facebook supplies categories and subcategories of the instants they deem momentous: changes in "Work & Education," "Family & Relationships," "Home & Living," "Health & Wellbeing," "Travel & Experiences." From this list emerges several subcategories including: "New Job," "Military Service," "Weight Loss," "Overcame an Illness," "First word, kiss, other," "Changed Beliefs," "New Relationship," "Loss of a Loved One," "Tattoo or piercing," "Removal of braces." Beneath the attached photograph I can add a "story," a written form similar to the oral tales my father spontaneously brings to his archive.

The "Life Event" button is recognisable from the icon of a billowing blue flag. It is the symbol of something marked in spatial location, territorially owned, and ceremonially placed. It pulls attention to a precise instant in time, a source of emotive magnetism distinct from the more trivial glimpses of daily life. It draws correlations to the idea of the milestone, with its metaphorical resonance for setting important experiences in stone.

I cast my thoughts over the literal origins of that term. Solid columns that were spaced across Roman roads to indicate the distance from the capital. These columns pointed the way forward to an eventuating destination; they were sturdy, chiselled, buried deep in the earth. They reassured travellers they were on the right path towards the place they sought, and served as reminders of how far they had journeyed.

The traditional album genre implies this same sense of processual certainty. Time is seemingly mapped into a structured script, with only one set path of movement, and with a clear beginning, middle and end. The front and back of the book bind the story in a distinct site, easily locatable and retrievable. Facebook aims to perpetuate this album myth by supplying "a complete record of a user's life" (Ebert 2014 p. 35). The term "complete" suggests nothing will fall off the edge of a contained archive. And yet the online photographed life online stretches beyond containment or completion as the present continually secretes itself in daily uploads. Records fall off the edges of recollectable time. The only certainty is that there will be a stopping point: that I won't always be here to watch the photographs grow.

Time is lived, writes Henri Bergson, like "the unrolling of a coil, for there is no living being who does not feel himself gradually coming to the end of his role; and to live is to grow old. But it may just as well be compared to a continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball, for our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way" (Bergson 1912, p.11).[1] This build-up of accumulations and happenings is what keeps the subject suspended in a perpetual movement of becoming. Change hovers in every present, which is seamlessly integrated with a multiplicity of other moments. Social rituals such as Facebook's "Life Event" give the impression of stopping points that are separate from other moments of everydayness. This is time artificially halted for the purposes of social commemoration (Bergson 2007). But the blue thread of the timeline runs counter to these flagged demarcated points, and as with Bergson's becoming, this coil is where all "states melt into each other," fusing past, present and future (Bergson 2007, p.243). Here, time felt as something indivisible, multiplicitous, and multi-rhythmic.

The designers of the Timeline eventually remove the blue line that links each moment to moment. There is something disquieting about watching it uncoil ceaselessly. A cascade of stored imagery unnervingly builds up and unwinds. There are no binding

[1] Bergson swiftly problematizes this metaphor in his book *Introduction to Metaphysics,* as the line of thread suggests all states of an individual's perception across time to be homogenous, rather than multiplicitous and always in the midst of change. In his search for a better illustration, he moves from the coil, to a spectrum of colours, and then to an elastic band, seeking out some way to demonstrate the fluid experience of always-becoming.

covers to neatly confine this story, it accumulates. How is it that time continues to give birth to so much, and simultaneously decay?

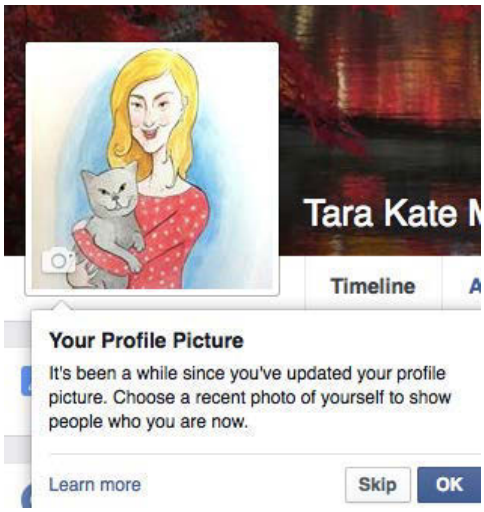


Image 39: Facebook encourages me to "show people who I am now"

Only Now

In the early hours of a Saturday, a group of strangers spill into the street outside my apartment, their footsteps loose with drunken hours. Voices float into my sleep through the open window. "I'm taking a selfie of a selfie. You stand there and I'll…woops! I took a picture of your ear. I'm posting your ear!" They're not making a moment for preservation; their photo is online graffiti. A mark made for depositing online, for being noticed. Their friends will know they were out together, making the most of a night out.

They don't shoot with their consciousness racing ahead, or with posterity in mind. The snap of a blurred face, a night photographed through Friday booze; this isn't made with children or grandchildren in mind. They know the evidentiary proof of their experience will be consumed over the next day or so, as their network likes and comments on their image. Then, the photograph's currency will expire. Click. Here I am now. Click. Here I am still now. Click. Now I am still here.

Media theorist Andrew Hoskins calls this swift and fleeting glance at the dissipating past "memory on the fly," in which "the unfolding details of daily life have a 'once through' quality, in which the mundane and momentous actions and events of people's lives carry them forward even as the continuous present seems to slide relentlessly into the past" (Hoskins 2009, p.3). Each image is noted in its time, but chased away by other apparitions in the glass: A cat washing its face with its paws, a cup of coffee steaming before a harbourside view, someone testing out their new outfit in a change room mirror. It takes only a second for the light caught onscreen to be sent running, through a networked virtual space, joining billions of other snaps, passing from screen to screen. The selfie-takers outside my window want to share the

now, to keep the now alive. To keep the reflection of the instant suspended in the glass display of the phone, until it expires, and a new now is illuminated.

In the Looking Glass

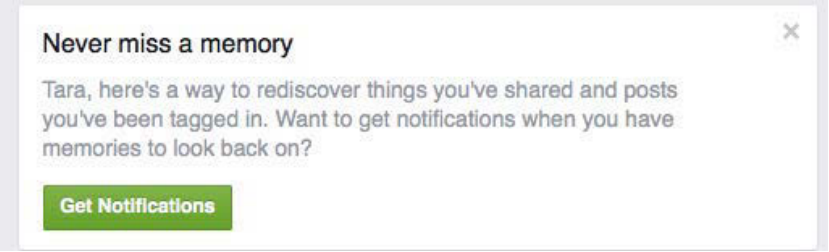


Image 40: Facebook invites me to use their app, "On This Day"

Arm outstretched, the selfie taker looks into the glass at their photographed reflection. Behaviour around the flipped camera lens mimics grooming in front of the pocket mirror. Hair is arranged, posture is emphasized. These self portraits aim for the ideal light, the perfected shot, the most presentable self. [2]

Self-image is so easy to catch, but the desire is not to fix one unique reflection in the mirror-with-a-memory. These portraits move all the time, across days, weeks, years and minutes. These faces will all be self-photographed in the near future. Their captured reflections move forward in time, always changing. For this reason, the content of what is posted doesn't tend to be momentous, more of a brief diary notation of the small details in a day. Selfies appear on my feed of a friend waiting idly at an airport, a couple sharing a twilight drink at a cocktail bar, a girl in her newly bought fuzzy beanie. These are portraits of momentary moods. "I bought some Lolita sunglasses," my friend says. "Wanna see?" She thumbs her way across her smartphone screen, where a quilt of selfies rolls by. She laughs, half embarrassed. The screen stops where her eyes are framed by chartreuse tinted love-heart lenses. There are several takes of the one pose. An Andy Warhol canvas.

Decades before the advent of the smartphone, Susan Sontag writes, "what the photograph-record confirms is, more modestly, simply that the subject exists; therefore, one can never have too many [photographs]" (Sontag 2001, p.165). Some smartphone users embody this desire, as the need to catch hold of each new present

[2] For this reason, pop culture and media representations of selfies are often linked to narcissism, and the story of Narcissus who stared ceaselessly at his mirrored reflection in a lake, only to drown in it. Research in the selfie as a performance of identity can be found in Frosh, 2015; Warfield, 2015; Murray, 2015 et al.

moment becomes a form of nervous tick. In one of his studies of vernacular photography, artist Joachim Schmidt comes across a social media user who takes over one hundred shots a day, all of which are uploaded online each night, regardless of the content (Schmid, Batchen & Burbridge 2013). Now and then I come across a news item on others who produce masses of photographic images. A twenty-three year old woman in Richmond who takes two hundred selfies every twenty-four hours, in her efforts to catch the best moment. These photographers are at the fever pitch of image production.

The ease of prosthetic photography makes this accumulation possible, although I am not sure Sontag's statement still rings true: that the more visual documents accumulated over a lifetime, the more confirmation of self-existence. There are 1676 photographs currently stored on my mobile. My iPhoto database is spread across several computers, and holds roughly five thousand images. Snapshots of the ongoing present continue to be uploaded on a regular basis on Facebook and Instagram. The numbers rise quickly, and the more they grow, the more I notice which moments have not been photographed. There is so much to see online of the world in motion, captured from millions of angles, that the unphotographed stirs an anxiety that something has been missed.

At my thirtieth birthday party, the night is quickly passing inside a constantly replenished champagne glass. The hours move in the hum of conversation, and before I can remember to eat, a niggling doubt creeps in: "Has anyone taken a picture? If there are no photos, all this is just gone." It is rare for a social gathering to evade capture. A record is usually guaranteed. Someone will think to take out their smartphone.

Such small voids in photographed time become more visibly absent in the smartphone context, when so many moments are caught, even incidentally. This is one piece of time that will go missing. I turn thirty at roughly 1:30 in the morning, and what have I kept of everything that has passed? Memory doesn't give me the totality of all those years. I sense small fragmentary interspersions of experience, scattered amongst the blank spaces of unregistered time. In smartphone photography's plenitude, a similar vast terrain of seconds and minutes will slip into forgetting. There is too much to hold onto, the rate of visual output is so high.

Such constant frequency of photos can trigger a heightened form of what Paul Virilio terms "picnolepsy"(from the Greek, *picnos*: frequent, and *lepsy*: the medical term for a seizure). This is the state of being when fragmental happenings fall outside of perception. Tiny shards of lived experience go unregistered by conscious perception every day. On a subliminal level, these voids in time suggest that for one brief moment, the subject was not truly present in their world.

> The cup dropped and overturned on the table is [a] well-known consequence. The absence lasts a few seconds; its beginning and end are sudden. The senses function, but are nevertheless closed to external impressions. The return being just as sudden as the departure, the arrested word and action are picked up again where they have been interrupted. Conscious time comes together again automatically, forming a continuous time without apparent breaks…For the picnoleptic, nothing really has happened, the missing time never existed. At each crisis, without realizing it, a little of his or her life has simply escaped (Virilio 1991, p.9).

The smartphone era has made picnolepsy conscious. The unphotographed becomes the escaped present, the missing time that was never really experienced, but is noticeably absent as image. These missing fragments of experience act like small deaths, where there is no perceptive body to feel the moment.

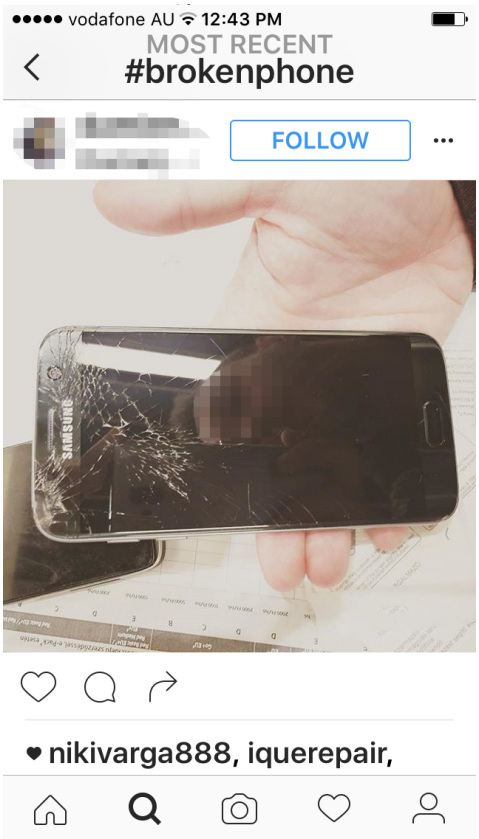


Image 41: a reflected selfie in the splintered glass of an iPhone

The smartphone is used as a mirror-of-the-now, more so than a mirror-with-a-memory. This does not mean the medium has disentangled itself from mortality by turning its gaze to the living present. The now that escapes the lens is an instantaneous loss. It structurally enacts the disappearance of experiences, and the inevitable disappearance of a body. Without a subject to catch their reflections in the glass, the mirror is blind, and "its emptiness is not just a vacuum but the absence of an eye" (Elkins 1997 p. 48). It sees nothing and no one. For some, the absence of a photo can be just such a hollowed-

out space, where presence is erased because one cannot see oneself seeing.

Remember Me

The original mirror-with-a-memory is not concerned with the imprint of the self in the now, but with the lasting impression a subject can leave behind. The daguerreotype is for future eyes, for the time after death. Media historian Geoffrey Batchen discovers the desire for the posthumous image inscribed in the writings of many daguerreotype portrait sitters of the 19th Century. One woman, identified as Catherine Christ, has her photograph taken in 1859, and behind the glass image she hides a piece of paper. It's a poem to accompany her after-image. She sits in a stark black gown with long sleeves, and almost merges into a plain black backdrop. Her pale hands and face stand out in the darkness, framed by the cuffs at her wrists and the white collar buttoned up to her throat. Underneath hide these curly quilled words:

> When I am dead and in my grave
> And when my bones are rotten
> Remember me
> When you see this
> Or I shall be forgotten
> The grass is green
> The rose is red
> This is my name
> When I am dead
> (cited in Batchen 2004b, p.47).

The writing rings with certitude as well as haunting. One name and one person: a presence that persists as image, beyond the existence of a physical body. The plaintive call to be remembered is tied to a sense of a singular selfhood. A sense of identity that is continuous over time. "Looking into the mirror each morning," writes Elkins, "I check to make sure that I am the same person who went to bed last night - the person who dissolved into darkness and dream" (Elkins 1997, p.70). Catherine

Image 42: The changing face of the daguerreotype,
captured by digitisation technician Rachel Maloney



Christ's portrait acts as her consolidation of a singular identity, as well as confirmations of her inevitable dissolve into darkness. "This is my name when I am dead." In this phase of photography, one portrait is enough to testify the subject exists, and it is a core subjecthood. She is who she is, for her it is a timeless truth: as much as the grass is green and the rose is red. And when she looks at her face frozen in the glass, she remembers that she is going to die. Memento Mori.

Today, the billions of faces held beneath smartphone glass do not reflect singular subjects, each with an enduring, single self. In these brief, fractal glances at mutable identities, the tense has shifted, from "I was here," to "I am here." Now, and now again. Yet the liveness of these shots doesn't immunise them from photography's embroilment in mortality and deathliness. The medium still dances with the encroaching non-existence of the lives it captures. Structurally, these live photographs enact self-disappearance, regardless of whether the subjects do or don't see their mortality in the lens. This lithe image keeps slipping away in its own happening, a constant act of self-erasure, change and becoming. This has been the constant paradox of the medium , writes David Sutton. Photography has always been a "strange contradiction: life (in memory; in the present) within death (the dying moment; the silent, dead past). The history of photography… has been a continual struggle to re-examine this contradiction" (Sutton 2009, p. 96). The live time of ubiquitous photography lends this contradiction added nuance and force as frozen moments depart in the stream, yet remain present somewhere in distant internet records which accumulate like the long stretch of duration.

I feel closer to the smartphone's dance with remembering and forgetting when I hold its glassy shape in my hand, and sense a material echo with the object of the daguerreotype. Like the smartphone, daguerreotypes were handled and touched by their owners in the late 1800s. These portraits still remain subject to transience and disappearance; silver nitrate has a duplicitous character. Figures and shapes emblazoned on them ripple between full visibility and complete loss; what can be seen depends upon the angle. In some lights, photographed bodies come into sight with bold detail. In others, the captured image fades and retreats into shadow. The viewer's image also flutters across the glassy surface, beneath which the silver-nitrate layer suspends the image of someone long deceased.

Image 43: A reflective dialogue between the smartphone
and the daguerreotype, posted on Ebay



At certain times of day, the pixelated image in the smartphone is clear; colours glow boldly beneath touch. At other times, sunlight changes the reflective dynamics, and the electronic illumination struggles to be seen. My face slides over the image saved beneath. An overlap of my skin and eyes across the images I browse.

Ceremonial Time

As I browse auction sites for daguerreotypes, my skin overlays the figures of strangers from the ninteenth century. Collectors gather these studies of nameless people, who now circulate as digital information in a network of copies of copies. One portrait in particular catches my eye. In a curlicue gold frame sits a woman in the black gown of mourning. A white lace collar tight about her neck, and neat white cuffs at her wrists. In her arms she holds what seems to be a peacefully sleeping baby boy, his head resting gently against her chest. His hair is just starting to grow in soft-feathered tufts. This is a memento mori of an infant slumbering with death. His little fingers are spread-eagled across the skirts of his black tunic. The mother stares front on into the eye of the camera, her hair tucked in a bun behind pearl-drop earrings.

A ghostly image from recent history superimposes itself on the glass surface: the hazy outline of a hand clasping an iPhone is caught in a camera-flash. A grieving mother is caught once in a hefty daguerreotype camera; again in a smartphone shot which refracts its own moment of capture. The dialogue between the two photographic practices catches the changes in the time taken to mark time. The thirty-minute exposure in silver nitrate has the poignancy of a carefully crafted and slow ceremony of remembrance. The flash of the smartphone has been captured by accident. Its moment in the glass is a side effect of the photographer's wish to quickly post the item for sale.

Photography doesn't take much time anymore. Little ceremonial process is involved in uploading and interacting with networked shots. This prosthetic camera is integrated with twenty-four-hour cycles. Photography is always close to the skin, so it zooms into the incidental and the physically proximate at any given moment.

A girl walking

down the backstreets of Newtown

shoots birds on telephone wires.

Two teenage girls

hold a bejewelled phone out

at arms length and

photograph smiles of braces and teeth.

Travellers photograph
at my local café,

pink-frosted watermelon cakes

and the Shih Tzu chained
to a bike rack outside.

There is very little to do to keep an image of experience, because the smartphone device automatically retains a photograph from the moment it's shot. An instant is kept in the cloud, in the server, on the smartphone.

This contrasts with the mourning mother's ceremonial relationship with photography, where a sequence of gestures and rituals in front of the camera transform the daguerreotype into a mirror-with-a-memory. She and the body of her child are immaculately dressed. Their faces are made up so they will be visually clear in the resulting image. The studio has been prepared, a plain coloured backdrop hung in place. The time of day is carefully selected. Light will leave a strong impression of their forms. The traditional cold metal brace is lined up her spine and clamped around the nape of her neck to keep her still for the thirty minutes of exposure. The baby is held still by death. She holds its little body in her arms, frozen in place, her

eyes fixed on the glass eye of the camera. A prolonged farewell. Once the portrait is taken, the baby is ready to go in a coffin.

Her preparation around the photographic event speaks to Batchen's observation that "something creative has to be done to a photograph, some addition has to be made to its form, if it's to function as an effective memory object. Nowhere is this assumption more apparent than in photographic albums" (2004b, p. 48). I think of my father's ceremonial relationship with his material album. More than the pictures themselves, the act of assemblage is what makes this book a way of seeing his self-image reflected back by a medium. "He's chosen some very strange photos for the book," says mum. "Some of them aren't very good… there are nicer-looking photos to use." Strangely, the pictures themselves are not the crucial element. The time taken to create a memento makes the inevitable loss of things bearable.

"Where will the images of this Instastory go, after they disappear?" asks dad. "Will they be completely gone?"

No, they'll be automatically kept on my phone and in my personal iCloud account. They just won't be in a slideshow format anymore, nor will they be on Instagram.

"The land where stories end" he mutters.

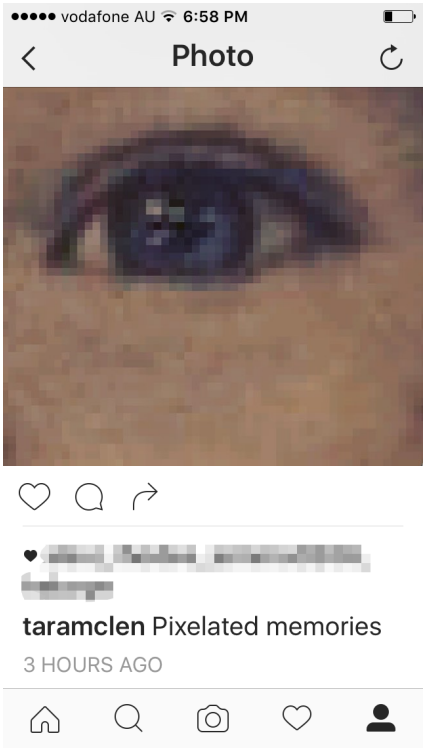


Image 44: A fragment of my father's childhood portrait, uploaded on my Instagram account

Time Plays its Tricks

"You should put this in. Must be about 1946…" He's a soft-cheeked toddler, plonked in front of a soft grey canvas backdrop at a portrait studio. It's a sepia print, which like many of the period, has been tinted by hand. Soft colours breathe life into abstract grey tones. Faint lilac for the clothes, straw blonde for the hair. Rouge cheeks and hibiscus lips. His mother has dressed him in a ruched cotton tunic with the top button done up. His round baby thigh protrudes from under the outfit. Soft new skin. His curls have been carefully brushed and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Timmy Tip Toes* is placed in his lap. It's brushed an olive green. This is the palette for a naturalness that reveals childhood in the glowing magazine style.

The colour scheme brings to mind a picture-perfect image in an old Kodak ad from 1917. A young mother and father with their newborn bundle, tinted with rosy-auburn hues. She holds her vulnerable new child asleep in a swaddle of white cotton, as she watches her husband write the date and time onto the photo just captured. This is the autographic Kodak, which has a small re-sealable slot in which he can handwrite calendar and clock details, not unlike the Polaroid tradition of writing in the white base line. All three are flushed healthy skin and the contended closeness of family peace. "Keep a Kodak Story of the Baby," says the headline, and beneath, in smaller font: "Such records mean a great deal when baby has begun outgrowing baby ways, and time has begun playing tricks with memory." Images of babyhood are frequent in the company's marketing as a memory safeguard.

This is the era when photographic technology is entrusted as the automatic gatekeeper of past experiences. The land where stories stay. There is less call for human ceremony to steep the photographic moment in personal memory, as the camera itself is endowed with the task of automated remembrance. The catchphrase "Let Kodak Keep the Story" appears around 1915. The advertising pitch is outsourced memory.

Dad has retouched the blemishes of his photograph onscreen. The physical image was prepared for a long life, attached to a sturdy piece of cardboard, but now, the corners peel and curl upward like kindling in the fire. A few days after his MRI, he scans the shot into his computer. Small flakes came off like ash in the tight compress of the scanner. Neon blue light over sepia, a surface imprint is sent into an ether. He zooms in and out to look closely at the specks of rust and dirt engrained on its surface. He gets out the editing tool and with intense concentration, passes a small round circle over the photo's blemishes. With each click he erases the rust, renews the colour. *Pock*. It rewinds slowly backwards. *Pock*. He renews the hues from when it was freshly tinted. Iris blue to the eyes. He stares at the screen with the disengaged stare of a surgeon, operating on his childhood. *Pock*. Marks of time are dissipating around the glowing baby. He clicks on a small scratch, clears away the bacteria. *Pock*.

"How is your memory these days?" the doctor asks my father at his latest check-up. He shuffles in his chair. "Oh, you know. Not as good as it was," and he laughs. His condition affects his concentration. Blood thickens, and the pulse through organs, such as the brain, is slowed. Now he can see himself as a small baby: a moment uninhabitable. That little body was his once, but time has worked its way into his skin, hair and bones. Cells have changed and renewed, muscles have stretched and shoe sizes have increased by inches to a size nine and a half. I try to imagine that baby in fast forward growth, that tiny face shifting and stretching, the skull and ears moving through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, like sand settling beneath wind. I look and wait, but the baby doesn't transform into the grey-haired man who stares back at his former self in the computer screen. I think of all the blood that's pulsed through his veins since that moment; the number of times he looked at the clock, the hours of sleep he's had and how much salt water he's sweated and cried and swallowed at the beach. This is the image of him before time began playing its 'tricks.'

He uses his computer to undo these tricks on old Kodak family snaps too. Images from his childhood, taken with his great grandfather's box brownie. Dad recalls the camera as a square wooden device. The space between the lens and the viewfinder was made of corrugated green leather; accordion shaped. It had already deteriorated by the time he inherited it. Small holes ruptured the leather corridor through which

.

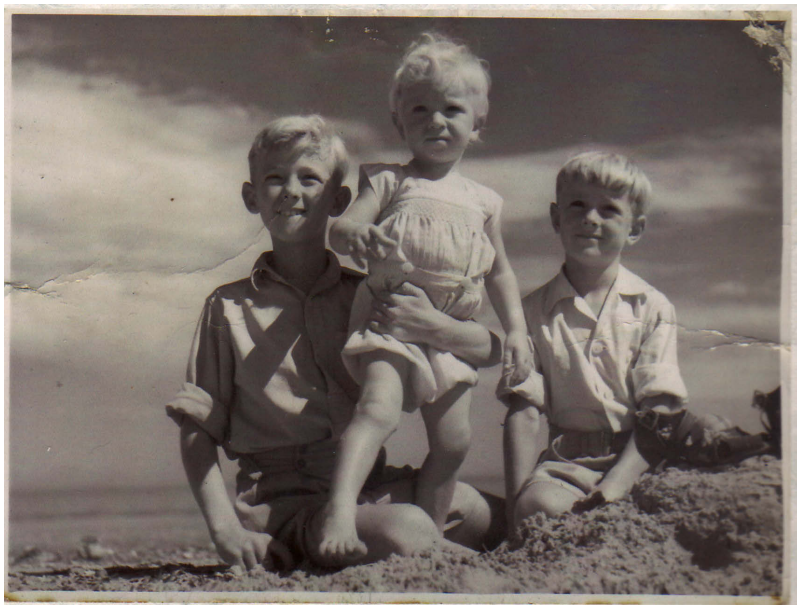


Image 45: Three brothers photographed at Largs Bay. My father holds the baby of the group, little Craig, and a young uncle Kym sits with his hands in the sand.



Image 46: "I think it was a monkey."
My father's professionally taken infant portrait.

the light travelled. This left an unmistakable signature: an overflow of light that disrupted the image in patches. Bleached spaces of overexposure form voids in pictures of boyhood. Smaller pinholes have created a scattering of dust, and open tears have made an enveloping fog. His images are full of white whispers.

A room
where three brothers slept and
turned their beds
into sailing boats.

Baby uncle Craig
blinking in the sun and
grabbing at the garden soil
with his young fingers.

Digital technology allows dad to steal back the tricks the decaying Kodak has played on these memories. Editing software washes away signs of the camera's flaws, and of each photo's material age. It restores newness to bodies and spaces of the past. Yet these rescued images are subject to another form of decay.

As digital files, his rescued shots are structurally akin to any other smartphone snap. Photography is no longer tied to distinct material objects, but exists as pieces of encoded data. It is a medium made up of files, read and assembled into images by the computer. As computerised information, photographs now have very particular vulnerabilities, and can disappear in almost no time. The digital is not always a restorer or saver, but has tricks of its own.

A post appears on my Facebook feed one Sunday afternoon in 2015. No photographs are attached. It is a comment that stands alone as a statement of a young mother's distress. "Apparently, when someone accidentally reformats your memory card (with

pictures of your child), you go through the five stages of grief…I'll never get those days back ever again." Commiserating networkers respond with stories of their own photographic losses. The delete button is so easily pressed by mistake. This is just one form of what is colloquially known as digital decay. Saved information is often lost when operating systems upgrade and can no longer read the photographic information. Personal records vanish in the hundreds. More rarely, the online platform that houses the images becomes defunct. The internet servers of dead sites are dismantled, and images safe in "the cloud" are no longer accessible.

One day after her loss, the mother posts an update about her photographic archive:
"After hours of waiting and crying heaps, my husband finally recovered most of my files. After making three sets of back-ups, I can finally breathe. This little man is my favourite subject…I take pride in the thousands of pictures that I've taken of him since he was born. I know that as long as he's in the picture (and as long as it's not very blurry), I will keep and cherish that picture because every moment with him is important." She thanks her husband "for recovering what [he] accidentally deleted."
Most of my own smartphone photographs are not printed. They do not exist as objects. Should digital decay, data rot, or software erosion snatch my images away, I won't be using Photoshop to recreate small visual voids, as my father does with his old Kodak snaps. There will be no surviving traces for me to restore, and the chances of recovery will be slim.

"You say the pictures we put on this Instastory will stay somewhere?"
Dad is double-checking their safety from disappearance. "They're on my phone. They'll be in my iCloud." I say this as though it gives us some certainty against loss.

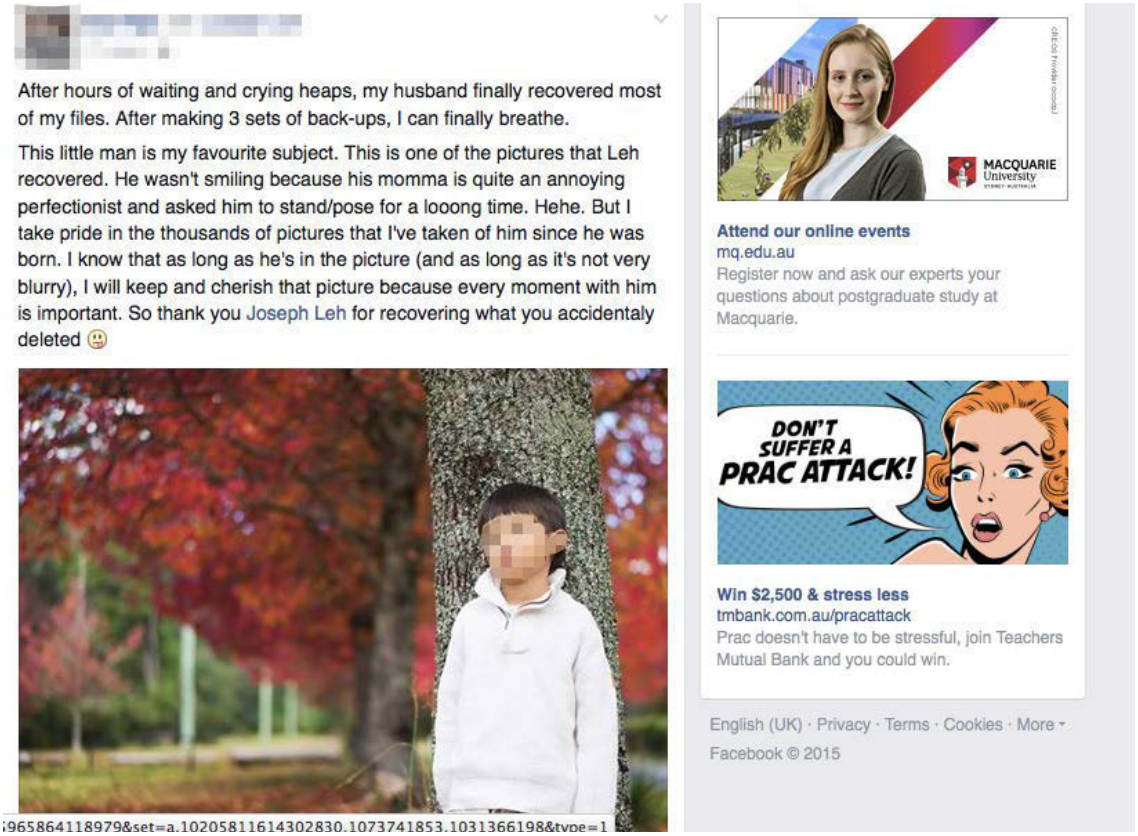


Image 47: Accidental delete. A rediscovered photo file.

Hysterical Time

From image 45 on page 119



It is uncanny to look into the eyes of a parent as a baby. Dad's studio portrait points to the time before my time, and beyond, into the continual cycle of births and deaths which uncoils through centuries. Barthes writes of this destabilising encounter with his mother's childhood portrait: "The life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses in its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it - and in order to look at it we must be excluded from it…That is what the time when my mother was alive before me is - History" (Barthes 1981, p. 65). He is adamant that no photograph of his own babyhood could estrange him from his personal experience of the past. "No anamnesis could ever make me glimpse [hysterical history] starting from myself... Contemplating a photograph in which [my mother] is hugging me, a child, against her, I can waken in myself the rumpled softness of her crepe de Chine and the perfume of her rice powder" (Barthes 1981, p.65). As my father looks into his own baby eyes, he is drawn into just such an imaginative reminiscence of what happened in that studio in 1946.

The little boy points at something outside of frame, to the upper right. Wide-eyed, arm outstretched, one plump finger beckoning an unknown source of wonder. His mouth opens slightly, his fingertip ever so slightly blurred with movement. "I think it was a monkey," he says, seventy-four years after the click of the shutter. He can't be sure, there is no return to a child's eyes and to that look which hungers. His mother and the photographer have done something to trigger a natural burst of surprise in a little boy who is unaware of his own production as image. This is the period before the child can see himself in his great-great-grandmother's mirror. Before memories congeal into recollectable and re-conjured images. When he stares at his own infancy, dad is excluded from the image. He is an observer of his own body in the past. This must be hysterical history: hysteria in the sense that he is quite literally "beside himself" or perhaps outside of himself, in a photographic experience that points to something outside of the frame of reference.

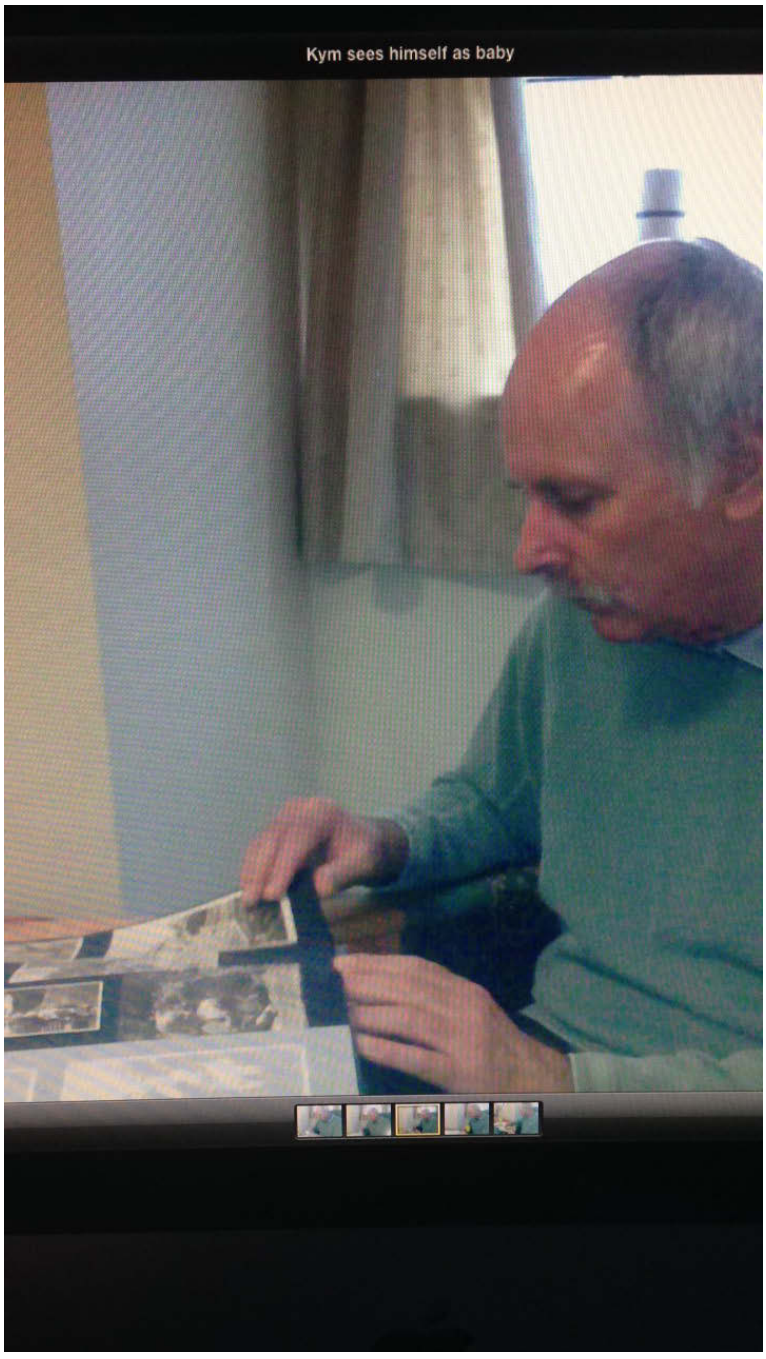


Image 48:

"Kym sees himself as a baby."

A screenshot of a photograph on my father's computer, in which my uncle leafs through his childhood years in dad's newly made album.

The baby reaches out to a site no longer visible in memory; to something that is present all the time, though never directly in sight. The non-existence always on the edges. The self who isn't seen by the mirror. Something is "over there", in the twinkle-eyed gaze of the tiny boy. In the unphotographed space, outside of remembrance, and touched by imagination.



Image 49: One of the many ultrasounds uploaded to Instagram

Time Before Memory

Memory wrests its way into these infant moments through tangible dreams. Barthes feels the texture of his mother's crepe de chine; my father thinks he can see a small monkey perched in the portrait studio. But there is a photographed space of the self that is impossible to imagine with such intimacy. Neither Barthes nor my father come across photographs of themselves before birth.

Prenatal imagery has now become a familiar part of vernacular photography. On Instagram Explore, amongst photos of decorated fingernails, wet-suited surfers at Bondi, and cronuts in Newtown cafes, an ultrasound appears. Out of a darkened space, coral white shapes seep into emergence. The Rorschach of cloudy human tissue takes shape. I identify a nose, the tiny underdeveloped fingers of an outstretched hand. A foetus curled into the dark. The proud announcement of a pregnancy. These hospital images are a ubiquitous aspect of social media

photography, with parents creating timelines for offspring who are still in the womb.[3] "Healthy at eight weeks. Could be girl or boy."

Hysterical history comes into new light in this shared prenatal imagery. The word hysteria comes from the Greek, meaning pain in the womb. Ultrasounds present the self as image, before images are perceptible to the subject. This is time outside of oneself, yet starting from oneself. These photographs are not made of light and their subjects are unable to see. Their bodies experience an enclosed watery world through sound, and they are visually captured by sound waves in a scanner. This is the site before birth and before light, which points to the living that will continually produce itself before and after an individual life. For some, this wanders too far into "the unpredictability of the flesh and the exigencies of time" (Batchen 1999, p. 84). Many social media users believe the womb is not to be broached in the everyday context of networked smartphone shots.

Bloggers document their unease with a reaction ranging from abject disgust to trite dismissal. "I can examine the inside of a near stranger's uterus every time I click on my newsfeed - a side of sonogram with my breakfast tea and toast. It's weird, right?" (Brewster 2013, para. 4) Another blogger chimes that the reaction to such posts "is less 'Is it a boy or a girl?!" and more "Why are you showing hundreds of friends your uterus?'" (STFU Parents 2014, para. 2) Some celebrate the early stirrings of a new person, with congratulatory comments appearing beneath the growing body.

"Congrats your gonna be an amazing moomy!! ♥ I love you soooo much!!!"

"So excited for you!! Yay! She's almost here! ♥"

"OMG she is smiling"

"Congratulations! She is going to be beautiful."

Whether a source of fear or joy, the continual generation of living and dying forms implicates the viewer in the uncoiling of duration. As Barthes writes, "a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though

[3] While Facebook requires users to be over the age of thirteen, there are still ways that parents can create timelines for their babies (without the newborn's profile being singled out for deletion).

impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (Barthes 1981, p. 81). It is vertiginous to be implicated in the stream of becomings and unbecomings. The photographic thread unwinds and accumulates more and more lives, moving incessantly, never pausing at the momentous or the everyday.

Stop all the Clocks

Social discomfort arises around networked images such as the ultrasound because the everyday has not stopped in the face of profound change. The thread of duration hasn't been put on pause with the arrival of a new living person, and it won't halt at their departure. The smartphone allows a forward reaching movement into time that bleeds into the past and future. Sharp twists in lived experience merge with the normality of the mundane. In the twenty-four-hour scene, a pink prune baby arises, next to a photo of a plate of mussels at Watson's Bay, a snapshot of a cat in a carry bag, and a commemorative portrait of someone killed in the Paris attacks at the Bataclan theatre. Time will not freeze at things that matter intensely on a personal level. Sometimes I wish it would, as though time could behave like a snapshot photograph and halt everything in its tracks. At other times, I fear pausing at images that bruise, and am compelled to keep moving in the flux of monotony or distraction.

The live feed often encourages this urge to keep moving with the present. But the twenty-four-hour cycles of photography do not give me an escape route from images that hurt, nor do they abandon photographic ceremony altogether. In this space, it is possible to reconceive the ceremonial. Online, photography is not about making a monument, because death is incorporated into everyday banalities. The possibility for a fleeting photographic ritual arises at one of the recurring trips my father, my mother and I make to the oncologist. A round of now familiar questions are rehearsed: "How are your feet? Still numb?" "Do you feel tender in the glands?" "How often are you sleeping?" "Do you remember to eat?" The process has become routine, and the appointments have continued far longer than any medical professionals estimated. After years of the same meeting, it strikes me that we are scheduling appointments for my father to remember that death is in each breath of life.

His doctor is friendly and caring but doesn't ever look his patients or their families directly in the eyes. "If you decide to have chemo again, we would put you on a different version, a new formula, and we wouldn't give the Phenergan, last time that triggered the allergic reaction…" Each visit, my father leans his gnarled wooden walking stick against the office wall, and perches his tilly hat on top. "You should take a picture of that," mum says quietly. But I don't get out my phone in response.

This is a lost opportunity for a transient ceremony that acknowledges mortality. At the time, it seems too casual and brief a gesture in a raw moment. As a photograph, it would point to the time without him. I freeze at my mother's request, because I can't bear to anticipate the endurance of the ordinary, despite the enormity of impending absence. Smartphone feeds of global temporality remind me that time doesn't stop at grief or celebration, even when it is photographed. People still eat, and sleep, and brush their teeth, get dressed and undressed, vacuum up the dust in their homes. The earth continues to spin on its axis.

I recall an entry in Roland Barthes' diary of grief, which he fills with fragmentary passages after the death of his mother. He writes:

> From the terrace of the Flore, I see a woman sitting on the windowsill of the bookstore La Hune; she is holding a glass in one hand, apparently bored... A cocktail party. May cocktails. A sad, depressing sensation of a seasonal and social stereotype. What comes to mind is that maman is no longer here and life, stupid life, continues. …No sooner has she departed than the world deafens me with its *continuance*." (Barthes, 2010, p.148)

How dare the ordinary assert itself so regularly without halting at the loss of something precious.

My father doesn't carry the weight of outrage or fear at time's continuance. After so many years of living with the Damoclean sword of mortal illness, his perspective takes a softer tone. "To be honest with you, I'm astonished I'm still here." I come to understand his meaning a little better as we look over images for his Instastory. Daylight dwindles and his reflection disappears from the computer screen. He says, "we didn't take any pictures of me in the chemo chair. Sorry, don't have anything to give you from that time."

He has sat many hours in a padded grey armchair, chemicals dripping slowly into his veins. The oncology ward has become a familiar yet abstract space for us. Around



Image 50: an ultrasound nestled
in the midst of Instagram Explore

dad sit the old and the young. Many still have their hair; some are a lilac pale colour; some look like silkworms. They wait, drip by drip, and now and again the beepers sound loudly to say it's time for another flush. Newspapers and bad television are the distraction against the distended seepage of chemicals in the blood. Boredom mingles with illness and smells of disinfectants. Confinement in the seat, the ache of inertia, and the squeak of trolleys bearing plain sandwiches. I recall the sterile yet sweaty feeling of aeroplane flights. Uncomfortable bodies are too close to one another's breath and sweat, and the hospitable nurses move about like flight attendants, trying to keep that stale feeling from breaking through the image of tidy comfort.

"The chemo chair. I don't think any of us would want to photograph that," I say.

"Why not?" he says. "It's part of everything."

Instant Commemoration

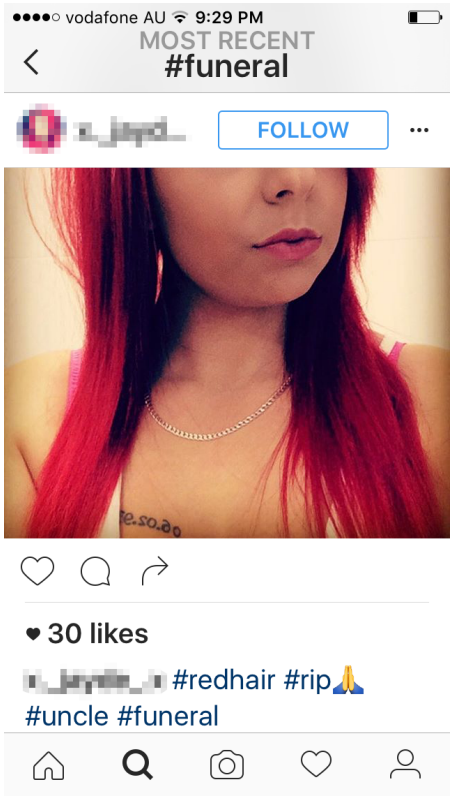


Image 51: A selfie on Instagram under hashtag "funeral"

The live feed of smartphone photography generates such openness to the banality of mortal moments. In constantly changing screen displays, the perpetuity of time re-iterates itself, and enfolds loss into daily routine. On Instagram, I browse through a series of snaps that bring the casual and the ceremonial into dialogue. A new hashtag has started to make its way into social media vernacular: hashtag "funeral selfie."

The smartphone reflects the faces of people on the day they bury their dead. Many of these self-portraits are taken in front of mirrors. The casual brevity of the selfie, the mirror that shows the now, doesn't rest for a memento mori. Nevertheless, it acts as a passing ritual to acknowledge someone's death.

> A man stands in front of the mirror of his built-in wardrobe and shoots his freshly pressed suit, one hand resting on his blue silk tie. It is the day of his cousin's funeral. Comments dance around his sleek appearance, and the sadness of the day. "Looking good!" "Sorry for your loss."

> A young woman prepares for her grandfather's funeral. In the cool light of a white tiled bathroom, she stands in a full-length mirror, wearing a long black lace dress. Soft ash blonde hair frames her face and downturned eyes. Like many of the mirrored funeral selfies, she gazes not at the looking glass itself, but at her miniature reflection caught in her smartphone. "Hardest part is saying goodbye ❤". #missyougrandpa #icedesignfashion A networker comments on her outfit: "Nice one!"

Networkers' comments dwell on choice of clothing and make-up. The ceremonial occasion is often given less attention than the presentation of the selfie-taker (Gibbs *et al.,* 2014), with funeral selfies accompanied by doubts or pride at personal appearance. A recent study on this phenomenon notes the frequent use of attendant "insensitive hashtags such as #likeforlike #sexy and #followme" (Meese *et al.,* 2015, p.1822) which jar with the traditional gravitas of a Westernised commemorative act in the twenty-first century. The fleeting glance at aesthetics in the mirror is brought openly into the public mourning space:

> a woman in simple black leggings and a t-shirt: "For funeral today… couldn't find out what to wear - Hope this is okay!";
>
> an awkward teenage boy in dim lighting: "I'm really bad at ties. Funeral today";
>
> a girl with vermillion lipstick: #redlipstick "I love you grandpa";
>
> a teenage girl in thigh-high boots posts #outfitoftheday,

> and a smiling young American with whitened teeth, a crisp white shirt and designer sunglasses comments on his selfie: "RIP Amelia." A friend responds: "And you smiling like that??… Lool" [sic] He replies: "Lol, after we had finished crying miss."

In spite of the loss of loved ones, people still do the regular things they always do, including taking conversational pictures. "Life, stupid life continues," and the non-existence that shadows the living is rendered more ordinary, as part of everything. These are reflections that do not reflect back in time, but stay in the moment.

Some bloggers document moral outrage, they state that death has been handled with a lack of respect and solemnity: The funeral selfie is framed as an egotistical distraction from the ceremony. As one blogger puts it, "If you're just amazed at how much you're rockin' the outfit while Cousin Jamie is laid out in a coffin, well, that's not grief; it's a symptom of our collective cultural death" (Wells 2013, para. 8).

On the other hand, some social commentators write that this is just another part of the strange continuum in behaviours that arise around funerals, "like drinking too much or falling into bed with a fellow griever" (Clark-Flory 2013, para. 2). Even without a selfie: "grieving is a strange ritual…we dress up really fancy and then have a catered party in a room with a dead body. Someone should probably start a tumblr called Adults In Suits Eating Hors d'oeuvres Near A Corpse" (Vogt 2013, para. 8).

The photographs themselves cannot reveal what the subject is feeling on the day of mourning. Funeral selfies reveal how birth and death are documented in the same way that networkers capture morning walks, holidays, and lazy Sunday brunches. The mediocrity of living interweaves itself with the continual process of dying. Self-portraits of this kind may rest uneasily with the category memento mori, but as passing moments in the smartphone screen, they reflect the mortality of their users. The snap at a mirrored self-image, a body in motion, an instant the glass will forget.

> A young woman in a tailored grey dress takes a selfie in the back of a freshly cleaned car on the way to or from a funeral: "Live the life by the moment," she writes. "Only Memories Are Forever."

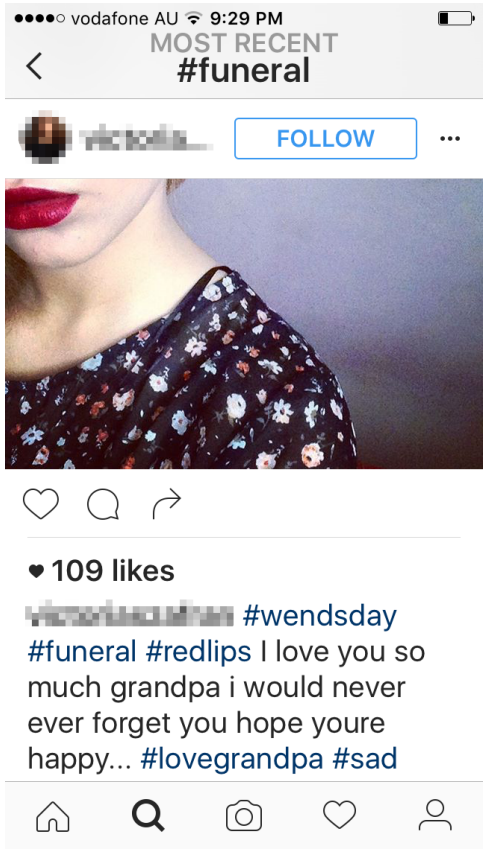
If I didn't screenshot her image, I could forget I'd ever seen her face.





Images 52, 53, 54 & 55: compilation of hashtag "funeral selfie"





Photography's Graveyards

The last photos dad shows me for his Instastory are two self-portraits he took at the death of his brother Kym. The camera is placed on a tripod in front of the wicker coffin. It is the roughness of willows plaited into a neat form. Dad sets the camera's timer for a delayed shot, and stands next to the body. Kym's face is thin, his form whittled down and faint in the white sheets of his final resting place.

In the first shot, my father looks straight down the lens. His eyes are full with the new emptiness that has come into his world. On Kym's body, he has laid out several family portraits. I recognise the one on his chest: a photo I took of my mother when she visited me in my first home away from home. Other familiar faces look out from the coffin from disparate points in time. Leaves of the past strewn across the shell that was Kym. "I took the first shot looking in the camera," says dad, "and then I realised that wasn't where I should be looking."

He shows me the second portrait. In this shot, he rests his hand on the wicker frame, and looks down at his brother's face. He wants to be photographed in the act of remembrance. The camera suspends him in the midst of several photographed layers: the body he photographs now, and the handful of pictures that canvas it. On Facebook I go looking for virtual places where others have enacted this same gesture: the laying down of images where the deceased once lived. I come across a timeline for a young man who died before he reached his late twenties. His profile picture remains from when he last updated it. A selfie catches him wide-eyed in the flash, his face framed by licks of long dark hair. He wears a tie-dyed shirt, and strings of electric green and yellow beads about his neck and wrists. Tanned skin and a look of eagerness. He holds his left hand in a peace sign. A student world-traveller; someone who loved to share snapshots. A relative writes, "if anyone has any pictures of Dustin, I would love to have some more…" People post photographs for each birthday he is absent. A snapshot of a Sara Lee pavlova is uploaded with the comment "Let's enjoy his favourite today." Now and again, his network shares images of little pleasures he would have enjoyed. A live concert he would have loved, a beach skyline burnt rusty red before an oncoming night. "Wish you were here."

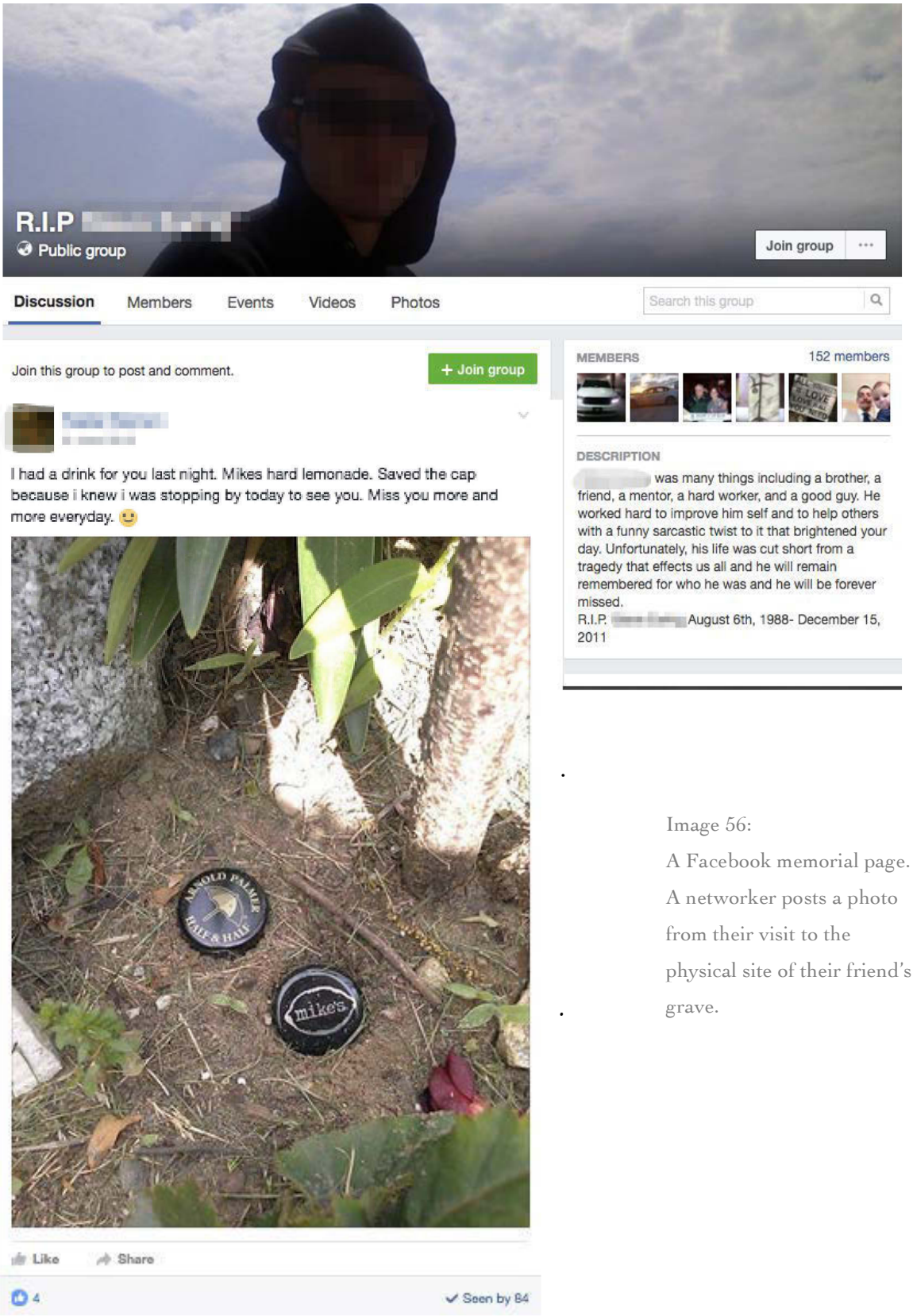


Image 56:
A Facebook memorial page. A networker posts a photo from their visit to the physical site of their friend's grave.

As with physical spaces inhabited by crowded populations, cyberspace is brimming with the territory of the deceased. Approximately thirty million of the 1.3 billion Facebook profiles belong to the dead. As a recent news item from the ABC's '7:30 Report' noted, eight thousand users die each day around the world, but their timelines remain live; a virtual graveyard (*7:30 Report*, 2015). Facebook statistics on the living and the departed remain dubious, as only some lingering profiles are officially registered as commemoration sites. Many timelines stay marked as profiles of the living, in part because the process of confirming a loved one's death can take extensive time to be processed by the social media service, and proof of death can be a complex legal matter.

Whether or not they are signposted as graves, these accumulating profile pages belong very much to the living. Occasionally images from the past are uploaded to reminisce. Scanned analogue pictures appear for those who lived through the era of the one-hour photo shop. Some Facebook snaps are re-shared from their archival resting place. Others are digitally manipulated to reflect the present grief that tinges images of the past. A young woman interviewed on ABC radio's *Future Tense* tells of the strange PhotoShopped images that appeared on her deceased friend's profile page, where networked mourners uploaded their altered portraits of the departed such that she would appear as a winged angel (Funnell 2011).

For the most part, images uploaded to the profile pages of the dead act to present the ceaseless present. They are symbols of the now in which the profiler no longer exists. Heidi Ebert writes that when a networker dies, their profile space "can continue to evolve precisely because the behaviour of visitors does not; many…friends continue to post details of their daily lives as though their relationship is the same as it was before (their) death" (2014, p. 32). These virtual spaces do not allow a narrative boundary to separate death from the everyday. They "move the memorial site from a distant graveyard into the midst of life" (Hutchings 2016, p. 43). The continuity of experience reveals itself in tandem with discontinuity, and presence enters a destabilizing duality: it is both always there, and always in departure.

A physical headstone becomes mottled with moss. Its solid foundations crack with the pressure of moving earth. A profile page becomes overgrown with persistent traces of a moving present. On Facebook memorial pages, "the memory of the

deceased eventually becomes secondary to the needs and interactions of living visitors as the narratives of shared grief are buried beneath newer autobiographical posts" (Ebert 2014, p. 38). The past slowly disappears beneath an always growing present. Each live upload that is bent on grasping the present will inevitably drift into a cyber mass of what Anna Haverinen has aptly described in her dissertation as "unintentional memorials" (2014). A photographic legacy is being perpetually created, but without the future in mind.

The Angel of History is Online

The accumulation and motion of the live stream resonates with Walter Benjamin's angel of history. He drifts backwards, into the future, caught in the currents of a storm called progress. With his gaze set into the past, he watches history pile its dust higher and higher into the sky. The future is unknown, always at his back (Benjamin 1982b, p. 257).

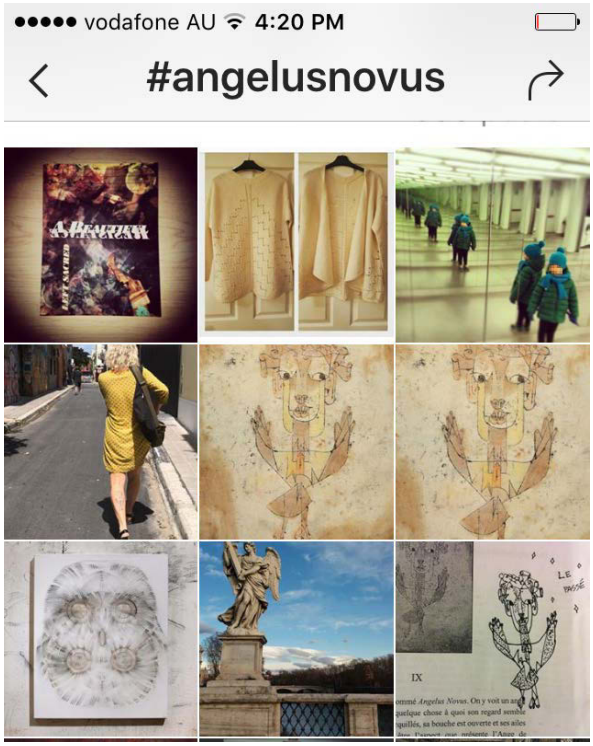


Image 57: Instagram's hashtag "angelus Novus" I find the eponymous artwork by Paul Klee, and the photo of a small child in a corridor of repeated reflections

Threads of photographed lives accrue over years of social media usage, each image replaced by a new one in the unfolding of change. Photographic data turns into online debris, and the long-term future of shared photos becomes obscured. There are the unknowns of digital decay, and unimagined photographic practices that will throw new light on images uploaded now. The photographic inheritance left behind may be a strange virtual space of predecessor's day-to-day habits. Will future generations trawl through their great grandparents' digital archives to see what their predecessors ate and drank in their early twenties? Or what sky they captured on a late Wednesday afternoon after the rain fell? Will all these stored faces one day become blank signifiers, like the nameless mother who looks at me through my smartphone screen in her mirror-with-a-memory? Her memento-mori is a request to the distant future: *remember me*. Yet as

Batchen reminds me, "not being remembered at all… has, in the end, been the fate of the subjects of most of these photographs. The men and women in these portraits are now, for the most part, unknown to us" (Batchen 2004b, p. 98). The intentions behind the mother's portrait may be quite different from smartphone users of today, but the fate of these glassy images may be similar. Decades from now, smartphone shots taken in the early noughties may be the new curiosities of history; they will float into the view of future strangers, and light up moments from long before they were born.

Look in the Mirror



Fragment from photo to come.

It takes about thirty minutes to put together the images for my father's instant story. Photos of the dead and the absent make an ache, which rises with salt water. There is a heavy sense of responsibility in choosing from the collection he has shared with me. I try not to hesitate over my selections, although some of them will weigh heavy on him and my mother. There are things here she wished to forget. There are people pictured here who cannot grant me permission to engage with their images, either because they are dead, or they are on the other side of an impassable family rift. I comfort myself with the strange and melancholy knowledge that pictures of loss will be safe in this Instastory, because it will all vanish soon. A performance of disappearance seems a fitting way to mark and release the departures of loved ones.

I caution that I haven't shied away from pictures that hurt. "Only we three will see the images. And by this time tomorrow, the story will be gone." "It's never really gone," says dad. I watch his face as he views forty seconds of still images rushing by. The swift and cumulative effect is different to the slow-building meander of pictures we shared on his computer. The computer flashes moments across the screen in quick, regular beats. This rhythm doesn't give a chance to pause and contemplate. There is no restorative rest to breath the spaces between moments. The story hits

with a staccato tempo. Dad's responses are visceral: the low-pitched rumble of pent up feeling in the throat; the crack of laughter; small exclamations that pass the lips as "oh dear" and "ah yes". His eyes twinkle, then go slightly red. He walks out of the room and then back in again. My mum confesses that she could sob. I tell her I'm sorry and put my arms about her. "It's alright," she says. "It's a sweet sadness." We are wrung out.

A material album doesn't present birth and death in quick succession, but gives the reader room for tumbling with the daily flow. Images of the everyday have a softer poignant quality. This gives the necessary space for resting comfortably with mortality, without its presence lashing out in swift bursts. Counter to my father's slowly paced album, the Instastory simulates that cliché of "a life flashing before the eyes": an encounter with lived time that can't be taken in regular doses. There's a need for everydayness lapping against the edges of those heady reminders of birth and death. I know dad needs this too.
"What did you get up to today?"
"Oh nothing. Nothing always happens."

On my return home, I crave the feeling of nothing-much-happening. My body feels as though a rough ocean has knocked it down in unrelenting waves, again and again, without time for me to stand and reorient myself to the continual flat-line of the horizon. I go home, and rest crumpled on the couch. I look for images that wash over me gently. I log on to Instagram, open the explore page:

a freshly baked banana cake decorated with petals;

a woman plucking idly on a guitar;

a glass of white wine reflecting the upside-down spread of tree branches,

and a woman posing for a mirror-selfie with pouted lips.

I stare at the flow of stranger's worlds for quarter of an hour, then feel compelled to publish just one picture from our Instastory: the last one.

"Can we take a selfie in your old mirror?"
Dad agrees, puts his arm about my shoulder, and I raise the iPhone to catch us together in the glass.

Glass objects housed photography's first attempts to fix time through one frozen image, the mirror with a memory. Glass objects now reassert the unfixity of time, the form of temporality that slips restlessly across a smooth surface. Vernacular smartphone photographs won't stop moving with the live, they won't stay still. Ceremony and triviality converge as the spool of the past winds up, and the thread of the present unfurls.

"Don't look in the phone," says dad.

"Look in the mirror."

I hold the cool smartphone steady and raise my eyes to look at our dual reflections. Our faces in the mahogany frame are instantly stored as data. I would like to print our portrait, despite the fact that even that would disappear. The mirror-with-a-memory forgets, remembers, and then forgets again, always moving out of sight in the vanishing now of the "live."



Image 58: “Look in the mirror”

Shadow



Through a Stranger's Lens

My mother's childhood is caught in the cameras of strangers. Her picture is snapped on three of her visits to Sydney, when photographers find her waiting alone, amidst the rhythms and networks of city streets. One catches her as a four-year-old sitting on a pew in St John's church; another sees her loitering in Castlereagh Street, when she is twice that age. The last picture is from when she was found standing in slow-moving queue, but where she was, or what she was doing, that is forgotten.

Fragment of a photo to come.

As a child, she well knows the to-and-fro crowds around St Mary's cathedral, the Queen Victoria Building, and Circular Quay. Her mother Margery takes her wandering. They walk beneath the fig-tree shade of Hyde Park, past St James' station where businessmen rush into the humid subway with full briefcases. They pass swiftly through the swinging glass doors of David Jones, enveloped by the scent of orchids and piano notes, then spat back out onto the asphalt. There is nowhere to belong, so they keep walking. On some nights they sleep in the shadows of Beare Park, or Rushcutters Bay. Then in the mornings, Margery finds somewhere where her little girl can loiter while she looks for work, or asks for money from the few she knows. She will never be able to pay it back. They live off boiled rice mixed with vegemite and butter, and now and then move between different rented apartments. When the rent is unpaid, it's time to relocate, hurried away by a landlord's sharp words. "This is not a charity for you and your bastard." When they reach the next new place, they keep an old piece of clothing rolled up against the base of the door; so the landlord won't be able to see any light seeping out. "I'm not really sure how she got what money she scraped together. I don't know what she was doing when she left me alone in the city."

Sometimes Margery is gone for hours, sometimes a day or two. She usually leaves her daughter in public sites where visibility is high but the crowd is at its calmest. The state library with its high arching ceilings and echoing silence. The Royal Botanical Gardens, where she asks an old gardener to keep an eye out for the girl.

"I'm not a babysitter," he scoffs. "Wait here," Margery always says, and disappears. "I won't be long."

Three strangers' photographs freeze my mother in this distended promise. Never entirely alone but never with anyone, the faceless motion of the crowd swathes her as she waits. She is visible in her invisibility, a figure on the periphery. Each of these portraits speaks to photography's ability to present the absence of another. Circumstances have made time with her mother a rarity, and her father is as much a stranger as the photographers who ask for her picture.

Through my mother's happenstance photographic encounters, I venture into the medium's intimacy with absent others who are in faraway spaces. The captured moment is constituted by those who are not there in the picture, and by connections that are out of reach. For Susan Sontag, photography creates a "pseudo presence". "Like a wood fire in a room, photographs - especially those of people, of distant landscapes and faraway cities… are incitements to reverie. The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance" (Sontag 2001, p. 16). I write about this pseudo-presence at a time when smartphone photography implies complete social visibility and connectivity. It is live. It is now.



Image 59: Facebook's Logon Page

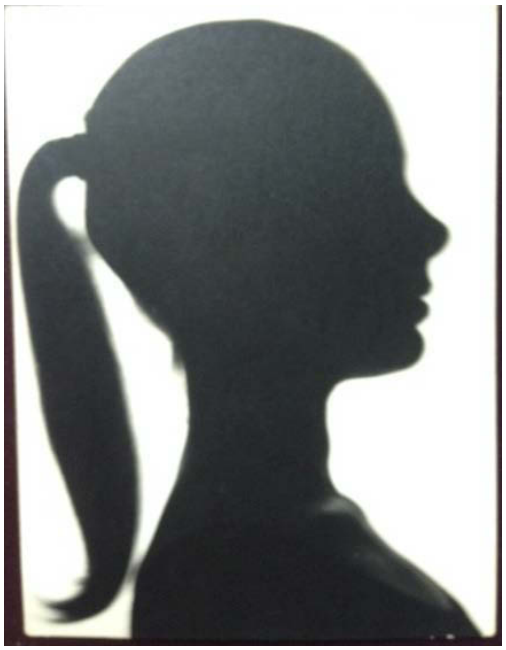
The feed is designed to bridge the distance between networkers by presenting the image of the other in real time. Facebook's mission statement is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world" (Facebook Inc., n.d.). The platform's login page is emblematic of this notion of connectivity: it displays a lightly shaded map of the world within which are the simple, cut-out icons of anonymous users. Their stark yellow busts are linked by a network of overlapping grey lines and visualised feedback loops. A map of visual exchanges trail across the seas. "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life."



Image 60: My mother and grandmother in St John's church

Image 61: My mother's shadow portrait, by John Weiner

Image 62: An anonymous street photographer captures my mother in Castlereagh Street.





Togetherness in the live feed is also key to the subsidiary company, Instagram. "We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos"(Instagram n.d., para.2). Smartphone users disseminate images of what is happening for them right now. Distant others perceive one another's represented presence in cyberspace as though spatial divides were crossed. This scene of visual plenty is made of images that testify: *I am here. I am live.*

Yet even in the era of social networking and instant dissemination, photography pulls on the distance between bodies and places, sometimes promising access to the other, sometimes residing in the space where connection is frustrated or denied. Photographs circulate between beholders and signal different testimonies of co-presence or separation. The other person or the other space is over there, or here, or acutely felt in a distance from the present moment. Live networked photography evades the medium's history with unfulfilled connections between self and other by emphasising social media's signaletic immediacy. Yet somewhere in the frequent uploads of photographic presence, the absence of connectivity lingers.

Three Shots in an Analogue Network

St John's church is a small sandstone building on Darlinghurst Road, and this is where my grandmother leaves my young mother sleeping one day. "I won't be long." A man working in the grounds sees her resting on one of the pews, a girl of about four or five. "I think he might have taken my picture while I was asleep. But I don't have a copy of that." The photograph we do have from that day shows Margery and my mother sitting side by side. The girl grasps hold of her mother's gloved hand with small fingers and smiles widely. Margery looks down at her, mid conversation. "She must have been looking for work that afternoon. She's dressed in her nice clothes." They each hold a very tiny sprig of wildflowers, something one of them must have plucked from a nearby garden bed. Behind them is the roll of honour; a copper plaque with the names of soldiers, dead or missing in action. A quotation is cut off at the edge of the image, something about the flame that sanctifies.

The Castlereagh Street shot finds my mother on a smoggy day in nineteen fifty something. “I don’t know when it was,” she says. “I must be about seven or eight.” A camera hobbyist finds her standing outside Usher’s Hotel; a freckled girl with clothes that don’t fit. Her overalls are too small, they ride up her legs and are cut off mid-shin, exposing her baggy woollen socks. Her oversized shirt rumples beneath the suspender straps. Her mother never has other clothes to give when she picks her up for a city visit, so she stays in the same outfit until she is returned to her main dwelling place, a children’s home in Wentworth Falls, the Blue Mountains. It’s known as a “children’s hotel,” although some of the children stay there for years. Every morning the box of donated second-hand clothes is passed around, and she wears what she is lucky enough to grasp. Like her, the street photographer is an outsider yet still part of the crowd. The camera he wields is metallic and heavy about his neck. The lens puts him at a remove from the world through which he travels. “Can I take your picture?” he asks.

The question recurs a year or two later, this time from a professional photographer called John Weiner, who specialises in children’s portraits. He sees her standing in a queue. “I'm about ten or eleven in the picture. So it must have been '59 or 1960. I'm not sure." She can’t remember exactly what she was standing in line to see or do. The first time mum tells me the story, she says she was waiting to get into a ballet performance. The second time, she thinks perhaps she was waiting for a bus. She has no relatives to take her through the paces of her own history. “There isn’t anyone around who can locate me… where I was, what I was doing.” All she has are the shadows of child’s recollections; small images, sounds, feelings. Faces she can no longer see clearly. “I'm not even sure if what I remember is real.”

She remembers his studio in Double Bay, and that he had a “kind but distant way about him.” He sits her in front of a large bright light, which casts her shadow on a hanging sheet of thick white material. From the other side of this dividing screen, he captures her silhouette in profile. The contours of her darkened presence. The camera traces a figure it can’t see directly. Her button nose, the wisps of hair at the back of her neck, the upward curl of her ponytail, all caught in thick black. The sooty density of her shadow blurs slightly at the edges. The screened separation between cameraman and subject records the site where the light doesn’t touch my mother, the place where contact with the cameraman is both visualised and disrupted.

The Unfulfilled Touch of Light

The portrait raises the spectre of an image from mythology, a scene of longing for visual intimacy with another. The myth of the Corinthian Maid is a story of classical antiquity, imbued with the weight of pre-emptive loss. The maid, Butades, draws her lover's shadow before he departs for war. She leans over his sleeping figure in candlelit darkness, and carefully traces the projected outline of his profile on the wall. Her loving act of mediation is enshrined by numerous painters in the 1700s (from Joseph Wright [1782], David Allan [1775], to Joseph Benoit Suvée [1791]). Butades' gesture is often cited as the origin of drawing (see Pilny the Elder's *Natural History*, circa 77-79AD), but her act of love has also been tied to the photography, the "art of fixing a shadow" (see both Batchen 1999 and Derrida 1993). She is entranced by the sign of visible absence, anchoring herself intently to one precious shard of time shared with her lover. Her transformation of his silhouette into image is not only to keep some symbol for future keepsake, but also to work her way into the feeling of his encroaching absence. She touches the space where her partner's shadow testifies to disappearance. It is an intimate gesture inscribed with separation.

To preserve the shape of her partner's face, Butades must first turn away from him and focus on his silhouette upon the wall. Her shadow-portrait creates a distance between the two. As Derrida writes, the story of this image relies upon the absence or invisibility of the model. "It is as if the condition for drawing is to be unable to see, as if you can draw only if you do not see. So drawing appears as a declaration of love directed or ordered by the invisibility of the other, or maybe it's that drawing can be born only when the other is hidden from the gaze."(Derrida translated by Batchen, 1999, p.118) The representational act emerges from a separation that is pre-empted, and already enforced through the effort of capturing the moment. Butades cannot be entirely present with her lover; she must suspend herself in the liminal space between them if she is to mark his shadow on the wall.

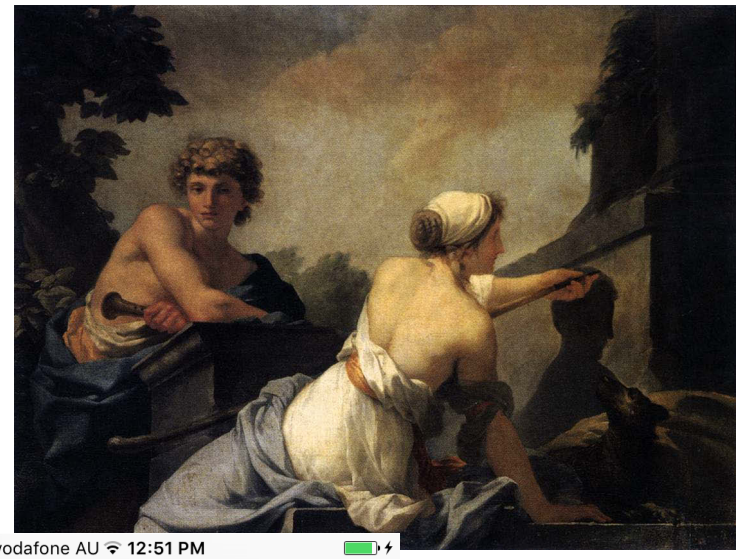


Image 63: Jean Baptiste Regnault (1785)
The Origin of Painting



Image 64: An Instagram post of Joseph Benoit Suvée's 1791 painting, *The Invention of the Art of Drawing*.

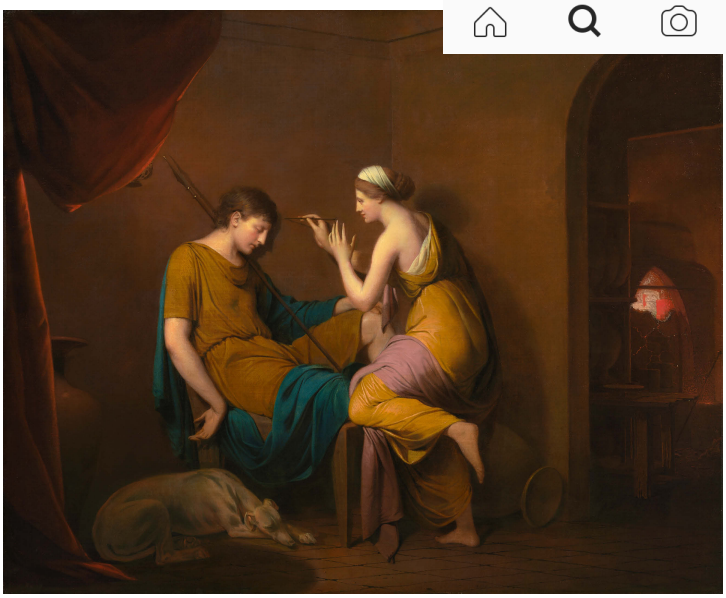


Image 65: Joseph Wright (1782)
The Corinthian Maid

Along the same lines, the shadow picture of my mother is made of an unfulfilled gaze between self and other. It captures the strangeness of the mediating gesture, and to my mind, speaks to a familial void which is present in her everyday life. "I knew about my father, that he lived overseas. That he only knew my mother briefly." As a little girl, she imagines this man could have any face. He knows about her existence from across a distance. They don't lock eyes until years later, when she is twenty-eight. After their first encounter, they meet in person only a handful of times. I remember meeting him once, as a girl. My main impression is of a tall, intimidating stranger, who somehow still retains the title of grandfather, a blood relative. He passed away when my mum was fifty-six years old, and she still carries the loss of something that never was.

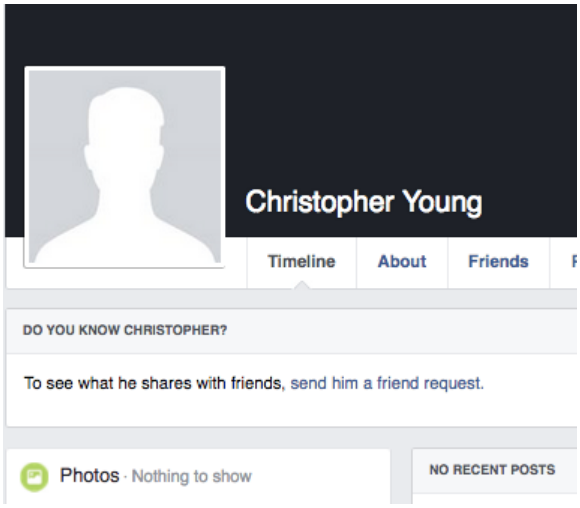


Image 66: My mother's Facebook profile page

Not long after his death, she sets up her own Facebook account. She doesn't give her own name, instead she names the profile after him: Christopher Young. There are no photographs attached, his fictional timeline is empty. My mother never uses the account she created. In place of a picture, the page is marked by one of Facebook's most well-known icons; the anonymous avatar. It is the stark shape of an outlined portrait figure, seen only as a white imprint against a soft grey backdrop. The only discernible features are the slope of the shoulders, the upward curl of a flick of hair, the shape of the neck and head. This white shadow carries the digital trace of Butades' portrait, because it is the present absence of an other; the negative space that might one day materialise in detail. This empty portrait is fitting for a man who was never there, the shadow of a father. Mum remembers waiting in crowded streets, wondering if some passing figure would step out of the cityscape and become the completed image of an imagined man. A shadow made whole.

As I reflect on this profile and its void of a portrait, it strikes me that my mother has always related to photography as a site of intimate exchange with those who are not present. The term "medium" itself suggests that it is possible to engage with absence,

to create a dialogue with that which is invisible or intangible. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines medium as, among other things, the agent that "communicates between the dead and the living," and "the intervening substance through which sensory impressions are conveyed or physical forms are transmitted" *(Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). The medium of photography can be used in ways similar to these definitions, as a mode of contact that testifies to the distance between people and bodies, even as it transgresses that distance. It intervenes in the contact it creates, and paradoxically acts as both a barrier and a gateway. Thus, photography's power as a medium stems from its emphasis on a "middle quality or state between two extremes" *(Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). It becomes the connective space between the disconnected.

My mother's three portraits are emblematic of photography as a site of in-betweenness and (dis)connectivity. Each image suspends her in a liminal space: "Wait here, I won't be long." These pictures carry the potential contact with the other. The presence of an absent family electrifies each shot, but is never closed-over or realised. Each portrait thus becomes what Barthes describes as "neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch" (Barthes 1981, p. 87). She cannot access the figures of mother or father through these photographs, but she can touch the longing to touch them. She knows how to be in that liminal space.

Now that smartphone photography disseminates the live presence of distant bodies, I wonder how this twenty-four hour medium still touches the unattainable, or if it still speaks to the unmet gaze between self and other. This chapter asks if photography still has this capacity to be a site of liminality and in-betweenness. Does the medium still have a shadow?

We're All Here, All the Time

On an idle Saturday, I find myself continually returning to the live feed of Facebook. At intermittent points over the day I login to see what my friends see, eat, touch, read and play. They photograph and stream their activities live, showing their online network a walk in the park, this morning's breakfast, a much-spoiled pet, or a meal with loved ones.

An old friend posts a selfie with his new tabby cat, and I click the like button. We haven't phoned each other in a very long time, although we often write comments beneath one another's photographic posts. These uploads keep us informed of the minutiae that would normally sift through casual conversation. Without direct contact I know he's been to the beach recently; he's been studying intensely in the library; his pot plant died on his balcony. He knows that I went to the opening night of the Sydney festival; that I had dinner with a mutual friend over the Christmas season; that the gardenias in my garden are blooming in their dappled corner. Photographic signals sent to no one in particular, and yet to everyone, continue to sustain some knowledge of others, distant or far. We emit recorded actions and behaviours of daily existence and in so doing, sense the visual currents drifting between users, each with distinct perspectives on the pulses of lived experience. Satellites that circulate about the earth label the distributed presence of the smartphone user with geo-locative technology. Socially mediated photographs of me are located with drop pins on the streets of Sydney. My body is mapped out in social and spatial movements:

dinner with Tara at Cheeky Czech;

sharing a bottle of wine at the Clock Hotel;

birthday fun at the Absinthe Salon.

Conversations at group gatherings have changed. A recent barbeque party at a friend's Newtown home is guided by the images of others. There is no longer any need to ask what someone has been doing recently as this is already acquired knowledge. We have been co-present in eachothers' experiences by viewing online photos, and we bring our visual knowledge to the banter of the night. "I saw the photographs of your new home, congratulations!", "Looks like you had a nice date the other night… what's her name?" "You guys had an enormous schnitzel for dinner on Tuesday, where was that?"

I'm at a dress-up party, another *Mad Men* theme where we pose in outfits of an era before our time. A friend snaps a shot of us in our bright retro dresses and suits, and within seconds someone on Facebook has commented. A man I've never met has seen our faces from a café in Germany, where yesterday's sun is still shining. He says our costumes are fantastic, and he clicks the like button. His words enter the conversation in our gathering of friends in Chippendale; he becomes semi present in our night, and our experience becomes part of his day. Mark Federman describes this networked scene as one of "zero-space":

> One of the most important effects of massively multi-way, instantaneous and ubiquitous communications is pervasive proximity. We experience everyone to whom we are connected—and conceivably everyone to whom we are potentially connected—as if they are exactly next to us. The effect is that of hundreds, or thousands, or millions of people coming together … so that there is no perceptible distance between them (Federman 2004, p.8).

The online scene circulates personal photographs as though distances between people are traversed, and absences are translated into presences. It is as though the live apparitions on the internet had done away with the shadow of photography, or stripped it of its intimate relationship with the unattainable.

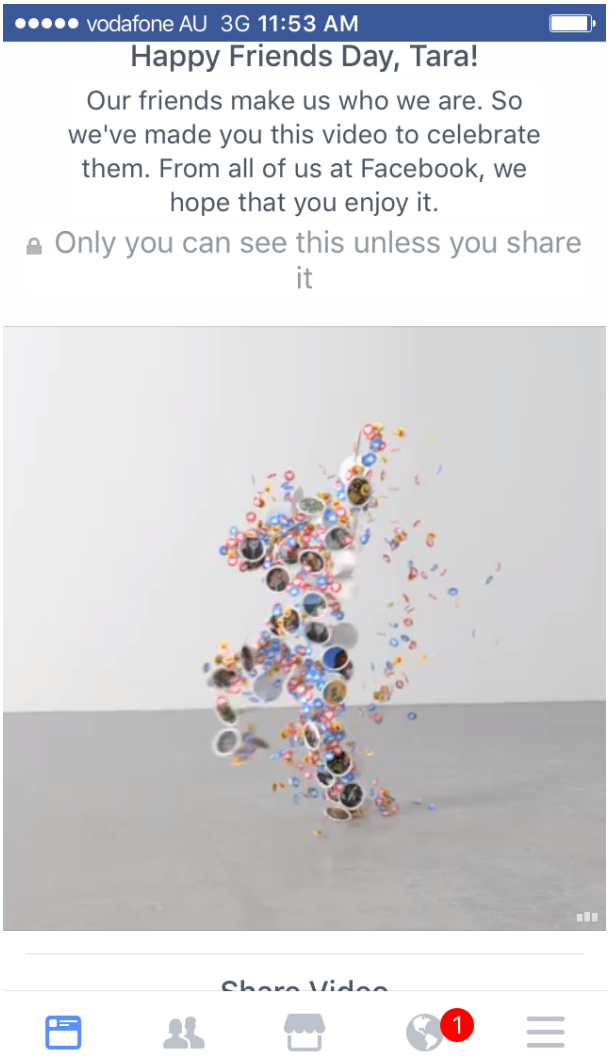
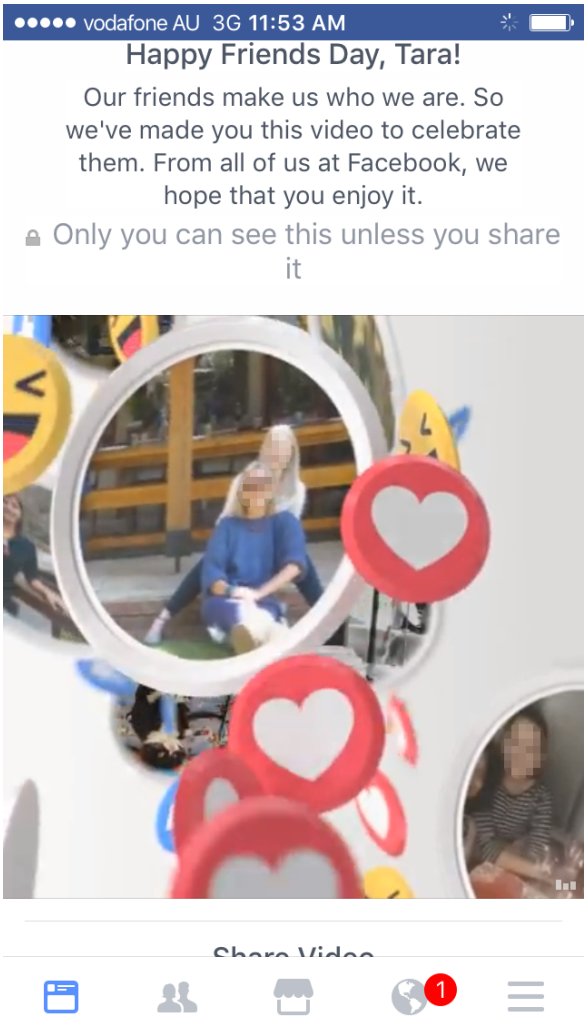


Image 67 & 68:

A Facebook video for "World Friend's Day"

A computerized figure dances joyfully about an empty room, its body made of floating round discs imprinted with emoticons and photos of the profiler's network. A body made of photographic cells which pool together in the form of a dispersing shadow



We're Close Across a Distance



Fragment from Image 60, p. 145

"Will you take my picture in St John's church? I want to sit in the same pew where my mother and I were photographed together." Mum's request takes me by surprise. She is usually so wary of being on the other side of the camera, she prefers to be behind the lens. But this time she wants something different. She wishes for an image that will reconnect with a moment of togetherness with her mother, when she clasped Margery's gloved hand, and smiled at the stranger behind the camera. It will be a portrait to add to the very few photos she has of herself and her mum side by side (I can only recall three such pictures). As a grieving ritual, this new portrait will testify to the absence that informs mum's present, and has informed her relationship with her mother for a very long time. My grandmother passed away when mum was only twenty-four, yet death hasn't been the only force that divided them.

Over the course of my mother's childhood, they were separated by spatial distance, with the majority of mum's early years spent in the children's home. Social rules and poverty continually asserted and strengthened this distance between them. And then illness was the next thief that incrementally stole time away from their relationship. My grandmother developed dementia, and was unable to relate stories that put all the pieces of mum's early history into some semblance of unity. A few photographs are the only testimonial objects remaining of what moments they shared.

I promise to take mum's portrait on that pew in St John's, knowing the image will become the meeting point of two contradictory forces. As with Butades' shadow portrait, it will express the paradoxical wish to hold onto the loved one, to keep them present, and equally it will be about "unbinding" the bonds of love in the process of letting the loved one depart (see Mitchell 2005, p.66 and his discussion of this paradox in Butades' image). Mum wants to sit in the space where the distance between herself and the other cannot be traversed, where there is no direct access to the loved one, but there is the presence of their loss. These "sorts of photographs tantalise…with a nearness made insurmountably distant" (Batchen 2004b, p.74). It is

not easy to rest in the space where connection is never quite reached, but this is one of photography's powers: to linger in the spatial or temporal divide between loved ones. The medium stays suspended in the place where togetherness is not met directly, but its shadow is felt.

I See You Darkly

The early phases of photography's convergence with telephony invite this tantalising relationship with insurmountable distance. The symbol of the shadow makes its way into imaginings of telecommunication, borrowing from Henry Fox Talbot's description of photography as "the art of fixing a shadow." The figure of the other remains obscured yet visible in their obscurity, seen from afar.

After the invention of the telegraph, inventors and writers begin speculating on how images of loved ones could be sent across space. In 1881, the editor of the Paris *Electrician* magazine ruminates on the "…hope of being able, sooner or later, to see by telegraph, and behold our distant friends through a wire darkly, in spite of the earth's curvature and the impenetrability of matter" (Burns 1995, p.34). This fantasy begins with an image that is not quite visible, that teeters on the brink of being perceived. The writer echoes the biblical phrase "through a glass darkly", a term written by the Apostle Paul to describe reflections caught in early mirrors of the Corinthians. These objects were made of polished metal, and unlike the clarity of mirrors today, they held indistinct, hazy visuals. As mirrors, they reflected the world darkly, as "an obscure or imperfect vision of reality" *(The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* 2005). The *Electrician* article keeps the biblical phrase, and so holds onto the tantalising distance between bodies, never perfectly revealed. The hope is for a darkness on the border between shadow and image, a distance still pronounced and enjoyed.

One year before the publication of this article, Alexander Graham Bell announces his new device, the photophone. This device is essentially the first form of wireless communication. Bell strikes upon the notion that light can alter electrical signals, and so finds a way to transmit voices across small distances with the help of sun rays. The speaker directs words into a concave mirror, which vibrates with sound, and changes the way light reacts to the reflective surface. The sunlight in the glass is redirected to

a light-sensitive receiver, which transforms the beams back into speech for the distant listener. Bell pronounces that his invention makes it possible to "hear a shadow fall"(cited in Batchen 2006, p. 38), and so echoes Talbot's words from decades earlier. Telecommunications and photography are beginning to fuse, and to revel in the intimacy of the other's sensed absence. Bell's invention does not gain popularity in his lifetime, but it does provide the beginnings of the technology for fibre optics, which make mobile telephony and computer displays possible.

Experimentation with these different devices shows a desire to reach the other who is faraway, and this is something that endures into the noughties, with the invention and popular uptake of the camera-phone. In 2005, Mizuko Ito follows the use of photo-sharing amongst young Japanese couples who keep in touch through casual photographs. Her study takes place before social media has become integral to photographic sharing, when mobile users are still text messaging their personal images. In these intimate exchanges of visual information "couples have an ambient, shared visual context that they are jointly aware of even when they are physically apart … the sense of engaging in joint side-by-side (though remote) activity is maintained through these exchanges" (Ito 2005, p. 3). She describes these photographic conversations as a form of "distributed co-presence." Two people connect through the transmission of visual data, which moves from one glass surface to another: illuminated information handled on touch screens. They gift one another with a togetherness that is not reliant on being in the same space, at the same time. It is a one-to-one exchange, a visual dialogue between two.

This is a fantasy of visual intimacy only dreamt of in 1882, in the pages of a popular science-fiction series called *The Twentieth Century*, written by French author and illustrator Albert Robida. He writes of a fictional device known as the telephonoscope, which is inspired by the yearning for contact with others across earth and sea. The aim of this invention is "La Suppression du L'absence" (Robida 2004). The series is written in a period when people seek new prospects abroad; the colonial ventures of European empires take their global grip, and prisoners are shifted to foreign lands. The telephonoscope becomes the technological magic that could visually reach the space of another and enter their private world from afar. It consists of a crystal disc or mirror, through which live moving images can be

streamed simultaneously with sound (essentially, an early premonition of Skype). The glass screen is often kept above the family hearth and Robida's characters use it to watch live theatre, to peer into people's homes, and to make contact with others around the world. The moment is shared virtually, in order to suppress the ache of being apart but also to indulge in it. It is a dream that revels in the melancholy of yearning and in the allure of almost-touch. This is another manifestation of the longing to share a moment in time; to see someone and have that gaze returned. The shadow of absence is here transformed into light.

In fine-lined, black ink sketches, Robida's figures interact with these intimate screens as though they were the people and scenes depicted within. Many couples are shown in his drawings, including a woman who rests her chin on her hands as she listens acutely to her partner, and a man who throws a chair at the image of his wife. She reaches out her hand as if to stop him. One illustration, subtitled with the caption "Keeping in touch," shows a man in a claustrophobic bedroom, talking through the telephonscope to his wife and children. Behind him, a window opens out into an exoticised tropical scene of palm fronds, where silhouetted native people carry bulging rucksacks through the heat. He is a bearded colonial explorer in a broad-brimmed hat, straw-woven in Vietnamese style. In the looking glass is the soft outline of his partner, her hair swept up in a soft bun, a newborn suckling at her breast, and two toddlers grasping at her skirts. He leans in to her live image, as though he could get closer. As though they could whisper.

> "How convenient. The telephonoscope reunites faraway loved ones!" exclaims one of the book's characters.
> "Almost," replies another. "You can converse with loved ones to your heart's content, and see them for as long as you wish."
>
> (Robida 2004, p.65)

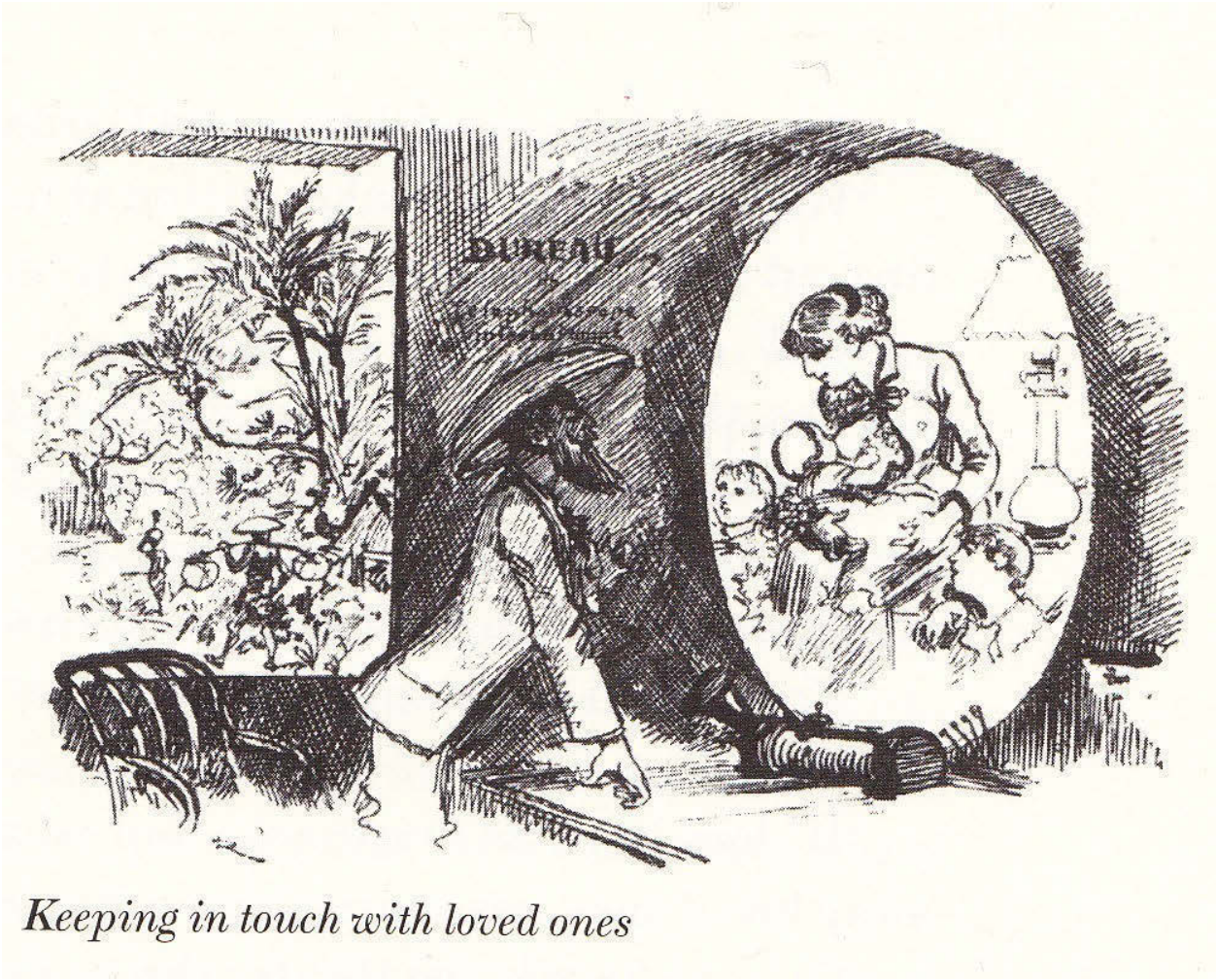


Image 69: Albert Robida's sci-fi fantasy, the telephonoscope.
"How convenient, the telephonoscope reunites faraway loved ones!"

The Image Travels

There is still a liminal quality to this envisaged technology, which allows the space between bodies to be indulged. Does networked smartphone photography seek to undo such tantalising distance altogether, to eradicate the in-betweenness of the medium? If so, it is difficult to determine when the idea of total access became so powerful in visual communication, but the language of instant data transmission begins to emerge in the same historical period as the first daguerreotypes.

In 1832 the advent of the telegraph makes an opening onto what Jennifer Roberts terms "a new world of instantaneity, of dematerialized, detemporalized, and despatialized transmission. Information [can] now move more quickly than matter" (Roberts 2012, p. 13). The swift flow of data across space suggests that distance can be outstripped if not removed altogether. The language of transported signals begins to infiltrate the prolific boom of texts on techno-social inventions. In 1854, Professor of Geology, Edward Hitchcock, predicts an oncoming "Telegraphic System of the Universe" which converts all of matter "into a vast sounding gallery, into a vast picture gallery" (cited in Batchen 2006, p. 35). Writer Walt Whitman also creates such an imagined scene of total accessibility when, in 1850, he poetically suggests that the presence of objects becomes dispersed like something spirit born. With the invention of the telegraph, images appear no longer tethered to their weighty material structures, and he writes of this novel concept as "the world itself rolling through the air" (Whitman cited in Batchen 2006, p. 36).

The language of this early telegraphic era has carried through to the early noughties where it has been adapted to the social imaginings of cyberspace as a connective technology. Katherine Murphy writes that "the air is full of people," that networked prosthetic devices have changed our sense of physical embodiment and space:

> Even the places where we used to go to get away from the crowd and the burdens it imposes on us are now connected. The simple act of going out for a walk is completely different today from what it was fifteen years ago. Whether you are walking down a big city street or in the woods outside a country town, if you are carrying a mobile device with you, the global crowd comes along.(Murphy 2013, p. 35)

When the air becomes crowded, the intimacy of one-to-one interactions is no longer the main attraction. The distance between people is not embraced, but seemingly surpassed. Many people pool together online, observing one another's lives through images that appear in real-time. This is not a movement of photographs between intimates, nor even from one-to-a-select-few. It is a complex and multifaceted visual exchange that plays out in unpredictable fluctuations, passing between millions of networkers.

Bodil Mari Thompson writes that it is the interfacing of signals which most affects networkers, because this technology promises real-time transmissions to relate distant places and spaces. In the context of near-instant data dissemination, the "importance of being 'connected' in 'cybernetic space' is our new common universality" (2012 p. 5). An uploaded photograph thus becomes less about the art of fixing a shadow, and more about the signal that brings the image of the other into view. The desire is to spark direct connection and to drive away absence through speed and dematerialised processes. As I scroll through the live feed and watch the distant spaces of others fill the screen, I think of the process photographic sharing once involved.

The stranger who captures my mother standing on Castlereagh Street makes a gift of his image. Despite strict instructions never to tell anyone her address, the little girl tells the man where she and her mother are staying. He says he will mail her a copy of her portrait, and despite all the odds (that mother and daughter will be turfed out for unpaid rent, or that the child will be sent back to the children's home), the picture remarkably makes its way into the girl's possession.

Time and space go into the stranger's material making of the image, from the click of the shutter to its rebirth in the darkroom and its physical journey in the post. A paper object is slowly developed in emulsifying liquids, it is dried in red shadow and sent across a city. It arrives after a series of wheels turning across Sydney streets. The photograph passes between hands and then becomes a gift for future memory making.

In the networked ecology, the movement of photographic gifts depends on the motions of signaletic data. The etymological root of data is the Latin "dare": to give. Photographs are posted to the stream but not mailed. They are simply there, drawing

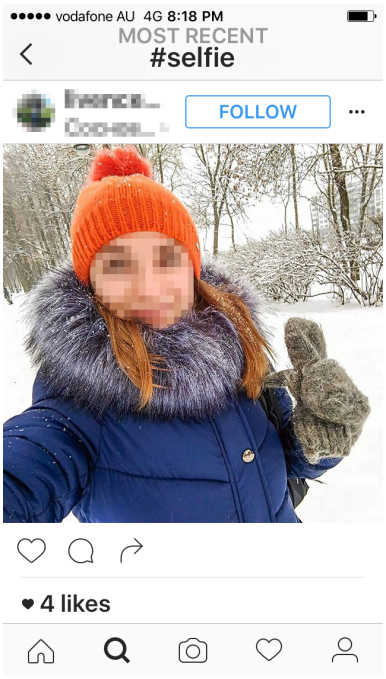
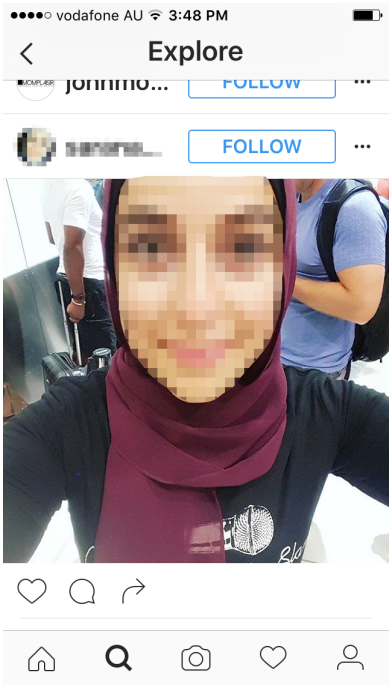
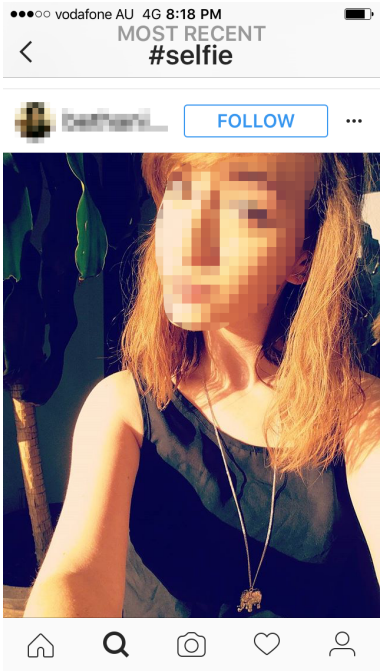




Image 70, 71, 72 & 73: A compilation of hashtag "selfie" uploads from Instagram





in those viewers who are online to see them. And the more they are seen by a network, the more visibly available they become as trending data dispersed in the live feed.

I Am Here

On a summer Sunday, my mother and I watch a girl in a slow-inching cafe queue as she takes out her smartphone, raises it high in the air, and catches her selfie. She is thinking of the many networked others who will see her, so she carefully arranges her auburn fringe around her eyes before she takes the shot.

“Look, look!” mum whispers, none too discretely.

It is an oddity to her. She didn’t grow up in a time when a moment of solitude could be self-reflexively captured in such an easy way. Her three portraits exist because photographer and subject were physically together in the moment of the image. In each shot, my mother was seen by another, as a present body, anchored in space and time. In these portraits, the little girl captured needs that photographing other to be with her and to see her in person.

The gesture of being recorded by another is grounding. "I *need* to be seen by objects and by people," writes James Elkins. "There is something fundamental about it, something that goes into being human… I need to be caught in [an] intersection of gazes” (Elkins 1997, p. 70). Photography places my mother in such interlocked gazes of recognition, and asserts that she is noticeable. She is caught in what Elkin’s describes as a “cat’s cradle” of crossing lines of sight (Elkins 1997, p. 70). The portraits show that she does make a mark upon the world around her. My mother’s presence has affected someone enough to provoke the creation of an image. The photographers notice her, they want to keep her picture. Somebody *wants* to keep her.

As my mother and I watch the making of a selfie in 2015, we witness how the wish to be caught in others’ gazes has adapted with smartphone photography. There is no need for a physically present onlooker to be part of this photographic gesture, it is a solo venture. At the same time it is communal, being intended for others who are absent from the actual space but who are present on social media. As she stands alone and reviews the portrait she wants to send out into the world, the girl doesn’t

concentrate on the fact that she is solitary in physical space at this moment. She focuses on her own presence and on being visible in the live feed.

Unlike the texted pictures of Ito's study, or the telephonoscope dreams of Robida, these self-portraits are not sent specifically to some*one*. And unlike my mother's happenstance city portraits, there is no contact with another person behind a camera. It doesn't particularly matter who sees the image, as long as it is seen. It is made for the many. Anybody. Everybody. Anywhere. This is a reaching out that is almost directionless, a desire without a singular receptive target. On social media, "The goal is no longer to be in touch, but to erase the possibility of ever being out of touch" (Murphy 2013, p. 35). This girl is here. She is live.

I See You See Me

"Did you see my New Year's pictures?"

I'm halfway through a mouthful of lunch when my friend launches this question.

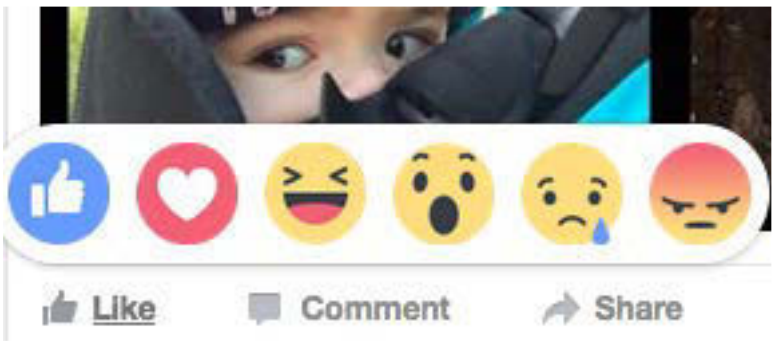


Image 74:
A baby peers over the top of Facebook's new emoticon reactions

"Which pictures?"

"On Facebook. You didn't like them," she says.

"I did like them."

"No, but you didn't 'like' them."

I realise she means I didn't click 'like' in adequate timing. She had been waiting for more responses. "I saw them, it looked like a nice time."

"It was, you should have a look."

She pulls out her phone and shows me the pictures of her night's celebrations; the flashbulb glow over her white V-neck dress, the red-eye edited from the shot. The distant glimmer of city lights transformed into drunken fog.

The photograph alone is not enough to create the fullness of a moment, it needs to be caught up in a weave of signalled interactions. The captured moment will not be substantiated until other social media users have acknowledged it, and if it goes without marked notice the uploader often deletes it. Photos that don't generate interaction in cyberspace are pulled out of the stream, as though their presence were diminished. As though they never became live.

Users who remove unliked images are aware of the fact that without any online traction, a photograph becomes less and less visible in the live feed. Algorithms that formulate Facebook and Instagram's live displays are designed to make pictures with more likes prominent in the twenty-four-hour feed. Images that gain traction appear more readily to networkers scrolling through Instagram or Facebook. Images with less likes will also be in the feed but not at the top of the screen. The casual browser who dips fleetingly into social media is unlikely to encounter a socially unacknowledged photo on a brief visit to their account. In other words, the act of liking or commenting on a photograph pushes that photograph into others' display screens (see Bucher 2012). The affirmative response of others makes a photograph move with social visibility, and so generates the photographer's feeling of being involved in a communally driven space. The more it garners attentive interaction, the more "real" a photograph becomes. The image becomes a happening in the uploader's present with a social reality of its own.

"How many likes do we have now?"

This is the voice of a teenage girl who sits in the broadcasting studio of the radio program *This American Life*. I listen to her and two other girlfriends on a podcast through my phone. They're being interviewed as they post a group selfie with the radio host, Ira Glass. They watch likes increase for their photograph over the course of the show. Discussion centres around the unwritten rules and conventions for posting on Instagram, but is always interrupted by attention to the live feedback of other networkers. Tremors of excitement and anticipation run through the group.

"OK, we have one, two, three, four, five, six likes in a minute. That's actually good."

The interviewer poses the question: "How quickly do people have to respond?"

"Within ten minutes I think," comes the swift reply.

They are using networked photography to bridge a spatial, rather than temporal, distance. The liveness of the image outstrips any thought that one day these images will be seen by future beholders, far from the moment they're now uploading.

"You have to work hard to stay relevant," says one.

"Yeah, relevance is a big term right now."

(*This American Life* 2015)

The dictionary definition of "relevance" is "to be connected to the moment at hand." (Random House Dictionary 2017), and thus the term has strong affinities with the concept of signaletic co-presence. The hope is to use photographs as a means of being part of something immediate, so as to make one's presence felt. "Likes" add substance to a sense of being here and now, by making the photograph and those who upload it "telepresent." Derrida describes this term as "a maximum of 'tele,' that is to say, of distance… [which] will convey what will continue to stay alive, or rather, the immediate image, the living image of the living" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p. 38). To be relevant is to be part of the live, and to feel more alive.

This feeling of immediate access to one another's mediated worlds would not exist without the continual chase for networked feedback. Networkers' eagerness to be part of a twenty-four-hour stream is what produces the very liveness they seek. The "now" becomes a cyclical production, an oroboris, where the production of liked images generates what is prominent in the live feed, and in turn produces the desire for even more networked photographs. Networkers exchange likes for likes, they add more photos in the hopes of being socially acknowledged, or they use the trending hashtags that will get higher response rates. All of this is done to stay abreast of a quickly changing attention economy, where each relevant image soon decreases in social mobility.

What appears to be direct access to people and spaces in the real-time of the internet is, however, "never 'an absolute 'live,' but a 'live effect'" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p.40). The "now" is formulated through the interaction of user-generated content

with algorithms. Each photograph uploaded to a social media site, and each comment or "like" attached, creates what appears as live, and gives smartphone users a sense of immediacy to chase. This decentralised archive is an ecosystem of signals produced cumulatively over the course of each day, and co-constructed by billions of networkers.

The feeling of being connected instantaneously and across a distance is seductive. My phone chimes with Instagram notifications. The sound is uplifting and a small spike of energy runs through me. Three new likes have been added to my close-up of a yellow bottle-brush flower on a restaurant table. My instant response is a subtle physical sensation, not unlike the feeling of someone calling out my name or tapping me on the shoulder. The online interactions with the photograph seem not only to give the image more substance, but act like contact with my own presence, as though I have been touched in some way.

The icon for likes on Facebook is a little blue thumbs-up symbol. The gesture is casual, friendly, and evokes the body onscreen. On Instagram, the like is represented by a love heart. I scroll through the stream of photographs networkers have uploaded in the past twenty-four hours and I tap on the little things that grab me. At the touch of my finger, an empty love heart symbol fills with red and a number is added to the image. The growth of likes is important, giving the image and its represented experience some sense of quantifiable weight. Fifty likes. Four comments. Fifty six likes. Five comments. These small signals of recognition act like touch in the absence of a discrete tangible image. They are enough to show that the browser has been affected by what I have made present in the network. They have engaged with my online presence. Such visualised feedback does seem to lend relevance to the moment by turning it into something that "matters" to others, as both as a thing of importance, and as a thing that takes up real space and time in others' eyes. A physical presence.

Friends gather at a Japanese restaurant in Surry Hills to celebrate the end of the working year. Plates decorated with finely sliced sashimi and slithers of ginger are presented on rough-hewn, black pottery. A feast for the eyes, a patterned arrangement of colours and textures, cut with sharp-knifed precision. We eat until every last bit of garnish is gone. "Oh no! We forgot to photograph it!" My friend isn't worried that she has no personal record to reminisce upon. The instant has lost

something because it hasn't been flagged with a measurement of networked affirmation. "What a waste," she says, as though the food had not been tasted. As though it didn't *matter*.

I Am There

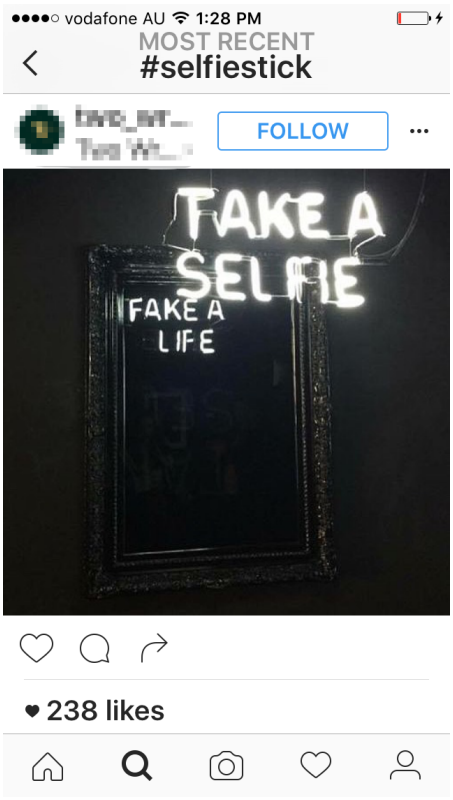


Image 75: hashtag "selfiestick", an image addressing the picture-perfect creations of social media

There are certain types of images that draw clusters of likes. Literacy in the visual language of smartphone photography creates recurring tropes of the "likeable" life. At a cafe in the city, I sit across the table from a friend and watch as she carefully arranges and rearranges the salt and peppershakers, the steaming cups, the napkins and the platefuls of cake, to make the best arrangement for her photo. She takes a few pictures, deletes those that are unacceptable, and then slides through the Instagram filters to see which will lend the most atmospheric results. Not only does networked affirmation prove that the image is happening right now, it attests that the instant is happening in *this* way. The instant is both live and improved through aestheticisation and social approval. Its perfected qualities are validated by the witnessing network who will see it the way that we present and visually perfect it. We experience the instant via the way we choose to mediate it and according to what we wish the other to perceive. The cups are in the right places on the table and the Instagram filter makes the light fall with just the right romantic tinge. It is an instant stranded somewhere between the two of us sitting opposite one another in this crowded little cafe, and the stylised appearance we have crafted for others in the live feed. We have not taken a photograph, we have made one, according to how we wish this present moment to be seen.

Without conscious awareness, we mimic the style and content of image repertoires we have seen online ourselves. On absent-minded ventures into Instagram or Facebook, the image of a likeable life recurs. Smartphone users align objects and figures to generate implications about the type of life being lived:

the freshly cooked home meal presented on a textured wooden table;

the partner sleeping in the car passenger seat on a long country drive;

an affectionate pet falling at the photographer's feet;

newly painted toenails in the hot sand of a summery beach;

a glowing concert crowd illuminates a stadium for a live band;

a glass of red wine appears next to a book of philosophy;

a pair of crossed feet stretch out in front of an electric blue pool;

a black Spoodle lounges next to some well-worn gumboots;

some rumpled white bed sheets foreground a window of sea-view,

and a rosy Campari is held up against the serene blue sky.

According to Susan Sontag, images "have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality" and are "indispensable to the pursuit of private happiness" (Sontag 2001, p. 153). The photographic life is on display everyday. In the cumulative uploads of networkers these idealised instants become relevant in others' eyes, as though they were happening just so, right now. That is the live effect. The network's public endorsement of pictures of happiness lends picture-perfect shots some form of social reality. Even if there is artificiality to an uploaded picture, it is witnessed as happening in real time, and thus becomes an event. Is there some wish on the photographer's part to manifest the picture they have manufactured, and to feel this beautified moment is really happening exactly so? Is this the way to make a picture of the likeable life come alive?

A few years after my mother's first meeting with her father and his family she begins sending him photographs of the family life she is making, on the other side of the world. Over the years, she mails him images of her child, her husband, and the gatherings at holidays and birthdays. She prides herself on being the maker of the family image and she knows how to compose pictures of belonging and closeness. She has learnt which moments are photographic and takes pleasure in catching the

right instants. There are particular aesthetics and qualities of feeling that she has picked up by osmosis. She has come to know the visual language that makes the picture of a family by looking at others' images, and from this knowledge of vernacular snaps, she crafts the image she always wanted her reality to reflect. It is an image trope so easily recognisable from family albums around the world, where the happiness and togetherness align in homely moments.

A little girl wearing a tinsel crown at Christmas
surrounded by the torn shreds
of gold wrapping paper;

A father
holding his newborn
in his arms;

A child
dancing
barefoot in the park.

She sends these Kodak moments to her distant father as testimonials of the image she desired for herself for so long. She tells me, "What I have always wanted, and thought would make everything alright was a family. People around me, a place where I could feel I belonged could love, and be loved in return. To feel safe, secure and loved. Simple… perhaps not."

Her mimesis of the vernacular family shot has been practiced by billions of photographers over the course of the medium's history, each one seeking to situate themselves in a genre of photographed presence and to be witnessed as living *that type* of experience. The convention of sharing the picture of happiness with others has a powerful role to play in the production of images on social media. The smartphone has brought networkers' images into one anothers' day-to-day routines, and has heightened exposure to the crafted moments users consider likeable. Image types

begin to reproduce themselves as smartphone users learn particular visual languages, almost through osmosis, and begin to appropriate their style and form.

Studies have emerged on how such shared images enter a spiral of continual reproduction. The drive behind the repetitive social sharing of the picture perfect has been defined in terms of "Facebook Envy." This is a phenomenon in which networkers who are regularly exposed to ideal shots, develop the sense that "others have a better life" (Krasnova & Buxmann 2013, p.3). The response to the photographable life of others is what Hanna Krasnova and Peter Buxmann term the "envy spiral," where the browser who feels discontent with their own lived experience begins to replicate images of happiness they have seen online, in the hopes that their photographic uploads will likewise generate a sense of contentment with reality. "I hate Facebook," a friend tells me over a beer one evening. "Everyone's always having babies and getting married and going to parties." I laugh, and remind him that he's always posting pictures of his motorcycle trips in beautiful landscapes.

Even at a time when social networkers are media savvy and can spot the crafted nature of an image, the photograph still evokes the magical thinking that the picture and experience could align. As Kiku Adatto puts it, we know "images are fake, but, on another level, we are seduced by what we see, and we measure ourselves by the images around us" (Adatto 2008, p. 24). Regardless of the knowledge that others' images are constructed through composition, atmospheric lenses, and the choreographing of salt and pepper shakers, there is always the imagination that images testify to the lived reality of the photographer. The other lives their image.

Shared Albums Converge

Networkers' likeable photographs start to take on a similar romanticised hue to advertising companies' pitched images. Commercial shots and personal snaps gather in the same contextual space, and both seem to take on the same sheen and gloss. The boundaries between artificiality and the candid snapshot have blurred with the convergence of social media and photography.

> The colourful lenses of friends' beach holidays start to merge with the Getaway deals promoted on the Facebook homepage.
>
> A girl posts her new dress in a shop mirror, and the shot merges with frocks advertised by online stores.

Advertisers have targeted my own profile as that belonging to a thirty-one-year-old woman. The result is that my photographed memories appear alongside shots of slender models, engagement rings, diet miracles, cupcakes, and a long line of shoes. This picture-perfect commercial narrative is placed parallel to my own, portrayed through depictions of the photo-shopped body, the stable relationship, and the lifestyle of a shopaholic.

On Instagram, boundaries between commercials and personal images dissolve even further through product placement. Popular networkers are employed by companies to wear, display and use products in their personal images, as though these objects were an organic part of their daily snaps.

> A twelve-year-old boy in California is paid by clothing brands to incidentally include certain products in his popular snaps of skateboarding tricks.
>
> An avid Canadian Instagrammer known for images of backpacking adventures, begins to include new converse runners and fur lined jackets amongst his scenic shots.

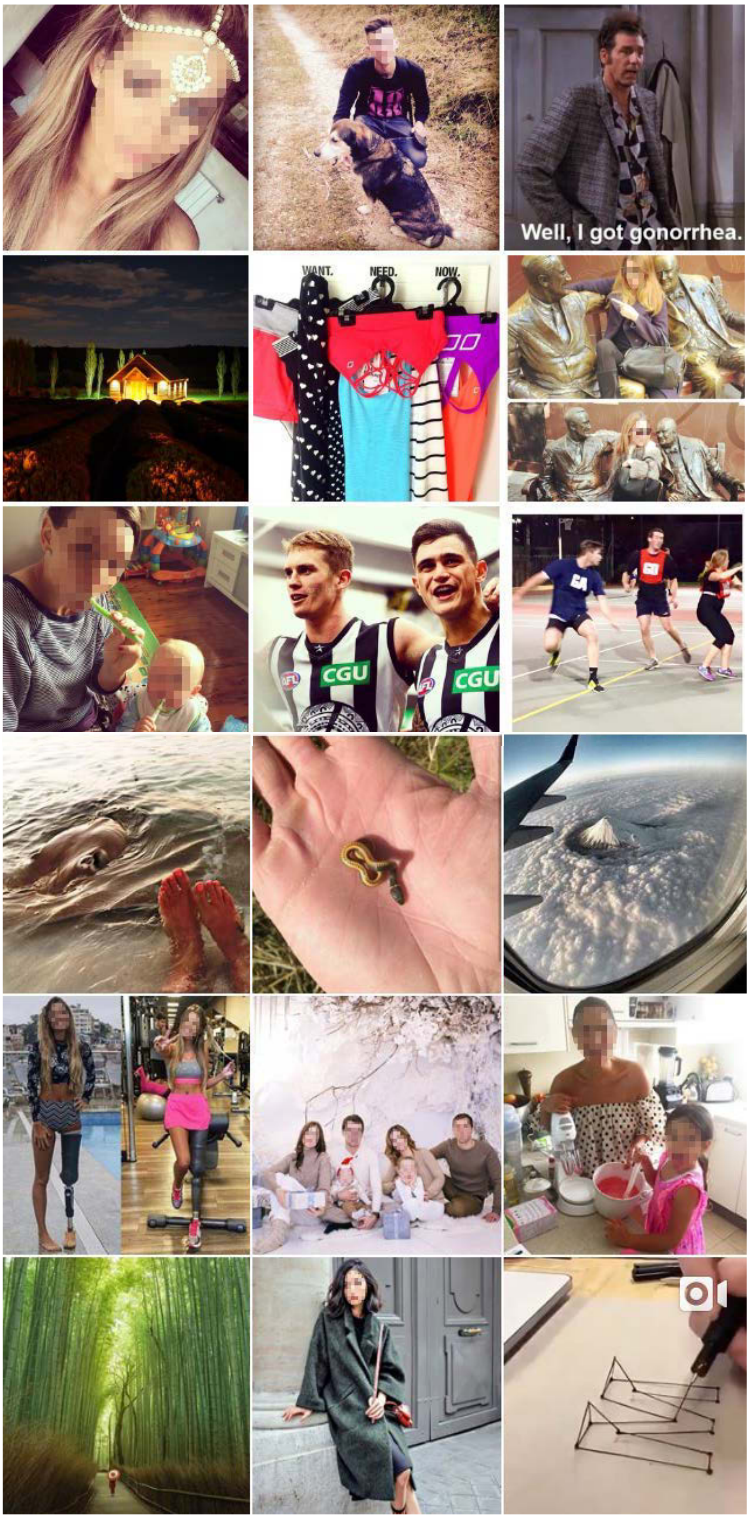


Image 76: Compilation of Instagram Explore uploads

Celebrity culture also pools into the same online space as the vernacular. On Instagram Explore:

> a friend's puppy in a birthday party hat appears;
>
> next to a close-up selfie of Taylor Swift in chartreuse red lipstick;
>
> oily French fries drip with tomato sauce,
>
> next to a screenshot from the 90's TV show of *Friends*;
>
> a blurry image of a restaurant snapped by comedian Jerry Seinfeld arises
>
> next to a picture of a toddler tottering around a glowing Christmas tree.

The merging of all these visual forms in the one space has the potential to subliminally influence what networkers photographically craft for the eyes of others.

Such coalescence of popular culture tropes with vernacular photos is not recent to the medium of photography. Celebrity culture and a painterly aesthetics appear in the first photographic social network. Cartes des visites appear in the mid-nineteenth Century on albumen prints. They are reproducible, easily manufactured, and designed to be seen by others (they are based on the idea of the calling card, which people leave as a signature of their presence as a guest in another's home). The term albumen comes from the process of coating the photographic paper with the emulsifying liquid of egg whites. The demand for eggs goes up, as factory lines of women crack and split eggs, making buckets of milky substance for the production of more and more dispersible photos. People create cartes des visites albums, filled with the portraits of everyone to whom they are connected. "Photography is a marvellous thing," writes a journalist in France in 1860. "It is very pleasing to have one's relatives and acquaintances reunited in an album. You open the book and flip through it: you see your brother who is in the army in Syria or China, your sister who is fifty leagues from Paris. You converse with them, it seems as they were there beside you." (cited in Batchen 2005, p. 71).

Beyond the ideal of co-presence, these collected portraits do more than reveal family connections. They gather together collections of faces from celebrity culture. Portraits of family and friends appear alongside reproduced albumen prints of

Abraham Lincoln, Queen Victoria, famous actors, actresses and scientists of the late nineteenth century. The same props and accoutrements are found in every shot, and visual equivalence begins to form between the pictures of loved ones and celebrities. A middle-class businessman can have the same form of portraiture as a queen. All photographs from all walks of life are placed on the same visual plane. What happens, asks Geoffrey Batchen,

> when a photograph of Queen Victoria is distributed in thousands of identical copies, finding its way into the homes and hands of her subjects in the form of a cheap picture?... Such a photograph certifies that everyone is now equally susceptible to reproducibility, everyone can be reproduced to the same scale and in the same format" (Batchen 2005, p.72).

The same aesthetic languages are used to present people whose lives move in very different social spheres.

Artificially perfected and idealised portraits display subjects in the way they would wish to be seen by others. Studio rooms are full of theatrical props such as large peacock feathers, broad palm fronds, thick velvet curtains, and fake sandstone plinths. There are generic postures that go with this charade such as the seated pose, with one hand resting calmly on a pile of books; the well postured subject standing with one hand on plinth; and the throne-like seated position in front of a grand sweep of velvet brocade fabric. Amongst the auctioned cartes de visites online, anonymous faces from the past arise in aggrandised moments.

A little boy with brassy confidence,
one arm resting on a stone balustrade.
Carved birds freeze mid flight
from its cold grey surface. In the background,
a pagoda rising in the misty haze
of a non-existent painted garden.
The address of the cartes studio printed in dark-blue:
Stubers artistic photographers, *No. 434 East Market St, Louisville, KY*

A woman with downcast lips
folds her hands over the back edge
of a dark brocade chair and gazes
into some unknown distance.
A satin curtain falls
in front of the stark undecorated wall of the studio,
a large crack running through the paintwork.
Underneath the image: *H.Burrows, Liverpool*

A lady with subdued eyes,
and white plumage bursting
from her velvet hat. She holds her riding whip
against the rumpled thick gatherings
of her imposing gown. A backdrop of dappled light
on soft brush-stroked flowers and garden urns.
CH Reutlinger Photographers - Garanti d'apres Nature.

Sitters present themselves as living the good life: educated, well-dressed and well-off. A pose is struck in the midst of a simulated place. The portrait sent to distant places is embroiled in make-believe. A nowhere land.

As with today's smartphone browsers, the network of viewers had enough media savvy to know these images were constructed, and yet the social drive to create more of these artificial scenes persevered. "Anyone looking at a carte-de-visite photograph in the 1860s or 1870s would have known what we all know now," writes Geoffrey Batchen. "These figures are posing for a camera, pretending to be somewhere they aren't, standing next to a studio prop in front of a painted backdrop… you can often see the edges of the painted backdrop and the base of the head stand, as if revealing the means of production won't make any difference to the viewing experience" (2005 p. 74). Likewise, anyone looking at networked shots on social media could identify digital fakery, manipulation, or compositional adjustments to an image. Smartphone users are literate in the ways pictures are produced. Nevertheless, as Adatto suggests, the artificiality doesn't detract from the photograph's power to simulate a sense of



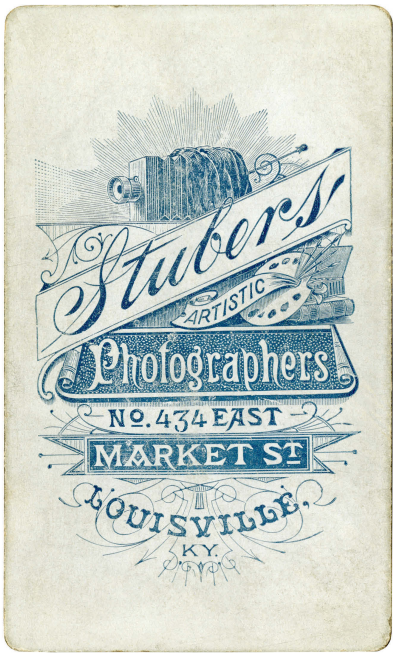


Image 77:
Carte de visite of a little boy in Louisville, circa 1882, taken by Subers Artistic Photographers

Image 78:
A young woman poses for a carte de visite taken by George Churchill



Image 79:
Carte de visite of the soprano Miolan Carvalho, by Charles Reutlinger.



another's reality. "Fascinated though we are with the process of image making, another side of us believes in the images we see. This belief stems from the fact that images are bearers of meanings, enduring carriers of ideals and myths" (Adatto, 2008, p. 243). There is some wish despite cynicism and media savvy, that photography could envelop its beholder or subject in the image of presence it displays.

Take Me There

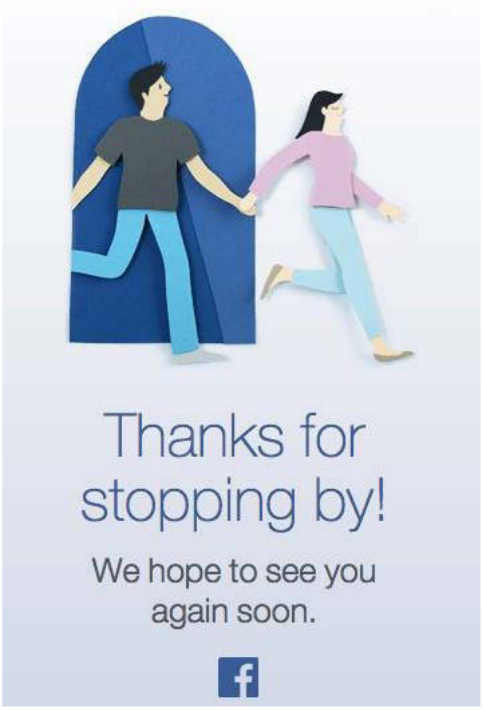


Image 80: Facebook's logout page 2015

When my mother first visits her father in his home in Puerto Rico, she steals some photographs from his shoebox collection of family snaps. Christopher shows her pictures of his growing up, of his parents, and of the three half-brothers he has raised with his American wife. He shows her portraits of ancestors, of great-greats on his mother's and father's side. He says she should take some back with her, but covertly she takes more than he offers, including pictures of deceased relatives she can't identify, and images connected to unknown events. In their removal from Christopher's shoebox, these portrait subjects have now become nameless and dateless.

She steals them purely to take something away from Christopher, because she feels his long-standing absence has robbed her of history. I wonder if the drive to own these photographic objects comes with some form of magical thinking, wherein this act of claiming ancestral images creates the feeling that she can belong to the photographs. They could bring distant times and places of family history into her present, or somehow grant her access to a past she never shared with this bloodline.

She often dreams of visiting Argentina, because this is where her father lived from childhood into early adulthood. She would like to form some unrealised connection to that space, to assert her presence there as though she had been missing from that city all those years of her childhood. All that time spent wondering about the overseas

stranger, her father, and what he might look like, how he might sound, or move, or look at her.

A photograph doesn't only offer the possibility of connecting with the other, but also with the space that other inhabits. Facebook and Instagram treat the photographic experience as one of spatial reorientation, as though the networker could remotely enter the captured space of the other through visual transportation. On the logout page of Facebook a cartoon image appears: a cardboard cut-out woman leads a man by the hand and together they run out of an open blue doorway into a white expanse of nothingness. An escape from somewhere into a vast, inviting nowhere. "Thanks for stopping by," reads the blurb. "We hope to see you again soon."

A regular visit to Facebook perpetuates the sentiment that others' photographs are a point of access. The platform encourages the notion that "we are expected to look through a photograph as if it were a sort of window." Batchen writes that photography invites the wish "to penetrate its limpid, transparent surface with our eyes and see only what lies within. Posing as pure sign, or even as no sign at all, the 'good' photograph offers minimal resistance to this look" (Batchen 2004a, p. 40). The good photograph allows the viewer to be saturated in the represented moment, as though looking were a way to step through a threshold.

An advert arises on my Facebook feed: "Where will your friends take you?" The words are printed in bright white letters across a patchwork layout of square photographs:

> two drunken karaoke singers with yellow teeth caught in the flash;
>
> a slick-haired woman floats through smooth sea-blue;
>
> a girl bites into the juicy flesh of a tropical fruit;
>
> three friends sit in blue-striped deck chairs on a dusky beach;
>
> a woman's broad grin spreads beneath an overbearing sombrero,
>
> and a motorcycle kicking brown dust into the dry air of an outback road.

Other self-promotional ads appear with a similar theme of transportation to the others' space.

> In the thick heat of Thailand, a tourist hoses down a large mottled elephant, who stretches his mouth open wide to catch the cool water, and sprays back fine mist through his raised tusk. "Friends guide friends to amazing places," reads the catch line.
>
> Two bushwalkers follow a winding dirt track towards a calm sea. "Before it's your favourite place, it's a place you've never been."
>
> A couple of silhouetted figures stand at the entrance to a dark sequestered cave. "One of your friends knows your favourite spot before you do."
>
> An eastern European city of tiled rooftops spreads out before the lens. The photographer's fingertips foreground the shot, all inked with the cartoon faces of little people. "Where will your friends take you?"

I slide past these adverts and see disseminated shots from elsewhere, where people I know are present in faraway spaces. On the other side of the world a friend has just uploaded a picture of her graduation from New York University, and another has posted a shot of a typical Parisian cafe in his journey through France. The affect of seeing such images in the live feed shifts depending on the moment I look at them. At times I would love to indulge in the magical thought that these images could be windows to the spaces of missed others. Then there are the days when the window becomes a barrier between myself and those I see. This is the dystopic notion of modern media that Ron Burnett describes as a glassy window that cannot open to elsewhere, but exists only as a surface for the eyes to slip across. In these moments "vision shifts to the insecurities of watching… from afar as observers" (Burnett 1995, p. 5), and photography bars me from what is represented. The medium is in the way of the connection I seek. I can look, but I cannot participate.

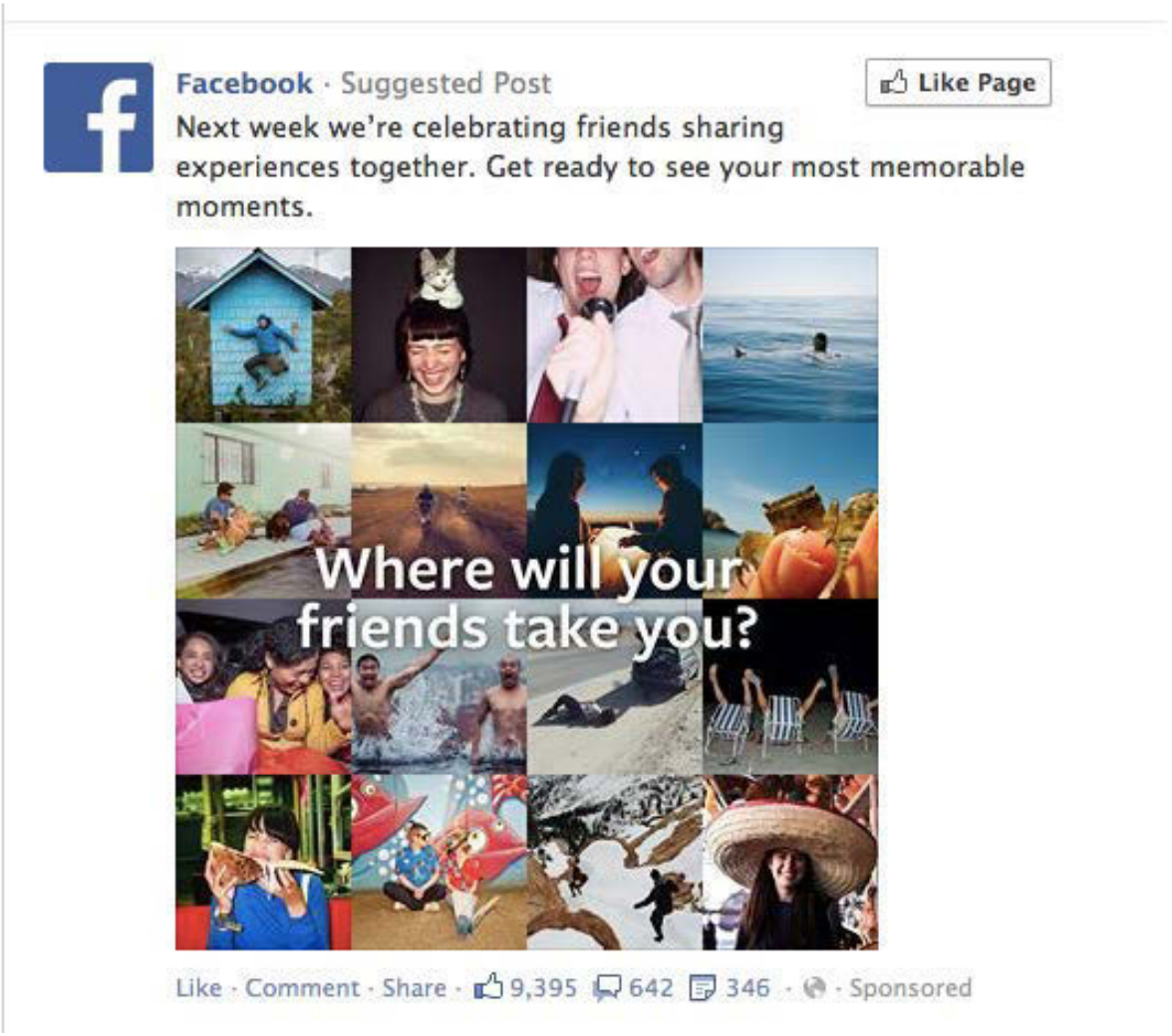


Image 81:

Facebook's self-promotional ad campaign, 2014

I Am Not There

In 2015, a new popular term is officially documented in the Oxford English dictionary: FOMO (pronounced foe-moe). Fear Of Missing Out. It is defined as: "Anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere." I've heard the term used as a joke, with a twinge of irony, an acronym not to be taken seriously. I have laughed at the term myself, regardless of experiencing something akin to it on social media, in those moments when the disparity between my here and another's there becomes aggravated. The shared images that appear onscreen impress upon me a sense of happening right now, of being eventful, such that my present moment seems empty in contrast. From far away spaces, the moments of others' worlds appear in the same clock-time by which I measure my own day. A silhouetted couple embraces for the camera and a peacefully sleeping newborn clutches a toy lamb. I believe this to be taking place in the very same moment I drink in the image. The signaletic form of photographs, with its connotations of access and immediacy, grates against the feeling that I am cut off from these visualised experiences. I am here, and they are there. When such networked photographs are experienced as a contrast to my lived reality, I can feel the urge to craft an event of my own.

On an absent-minded day of solitude and slow chores, I shuffle about the house, doing the to-do list of study and cleaning and paying the bills. Nothing has really happened, not in the way that I would call a happening. I keep logging on and off Facebook and Instagram to feel what is taking place elsewhere. I am hunting a feeling of eventfulness through the smartphone. And then I begin to take pictures to be part of this live feed.

> I photograph my cat, stretching his paws above his head as he melts into the couch;
>
> the tea pot on my table, brimming with a fresh bunch of flowers.
>
> I go for a walk and shoot a glowing city horizon from the harbour view of Beare Park. Twilight turns the skyscraper windows burnt orange, and the arc of the harbour bridge strikes a black signature on the sky.

I have transformed a day experienced as isolation into a beautiful picture. Isn't it beautiful? I upload this carefully composed photographic event so that it can become live, so that it can cross the distance I sense between the experiences of myself and others. And yet my desire to attain something akin to what I perceive in networked images remains unabated. The day remains taut with an urge for unreachable resolution. The divide between here and there has not been bridged.

Sontag reminds me that photography is used to "help people to take possession of… an unreal past… or a space in which they are insecure" (Sontag 2001, p. 10). As I take pictures of the embers of my dull day, her words resonate in ways I had not anticipated. Networked photography has helped me take imaginary possession of a present that feels unreal, but perhaps it feels unreal because I have turned it into pictures. I have crafted images to testify to time well spent, but my time has been spent on the act of mediation itself. Each photograph points me to my own pursuit of something experientially rich, and so rather than leading me to more intimacy with a beautiful harbour, a decorative teapot or a coy cat, I have become intimate with the process of photography. The moment is being experienced *as* an act of mediation, always with the other in mind.

The Camera is Between Us

On a rainy afternoon, I meet mum at the Black Star cafe in Newtown. It is a cosy hole-in-the-wall, full of damp customers and dripping umbrellas. We squeeze into a small gap on one of the narrow benches and order hot chocolates. The girl next to us is alone. She fidgets; picks at tiny left over crumbs on a now empty plate, looks at her iPhone, looks out the window for a friend who hasn't arrived. I don't pay too much notice to her restlessness, until she leans over our table with the phone close to her nose. She brings the lens a few inches from my steaming mug of chocolate and takes a picture. The intensity of her movement breaks the boundaries of personal space, although she behaves as though we aren't really there. My mother looks at her, nonplussed. "Oh… for Facebook," says the girl, barely looking up at us as she occupies herself with editing and uploading my drink. She does not seem to have

Image 82:

George du Maurier's cartoon from *Punch Magazine*, 1863

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A PHOTOGRAPHIC INCIDENT.

Those who are familiar with the phenomena of the Camera Obscura will readily understand the precaution taken by Miss Tabitha Prue, on being focussed for her Carte de Visite.

noticed the peculiarity of her mediating gesture, and our close physical presence seems almost irrelevant. The end result is what matters most: an image of a hot chocolate which she didn't taste, but that networked others will see.

The smartphone lends itself to these strange physical acts, because like most photographic practices, it is what Derrida describes as a "calibration of the body to technical affordances and desirable representational outcomes" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p. 96). To get the picture she wants this stranger has to lean forward awkwardly and push her head uncomfortably close to me and my drink. This antisocial process stands out as a reminder of the peculiarities of embodied performances that have been part of photographic practice since its inception.

The camera is always embroiled in physical relationship with the moment and it inevitably alters interpersonal body language. People twist and turn in odd shapes to get the right composition. They look away from the original site to its replication on a glass screen. They put their arms about one another in a joint selfie, and look at the flipped mirror-view in the phone stretched out before them. "This relation to technics…transforms the body. It is not the same body that moves and reacts in front of all these devices. Another body gradually invents itself, modifies itself, conducts its own subtle manipulation" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p. 96). Photographic practice engrains itself in the physical presence of subjects and photographers, and creates the way the moment is experienced: as mediated.

To an outside observer, the photographer is undergoing some form of dissociation from the things and people they capture. Yet for this girl in the cafe, the physical screening off from the space around her is done to be onscreen. Like my photographs on a tedious and lonely day, she wishes to share her presence in this moment, with people who are not in the cafe, but who are online. Photography has a history of staging a particular form of (dis)connective attentiveness, where the camera operator inserts a remove between themselves and the physical presence of the other, and does so in order to create that other's photographic presence.

Mr Weiner takes my mother's shadow portrait at two degrees of remove: the layering of the white screen and the camera's glass eye are two screens that simultaneously divide them and draw them together in the making of a photograph. This little girl is seen, but through the distancing process of mediation. It is a strange contradiction, to

connect through disconnect. To relate to one another through a look that is always a step or two removed.

Photography's effect on interpersonal body language has often been lauded as detrimental to "genuine" connection, or framed as unnatural. In the late nineteenth century, the photographing body is sketched in the cartoon images of magazines such as Punch. As media archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo observes, the early photographers are depicted as "a new species, partly technological" (2004, p. 17). They are drawn as cyborgs, merging with the camera's "large Cyclops eye'" (Huhtamo 2004, p. 17). The photographer's head is submerged in the dark hood of the camera as though the medium were parasitic. These are humans becoming machines, both comical and disturbing in their depiction. Their pursuit of the crafted photographic image is portrayed as somehow de-humanising their encounter with the captured other. The cameraman, situated in the darkness of their device, is sealed off from the experience of the instant, stripped of the capacity to relate to the other through empathy or understanding (Huhtamo 2004).

There is some part of me that believes in this image of a camera operator as a figure dissociated from their world. I worry that when I take my mother's portrait in St John's, the smartphone will come between us. As she enacts her ritual of mourning, I'll be thinking about the technical needs of the camera. I will try to catch her in the right light and with good framing and composition. I'll be thinking about how the resulting image will appear to others who read this work, rather than simply sitting with her in the church. My fear is that this process will detract from her wishes, that I will become a desensitized photographing body. This concern reveals that the cyborg logic of the camera operator, that image of a dehumanised mediating body, has not quit social imaginings of smartphone photography. I recall a recent photo on my Facebook feed which represents the smartphone user as a body cut off from immediate communication in their own physically embodied space.

One afternoon in Orlando, during the electoral campaign of 2016, a crowd of American voters turn their backs on presidential candidate Hilary Clinton. They do so, not out of disrespect, but to take selfie pictures wherein the frame of each flipped camera catches its subject in the vicinity to the famous politician. These voters are so eager to place themselves in the picture with Clinton they have severed eye-to-eye

contact with their idol on stage, and pay little mind to the many other spectators crammed into the same space. Attention is cast intently into the small screens in their hands. There is some solidarity in this communal gesture, albeit a strange form of shared ritual, where some disconnection from the lived event is needed in order to connect with online others; the people who are not present in the room.

A professional photographer seizes upon this mediated moment and the resulting portrait of selfie-mania goes viral. The focus in the image is not the electoral campaign, nor the figure of Clinton, but the way in which socially networked photography has recast social body language in a public event. On Facebook the picture spreads rapidly, as networkers cast their eyes over the strangeness of smartphone use. It is ironic to read this image on my phone: the estrangement of smartphone photographic practice via the very network and technologies which facilitate such moments.



Image 83:
Selfie takers in Orlando turn their backs on
U.S. presidential candidate Hilary Clinton

In my wanders from home to city, I often encounter solitary selfie takers, many of whom are drawn to the graffitied walls of Newtown or the entrance to the local café that was advertised in the Lonely Planet travel guide. I watch how they transform into photographing bodies. Have they lost sight of the moment they are living by adapting it into image? That seems to be the implication of the Clinton scene, where avid selfie-takers are considered by social commentators to be behaving "unnaturally," as though the public embodied motions of smartphone use were not integrated with the happenings of their surroundings. As though the commentary itself were not embroiled in the strangeness of smartphone mediation.

As I prepare to take my mother's portrait in St John's, I make a conscious choice not to condemn the medium for being an obstruction to our experience, nor to give photography that magical power of being a window to a distant other, my grandmother. Photography will not *get in the way* of this ceremony, nor will it *be the way* to reach new knowledge of my grandmother's past. This portrait can be what my mum has requested: a ritual of mediation. It will be a site of liminality and in-betweens and the smartphone camera will be integral to her ceremonial act. This technology must be self-reflexively included, rather than denied as a presence in itself, or feared as something dehumanizing.

The Camera is Here

I start searching for smartphone images that self-reflexively incorporate the medium into a photographic dialogue between self and other. Are there images in the live feed that communicate their own mediating gestures by openly including the camera in the exchange between distant networkers? In the heat of peak-hour in summer, I'm traveling on the inner-west train with a crowd that sweats five pm fatigue. I watch train stations slide in and out of my view on the other side of the window: Stanmore, Petersham. We reach Lewisham and on an almost empty platform, in the tawny sun, sits a solitary girl. She is taking a selfie. I can see the layers of her make-up even though she is a few parallel train-tracks away. She doesn't notice me watching her through the window and takes several consecutive shots, arranging her hair and shifting angles to get the right reflected image.

The extension of her arm, that reaching touch towards the lens, will be integral to the portraits she creates. Touch and vision are entwined in the prosthetic device of the phone, where the thing she holds is also the thing that sees her. The selfie-taker's posture is what Paul Frosch describes as "simultaneously mediating (the outstretched arm executes the taking of the selfie) and mediated (the outstretched arm becomes a legible and iterable sign within selfies of, among other things, the selfieness of the image)" (Frosh 2015, p. 1611). It appears to be self-reflexive mediation that is aware of its own constructedness. She touches the object that makes her image. Yet the fact that the selfie refers back to itself does not mean her main drive is to point to her own act of mediation.

The production of her portrait is concentrated on the desire to be live in the feed. She captures herself in the moment, as though the distance between networkers were traversed instantaneously. The presence of the medium is less prioritized, than the fact that she will be seen by others. She works hard at crafting the picture of herself that she desires.

For beholders, her image will appear to reach out as though seeking to connect. There is "the suggestion of bodily contact," an inviting gesture that "proposes a particular kind of sociable interaction… companionship" (Frosh 2015, p. 1617). And yet there is a disconnection between self and other. In the mirror-like screen, selfie-taker sees only herself and the presentation she wishes to display. The image circles back upon itself at the very site where the photographer's hand meets the point of the beholder's visual perspective. Her touch doesn't reach the viewer, but points back to the medium that allows others to witness her presence.

By drawing attention to the medium, these portraits keep both subject and viewer suspended in the distance between one another, regardless of the photographer's intention to connect directly through the live. A selfie-taker's hand reaches out and promises to align their touch with my sight, as though I were seeing someone right in front of me, a physical presence. What they do touch is that reflective object, the prosthetic phone, the thing that both connects and divides us.

There is something ghostly in this unfulfilled connection. It recalls Derrida's sentiment that "touch in the photographic experience, the very thing one is deprived of… is violently summoned by its very frustration, summoned to come back… like a

ghost… in the places haunted by its absence" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p.115). The medium stays suspended in the site where the other is not, where the presence of absence still shadows the image.

I've come across this loop of frustrated connection and touch before in photography's history. The medium's intimacy with absent others appears visibly in this mode, in a daguerreotype practice from the late nineteenth Century. Portrait sitters often pose holding the empty daguerreotype case destined to house their own image. "Think about what this means," Batchen writes.

> First we handle the case, feeling its surfaces ... We see and touch the outside of the case, then we open it up and look inside to see that case again, presented to us as a picture (and in that picture the case is being touched once more, but by someone else). This is an object that continuously collapses sight and touch, inside and outside, into the same perceptual experience (Batchen 2004b, p. 14).

The gesture is simultaneously mediated and mediating. Like the selfie, it loops sight and touch in the same mediating object. Yet for the subjects of these images there is no intention to be seen immediately by a twenty-four-hour network. These portraits linger in the space where the other's absence is pronounced. They have the picture's future beholder in mind.

A little girl in a white dress
looks sullenly
at the camera,
with a small silver case
resting in her lap.

A young woman clasps
a mother-of-pearl case
in her hands, as she looks dolefully
into the future.

They focus on who isn't with them in that moment. These portraits reveal what the selfie taker ignores in their pursuance of a live, connective signal: a photograph is a mode of presenting contingent on the absence of others. I would like to reintroduce smartphone photography to the shadow of the other, which is still very part of its ontology, yet is buried beneath the desire to upload an image of the now. Photos that appear in the real-time of the internet still hold a strong tie to unbridged connections that appear across a distance. In the context of social media, this distance initially appears as spatial, rather than temporal. Yet, all images uploaded now will pass from the immediacy of the live and move into the storage of the past. Any image captured, be it for the internet or for print, holds something of the subject's relationship with those who cannot be there in the moment, who are absent because of death, or separation, or circumstance.

I tell my mother about the daguerreotype portraits. Sometimes the sitter opens the case, and it isn't empty, but holds the image of someone they love and have lost. In these images, the longing to be present with another's absence concentrates on the dead. I discover some of these historical shots in auction sites online, and share the images with my mother.

A little girl with a sour expression
holds a portrait of her father,
and glares into
the tedium of the long exposure.

Identical twin sisters
sit side by side
in identical white gowns
with patterned flowers. Their hands
act like mirrored images on
either side of the picture of a man in a waistcoat.



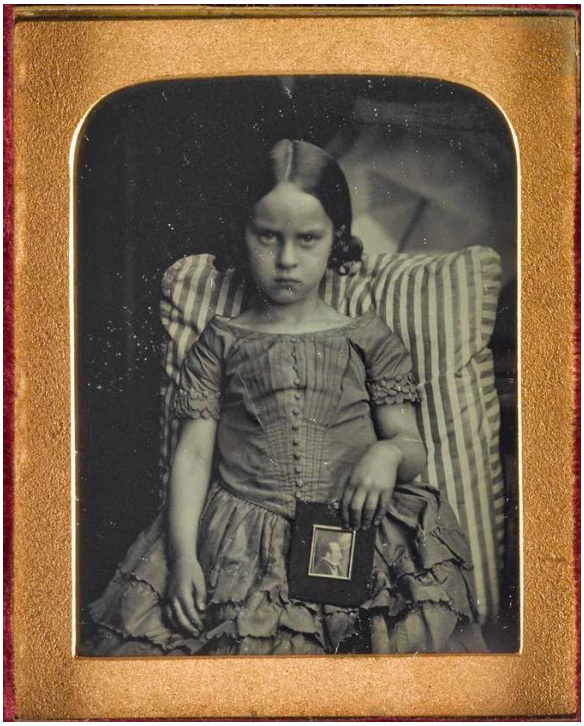


Image 84: A child in white holds another's sealed portrait

Image 85: A daguerreotype of little girl holding a man's portrait, by Ross & Thompson

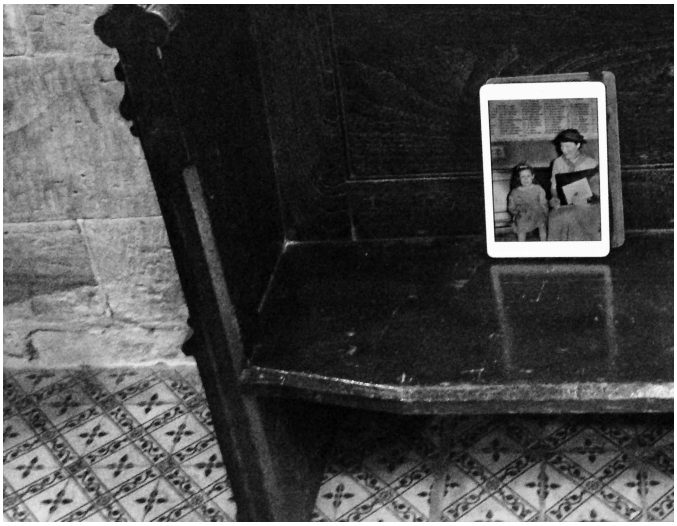
Image 86: "This daguerreotype is so meta." An Instagrammer uploads an historical image of mourning



I ask my mother if I can photograph her in a similar pose, with her mother Marjery's image in her hands. "We could put it on an iPad screen, it would be something like these old portraits." She agrees and asks that I be included in one of the photographs with her. She will want the comfort of someone sitting beside her.

I prepare for our day at the church, and scan the photograph of mum and grandmother into the computer, transforming it into pixels of light. Two manifestations of the medium draw together: one stored in the materiality of silver nitrate, another made of data that has the potential to become a signal in cyberspace.

I Am Here Without You



Fragment of an image to come.

When my partner Oskar and I arrive at St John's, Mum is already standing at the gate. She is always early, she hates to keep anyone waiting. "I'm not sure it's the right church," she says, "but this is definitely where my mother said the photo was taken. She must have forgotten herself." I can feel the anticipation she has been building for the day. She's dressed herself in a black and white striped skirt and a plain black top. She takes off the red silk scarf that I gave her one birthday. "I don't want to take attention away from the photograph of mummy and me."

We enter the cool quiet of the room of worship. There is an oaky scent from the old polished pews and the gentle reverberation of our soft footsteps on the cold tiled floor. "It wasn't here," she says, "the minister thinks it didn't happen here." I have no doubt that after this day of photographing mum will go looking for the exact site in which the picture was taken. She asks if we should wait until she finds the historically correct location. I say that if she is comfortable to have her portrait taken now, then we can follow where her memory has led. "It's less about fact, and more about how your image of this photograph has developed over time."

She holds the iPad carefully in both hands and looks up at me with moist eyes. It's a lowered gaze, framed by salt-and-pepper hair. She is older than her mother ever lived to be, yet there is still something of a waiting child in her look. The space on the seat beside her has an emptiness about it. She holds the pixelated copy of her treasured photograph and thus puts herself in contact with a disconnection from the image. The picture is not here, we only have a screen of digital light to testify to its existence. She touches the place where the photograph is physically absent, and feels the stirred experience of separation.

Afterwards, mum wants me to sit beside her. The physical presence of someone close is needed. I put my arm about her shoulders while Oskar takes our joint portrait and I kiss her on the forehead. When we go out for pancakes afterwards she laughs and chats conversationally, but I know this day will linger with her for a while. She has ventured into that space of liminality, where the connection with another's absence has recalled childhood hours of waiting with the wish to be held in another's returned gaze. She has always been present with a missing otherness; it has charged all her images, even those captured before the death of her parents. It is never easy to sit with the presence of disconnection which haunts the medium in every second of the live.



Image 87:
My mother holds her mother's image

Air



Nora

Fragment of an image to come.

I close my eyes and see my grandmother's photograph, her distant figure in a black and white field of wild flowers. Her floral dress bleeds with the surrounding bush petals, the outline of her body merges with the landscape. I need to look long and hard to find where she begins and ends in a scene bleached of colour. She died long before I was born, in a car accident on Bells Line of Road. It was the day before Mothers' Day, 1968. The last photograph from her history did not show her body. The local newspaper that day printed shots of metal on bitumen, broken pieces. In her photo, her face is soft with the hint of an appearing smile, the plants around her shift in captured motion. She is very much alive, about to walk away from the cameraman, about to continue living and growing quietly old. Yet she is dead, existing to me only in my father's stories and my imaginings.

From family tales I conjure an imaginary of the woman she was. I know things about Nora, such as the way she sewed torn clothes in a chaotic web of threads, that she once attempted to jab my grandfather with a carving fork, and that she loved the way my Poppa brought her breakfast with a geranium from the garden. I know these things. And yet I do not, because for me, my grandmother is purely an image. Nora is this photograph. In this chapter, she has become part of a form of magical thinking that enables me to intuit something vaster than the split second of her portrait's capture. In the haze of petals and grasses that surround her I sense something of the temporal flux that permeates more than a family and its body of stories. I intuit duration, which weaves through the bush landscape, her body, the hat in her hand, the lives of predecessors and relatives unborn, and my body as the beholder.

The Movement of Intuition

Everything in matter, according to Henri Bergson, is subject to the continual movement of happenings, which can never be fully grasped in isolated and self-contained states as each moment is constituted by change and process. Living and



Image 88:

My grandmother Nora's portrait

non-living forms are embroiled in this non-chronological weave of time, which endows everything with the co-existence of its past, present and future. Even a moment caught in a camera, which on the surface appears to be a seized point of stillness, is pregnant with the future and past it carries in its wake. It is implicated with matter that shares the instant of capture so that a picture of a woman shows the interweave of her existence with hat, dress, grass, soil, sunlight, and the camera itself, that device that draws these things all into the one frame.

The continuance of time is suspended in one captured shot, and in this pregnant stillness, photography reveals how human lives are entangled with other existences passing through duration. Bergson writes that the intuition of our duration

> brings us into contact with a whole continuity of durations which we must try to follow, whether downwards or upwards; in both cases we can extend ourselves indefinitely by an increasingly violent effort, in both cases we transcend ourselves (Bergson 1912, p. 63).

Thus the writing of this chapter will move up and outward, starting with the personal image of my grandmother and then expanding to encompass non-human existences that co-habit family memories. I start with Nora in a field of flowers and then move into photography's integration with other material things and spaces: I follow the medium into the branches of a weeping myrtle tree; into the dusty attic above my parents' apartment; up into aerial photography in hot air balloons, and further still, into the distant reaches of the Milky Way. As I travel back down and return to the picture my grandmother, I'll draw upon a temporal continuity much vaster than the lives of blood relatives and inclusive of other matter.

Along the way, I seek to reimagine the ways objects and the personal are interwoven in photography, and to consider how the computerised memory of photo-data reacts with human memory. Internet time couples with vernacular photos, and forms momentary glimpses of how things and bodies partake in one another's presence in the unfolding of duration.



Image 89: Something caught in the photo scanner

Data and Hair

What happens when the camera takes an infinitesimally small trace of my grandmother's existence on that summery day? How does this picture situate her in time? The Kodak used to take her portrait is an analogue device, so I can never be certain exactly when the moment transpired according to clocks and calendars. I do know that it is a very short window in her life, perhaps less than a second. I can make informed guesses about her age, the location, the period of her clothes and hairstyle. But there is no data on the image to state the day it was taken.

A more precise schema of time develops when I scan this analogue shot into my computer, and it becomes data. Her image is now tethered to the 20th July 2016 at exactly 6:23:03pm. Bergson would argue that this form of time-keeping runs counter to the intuition of duration. It is part of a socially accepted way of understanding time as linear, ordered and possible to apprehend in small, precise instants. Time measured in this way is compartmentalised and systematised with calendars and dates. A body or object occupies space at a precise point on the clock and is isolated from change. Such segmented structuring of temporality does not allow for a sense of duration, "wherein our states melt into each other" (Bergson 1991, p. 186), where "the past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which co-exist" (Deleuze 1991, p. 59). Each moment is porous with other instants. Can a still photograph capture this elusive and uncontainable time that is always process, never complete fixity?

Photography is sometimes used as a metaphor for the way duration is wrested into more containable units. Bergson writes: "Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside of them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality" (Bergson 1922, p. 322). His illustration is useful for understanding how temporal flux is cut into socially manageable slices so that people can go about their day to day activities and pinpoint experiences to socially shared reference points in time. Yet even a snapshot anchored to a computer date finds ways to expose me to duration as continual flux. I upload the scanned portrait of Nora to my Instagram account on 22nd

February 2017. Now she is the 20th of July 2016, she is February 2017, and she is many years ago in the undated blink of an old Kodak.

I zoom-in closer to the pixelated image of her onscreen, and realise the scanner has picked up more than her photograph. A thin line lacerates the bottom left corner of the image and disrupts the flatness of the picture. Is it a strand of hair? My hair? A cat hair? Or is it plastic, a piece of thread? It is difficult to read because the digital display has turned its organic form into minute small square blocks of light. Its curved line is now a sequence of segmented data. I glimpse how computerised and digital mechanisms of photography interact with my own imaginings. In the interplay between precise calculations of time and one small enigmatic fragment of Nora's life, I enter a space of interruptions. Systematic dates and time codes cannot prevent duration from seeping into my gaze at this image. Along this line of thought, networked photography can point to the co-existence of matter with bodies and online information such that a woman's pixelated form begins to merge with a strand of my hair, and with a field of flowers, unfurling and coiling back up and rotting back into the soil from which they emerged.

A River of Code

Facebook and Instagram use information and algorithm to make the fluctuations of change more apparently containable for the individual. Photographed moments are encapsulated in dated and time-stamped storage, as though experience could be encased in the isolated occurrence of a second. These mathematically assigned photos are then used in sentimental slide-show presentations, such as Facebook's "A Look Back" or the "Year in Review." On Instagram, not only are photographs dated and timed, but they are granted an artificial pastness through the platform's so-called "retro" filters, through which they are digitally coloured with artificial age. Filters use pre-programmed data so as to simulate the slow material change of analogue photographs in a snap second. Both the filters and the algorithmic slide shows are intended to conjure a certain form of nostalgia, as that sweetened mode of retrospection that keeps images of people and things suspended in an idealised frozen state. The nostalgic past is held in stasis, tantalisingly out of reach, but also beautifully unaffected by change. I want to learn how these two forms of automated display are used to relate to the notion of duration. Retro filters and retrospective

slideshows are intended to contain the fluctuations of time, and yet computerised memory and generic applied lenses can be seen in another light: as a means to intuit time's multiplicitous endurance.

There is a choice in whether or not I look for the traces of becoming in both human and non-human forms. I look to the live stream of photographed things and people on Instagram and Facebook, and find myself drawn into another image of currents and eddies. Henri Bergson writes of intuition as time spent sitting by a stream of water. "Sitting on the bank of a river, the flowing of the water, the gliding of a boat or the flight of a bird, the uninterrupted murmur of our deep life, are for us three different things or a single one, at will" (Bergson 1999, p.36). He has chosen to experience matter from the past and present as integrally connected in a whole. Moments resolve themselves "into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers through an immense body" (Bergson 1991, p.208). A strand of hair, a sequence of electronic pixels, a cotton dress, a field of native flowers, and a degrading paper photograph co-habit this immense body of time.

In light of this description of duration, I look to defamiliarise the non-human workings of code. Photo-data begins to take on renewed aspects that expose me to the continual unfolding of lifetimes and material forms. Online, the co-habitation of human lives and matter is heightened by the coagulation of many photographs in the one digital space. Instagram's explore page lights up with an array of unstitched images from around the globe. They form a quilt with amorphous seams. On one day, Instagram is a patchwork of food, nails, mountains, faces and animals. And then it is gone, although all the pieces are still out there somewhere, disassembled. Can this chaotic culmination of hair, skin, earth, and vegetables be bound together like shivers through an immense body? Like forms caught in the same river of time?

Aura

From Bergson's riverside scene, I move to another corresponding landscape, this time a mountainous horizon written into existence by Walter Benjamin. In *A Short History of Photography,* he describes a contemplative moment that stretches out across a

distance of earth. From dreams, memory, or some synthesis of both, he draws a visual portrait of his elusive term, *aura*:

> To follow, while reclining on a summer's noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence—this is to breathe in the aura of these mountains, of this branch (Benjamin 1972, p. 20).

An awareness of the transience of experience has seeped into his writing and his sense of embodied presence. The shape of distant mountains, a tree branch in shadow; these images cast a reflection in him, as part of the passing instant. While Walter Benjamin and Henri Bergson have very different approaches to understanding the conditions of experience[4], there is a certain sympathy between their work on this one point: that a relationship with material objects can implicate the beholder's sense of existence in currents of time.

In Benjamin's mountain scenery I read the intuition of duration, or the process "by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (Bergson 1912, p. 7). An experience is grasped as a moment shared by multiple existences, not all of them human. Some of them are mountains, trees, or other objects. The beholder partakes in the presence of these things, each of which has its own unique rhythm and pace of existence, but each one similarly interwoven in the permanent unravelling of change. The wind is slowly buffeting the face of the mountains, the tree is aging over slow seasonal growth, and Benjamin is breathing in and out, gradually getting older. When these elements are intuited as synchronous in a present instant, the experience becomes "vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, and knowledge which is contact and even coincidence" (Bergson 1946, p.35). Benjamin surrenders to the instant with relaxed yet astute attention. He inhales it for as long as it will last, its impermanence part of its power. It maintains a tantalising loss that both resists and promises to be regained and a fragility that evades calculable definition.

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[4] Benjamin was highly critical of Bergson's work, claiming that the former had not adequately acknowledged the socio-historical and political forces that influence the qualities of experience (particularly in relation to the consumption of industrial media technologies). That said, the two had several points of agreement on the role of the image in the emergence of the past within the present (and for more on this, see Benjamin's '*On Some Motifs of Baudelaire*' [1982])

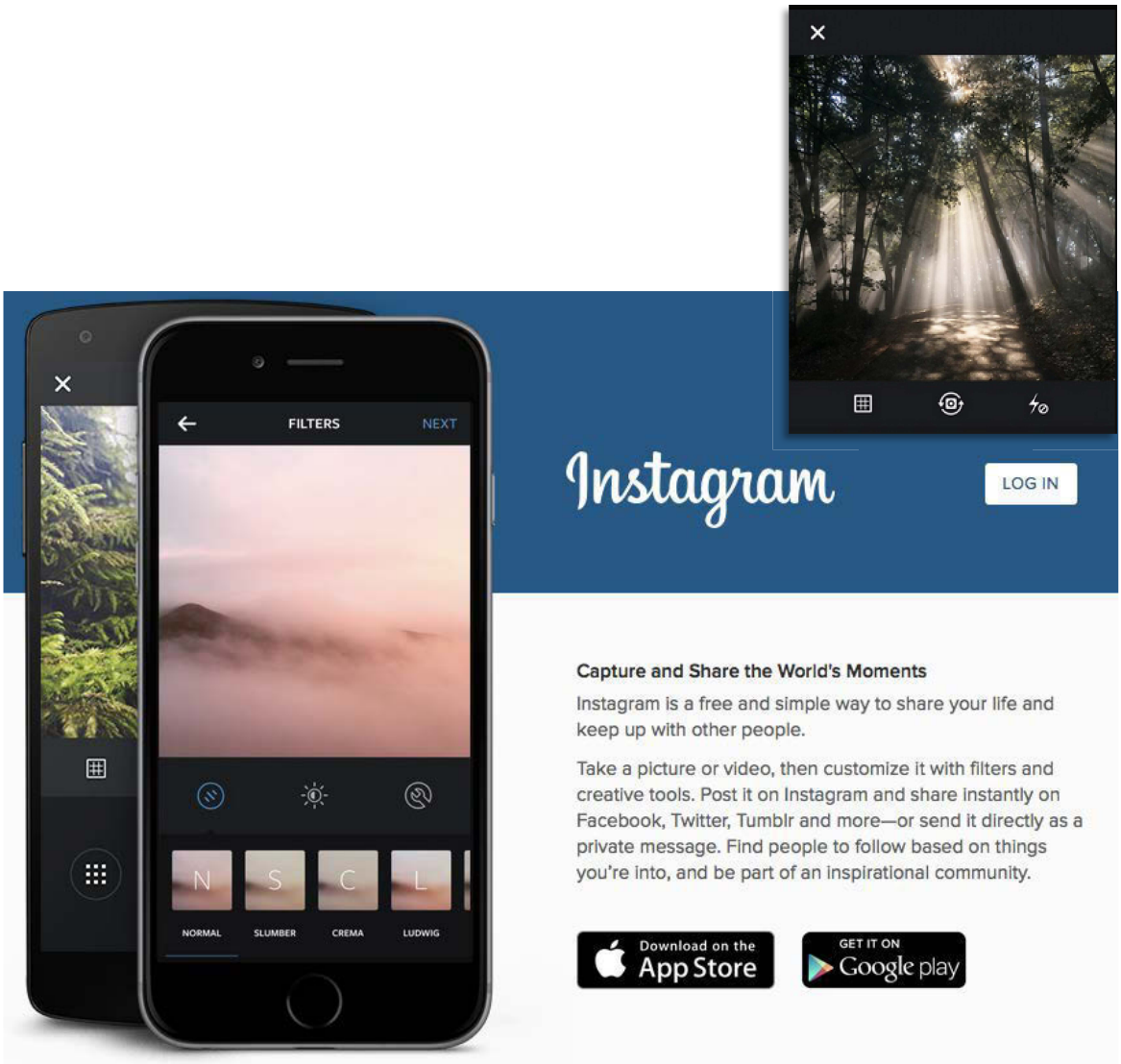


Image 90:
Instagram's login page (2015) with
atmospheric shots of mountains and forest trees

The word aura stems from both the Latin and Greek terms for air, that life-giving element which circulates between and within bodies. Air carries minute particles of dust across distances, invisibly touching and moving amongst everything within its path. It travels the space that suspends Benjamin's gaze to the mountain horizon.
To describe how he and the mountain image find fleeting affinity, Benjamin uses the verb "atmen," which translates in English as "to breathe." Aura is not founded purely on sight. It may begin with the visual outline of something, but it isn't simply an image-based experience. It is an evocation of the invisible currents that touch different materials and bodies and form subtle correspondences across a vast body of time. Almost imperceptible things get picked up by the air I breathe. A small piece of hair drifts into a scanner, and particles of skin exhale from the photo album in which my father has stuck his mother's image.

Web, Weave, Tissue

"What is aura?" Benjamin asks. "A peculiar web of space and time, the unique manifestation of a distance, no matter how near it may be" (Benjamin 1972, p. 20). The material connotations of this phrase are shape-shifting depending on the translation. Benjamin's "web" is sometimes interpreted as a "weave"(Benjamin 1979b, p. 250), a "gossamer fabric" (Benjamin 2009, p. 184), or sometimes a "tissue" (Benjamin 2002b, p. 104) of space and time. These different translations call up strange associations with my grandmother's portrait: the weave is the cotton of fabric, the tissue is the skin of the body that wears it. Nora's body is softly blurred by the dress she wears. I am returned to my father's description of the wild criss-crossing stitches Nora made to fix old clothes. She stitched threads in a wild entanglement, just as her photograph weaves together different strands of bodies and things in the fabric of one multiplicitous moment.

John Berger describes how photography captures human co-existence with other matter through his encounter with another photo; a found black and white portrait of a man walking side by side with a bridled horse. There is nothing to tell him where the image comes from or what human lives it touched, but he identifies the first affect it has on him, before analysis and storytelling take hold.

> Before you tried to read the photograph of the man with the horse, before you placed it or named it, the simple act of looking at it confirmed, however briefly, your sense of being in the world, with its men, hats, horses, bridles (Berger & Mohr 2016, p. 90).

A sense of being in the world likewise comes via my interaction with Nora's image, and I come to understand I am a body among other bodies and things, all passing through time.

Drawn from the Artificial

If a single photograph weaves together many different forms in one shot, then an online landscape of billions of photographs is teeming with non-human durations which co-habit networkers' day-to-day existences. I scroll through Instagram explore, and start to attune myself to the unremarkable details which cluster onscreen in the live feed:

> the frangipani that fell at the feet of a profiler's long, evening shadow;
>
> salted eggplant laid out on a kitchen benchtop;
>
> scattered pet food upended on the carpet;
>
> one cracked eggshell with an exposed golden yoke amongst a carton of unbroken eggs;
>
> rows of busted car tyres form the backdrop of young man's selfie,
>
> and snowflakes frozen on the ebony fur of a household cat.

The mechanism through which I encounter these shots is data. Smartphone photography pins images to dates and those dates to a profiler's timeline. This system is intended as a way of keeping neat borders around stories of photographed experience, so an image is tied to a unique body and a measured instant. It seems almost counterintuitive to perceive these snaps as part of a strange web of time and matter. Their timed arrival online could delineate them as disconnected little dot points, broken off from one another in isolated moments.

A more traditional use of Benjamin's aura would position such online ephemera as the unstitching of aura. He writes of the modern urban dweller as a figure cut off from auratic encounters. Passers-by move through an environment where lived experience is transformed into quick doses of information. Moments are no longer felt in their gradual and subtle shifts but are swiftly consumed as data that leaves no lasting after-image in memory. Images have their practical function and are disposable. One of the main technological forms he identifies as responsible for aura's demise is the camera. In an echo of Bergson's metaphor of the snapshot, he uses the language of photography to say that contemporary life has transformed experience into something artificial. As Carol Duttlinger comments, it is easy to reductively interpret such theories, as Benjamin's writing sometimes appears to be drawing a sharp dividing line between photographic practice and auratic possibilities (Duttlinger 2008). On closer inspection, Benjamin's work destabilises any clear demarcation between photography and aura. The camera, the computer and the captured moment can be knotted together in strange ways.

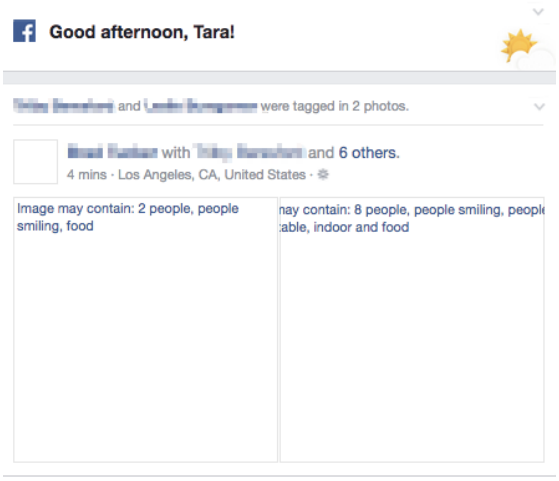


Image 90: The news feed takes time to upload image content

The Device in Aura's Web

Aura and photography have a contradictory relationship whereby the medium enables and impedes an imaginative exchange with a strange weave of time. In Benjamin's early work, the long exposure time of daguerreotypy is what illuminates the aura of the portrait sitters. In the distended opening of the shutter, the presence of people is burnt into the image, and will permeate the gaze of some future beholder who looks back at the light on long-dead faces.

After identifying an affiliation between aura and the camera, Benjamin's later work shows a shift in his thinking. He remarks that the inert look of the camera and its mechanistic appropriation of a scene is what steals aura from the image. "What was inevitably felt to be inhuman - one might even say deadly - in daguerreotypy was the

(prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera records our likeness without returning our gaze" (Benjamin 1982a, p.189). The object of the camera here acts to artificialise experience and to frustrate aura. The daguerreotype is a thing that turns the moment into recordable data and confines the image to its captive glare.

Benjamin's contradictory portraits of photography both interweave the medium in the strange weave of time, and simultaneously dissociate it from aura. Carol Duttlinger places this ambivalence in context when she writes, "Benjamin's late critique of the daguerreotype as an alienating and reifying medium concerns not the process of viewing but that of recording" (Duttlinger 2008, p. 96). The imaginative auratic encounter arises after the photographic shot, and partly as a reaction to the technological gaze that was so calculated and cold. In other words, technological forms such as the camera or computer, which seem inhuman in their automation, are not necessarily the downfall of aura. Instead, aura is the evocative experience that arises from a strange interrelation between device, captured moment, and the beholder's immersive encounter with the technically mediated image. From this interpretive framework of aura, I start to appreciate how the automated systems of social media platforms provoke my imaginative exchange with images in unexpected ways. Time-codes and computerised recognition systems begin to stir new perceptions.

On a day of slow internet connectivity, the home page of Facebook freezes before it has fully downloaded its images. The screen presents me with computerised readings of the photos that haven't yet appeared. I'm faced with a strange set of words. "This image may contain: eight people smiling, indoors, food." This is a glance at the invisible processes which scan the data of photographic uploads. It sounds comically inhuman, this list of an image's ingredients. One might even say it is the deadly non-auratic gaze of the networked system, which has converged with that inhuman look of the camera. The server has no concept that all these assembled things mean something to the people photographed. This is simply a calculation, a detached reading from a non-human source. But it invites me to look at photographs online a little differently. It shows me things that photographs always have in their periphery: the detritus, the 'stuff', the accidentally included objects. These are forms usually

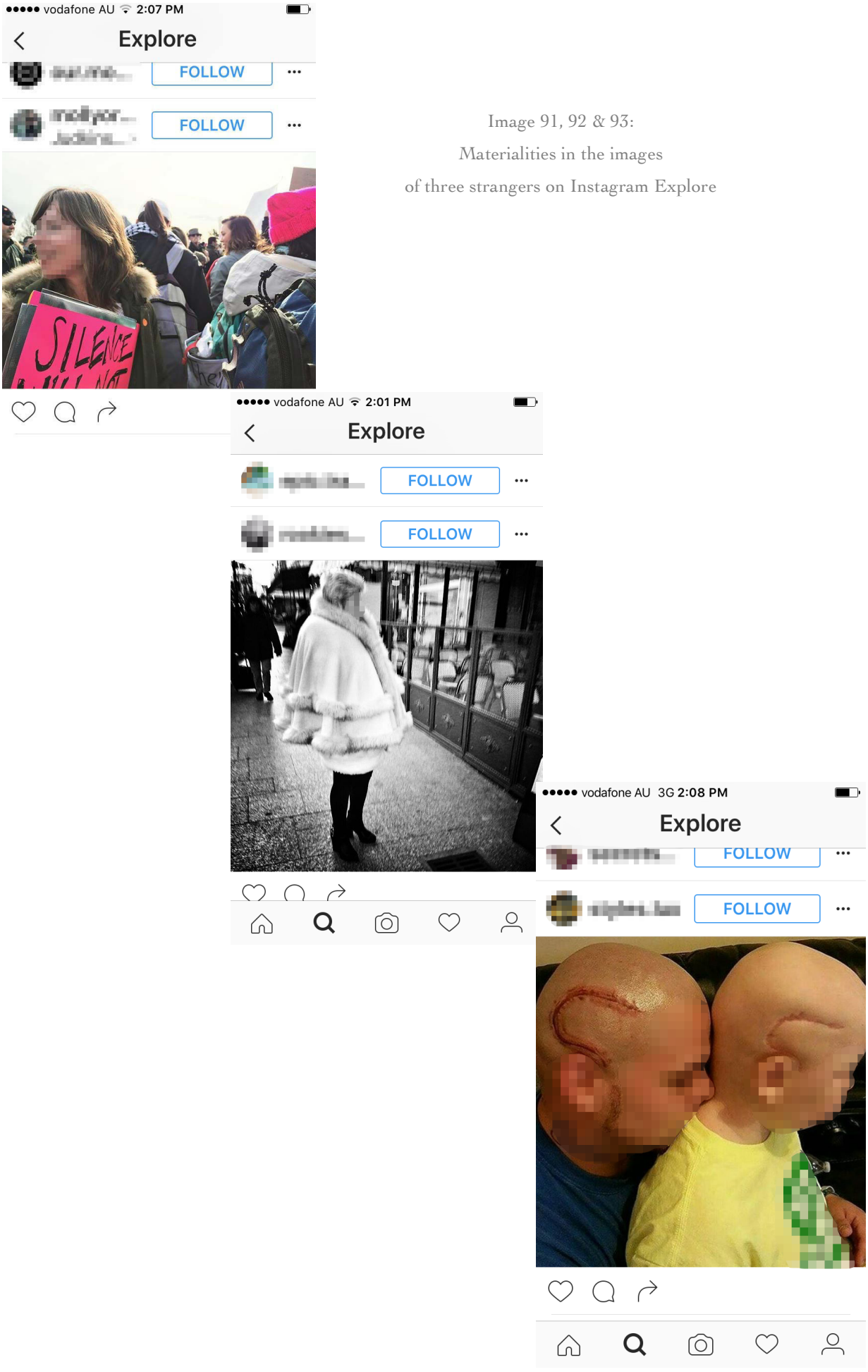


Image 91, 92 & 93:
Materialities in the images
of three strangers on Instagram Explore

unnoticed because they are in my blind spot, but they are part of any photograph's assemblage of things inhabiting the same moment.

I cast my eye over the Instagram explore page, and my first instinct is look to the more obviously human faces and figures of strangers.

> A woman in her fifties stands outside the glassy windows of a Paris café in a warm, fur-lined wrap. She looks in at the people sitting inside, or perhaps at her reflection.

> A little boy sits on his father's lap. He has lost his hair through chemotherapy and a scar from brain surgery wends its way above his right ear. The father's head looks identical. He has shaved his hair and has a new, healing tattoo that mimics his son's surgical markings.

> A young woman stands amidst a crowd of protestors on the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration. She carries an electric pink placard and smiles with relaxed confidence. The sign reads "Silence will not…" The words are then cut off by the frame of the picture.

I try to imagine what the computer would read in these snapshots. "This image contains: person, outdoors, clothes." "This image contains: a square, one person smiling." My awareness of the images expands outward and to incorporate objects my perception ordinarily dismisses. The often-unmarked parts of the image begin to reveal themselves as if through the impersonal light of the computerised camera.

The picture of the Parisian woman becomes infused with the cool surface of the glass window in front of her. This image contains wicker cafe chairs.



The portrait of a boy and a father incorporates threads of surgery stitching, and the fleshy colours ingrained in the man's skin. This image contains ink.





The protesting woman contains the story of a cardboard sign and the sharp black Texta markings of thick capital letters. This image contains: the colour pink.

I become aware of what Elkin's calls, "the stains photography wants me to see" (Elkins 2011, p. 91). These are the objects and earthy substances that infiltrate the billions of vernacular photographs uploaded daily. It's the empty coffee cup on the bedside table. The rock face in the backdrop of a surfer shot. The cold marble tiles of a mirrored bathroom. Smartphone photography isn't only picking up human experiences, but is recording a synthesis of human and material forms that exist in the live moment of the feed. This attunement to multiple durations is a particular evocation of aura which Benjamin describes as "the transposition of a response characteristic of human society to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man" (Benjamin 1982, p. 190). I am endowing the non-human forms of data and this networked camera technology with the ability to see the objects and forms I often forget in my storytelling of human lives.

It is a deliberate choice to think of this usually unremarked "stuff" in a photograph as somehow constitutive of captured human experiences. I have to work hard to see how personal stories converge with the medium's capture of non-human things. I invest time in discovering a coalescence of forms in the same river of duration. My choice to do so involves finding a shared tissue between the many things the camera sweeps into my view: to see the personal and the material intimately entwined.

This viewpoint can shift focus easily, and become something that dislocates me from the things touched by photography. John Elkins expresses this alternative perspective, as he believes the deadly gaze of cameras creates a divide between personal memories and the matter caught in the lens. He sees the things snapped up by the thing-like camera as cold and indifferent detritus, all automatically picked up

by photographic technology but totally divorced from the pathos of personal remembrance. "Photography fills our eyes with all the dead and deadening stuff of the world," he writes (Elkins 2011, p. xii). It "doesn't work, the way it does for Barthes, diligently supplying faces, love, and loss" (Elkins 2011, p. 34). Instead, "photographs have forced something on us… the world's own deadness, its inert resistance to whatever it is we may hope or want" (Elkins 2011, p. xi). Contrary to this sentiment, I devote effort to finding correlations between the personal and non-human elements caught in the mechanistic gaze of the camera. Some images will even refuse to be wrested into an impersonal division of matter from memory, despite the seeming coldness rendered by camera and computer technologies.

Inhaling Personal Matter

An interplay between remembrance and material forms takes place amongst the plastic boxes in my parents' attic. Here, a tide of disordered images gather in the disarray of fallible human recollection. Kodak envelopes are placed together according to guessed dates. Some coincide as events that resonate with the same emotional frequency, while others focus on the physical spaces in which happenings unfolded. Then there are connections I can't explain, moments that have been placed side-by-side haphazardly, maybe absent-mindedly. Time is scattered, not arranged or ordered, but folded in strange ways. 1995 at Myall Lakes, brushes up against 2003 at a picnic in the local park. An overflow of mental visuals is enabled by the experience of shuffling through images without order. The photographs are waiting for that time when they might be narrativised or perhaps sequenced in book formation.

Rain drums on the skylight window, a white-noise calm. The paper prints are glossy and they slide smoothly when shuffled in the hands, clinging ever so slightly to one another. The feeling of static. Celebrations and mundanities collide. The chaotically disordered memories breathe into one another without clear narrative progression. Memory moves between each image, until the present sound of rain seems to drip into each visual recall of personal history. In the moment of looking, I am the woman poring over images of the past,

the infant in the photographs,

and the child who waited

with her mother
outside one-hour photo shops.

Here is a photograph of my mother
holding her full pregnant belly,
just one month before my birth.

Here, a shot of me at sixteen,
confined to bed
with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome .

The now has become subsumed with images of past lived experiences which won't disentangle themselves from this current living, breathing moment. Things both foreign and familiar entwine: childhood, adolescence, Benjamin's mountains, my grandparents, Bergson's river, and rain upon the roof. Time is dripping. I have no clear story with which to pin it down and tame it.

Amidst the disorder I come across a photograph of a weeping myrtle tree. In the experience of this image, something shivers across different lifetimes and objects. It is a photographic encounter that puts personal memory in direct dialogue with earthy matter. I sense the strange weave of time that draws privately known moments into a temporal fabric much vaster than myself. Elizabeth Grosz describes the way intuition draws something from individual experience to expand outwards, into the apprehension of what makes any experience possible. She writes the…

> inner continuity, to which all living beings have direct access in varying degrees, is that through which they can access the outer continuity of matter and the world of objects, through which a different kind of knowledge is possible (Grosz 2005, p. 8).

I feel my way towards this different knowledge in a photograph that has its roots not only in my own memory, but also in times I can only imagine.

Weeping Myrtle

The portrait of the weeping myrtle shows a sprawling branch system. Arms spiral outward amidst soft strokes of green. Light splashes through the foliage as the plant drinks up the sun. Nothing but tree in the frame of the image. The camera looks up at this rough-skinned figure from the cool of its shade. A canopied sanctuary for the eyes. It grows in Rushcutters Bay Park and it is old. It has drawn water from the soil since it was planted in 1930. Etched into the scaly bark and gnarled trunk are the stories of many children who have hidden in its branches. My mother climbs it as a little girl, and decades later I follow her footsteps, up the knotted wood and into the lemony-pepper scent of its leaves. Other childhoods have passed time in its arms. The shot I find in the attic is captured by a family friend and photographer, Robert McFarlane, who once watched his little boy scale the tree. That little boy was Morgan, who in 1994, died at the age of twenty, in a car accident in Sri Lanka; it was New Year's Eve.

In 2004, Robert gifts us with the image of the myrtle his son loved. "He called it his twisty tree." He knows my mother and I have spent girlhoods amongst the same branches. We have all touched the skin of this wrinkled plant. I know the rough feeling of its bark on the soles of my feet. It has given me scratches, dirt and tiny splinters. In my memory it is a space of solitude and watchfulness, sometimes the best place to read a book, and sometimes a way of hiding from home. It looks much smaller now I am older, although it was never very tall. Its root system must reach far into the dark of the earth, beneath the constant tread of people and their dogs. Something of its body is interwoven in the relationship between photo and memory, a symbiosis that awakens gently and precariously. Half-lost sensations stir, some impression of touch and smell. I know the photo has a similar impression on my mother, and also Robert, our friend who lost his child. Are these memories ours, or have they grown into the tree in its slow and steady life beneath the sun?

I stare at the image and wait. I want some graspable way to articulate a different kind of knowledge in which various continuities share their presence with one another across time. The photograph is a split fragment of this ageing tree's life, and yet ensnared in its image are tremulous intimations of the long-term cycles it has



Image 94:
Weeping Myrtle
photograph by Robert McFarlane,
courtesy of the Josef Lebovic Gallery

undergone, interwoven with humans, birds, cicadas and possums. The photosynthesis that drew it closer to the sky echoes in the light-writing of the image. Does this photograph intuit duration? Grosz tells me that, "intuition is a mode of 'sympathy' by which every characteristic of an object (process, quality etc.) is brought together, none is left out" (Grosz 2005, p. 8). This means that the object is touched by personal memory because intuition involves "the direct contact of the living with the material… the movement whereby the one compresses itself as the other: the object touches the subject, mind partakes of and as matter" (Grosz 2005, p. 8). A photograph is the medium through which I partake in the presence of this tree, until it casts some its shadow on me.

This collection of images exposes me to non-linear fragments in time. It seems the auratic encounter has taken place because I am in a state of receptiveness in my parents' attic. As each single instant disrupts my sense of chronological family narrative, I become more open to a fusion of associations until the sudden appearance of a tree spreads roots into other moments in time.

Benjamin draws on the work of Marcel Proust when he writes that aura awakens things rooted in memory. A series of associations "seek to cluster around an object of perception," (Benjamin 1982a, p. 188), evoking what Marcel Proust poetically details as involuntary memory in his novel, *In Search of Lost Time* (1871). Benjamin's aura is particularly inspired by this book's renowned passage on memory's vaporous emergence in the present, which takes effect as the main character dips a madeleine cake into a cup of tea. With the first bite the narrator feels the deep recesses of personal history stir, bringing with them the taste something else: the conditions of experience itself. Proust writes,

> The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation the material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die (Proust 1981, p. 47).

I chance upon the myrtle tree portrait unexpectedly, and in its light-trace I read something that induces a quiet ache, a gentle reminder of my own mortal existence among other bodies caught in duration.

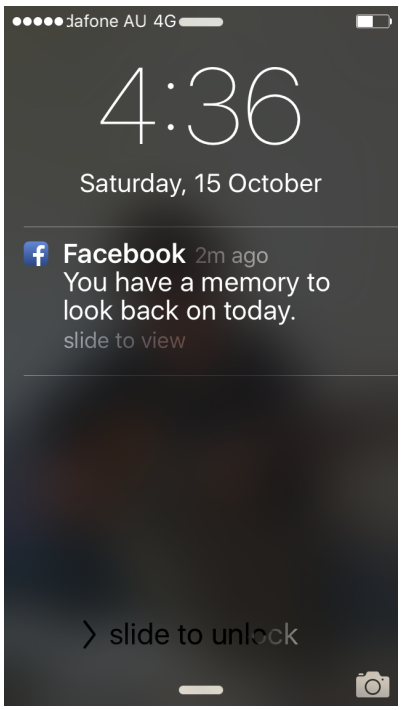


Image 95: An iPhone notification from "On This Day"

Involuntary Data

Facebook is now programmed to display photographs in ways that attempt to simulate Proustian encounters. The social media site uses its vast recesses of time-coded data to forge what mimics the apparition of remembrance. "You have a memory." This onscreen notification appears frequently on my home page as though some unbidden force has risen from the mysterious depths of time. Algorithms are used to replicate the unwilled resurrection of the past in my present. But such notification systems are not founded on the interplay of mind and matter, in which embodied processes and imagination pluck remembrance out of the air. These "memories" are generated by an application called "On This Day," which operates on robotic conceptions of time. Pictures posted long ago appear in the live feed to evoke sentimental retrospection. "You have a memory with Alex Lonergan from one year ago." A photo uploaded on the anniversary of this date arises on my timeline. It's that autumnal evening in a bar in Surry Hills, and a close friend is smiling shyly at me from behind a raised glass of white wine. On another day the app re-delivers a photograph of a *Mad Men* themed party from two years ago, where a group gathers in 1950s dresses and large hair-does. These automated memory-cues can be shared with connected networkers to provoke those reflective conversations which begin with the clichéd expression: "Remember when…" A friend shares their group photo of a family trip to Thailand, where tanned parents and siblings wear light clothing in the heady heat. He writes: "Facebook reminds me of this. Miss these times already." "I have the same memory!" replies one of their relatives. The same memory in what form?

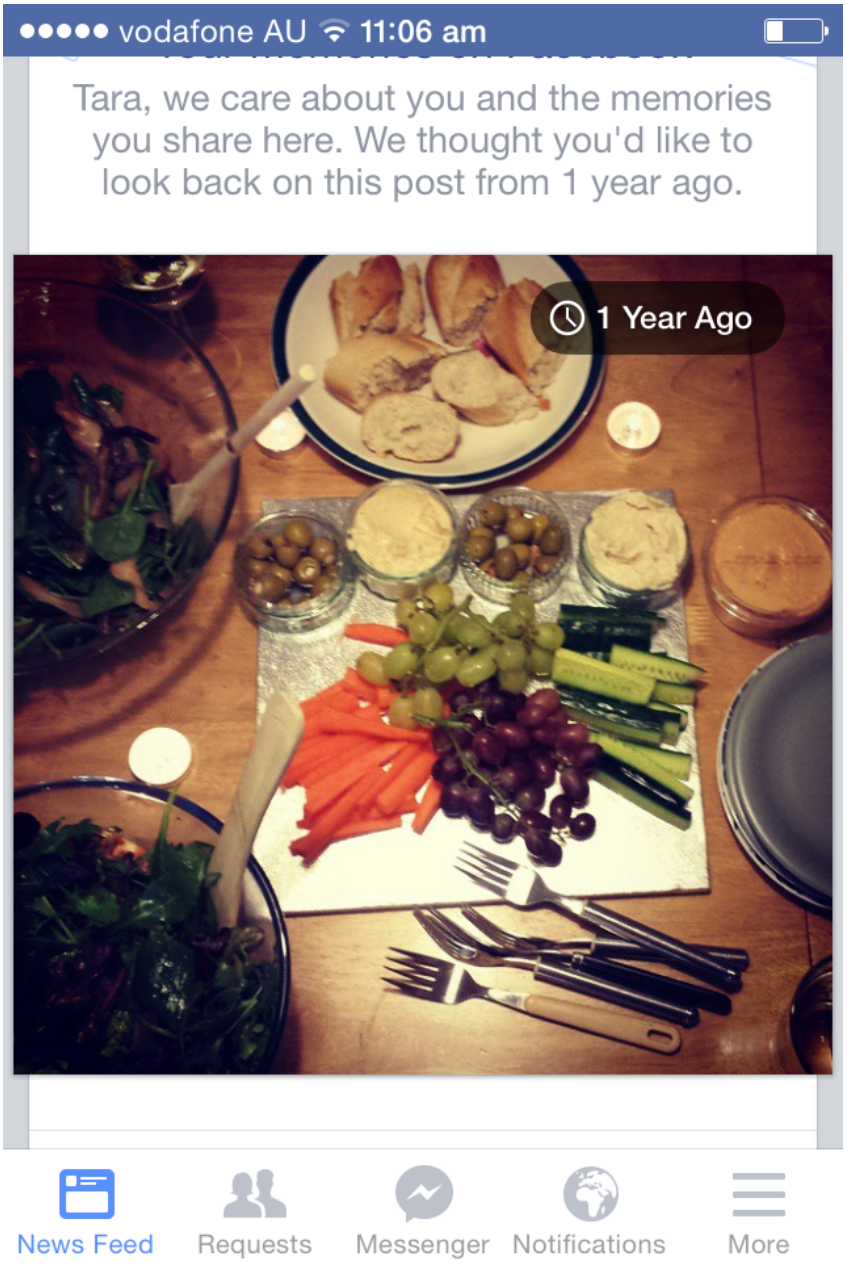


Image 96:

A notification entitled "Your Memories on Facebook"

Is remembrance an outsourced mathematical reminder made of social media data? These pre-packaged presentations hint at some organic and evocative emergence of lost time, although the suggestion of such mysterious apparitions of personal history seems at odds with a data-based framework that is timed like clockwork. The app formulates memories as though they could be isolated as precise points, like beads strung in linear formation, each one holding its fixed place in a progressive line. Each "memory" is recorded as a distinct entity that is recalled only on its recurring calendar date. The time-keeping structure suggests the artificial decomposition of duration.

Such a segmented version of memory becomes particularly clear when, unprompted by any notification messages, I open "On This Day" to see what is waiting for me in its display of the past. The screen is almost blank. There are no photographs, only a few brief words: "No stories today. We'll let you know when you have memories to look back on." No memories. I await the server's next instruction. This application is not designed to render the dull ache of photographic encounters that implicate me in duration. "On This Day" is here to give a quick dose of something much lighter, far-removed from the sense of being in a strange weave of space and time: a brand of crude nostalgia

Make the Good Old Times New

In Facebook's ad campaign of 2015, one self-promotional image speaks directly to this nostalgic structuring of the past. Teenagers splash playfully in a pond, hair dripping, laughter displaying their neat white teeth, and the caption reads: "Old times' sake can be new times' sake." Nostalgia of this kind is reassuring because it is beautifully static. The good old times are new because they have been restored in some glowing form, isolated from the continuity of endless change. This brand of sentimentality is a way of keeping an idealised past suspended and fixed in the now. Old is new again. In this mode, photographs become little dream moments which are acknowledged as belonging to the past, but are revisited in a pristine state touched with the warm hue of the ideal. At the perfect moment of vitality, these images are cut

out of the becoming that endures, like some version of Sleeping Beauty's castle where dreaming bodies never age. Everything remains immune to the volatility of change.

How easy it is to slip into such a comforting form of reminiscence with photographs when it takes much less effort than the search for Bergsonian intuition. Nostalgia lets me look at Nora's image as though it has suspended some part of her youth, free from death. She could stay that age forever in the stillness of a photograph. Nostalgia could also keep me as a child in the arms of a photographed myrtle. But the beautiful stillness of nostalgia is not the same as the stillness of the photographic image, it is simply one way of approaching the frozen shot. In another light, the more difficult choice of intuiting duration presents itself and the medium's halted trace opens the way to a sense of pure change. David Sutton comments on the photograph's stillness as an unexpected entry into pure duration. He writes:

> With a photograph we are presented with an image that is static but that nonetheless can give a powerful sensation of time passing. We are suddenly internal to the change of the world and can glimpse the enormity of past and future that the photograph suspends (Sutton 2009, p. 38).

Nora is smiling in the blink of the shutter and she is long gone. It has been years since I climbed the weeping myrtle and now a large crack runs down its spine. These photographs cannot grant me the stasis of golden age retrospection, free from change.

And still the impossible desire stirs to return to these depicted seconds as though they were untouched by mortal time. Nostalgia comes from the Greek *"nοstοs - algia,"* or the longing for the return. Its meaning and usage in the context of smartphone photography is radically different to its original interpretation. In 1688, a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer initiates the term for the first time, as a medicinal diagnosis. Voyagers on global colonial ventures develop strange symptoms at sea. The lungs of nostalgia victims tightly adhere to the pleura of the thorax, "the tissue of the lob [becomes] thickened and purulent" *(Dictionnaire de medicine et de chirurgie pratique*, 1834, cited in Starobinski 1966, p. 98). Sufferers struggle to breathe and develop an "abnormal brain disorder" as the spatial expanse between themselves and their homelands increases. The first officially diagnosed subjects are Swiss soldiers who long to return home to the Alps of their youth. Separation from the familiar



Image 97: Facebook's self promotional ads: "Old times' sake can be new times' sake"

Image 98: "Next stop, memory lane."



landscape of childhood brings patients close to death. As writer Elspeth Probyn suggests, it is not only the loss of a home environment that damages their health, it is also the wish to return to some idealised past which is affixed to those mountains via memory (Probyn 1996, p. 114). This early form of nostalgia as illness has some correspondence with the Proustian notion of *memoire involuntaire* because it is tinged with the same pain of loved things lost. Distance from memories and spaces instills a sore longing to experience the idealised past anew. "Yes," writes Proust…

> if the remembered image has remained in its place, in its time, if it has kept its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or at the summit of a mountain, it suddenly makes us breathe a fresh air, precisely because it is an air which we have breathed before – that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to establish in Paradise, and which could not convey that profound sensation of renewal if it had not already been breathed, for the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost (Proust cited in Cadava, 1998, p. 153).

Nostalgia sufferers are deprived of that lost and perfect oxygen and so they wither and fade. Medical practitioners who diagnose patients with this ailment are unaware that the symptoms they treat are in fact the signs of tuberculosis, meningitis and gastroenteritis (Lowenthal 1985, p. 10). In these doctors' professional opinions, these travellers are dying because they cannot breathe the fresh air of paradisiacal childhood.

Nostalgia as Inoculation

Despite origins in the language of sickness the word nostalgia doesn't make my stomach churn, not in the way that it would upon hearing the names of other illnesses. Words that describe sickness tend to produce a disquieting, embodied shudder at the recognition of physical frailty in myself. But nostalgia has strayed far from ideas of mortal decay. A degree of idealism slips into the term with the arrival of the Romantics in the 1800s. In 1821, one of the movement's key thinkers, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, describes nostalgia as "reviv[ing] an innocent past with sweet melancholy" (cited in Santesso 2006, p. 13). Today, the word nostalgia is sugary. It is not a sickness, but it is sickeningly sweet. Reminiscence as fairy floss, a quick-melting fancy. It has become a commercial strategy for inducing a relaxing feeling of affection for products and advertising, particularly photography. I do not look back at images

of the past and find that my lungs seize up, or my breath is constricted. It is a state of mind that numbs the pain of loss and I inhale it like happy gas. Nostalgia today is that fond and innocent look back which anesthetises pain.

A Look Back

On November 30th, 2013, the homepage is littered with video feeds titled "A Look Back." Friends have created slideshow albums through the social media platform's new application. "Press Play" is stamped on small collages of people's photos, which are displayed around the central blue icon for Facebook. "Take a look back on some of Michelle's most celebrated moments over the years. Click here to make your own." I watch one or two out of curiosity and discover they are based on a set of data algorithms and generic templates. The interface slots photographs into programmed frameworks. It pulls images from the timeline of each user in a way that suggests chronology and categorisation: "Your first moments", "Your most liked posts". The musical montage is identical for each profiler, with light-hearted and uplifting piano notes timed perfectly with the appearance of each shot. The soundtrack, has the generic quality of elevator music. A string orchestra begins to surge with optimism and grandiosity as more and more images slide in and out of view. For the finale, the slide-show app zooms out from a patchwork of images and keeps its central focus on the user's profile portrait. It has followed a growing emotive pace in order to come to this conclusive survey of images laid out like an aerial map. One or two more piano notes play as the final shot springs into view: an enlarged version of the Facebook 'like' symbol giving the thumbs up.

It has the dramatised sentimentality of *This is Your Life*. And yet the sweetness of the slideshow's tone is destabilised by the strange, inhuman calculations of computerized narrative. Some automated images propelled into users' feeds range from the bizarre to the distressing. Without the human logic of emotionally driven narrative the server can't determine which photographs fit the nostalgic tone, and which do not. According to the algorithm, all images are equivalent



Image 99: Facebook promotes its slideshow video "A Look Back"

I click on the link to create my own slideshow and the album pans over shots from get-togethers with friends; pictures of my cat rolling ecstatically on sheepskin; a tea pot filled with flowers; a party snap where my mouth twists awkwardly in mid speech and yet more cat pictures. And amongst these sentimental familiarities, appears a steaming wok, full of blue-shell crabs. It is jarring because I don't expect the sentimental display to pull out a dead thing so completely forgotten. I am not the only networker to be presented with such a non-sequitur. Online bloggers document the appearance of other odd images in their nostalgic slideshows, such as an inexplicable rock (Kumparak 2014, para. 3), a slimy unidentified fish (Gayomali 2014, para. 4), and close-ups of food (TMNsam [pseud.] in Hamburger 2014). Such sudden emergence of anything-whatever is a comical revelation of the computer's deathly and non-human stare at personal records. The things in these shots clash with the sweetness promised by the applications music and captions. Trivial objects that have been completely forgotten by the networker are displayed as though illuminated with idealised beauty, and they do not fit the nostalgic style of "A Look Back."

On another affective scale, these Facebook algorithms can spontaneously produce disturbing reminders of grief. In 2015, the company transforms "A Look Back" into their now popular "Year in Review," a slide show that appears every November. The same principle of automated photo displays applies, where a random sequence of data churns out stored images, and sometimes moments of mourning and shock arise.

> One user is delivered a photo of their apartment ablaze in flames. The destruction of their home is framed by a cheery confetti style design: "James, here's what your year looked like!" (Dzieza, 2015)
>
> Another profiler receives a photograph of the urn carrying his father's ashes. (Hern, 2014) This ceremony of grief is bordered by colourful dancing stick-figures. "See your year."

Grief curdles with the taste of sickly-sweet nostalgia because memories that are mourned are so heavily weighted with the reality of becoming. Bereavement images speak to the past which is enfolded in ceaseless change, wherein things are lost.

"A Look Back" may have sought a light-hearted sequence of photographs, but in the interaction between computer data and human memory something else has been

unlocked. This slippage of algorithmic display has rendered the boundaries around instants porous. This is a data-based interpretation of a strange weave of space and time, where mourning and the material stuff of the world are co-existent in the unfolding of change. The concept of nostalgia has been interrupted with either the spike or grief, or the numbness of non-sequitur tedium. Duration endures through images of both great forceful intensity, and those of quiet, easily dismissed moments. Each photo is one second entangled in hours, years, and centuries that are all born of seconds. Crab, slimy fish, and close-ups of sausage rolls are all forms touched by the light of photography, all changing through time at different rates. Some deteriorate quickly, others degrade over years. Some strike with reverberating potency in the beholder's personal recollection. The server draws everything and anything into a chaotic melange of mistakes, which inadvertently expose me to my own co-existence with other changing forms. I am present with the slow, steady deterioration of a solid rock, or the quick consumption of a meal. Many of these things are usually hidden in my blind-spot and I am indifferent to their presence in my photographed life. But then, amongst the random slides are the grievous memories of a father, or a house, which are here in data form, become memories of ashes and urns.

Subject as Thing

In those fleeting moments when I partake in the presence of other forms, I get some taste of my own transience as a body in time, as a thing among things. I recognise my mortality. In aura, "not only is the inanimate endowed with a kind of life in the fleeting moment of its disappearance, [but] that very movement raises the spectre of the subject's own disappearance, the prospect of the subject as a thing" (Balfour 1991, p. 645). When I look at Nora's portrait, I know that like my grandmother, I am a photograph to come. One day I will only exist in the trace of light, in the eyes of some future onlooker. I become both strange and familiar to myself. Like the paper of her image, I am subject to material dissipation. A form in passing, a being of cells and bones, of blood pulsing through veins with each inhale of air. And through this image I intuit the blood I share with this woman amongst petals turned into pixels. The fabric of her dress seeps into the computer's blurred impression of the bush. Body, flowers and cotton are only vaguely distinguishable.

In *Camera Lucid*a, Barthes stumbles across a photograph of his mother as a young woman, where the image of her dress becomes integrated with the lingering sensation of her embrace, and the knowledge of her death. He writes, "I could read my non-existence in the clothes my mother had worn before I can remember her"(Barthes, 1981, p. 64). A weave of cotton leads to the weave of time that far outreaches his own life, both before his birth, and after his death.

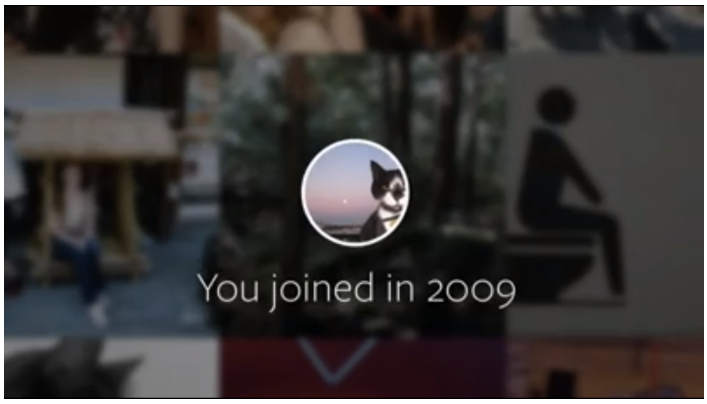


Image 100: Screenshot from my slideshow on "A Look Back"

A Returned Look

In these elusive auratic encounters the photographic medium becomes an intermediary space, where different entities enter a form of imaginative exchange. I feel myself involved in some two-way connection with photographs where these non-living objects that speak to me of my own existence as someone living through time. Benjamin writes that "to experience the aura of a phenomenon, we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us" (Benjamin 1982a, p. 190). Aura is reciprocal. In certain moments, a photograph can appear to have some agency. This happens when I relinquish my control as the person who looks, and the things in the frame start to return my gaze.

Kathrin Yacavone articulates this immersive exchange with aura by reframing Benjamin's relationship to the mountain landscape. She moves away from the language of vision to express the relational movement which transpires between his presence and the matter surrounding him. Benjamin's choice of the verb "to breathe" (atmen) rather than "to see"…

> suggests that, unlike a look, or an arrow whose movement stops when it reaches its target, aura is not a one-way experience but rather a circular or reciprocal movement in which closeness and distance are dialectically interrelated, as is characteristic of those life experiences marked by a pronounced imaginative immersion (Yacavone 2012, p. 57).

Air penetrates the body, enters the lungs, changes the pulsing of the blood. Particles of other things from the living and non-living enter the body through breath. Benjamin inhales the presence of mountains, and I breathe in the feeling of a weeping myrtle, or a dress in a breeze. This auratic exchange transpires only when I'm open to its subtle force and the mortal knowledge it brings. It is a kind of surrender in which my body is implicated in the passing of time, which has left its imprint through light. The feeling is unsettling. I would rather turn to the sweetness of nostalgia.

A nostalgic look back is unidirectional: I see the pastness of the image, but do not feel my gaze returned by the things I see. I have not relinquished control. In nostalgic form, the objects caught in photography don't look back at me and there is no exchange of mind and matter in which I can read my non-existence. There is only a bittersweet story of the past, a light form of engagement with time's relentless changes. On a late Wednesday afternoon, I share a Facebook memory with a group of networked university friends. The platform summons a photograph of New Year's Eve from eight years ago: a bunch of undergraduates, slightly cross-eyed with mixed drinks. My pair of fairy-wings are caught off-kilter in our embrace. "Look how little we were!" I write in my post. Not so little really, all of us are around twenty-one years old. But nostalgia is so well suited to connotations of childhood.

From time to time, friends' Facebook profiles are updated to display scanned Kodak shots of childhood, many from toddler age. Their round-faced expressions are textured with analogue grain. Comments and likes go up.

> "What a cutie!"
>
> "You were a superstar!"
>
> "Is that your original thinking face?"
>
> "Haha, can see you already needed glasses."

Emoticons of hearts and the round yellow smiley face appear. These posted photos offer a point of return to childhood as a sweet reunion with a younger self who carried less knowledge of change. The intuition of being a living, dying body is muted beneath some sugary coating.

The risk and pleasure of such sentimentalised relationships with photography is expressed in John Elkin's work *What Photography Is*, where he writes that such golden-hued reminiscences…

> remind us, just a little, of something else. They are like amusement park rides that scare us a bit and then console us… they put us in mind, just a little, of the fact that people we love will die - but then they make it seem that if we are clever enough, those deaths can somehow be solved (Elkins 2011, p. 40).

He calls these remembrances "toy-journeys," a term that has a wonderful association with childhood. Through a child's eyes, age and death can be appropriated through play. Like the game of hide-and-seek, peekaboo, or playing dead, nostalgic photographs speak to the fact that bodies and experiences are always disappearing, but there is some magical way of suspending their departure, or restoring them as the perfect image. "Childhood and toys… provide a means of staying on the surface," writes Nancy Martha West. "So do photographs, and so does nostalgia, which is always caught up in erotics – in the desire for a surface appreciation of the 'beauty" of the past'" (West 2000, p. 7). Make the good old times new, and the passing of time will hurt beautifully, gently, without brutality.



Image 101: Instagram's first logo

Toy Journeys with the Camera

The makers of Instagram pluck the sentimental chord of childhood in their marketing: "When we were kids we loved playing around with cameras. We loved how different types of old cameras marketed themselves as "instant" - something we take for granted today" (Instagram n.d., para. 4) The camera becomes a plaything through a brand of nostalgia which draws on objects and matter as fetishised things from a golden time. In this mode, nostalgia's perfect past is often situated outside of the personal experiences of the beholder. The remote past is attributed to things that are not anchored to the autobiographical, but to a state of mind that connotes the pathos of the past. As Aaron Santesso notes, "We can be 'nostalgic' for hula hoops and ancient Greece; we can be 'nostalgic' for homes we never had and states we never experienced (Santesso 2006, p. 14). Nostalgia then becomes what he calls a "trope machine," using objects, symbols and things to generate sentimental response. The matter used in these tropes is not intuited as part

of duration, where it would be bound to become other through decay or age. The nostalgia machine uses eternalised icons, dislocated from a fixed position in time, and touched with some sense of "oldness" as beauty.

The analogue camera is sentimentalised through its re-appropriations in the digital age, where social media platforms hark back to the good old days of photography. Elena Caoduro writes that the popularity of Instagram should "be understood [as part of] the widespread hype for all things vintage or retro" (Caoduro 2014, p. 71). The platform's fist iconic logo is symbolic of this hype for a fetishised medium. The image is a small 2D square that depicts the Polaroid 1000, or Rainbow-One-Step. It's 1977 when this cheap plastic model with its rainbow decal emerges on the market as a way of making immediate shots. From 2009 through to 2015, Instagram keeps its logo as a nostalgic throw-back to photography of yore. Then they update the aesthetic, replacing the familiar colours and shapes with an abstract outline of a camera's shape. White lines have merged with sleek curves reminiscent of the smartphone. This is a simplified image, emblazoned on a backdrop of melting electric pinks and yellows. The saturated hues of the polaroid's original rainbow decal have been replaced with fluro sunset colours. The public reaction is mixed with many loyal Instagrammers posting their dislike for the new image. Comments appear on Twitter, blogs, and on Instagram itself, lamenting the change as the destruction of something more authentic. Tim Nudd, a commentator on Adweek online writes: "Much of the backlash against the new logo can be chalked up to the simple fact that it isn't the old logo" (Nudd 2016, para. 1). This new icon doesn't draw directly from Kodak cameras. It is a step away from Instagram's association with polaroids and the fetishisation of these 1970s cameras as the symbol of idealised childhood.



Image 102: Instagram's second logo, 2016

Kodak is the first company to conflate photography with childhood and nostalgia. As Carol Mavor notes, this conflation is achieved through a series of successful marketing strategies and advertising images in the late 1800s, wherein which the child and the photograph are "commodified, fetishised, developed alongside each other… [they are] laminated and framed as one" (Mavor 1996, p. 3). The first instant

cameras are marketed as the accessible and democratic medium wielded by people of different classes and younger ages. Children are positioned as not only the subjects but as the photographers of the everyday. The memento mori implications of the daguerreotype era are beginning to fade in a commercial industry that advertises through lively, youthful images: rosy-cheeked babes and tots in lace tunics. Kodak's campaigns produce photography as a plaything, frequently incorporating images of infants with toys. "Let the children Kodak" becomes the slogan. The company's noun-turned-verb has subsumed "play" itself. The technologically sophisticated Brownie camera allows kids to play grown-up, much as they would with toy cars or wooden miniature kitchen utensils.

It's 1901, and the winter issue of *Youth's Companion* magazine includes an ad for the box brownie: a young girl dressed up as a pirate takes a portrait of her kitsch wind-up duck. He stands on humanized tin legs, and she's placed him close to the lens so that he will loom larger than life. "The New No. 2 Brownie camera is much more than a toy - it is a practical and efficient instrument." In 1906, a colourfully illustrated advertisement appears in America's *Country Life* magazine. The tableau presents a snowy day, when a little toddler and his older sister are confined indoors. She focuses acutely on photographing her brother as he wheels a miniature toy sheep across the floor. The 'little folk', as Kodak often calls them, are endearingly in charge of the family's photographic equipment. It's 1945, and an edition of *National Geographic* includes a technicolour shot of four young children playing in a sunlit garden. A small blonde boy in overalls sits astride a wooden horse. His steed is attached to a decorated cart, which bears two little sisters, both with oversized bows in their hair. The eldest of the four, a smiling girl in pink, pushes the cart from behind. The small print of the ad reads: "Film is still very scarce - the war takes so much - but there's a little to be had now and then… at your Kodak dealer's." The sunny return of childhood keeps the deathliness of wartime at bay. Kodak promises that photography can keep its beholders basking in the glow of infancy. The main slogan is "Life is Colour." Photography does not evidence erosion, destruction or disintegration. Kodak's bright tones keep the good old times new.



Image 103: Elizabeth Green's tableau for Kodak. "Turn the lens onto the home"



Image 104: Kodak's advert, to "help make Christmas merry"



Image 105:

"Life is Color,"

Kodak's advertisement for the end of WWII

Make the New Times Old

Instagram inverts this nostalgic equation through a different form of artificial colouring. Instead of seeking the blooming palette of youth, the platform creates easily applicable filters that colour a snapshot with artificial signs of time's passing. Instagram is adding decay to vernacular shots. Age is applied to the surface of the image like make-up on an actor's face. This application is not about making the good old times new, but about making the new times old. Known as "retro" or "vintage" filters, these editing tools transform a clean digital shot into an image with signifiers of out-dated camera technologies, particularly those of Polaroid days. The technical glitches that came with this device are replicated through digitised dust specks and halation effects, light-leaks and the qualities of overdeveloped film. Photos are reformed to have round paper edges, film perforations and burnt edge effects. Rust coloured stains are applied to echo the traces of developing chemicals. Some filters give a washed-out hue, referencing a 70's photographic trend for deliberately developing film in solutions designed for other film types.

A friend photographs our bare feet in the thick grass of Rushcutters Bay Park and applies a retro filter with a deep warm tone. She enjoys trying out different lenses before she settles on one. She taps playfully on the options at the bottom of the screen. There are different palettes to choose from: "Lord Kelvin" is heavily saturated and framed with scratch marks; "Nashville" frames the image in film strips; "Walden" bleaches the shot as though the image had been sitting unprotected in sunlight; and "1977" has washed out tones of autumnal yellow and brown, and is commonly known as "in-your-face nostalgia" (Chandler & Livingston 2012, p. 11). She fiddles with the presentation of a moment, making her mark upon the image with pleasurable control. In a child-like form of aesthetic play, process has been eradicated. There is no duration, no becoming. There is only instant result masquerading as the effects of change. Theses filters "[give] something just a few seconds old the texture of time" (Chandler & Livingston 2012, p. 11). Like the workings of hide-and-seek or peekaboo, smartphone snaps can pretend to be subject to gradual disappearance, and instantly fake the secretion of time which eats slowly at matter. A photo is given rust and degradation that will never physically eventuate.

Material signs of duration are impossible in data-based pictures, which are forever identical to themselves, always reiterating the same coded display. The things that will one day date my smartphone pictures could be their content and aesthetics, but they will never reflect the chemical and physical marks of time. They could simply stop working with changes to technology, when computers will no longer be able to read their information. They could instantaneously vanish because of digital 'decay': a misleading term, when information turns to nothing because it no longer computes. This has happened to some of my earliest digital shots, which belong to an outdated form of iPhoto. These images have now been replaced by dull grey squares stamped with large question marks. There was no transition between their existence as photos, and their now emptied content. They didn't age, they simply switched from image to emptiness.

Instagram filters may be a frustrated wish to return to photos that deteriorate; to encounter them as objects caught in duration. The touch of age is applied as though desired, yet it is also simultaneously repelled through a gesture of immediacy. These filters are one-click toys for playing with the mortality in duration. This visual strategy both dissociates from the currents of change, and replicates the very thing it denies. Stains and fades point towards the deathly connotations of analogue photographs, which as Barthes reminds me, have the fate of perishable paper. A material photograph has a form of mortality:

> like a living organism… born on the level of sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages. Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes; there is nothing left to do but throw it away (Barthes 1981, p. 94).

Instagram shots replicate such symptoms, but painlessly. These photographs don't mirror the ageing of my own body. Oxygen doesn't penetrate these images; the air can't slowly fade their colours. The digital pretence that such processes have come to pass is a clever way of solving the deathly side of photographs. The presence of mortality is visible, but through a toy journey. Instafilters allow me to float on the surface of a strange weave of space and time, transcending it, while reminding me it is there. There is no pain or dull ache. This is a ride that scares me a little, but mostly consoles me. I skim across the different filters for the picture of my two cats curled into a yin-yang formation: "Normal," "Clarendon," "Gingham," "Moon." As I watch the picture change hue and tone, I play with that word aura, or air.

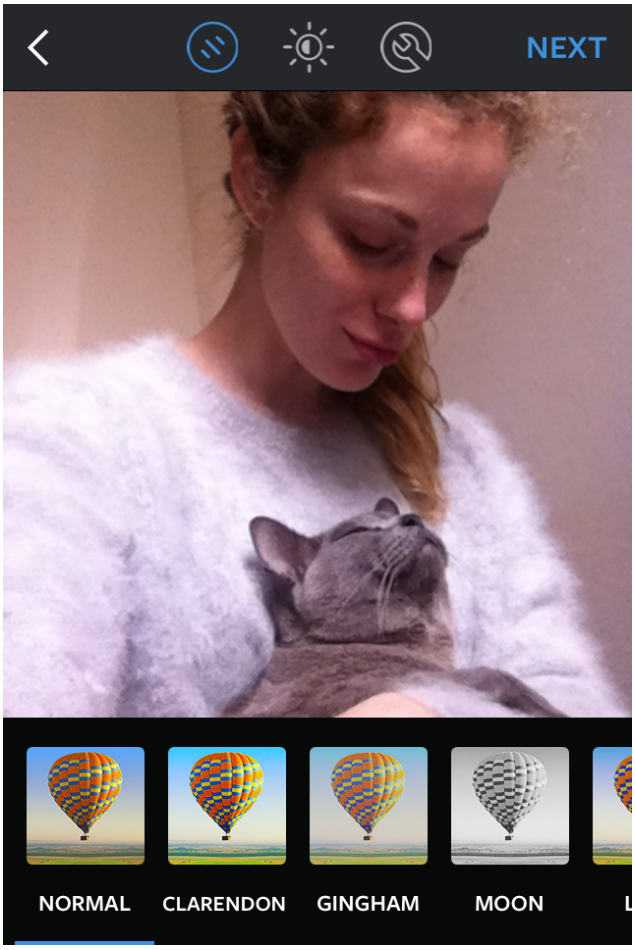


Image 105 & 106: Instagram's filters are trialled on hot air balloons images (2015)



It can be something to inhale and take into the body. Or could it be something to rise above? I turn over the phrase "lighter-than-air" and its connotations of taking flight. My word-play has been provoked by the photograph which comes hand in hand with the retro application. Each filter laid out on the bottom of the smartphone screen is trialled on the stock image of a hot-air balloon. The full-bellied parachute of red, white and blue is serenely suspended above a remote horizon. Its peaceful figure in the sky calls to mind a very particular history between photography and escapism.

Transcending Matter

The hot air balloon has a relationship with photography that begins with the earliest forms of aerial imaging. Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, famously known as Nadar, is the first photographic practitioner to take pictures while in flight. In 1858, he takes the first successful photograph of the Parisian cityscape from a bird's eye view. The image takes trial and error to create successfully, with the camera strapped to the bottom of the balloon's basket, and the controlled light of the dark room simulated to the best of his abilities. Conditions are trying, awkward and risky, but all pursued in the name of science. This is not a romantic quest. "We are not about to amuse ourselves ... in making portraits in the air," he proclaims. Instead, the balloon "will be employed in various works of aerostatic photography… the results of which will be so valuable for all planispheric, cadastral, strategical, and other surveys" (cited in Barber & Wickstead 2010, p. 250). In other words, this exercise is intended to create a controlled map that charters space from a great height.

His cool statement about detached scientific analyses leaves out the perilous details of his experiments. In journeys above the city rooftops, Nadar struggles with the elements. He faces the nauseous drop that looms between himself and earth. A black-and-white cartoon sketch from the time depicts him as a small figure perilously suspended in a balloon's claustrophobic basket. Top hat flying in the air, coattails rippling in blusterous skies. He is desperately trying to take a photograph from a dangerous altitude above the industrial landscape. The cartoon, drawn by Honoré Daumier, first appears in *Le Boulevard* magazine, on May 25th, 1863. It is the image of wild abandonment. The air has taken hold of him. It lifts him up and threatens to send him plummeting.

He makes notes of the danger he experienced in his private journals, where he describes the vertiginous sensation of rising into the sky. It is a sensation of fear that gradually passes and melts into something deliciously transcendent. He writes that the hot air balloonist experiences something like the lapse of times past, where the

> the altitude that takes him away reduces all things to their relative proportions… In this superhuman serenity, the spasm of ineffable transport *liberates the soul from matter, which forgets itself,* as if it no longer existed, vaporises itself into the purest essence. Everything is far away: cares, remorse… Another ecstasy, however, calls us back to the admirable spectacle afforded to our charmed gazes. …*It seems that an inexhaustible box of toys has been abundantly spread on this earth*…toys these little houses with red and slate-grey roofs, toys this church, this prison, this citadel…Even more of a toy this hint of a train which sends to us from down below its shrill little shrieking whistle, as if to draw our attention, and which so cute, moves slowly along… Nothing but distance to escape all the ugliness (Nadar 2015, p. 58 [my italics}).

This passage has all the ingredients for transforming the ache of mortal knowledge into child-like pleasure. His upwards journey lifts him away from the sense that he is part of duration. He sees the world of objects and humans laid out before him, but escapes the pain of coinciding with this matter because he is in command from above, separate from what he sees. This is superhuman serenity. But he is also just a boy, blunting the mortality of his existence by turning his dangerous trip into a game. These far-away things are only toys. In this giddy experience he is the icon of nostalgia. He is outside of time, lighter than air, and for a moment, nothing will change. This journey is his soul liberated from matter. There could be no better image than the hot-air-balloon for Instagram's vintage filters, which reduce duration into a toy-like mechanism.



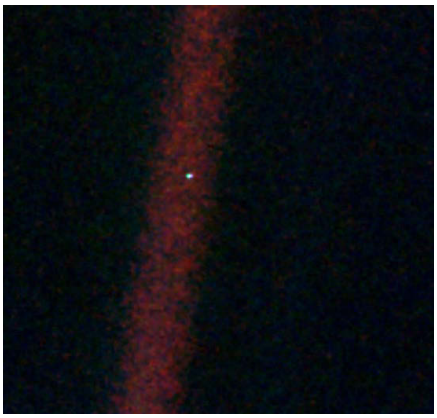
Image 107: Honoré Daumier's cartoon of Nadar and his hot air balloon experiments

(Brooklyn Museum, 2004)



Image 108: Nadar and his wife pose in a faux balloon for a carte de visite

(National Gallery of Art, 2000)



Fragment of an image to come

A Pale Blue Dot

The data of smartphone photography doesn't liberate from the durational matter caught by the medium. Sometimes the workings of computer information destabilise the sense that I am playing with my images. The server starts to toy with me. On the 13th of February 2016, a strange appearance on Facebook reveals how prescriptive codes can accidentally puncture nostalgic engagement with the medium. The platform's app "On This Day" sends me a notification and my phone lights up: "You have a memory." The social media site gives the usual blurb: "Tara, we care about you and the memories you share here. We thought you'd like to look back on this post from one year ago." This time, the photo that appears isn't of a friend, a meal, a pet, a plant, or any other small-scale matter. This look back inadvertently transports me further than Nadar's balloon could take him, beyond the stratosphere. The "memory" is a well-known photograph taken in 1990, from a NASA satellite floating through deep space. Known as 'The Pale Blue Dot," the photo shows earth as a speck of dust, suspended in a celestial swarm of deep purple and sea green. This is our planet seen from the distant reaches of the galaxy. I am caught off guard by this planetary interruption to my personal timeline. It is an oddity in this nostalgic form. It doesn't belong in the flashback of a Facebook memory. The Earth is wonderfully out of place.

I remember when I uploaded the image two years ago, one afternoon when trivial anxieties were invading my thoughts. Stresses about deadlines and a messy apartment. It is a photograph I turn to when I feel the need for renewed perspective. I look at the colours and grains of deep space to remember that a human lifespan is less than a nana-fraction of appearances and disappearances. Yet the emergence of this photograph in the prescriptive category of 'my memory' is jarring. The sentimentality of "On This Day" malfunctions because the server sees no distinction between a little speck called Earth, and the trivial snaps of my daily life. This is not my memory. Or is it? I stop laughing.

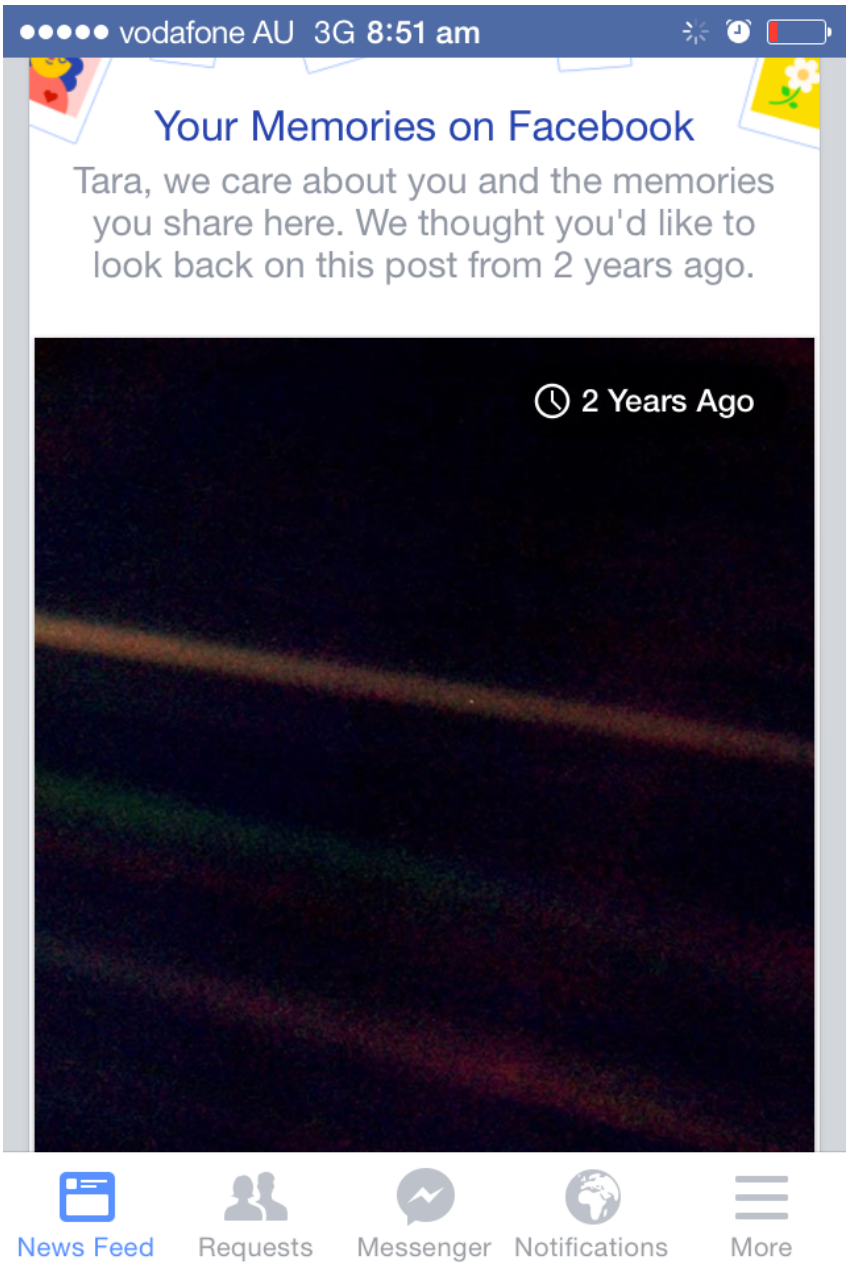


Image 109:

My Facebook memory of planet Earth

The photograph suddenly enters my awareness anew. I realise its comedy might stem from some bizarre truth. In this unexpected shot, I gaze at the site of all photographs ever taken: the Earth encapsulated in one pixelated cell. I see the place where four-hundred million photographs are shot every day. I see the Earth from which I photograph things. This is the image of a planet on which life and death have been dancing for eons before my birth. The mechanics of date-based algorithms begin to correlate with my own imaginative exchange with the image. In some unconventional sense, the computer's logic is not entirely wrong; this is my memory. Within that speck in space lies the life I am living now, the presence of all life on this planet, and the lost lives of all those who came before. The little white dot becomes a form of mirror in which I recognise myself for what I am: a passing life. To look at this photograph is to become an earthy body. There are no outlines to dissect me from its ancient form. I imagine my own image through the photograph's perspective, as part of a cluster of images; as immersed in the "vibrations through an immense connected body" of times and spaces (Bergson 1991, p.208). This is not transcendence from the intuition of duration. That little dot is no toy-like thing, it is much more real. I'm caught in a strange weave of space and time and my stomach turns. Mind partakes of matter (Grosz 2005). I co-exist with this speck in time and space, even if only for the short blip of my duration.

I am not just looking at this photograph.
It is looking at me.



Fragment of an image to come

Returning to Earth

From these far away reaches of space my writing starts to descend. I am going back down now, back to where this chapter began, with Nora's photograph, where her dress becomes earth. This chapter has been a search for other durations, beginning with my grandmother's figure, broadening out to a weeping myrtle, then rising with a hot air balloon, and breaking free of Earth with a picture of the planet. Photography has helped me "recognise the existence of other durations above and below" (Deleuze 1991, p. 33).

The interweave of human memory with data and digital display has accidentally provoked the imaginative exchange of aura, where objects and forms converge in the endurance of becoming, and the past co-exists with the present.

Nora's death still quivers in the air of the present. My father flinches at the TV news reports of car accidents on the road. The flowers left on city traffic lights make him go still. One night we watch a film in which a young man's mother is run down by a speeding car. He makes a strange little sound that chokes on itself. He gets glue on his fingers when he sticks her portrait amongst the other images of his album. I open his book to see if that strand of hair picked up by my scanner is still there. There is no sign of it, I only have the digital trace of its existence onscreen. Is it from my body? Does it carry Nora's DNA? It forms a long, sharp line at her feet where it looks like just another blade of grass. It echoes the way the bush and Nora's form succumb to one another, and is a reminder of the atoms and particles she returned to, that I will return to. She was scattered at Dobroyd Head, Balgowlah, in 1968.

Dad shows me another photograph of her, taken only a few years before her death. Her hair is silver in this coloured Kodak. Soft lines crinkle her mouth and eyes. She sits in a field of white daisies and clasps a bunch of plucked wildflowers. Her paisley pink dress infuses with the plants. Grass moves against her like brushstrokes trying to sweep her into the landscape. These are not the sandy ochre colours of Australia. This place is ice blues and deep greens. Behind her loom distant mountains against a crisp cool sky. Her eyes are closed and she is smiling. She's not looking into the camera. I can't help but think she is partaking in the presence of those mountains, of that grass. "That's Switzerland," dad tells me. "She loved it there." A holiday in the country which first induced the sickness of nostalgia. He tells me there was another photo of her taken in this spot. "An even better one. I've looked for it everywhere, but can't find it." He says it was an accidentally superimposed image, where petals and grass overlapped her form in a double-take. Where she became an earthy body. "I'm sure it will turn up somewhere strange," I say. Dad doesn't think so. "It's sad because…I think that's what she would have wanted." Ashes to ashes. To be part of the matter that wove through her existence.

Perhaps I can practice something with her image in the networked scene that will somehow return her to earthy things. In the small space of my smartphone screen an

array of captured forms arises in a digital patchwork quilt. Flickers of exposed experience from spaces around the planet appear and disappear:

> an electric orange gecko clambers over dried leaves;
>
> a teenage girl takes a selfie in front of a molten blur of city lights;
>
> there's a close-up of a Starbucks cup of iced coffee against verdant green grass;
>
> two horse riders in cowboy hats are riding through the streets of Aspen on Independence Day,
>
> and there are shots of people standing at great heights and looking down at the exhilarating drop beneath.

Everything is seamlessly stitched together, a strange weave of time and space and bodies. Blinks of light flare up and go out in the live stream. It could appear like a chaotic playground on some days. Or it could be a place where duration can look at me through the gaze of objects caught in light.

I decide to scatter Nora's image here, in the site where pictures will continually come and go like dust floating in the air. I don't include her name or any written information about the shot. By tomorrow, her picture won't show up on the live feed anymore, but it will still be stored in the database, ready to float to the surface of this endless expanse of images. One day a stranger might feel some unidentifiable ache that comes from breathing in the presence of her photograph. Then again, they will probably move right past it in the way so many people walk through Dobroyd Head, treading across soil and rocky outcrops, through eucalyptus scent and salty sea breeze, not knowing or thinking about what minute matter is adrift in the air they breathe.

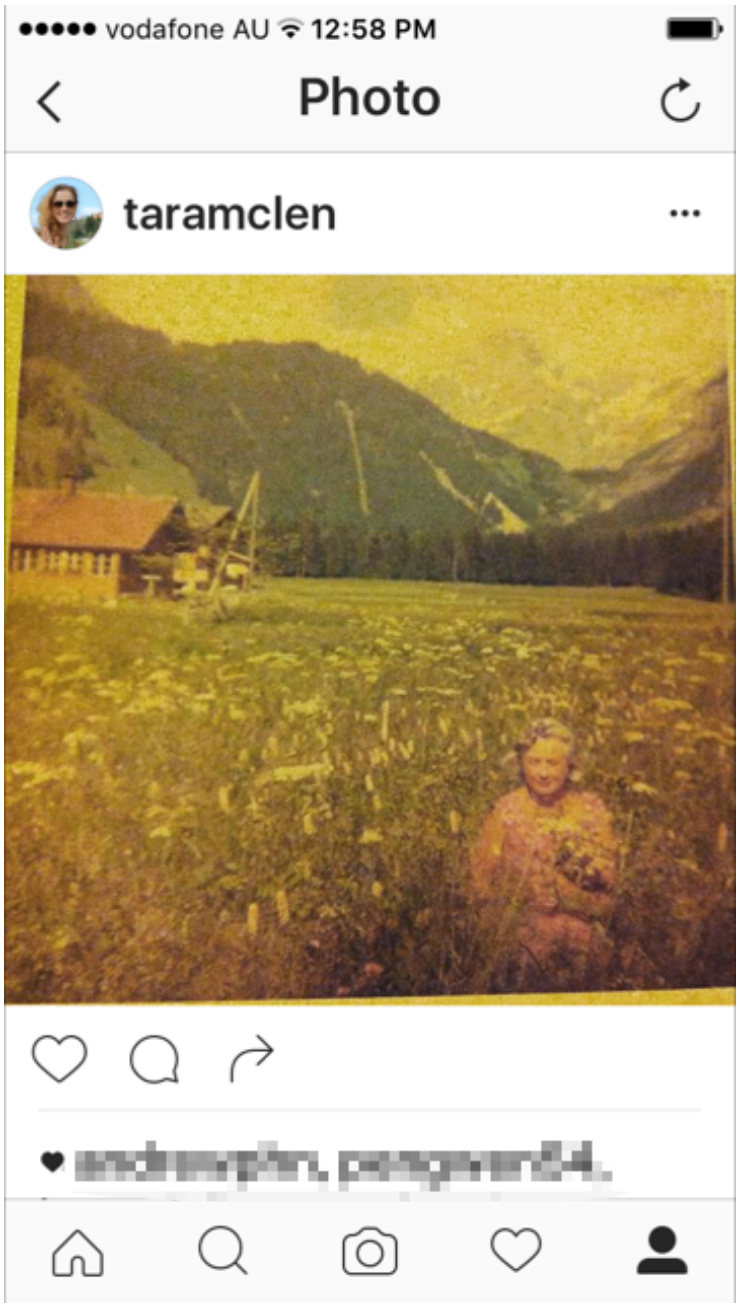


Image 110:

I scatter my grandmother's portrait on Instagram

Light



The Sun is Covered

Image 110: Fragment from a hashtag "sunset" post on Instagram

On a recent Friday evening in Sydney, when the dying embers of the day tinted George Street mauve and amber, passers-by stepped out of the slipstream of the crowd to shoot the colours of the sky. I wasn't looking at the sunset, I was looking at the photographers, thinking of the billions of flashes that wink from phones in the evening. A multitude of uploaded suns appear from one side of the globe, then the other. One hot star becomes millions of points of light which circulate the web in a tagged and liked kaleidoscope.

Later that evening, I logged onto Facebook and took screenshots of that same sky reproduced from many fragmented city viewpoints. I scrolled through shots of skyscrapers against violet, red and orange, mindful of my casual viewing pace. As an online wanderer, I killed time and basked in this series of images. One particular Facebook post from that evening did catch my attention. The comment was one of the very few that didn't contain an image. It read: "Was annoyed that my phone didn't work when I wanted to take a picture of the sunset. I'm comforted to know that y'all had it covered anyway." Beneath this acknowledgement of the multitude of suns appeared yet more sunset snaps from others online, each one giving visual testimony to the visual splendour from a few hours earlier.

The comfort this networker speaks of is familiar, there is certainty in the many lenses out there ready to shoot. With so many recording bodies sending photographic data into cyberspace, the fleeting and ephemeral is less likely to be missed. A transient instant such as the sun's disappearance over the horizon, cannot escape capture. Networked photographers "have it covered," reflected and immortalised in billions of glass screens, all pointing to the source of light which first made photography possible. In this chapter I will be using hashtag sunset as a metaphor through which to understand the relationship between serially reproduced images, and those images which form singular wounding shots. Hashtag sunset has featured in 126,823,382

N.B. This chapter extends upon the author's previous work, published in an article for *The International Journal of the Image* (see 'Hashtag "Sunset": Smartphone Photography and the Punctum of Time' [2016])

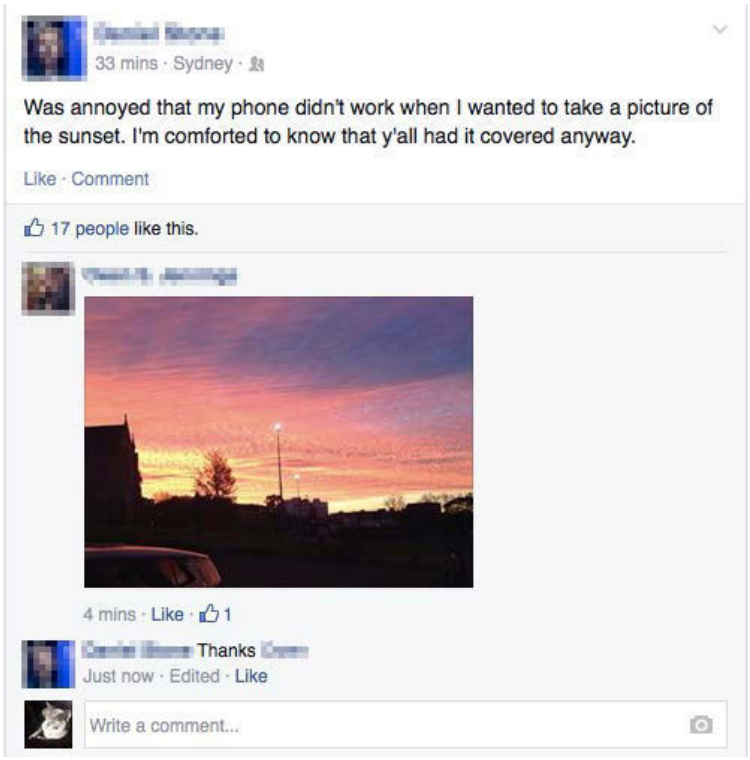
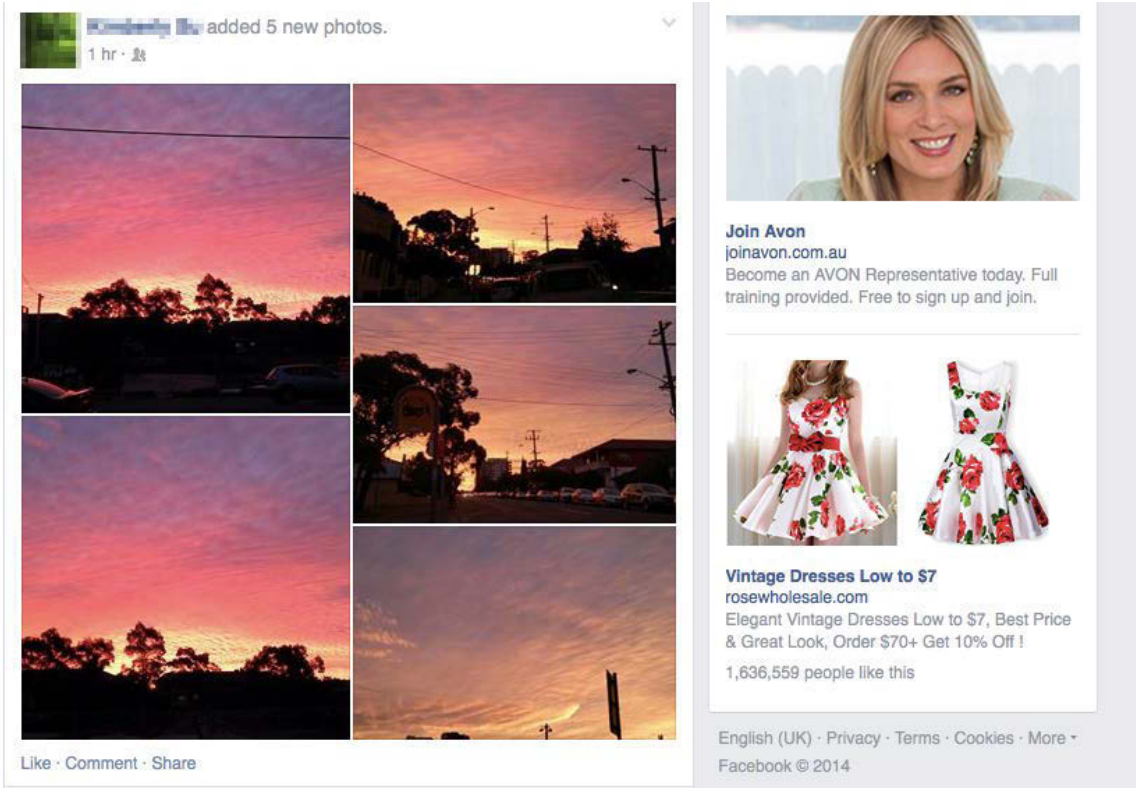


Image 112 & 113: Facebook posts have a sunset covered



Instagram posts to date (Instagram, July 2017). It has become a multitude of solar presence, reproduced ad-infinitum. On the surface, each of these celestial moments looks much alike, and it is easy to consign them to that derogatory term, the banal. I recall the starry flash with which the odd face imprints her image in me, and wonder how such an affective preserved light could register in this scene of constant luminosity. Somewhere in this repetition of suns, could I possibly find one solar orb that haunts me with its departure into darkness? This sun would be unique, a singular entity in space and time unlike any other, and therefore possible to lose. In essence, this photograph would be Barthes' punctum, the image that wounds with scorching knowledge that the instant is imbued with deathliness. A singular sunset always departs, leaving only its haunting after-image glowing on the retina. It is emblazoned on the memory because of its flammable impression of the past, the flash of light-writing. In the live feed of social media, such a burning relationship with photography's light is rare. The data based flow of imagery continually recasts the viewer's relationship with the light forms of the medium. At times the affective quality of a photograph emanates with the cool electronic glow of the screen to soothe me with the gentleness of seriality. At other times, the stream of illuminated images can become a blur of light without variation, one that aggravates me to go looking for something that will burn.

Barthes suggests that I have a choice in how I relate to the photograph's light. I can expose myself to the volatility of a searing image or indulge in a more benign photographic radiation. The punctum, he writes is a form of "mad" photography, by which he means its "realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time" (Barthes 1981, p. 119). The flash of death/life in one captured instant grasps the beholder with a form of ecstacy. For the most part smartphone photography is used to indulge in another relationship with photography, what he calls the "tame" version of the medium. This is a relationship with photography that follows distracted habits and absent-minded forms of attention. The power of images is tamed by gentle and aimless distraction, such as leafing through a magazine or window shopping without purpose. This engagement with photography does not invite the violence of a flash of history. Barthes writes that tame or mad, the two choices of the photograph are "to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of

intractable reality" (Barthes 1981, p. 119). Yet sometimes there is no possibility of choosing between these two photographies.

As I write my way into the experience of hashtag sunset shots, I learn that I cannot always consciously and deliberately embark on a controllable relationship with the medium. When the light of a wounding photograph pierces it is not because I have chosen the role of the hunter who wishes to catch it. A photograph will hit me with force when I am unprepared, when I am expecting the monotony of sameness to self-perpetuate and instead am confronted with the heady experience of the singular. It happens when I do not take the photograph, but the photograph takes me. Then I will truly experience an image of a sunset, of a star falling into the dark.

A Star Only I Can See



To write the experience of the punctum is a challenge because it is a private response that comes from the spontaneous and singular entanglement of involuntary memory, imagination and image. It isn't locatable in a specific image or viewer but takes place in a chance encounter. Barthes describes it as "a supplement: what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there" (Barthes 1981, p. 55). A particular image might affect one person but leave another completely void of response. This is not an affect I can deliberately recreate, the punctum cannot be willed into being because it doesn't happen by design. It is an affective happening that spirals into being with "a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me" (Barthes 1981, p. 27). Photography's light reveals something unanticipated when a series of personal impressions converge around an image, which is instantly impressed upon my memory. It is equivalent to the sensation that comes from accidentally looking directly at the sun, where the brutal glare gets trapped in the eyes, the muscles ache, and a ghostly solar echo superimposes itself on vision.



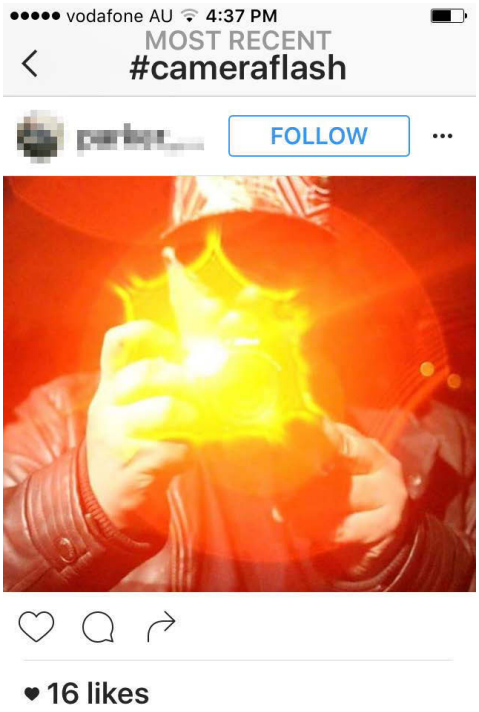


Image 114, 115, 116 & 117:

Compilation of shots from Instagram's hashtag "cameraflash"





This is the glare that produced the first fixed photographic light. The first photos appear through the scorching energy of the sun, which penetrates the camera with enough intensity to leaves a mark behind. The Camera Obscura operates by allowing a small pinprick of light to enter darkness, and so light-writing begins. It is a form of pinhole camera, where the *pin* makes a shrill point of light like a wound in the black. An intensity of energy burns through. A cut, a pin, a burn, a shot; these are words of light that wound. They are also Barthes' words for describing the punctum, as an "arrow" that shoots out from the image and pierces the beholder. It is a puncture or sting that affects the viewer before conscious thought. A pinhole burning through the dark. The response is precognitive and embodied, a visceral relationship that arises from exposure to the photograph, which leaves some trace of itself behind, as an after-image in the beholder's memory.

At times a visual detail within the shot is what ignites the punctum, when some object or form seizes the beholder. For me it is:

> a little girl's hand gripping her mother's gloved fingers;
>
> the pointing finger of a baby looking with wonder at something outside the frame,
>
> or the strange smile of an adolescent girl sitting by a window.

For Barthes it is the string of pearls worn by a woman in a family portrait, taken by James Van Der Zee in 1925. The detail of a stranger's necklace tugs at an involuntary remembrance of Barthes' deceased aunt, and the box of her jewellery which stayed sealed shut long after her death, sequestered away like the solitary and "dreary" life of the woman who owned it (Barthes 1981, p. 53). The sting of these infused memories reaches Barthes through a specific and tiny visual detail in a stranger's portrait, as some emotive correlation sparks between the image, and the woman who was his aunt.

On Facebook, amidst the platform's serially produced vernacular tropes, I sometimes come across similar little pinpricks of detail which flare up in the midst of the everyday.

In 2015, a young French teen uploads
a snap of her singlet top, soon after witnessing
the Bataclan attacks in 2015.
Splashes of red on white cotton.

In December of 2015, my Instagram feed is full
of hundreds of flowers.
Blooms laid out like a carpet along Martin Place
the days following the massacre at the Lindt café.

This is not the form of affect which takes hold via a nondescript image, and perhaps an image of the sun could not deliver such human detail. The great burning ball of gas that heats the planet could not be viewed as a small pinprick that smarts with pathos. It is the very light-source which renders such nuances visible as images. Rather than the punctum of detail then, I must then seek another form of wounding light to better understand hashtag sunset; I must turn to the "punctum of time."

This is an experience inbuilt in the structure of the photograph itself, as an enduring trace of a moment past. Unlike the punctum of detail, its affect is "no longer of form but of intensity… the lacerating emphasis of the noeme ('that-has-been'), its pure representation" (Barthes 1981, p. 96). This is the photograph's link with the transient light which brings the image into existence at the instant of its departure from experience. The rays of energy which form a picture have slipped through a moving present, become past, and still linger as image. The punctum of time is thus a sharp taste of loss that cannot be retrieved yet is visually held on the edge. It is the sun about to sink, a star's light experienced after its happening. "Like the photograph that presents what is no longer there, starlight names the trace of a celestial body that has long since vanished," writes Eduardo Cadava. The photograph is "an illumination in which the present bears within it the most distant past and where the distant past suddenly traverses the present moment" (Cadava 1998, p. 30). That is the poignancy of this medium which writes with light to enfold past, present and future into one.

It is, it will be

Barthes is swept into this experience when he looks at a portrait of young Lewis Payne the young man tried as a conspirator with John Wilkes Booth. In the photograph this young man is on death row, Barthes is struck with the multiplicity of time that weaves its way through the image.

> The punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: this will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake… Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe (Barthes 1981, p. 96).

Whatever the subject of a photograph, this catastrophe is always caught in the light of a medium which pierces the present with past and future. Lewis Payne is awaiting the noose and has long since become dust; the sun is on the brink of disappearance yet still burns in the lens. In this understanding of the punctum, the photograph's capture of light creates an uncanny and discordant statement: "I am dead." Derrida extends on Barthes theory when he writes that the temporal structure of the photograph works to create a strange liminal site, where things departed are still very much present, always about to disappear and yet already gone.

> The imminence of death presents itself; it is always at the point…of presenting itself no longer, so that death then stands between… "I am dead" and the instant when death ushers in absolute silence, allowing nothing more to be said (one point and that's it, period) (Derrida 2003, p. 66).

I wonder if it is possible for such a photographic encounter to be felt in the incendiary heat of a photographed sun, the radiations of which reach me in delay, and which have warmed the skin of my predecessors.



Image 118: A colourised version of Lewis Payne's portrait, by Instagram user *gentlemensbrim*

All Stars Alike

I search my memory for family photos that catch a single sunset as a vivid exclamation of a moment in time. In albums and attic boxes, there must be one sun which burnt me with its temporal mark.

My young parents
biting both ends of a dripping mango
before the gloaming
clouds of descending day.

A shot I took as a young teen,
from my parents' apartment window,
the streaks of a departing sun,
violet through windswept clouds.

Try as I might, the skies of these days begin to shape-shift between different suns, seen a million times before, in moments I can't pin to any precise experience, and which may have only ever been encountered as reproduced photographs. Suns, and the many moments they illuminate, become substitutable, each captured instant lit in

much the same way as the many that preceded it. It is a cliché. My response wanders into questions of aestheticisation or pictorial judgement. "What lovely colours," I think, or, "That's been tinted too much." Surface based encounters shield me from the sun, and rather than look directly into its solar energy I turn to its flat image structure, and it becomes a screen across which the gaze glides but never penetrates.

Towards the Light

In his reflection on sunset pictures, Geoffrey Batchen suggests that there is an impulse behind each one:

> The sunset represents the end of the day. Historically it's a metaphor for the end of life, therefore we have potentially moving even profound thoughts when we witness a sunset, when we pause for a moment to see it, because of course what we're imagining is our own sunset and we take photographs precisely in order to arrest the immanence of our mortality (Schmid, Batchen & Burbridge 2013).

The sun he describes is the one that hurts my eyes from overexposure, and makes them brim with stinging tears. This is an engagement with a sunset that wounds much like a punctum, implicating the beholder in mortality, and enacting the poetic relationship between light and photography. The brutal star hovers on the horizon of presence and absence, eradiating what has been, what will be, and what is yet to come. The planetary movement into night darkness conjures imaginings of the death of the star itself; this singular force, without which, life couldn't be. This light-source is the origin of our existence, and as such, irreplaceable, unique, and like any living being, subject to eventual disappearance.

The times when I have photographed a sunset, I've recognised something of the fleeting qualities of one moment's sky. The light caresses the clouds in a distinct instant; heat, colour and atmosphere coalesce as a picture about to disperse. Snap. The moment is disappearing, and unless frozen, it will take some part of me with it, into the passing of time. The punctum is awake in the lived moment and the response is to photograph. As Derrida describes it, a decision "takes place in the almost no

time of a (camera's) click: it will have been like this, uniquely, once and for all" (Derrida 2003, p. 34). Something has struck me and I have to shoot back, before it becomes the never-again of the past.

For the networker who missed his sunset snap, the prick of this photographic urge was sparked and then denied expression. I imagine him struggling with his malfunctioning phone, fidgeting with the screen and phone case as the unphotographed sky continued to change. It doesn't take long for the glow on the clouds to shift, and the instant melts into something other.

Yet even in the urgency of catching a fleeting sunset, some distance from the heat of the sun is enacted. When I raise my phone to the horizon, am I facing the mortal implications Batchen describes, or does some part of me shield itself from that burning light? The medium is giving me a form of engagement with this penetrating energy, which is neither too close to be painful, nor too distant to produce numbness. My photographic relationship with sunlight calls to mind those strange Sydney seasons, when bushfire smoke from the Blue Mountains cloaks the sky, and for a day or two it is possible to look directly at the burning orb above. Through layers of ash and thick smog, the sun no longer stings, but nestles in the grey like a matte orange. Photographic gestures give this same duality of separation yet involvement, where the more profound implications of a transient moment are screened, yet still are sensed within the eye of the camera.

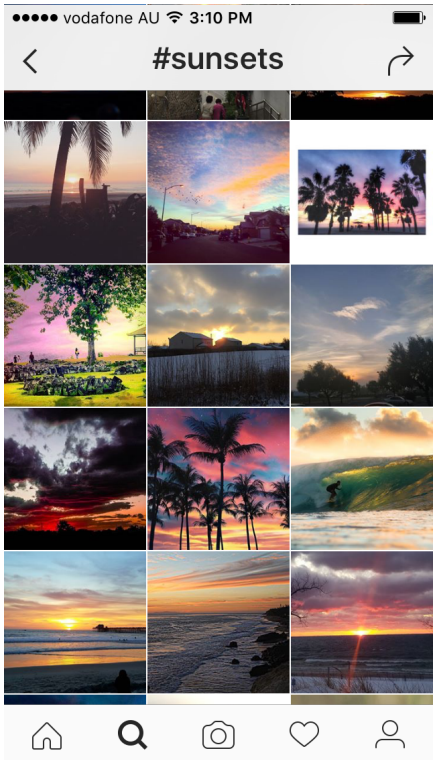


Image 119: Screenshot of Instagram's hashtag "sunsets"

Sunset photos don't take me directly into contact with that hot sun and its voracious duality of life generation and burning destruction. They are a step away from that pain, a way to see without the wound. I'm adapting Barthes' sentiment, that "in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes" (Barthes 1981, p. 53). This is what I shall do with my writing of suns, where the look away or the return to darkness is still entangled with the after-image of solar light.

Batchen's evocation of metaphor is fitting here. Like a medium, a metaphor can take me close to the heat of something without letting it burn. It doesn't take me to the scalding core of some original force of photography's light. This authorial role was once given to the sun which was traditionally deemed the creator of the medium's light-writing, and the only star of its kind. Given that thousands of suns now slip through the twenty-four hour stream, both day and night, the notion of an original sun does not fit my purpose. The multitudinous photographs could never lead me back to a one and only sun, just as they could never be deliberately used to expose me to the punctum. Photographs hashtagged as sunset can instead be used to trace the affective forces of serial images which follow the movements of a star about the Earth.

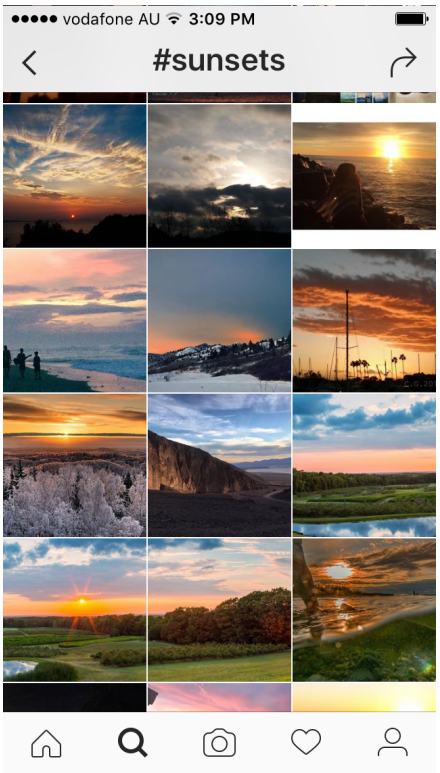


Image 120: Screenshot of Instagram's hashtag "sunsets"

Sunflowers

As I follow hashtagged images of the sun, my focus is not on the star itself, but on the networked gaze which is directed towards it from many points around the globe. My quest calls to mind an image Derrida used to conceptualise the metaphoric device itself. He saw metaphor enacted in the behaviour of flowers known as heliotropes, which turn to face the glowing rays of the sun as it moves from east to west and feed on the energy of a volatile light until evening cloaks them in shadow. Amongst these plants are the sunflower species, typified by a twenty-four-hour motion which first opens towards the sought light, and then disconnects from the desired origin by folding back in upon themselves in the dark. Their petals stay clenched until the solar cycle begins again, and they unfurl themselves for the repeated dance.

In this way, sunflowers are "characterised by a simultaneous movement towards and away from the sun" (Miles 2005, p. 31), and they mirror my desires to find the light

of a punctum. I draw closer, I want to feel the wound, until I withdraw and find myself once again in the cyclical reproduction of my own desire. No matter how much I look for a punctum in the image of a sunset, I know I will endlessly come up against my own search and not some original font of knowledge.

And yet, even without direct contact with the burning energy I both seek and evade, I will take something of photography's light into myself, as do these flowers. In their gaze across the sky, they photosynthesise the heat that keeps them alive. More than being a metaphor of metaphor itself, heliotropes are life-forms caught in the material and structural forces of light, which makes a mark on bodies and on photographs, and sometimes lends enough heat to spark a punctum.

The Umbilical Cord of Light



In the rare experiences of the punctum, the light that touched bodies of the past seems to burn my eyes in the present moment of looking. Something of the skin that has been photographed seems to connect with my presence now, as another life under the same sun. This is when my photosynthesis of an image takes place and I am open to the forces of the medium. This is when the image of my grandmother Margery comes to me through the photograph taken in St John's church.

The faint outline of her shadow is cast on the wall behind her with a dark softness that carries some haptic tremor. Her eyes are downturned, focused on the little girl who would one day become my mother. The click of the camera catches Margery as one who senses the now, and yet her attunement to the moment is on the brink. She would soon be in the throes of dementia. But in this instant she is poised, smartly dressed, her hands neat in their crocheted gloves. She is not the Margery who later wanders barefoot over Sydney asphalt, looking for the door that opened to some

familiar room she might once have known. Her portrait holds her in the space where she still knew her name, the date and the things she did the day, the week or the year before. It suspends one moment of her conscious awareness while promising the rust of her being.

This photograph connects me with someone I never met, whose existence both predates and is foundational to my own. The punctum wounds because some part of me believes the singular body and moment in the picture have infiltrated my present, and have travelled with light from the past. This is the belief that light has agency and that through the medium it streams something of the original form it illuminated long ago. The photograph here becomes an "emanation of the referent" (Barthes 1981, p. 80), or an emanation of my grandmother. This is an index of Margery where light becomes a connective and binding force between her life and mine.

The Cord is Knotted



I am susceptible to Barthes description of photography as a chain "or an umbilical cord" of light, which tethers the beholder to a distant moment in time (Barthes 1981, p. 77). Photography thus becomes a "carnal medium," a direct line to my mother's mother. There is warmth to these words, which correspond to some sense of skin on skin to deliver a sense of living heat. An embodied and motherly form of light emerges, one that calls to mind the life-giving energy of the sun that makes things grow.

The photos on my smartphone screen are made of a different form of light, one translated from sunlight into non-human electronics. Unlike the energy from the sun, the cool hue that generates images on the screen doesn't have any correspondence with birth or growth. The light of these photographs is an electronic and decomposed light. Is it still possible to experience this artificial light as a "carnal" chord that binds me to the past?

The photos which I view and make on my smartphone are displayed on an LCD (liquid crystal display) screen, and to avoid overheating, the light switches itself off if left untouched for too long. The physical properties of liquid crystals exist somewhere on the border between fluidity and stasis, fitting neither the category of a solid or a liquid. On a microscopic level they are rod-shaped molecules which respond to electricity by twisting and untwisting to various degrees, depending on the strength of the current that drives them. As the layers of liquid crystal spiral into different formations, some light passes their layered formations, while other lights are blocked or shaded, thus creating an image of different colours onscreen.

Smartphone technology often works with contact from sunlight to form digital camera images, but this form of photography doesn't display a direct indexical link with an originary instant. This light is electronically regenerated from data. And yet even that data maintains some correspondence with sunlight, for as Bernard Stiegler reminds me without the touch of external light sources, there would be no digital photo at all. Even in the smartphone's artificial glow there is a chain of memorial light, "not absolutely broken, [but] rather knotted in a different way" (Derrida & Stiegler 2002, p. 154). Knotted in the twisting and untwisting of molecules behind glass.

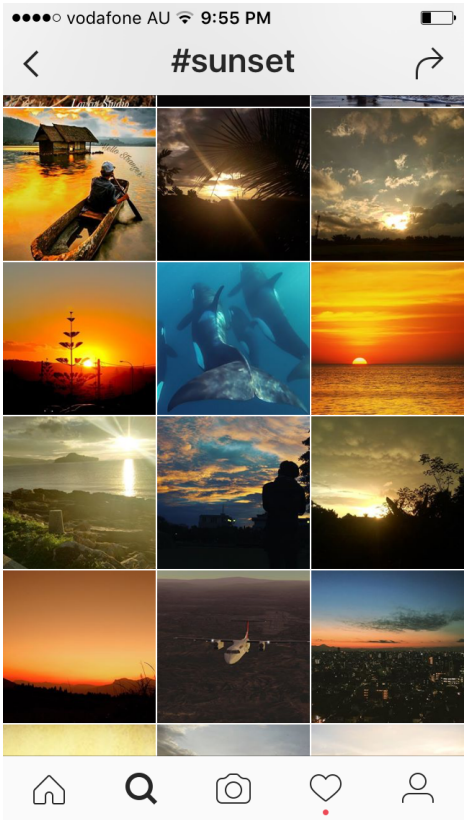


Image 121: Screenshot of Instagram's hashtag "sunset"

Taming the Sun

On my smartphone, Margery's digital image begins to break down into its component parts, as a patterned map of pixels that mathematically slot together to alter shade, lighting, and coloration. I start toying with the photo's knotted chain of electronic light by cropping and zooming and editing the exposure. My openness to the carnal light of her image begins to close over and shut down. I retreat away from the punctum through a controlled process of adaptation. This is my choice to receive the photograph's light through

a tamed spectacle, an entertainment in my command, which no longer carries the volatility of the punctum. That is not to say that I've severed my connection with the umbilical cord of light, but I am enjoying its knotted version in which the tie between the past and myself becomes less direct.

I discover a similar movement away from the burning affect of photography in some of the earliest experiments with the medium. Many of the medium's first practitioners were keen to tame the mad light of photography as contact with the past.

It is 1839 and Louis Daguerre publicly announces the invention of the fixed image: "I have seized the light! I have ceased its flight!" Years of experimentation, trial and error have led to a sense of mastery over the sun's rays. This is the capture of a force of nature and a way to take charge of what could otherwise be destructive or painful. Sunlight and the brutality of its heat are henceforth trapped as image. Up until this invention, all attempts to hold the image still have been unsuccessful because the light that creates the image is volatile. Images blackened and vanished as the sun continued to expose them to the movement of time. Yet with Daguerre's newly announced invention light is no longer destructive, it becomes a life-giving and creative tool with which to halt time. It is, according to poet Népomucène Lemercier, an energy imprisoned:

> the chemical snare of Daguerre…
> Will reduce or enlarge every object it marks.
> Its fine, lucid rays, through the depths of the traps,
> Catch the aspect of places in rapid inscription:
> The image imprisoned within the glass plate,
> Preserved from all threatening contact,
> Retains its bright life; and certain reflections
> Break through to the most distant spheres
> (cited in Benjamin 2002a, p.675).

The threatening contact of the sun has been drawn away from its mortal implications and retains a bright life. Not "I am dead," but "I am here." In this respect, the sentiments of Daguerre are mirrored in networked smartphone practice, where the

medium is used to keep light and life in the glass. While the approach is no longer to fix the light, the effort to keep light in live motion has similar taming impulses. Electronic light scatters around the globe and it is always switched on somewhere, always present. This is a source of light that doesn't sink into darkness, as devices stay aglow in billions of hands.

Online, the cumulative repetition of suns bathes the viewer in the star's continual return. The sun is constantly reawakened by viewers who scroll and tap and swipe across its image. As I photograph the sun sinking in my West, someone on the other side of the globe is capturing its arrival in the East. This light of continual second-comings suggests that a photograph is never touched with disappearance, and that the sunset has been divorced from the direct engagement with mortality. Binary code can come back from the dead and into the light at any time.

Premonition of an Always-Sun

One of the earliest images of nineteenth century photography acts as a precursor to the way the sun now proliferates in hashtagged seriality. It's 1826, and Nicephore Niépce, one of the pioneers of fixed photographic images, works steadily on his light-based experiments from his attic in Saint-Loup-de-Varennes, France. He practices what he terms héliographie, or "sun writing", a conceptual term that pulls on the metaphor of the sun as the origin of creation and the mythical maker of life and knowledge. To enable this celestial force to inscribe itself, Niépce coats pewter plates in bitumen and lavender oil, and places them in the camera obscura for exposure. Somewhere around this time (the precise date is uncertain), he aims the obscura out the window of his attic, and through prolonged exposure, the view from his study slowly emerges on the asphalt.

This photograph is regularly noted in historical texts as the "first photograph", or the oldest surviving image from the medium's past. This claim is made in 1952 by historian Helmut Gernsheim (1982), who rediscovers the image, hidden in a large musty trunk, in England. The view is faint and blurred on the silvery object of the



Image 122: An Instagrammer uploads the "first" photograph

heliograph, and like a daguerreotype, can only be seen from certain angles and in very particular light. In this deceptively simple image Gernsheim can make out the almost indiscernible content of a pigeon house, a pear tree in the garden, and a bake house chimney. All vernacular and quite mundane things, and yet the subject matter is not what makes this photograph striking. What makes this a singular photograph is the way the movements of the sun have registered over the course of the day. The image has retained many hours of daylight and is full of contradictory shadows that move both east and west, casting the trace of the sun's arc from morning through to afternoon.

As an image that enfolds many sunlit moments into simultaneity, *The View from Le Gras* problematises the search for an original solar force that wounds the heliograph with its presence. Niépce struggles with the term "sun-writing" as a conceptual framework for the photographic medium and begins to play with other terms: "nature itself, writing, painting, picture, sign, imprint, trace, image, effigy, model, figure, representation, description, portrait, show, representing, showing, true, real" (cited in Batchen 1999, p. 64). The terminology oscillates between the concept of an original moment that writes itself, and an act of re-presentation that instantly departs from any original source.

Throughout these philosophical and conceptual contradictions, Niépce retains the desire to imprison fleeting light so that time will stand still on a sun-sensitive surface. The fixed image suggests the sun is suspended at one precise spatio-temporal point in



Image 123: Nicephore Niépce's *View from the Window at Le Gras*

its loop about the Earth. Niépce's "evocation of the sun as related to the passage of time connotes photography's use of light to arrest the passage of time in the form of an image"(Yacavone 2012, p. 57). Yet the view from his window cannot pin down any fleeting instant of light, as it has drawn the entire passage of a sun cycle into the one frame. Through the lens of a camera obscura the sun is already beginning to divide from any singular position in time and space and to disperse itself, blurring as an unfixed light across multiple temporal and spatial points. The *View from the Window* reflects something of the many digital suns which now multiply on social media. Through the repetition of this star in cyberspace I sense time bleeding into itself, never completely arrested at a precise moment. The internet keeps the sun in every potential instant of its trail across the sky, such that even when browsing in the night, the smartphone keeps the sun alight.

Much like hashtag sunset, Niépce's window has become a serially repeated image. The original photo has been copied many times since it was found in an old trunk, first by the Kodak Research Laboratory, then by Hermut Gernsheim, and then by the Getty Conservation Institute, who digitally documented it under ultraviolet light. From these adaptations, it has multiplied a hundred-fold online, in constant data-based regeneration, and as Kaja Silverman reminds me, each adaption is an iteration of photography's impulsion toward further self-development (Silverman 2015, p. 60). The sun of that mediated day, and photography itself, are becoming more than one thing.

Today, the material object of the *View from the the Window at Le Gras* is kept at the Harry Ransom Centre, at the University of Texas, where it sits in an airtight steel and Plexiglas frame within a darkened and controlled room. It is positioned at the angle that best reveals its fading signature of a solar arc. Any further touch of sun subjects it to its steady disappearance. It is already "physically suffering from the ambivalent power of the light through which it was both produced and consumed" (Miles 2005, p. 147). This image, endlessly copied online like an undying form, is intimately imbued with the touch of death.



Image 124: An upload under hashtag "sunset"

The Lights Don't Go Out

With such high photographic frequency on social media networks I sometimes wonder if I will go numb to the potency of any single image as a trace of departed time. Could I ever be so over-exposed to photography that I forget my connection to its carnal light? I imagine becoming as blind to images as an old heliograph, which having soaked up too much light turns into a dark and unreceptive surface.

Since the invention of the smartphone, the frequency with which photographic light hits the eyes has increased. Mobile users scroll through images in the late hours of the night, or the early hours of the morning, and this contact with electronic light distorts the biological rhythms of wakefulness and sleep. Time spent with these liquid crystal displays has created an influx of sleeping problems (Rice 2013), as bodies do not register when the sun has set. Some networkers are setting their screen to lower its luminescence in the evening, in the hope that in the late hours, they are not still physically energised by the light of the live. This is the way light has been mastered in the online phase of photography, as something incessantly present and seemingly devoid of night. I am always "switched on," but I have stopped seeing the images on my screen. I am only looking, at a picture of this and a picture of that. Having experienced some form of one thing or another, I lose sight of the singularity of these photographs. I've seen the sunset trope so many times that regardless of its extraordinary signature of light and time, it becomes banal in its everydayness.

This overexposure to continuous imagery could be a contemporary iteration of Benjamin's description of urban stimulus. He writes how the rapidity of visual impressions in a consumerist, industrial environment overwhelms the beholder to the point where they can no longer invest themselves in what they see.[5] The velocity of

[5] This is also a prominent theme in Sigfried Kracauer's work, who writes:
> the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits…the phrase 'lie together, die together' applies to the multiply reproduced original (Kracauer 1993, p.432).

mediated impressions and city ephemera becomes too great to interpolate. Unable to withstand so many shocks to sensation the viewer creates a shield against images, preventing any from entering the deeper realm of experience wherein the present is illuminated by the past. Benjamin writes:

> the greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience… tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour of one's life (Benjamin 1982a, p. 159).

In this mode of (un)attentiveness, there is only the moment at hand. An image passes by without the shudder of its entanglement in duration and now is all that matters.

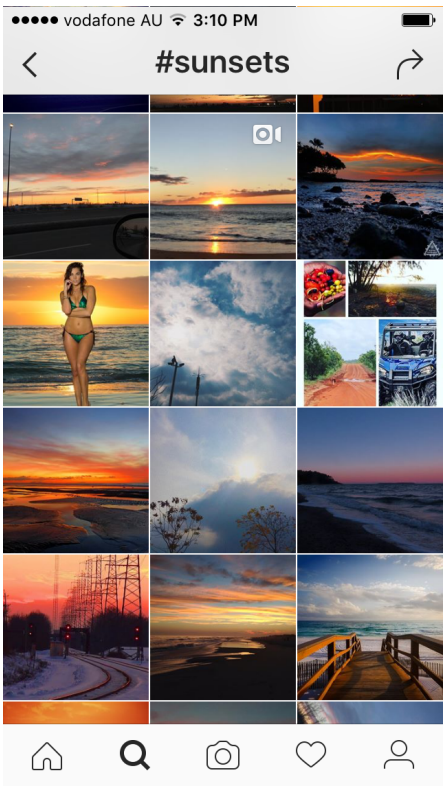


Image 125: Screenshot of Instagram's hashtag "sunset"

Nothing New under the Sun

In certain lights, the everyday experience of smartphone photography can become such a stimulus screen. A friend tells me of his experiment with Facebook's "365 challenge," the social network's page that invites members to post one picture from each day of their year. He says the first few weeks seem to present a limitless array of sights to upload, but after a while, the novelty wears off, and the regularity of mediation begins to drain excitement for what is photographable. Eventually, out of bored frustration, my friend ends up "taking pictures of ceiling fans and toasters, just to post *something*."

The continual light of smartphone photography is here no longer experienced as a flash, as a recognition of the once-only, but as a ceaseless light, which steals away the force essential to an experience of punctum. Everything is simply present, in a kind of ennui.

In this on-and-on-and-onward luminous motion, serial photographs sometimes appear bleached of variation. The image appears to be deprived of its relationship

with loss because it is permanently lit. Tens of thousands of suns appear under hashtag sunset, and the screen becomes a spinning celestial system without a solar centre. This image of a sky without a single sun (yet bursting with stars), speaks to Richard Goldstein's definition of banality as "the antithesis of originality" (1988, p. 82). There is no solo sun to be found.

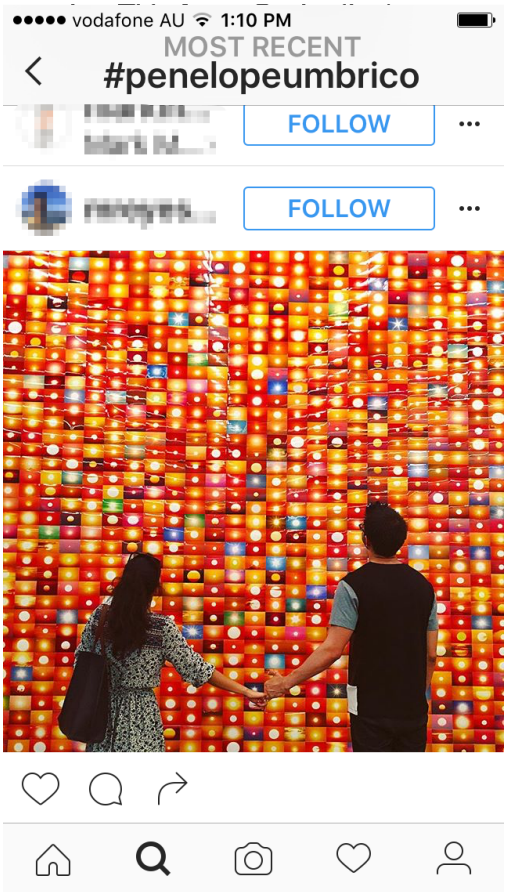
In 1999, Julian Stallabrass writes a pessimistic prediction on how the sunset trope will evolve in the hands of digital amateurs and snappers. "Every sunset will be perfect," he states. "A new wave of blandness will break over the world" (1999, p.34). He hypothesizes that the photograph's connection with lived reality will disintegrate as objects become eternal, "cleansed of gross particularity" (Stallabrass 1999, p. 37). His dire reflections suggest cloned visual types destined to swamp the distinct with homogeneity. In this framework, sameness smothers the intensity of any dormant punctum, and it would seem that a stimulus screen has formed between photographs and beholders.

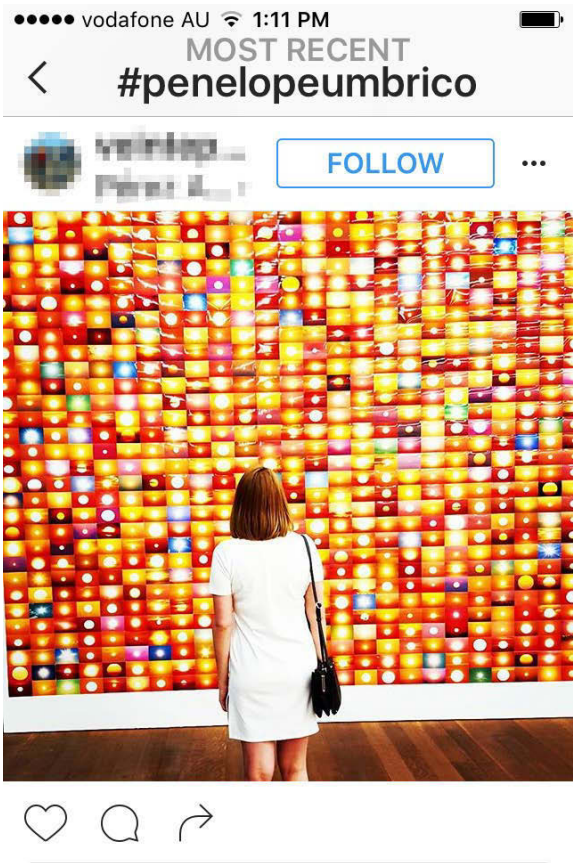
Ten years after his prediction, artist Penelope Umbrico extends upon the concept of repeated photo types with her work *Suns From Flickr* (Umbrico 2009). She collects sunset shots from the twenty-four-hour cycles of social media, neatly crops each image to frame only the glowing orb, and amasses these thousands of suns for exhibiting in gallery spaces worldwide. The resulting patchwork of edited stars is a quilt of rich oranges and violets, repeating the sun with polka dot precision. Her artwork is less dystopian in tone than Stallabrass' biting commentary, although she does display the networked star as a reproduced prototype, orbiting cyberspace to the point of overexposure. Online she sees a photographic scene that says, "'we're here, we're all here, we're here all the time, we're everywhere, forever,' and it is in this sense an eternal timeless spaceless algorithm" (Umbrico 2011). In a photographic landscape such as this, it may be possible to screen oneself off from the affective forces and stimulus of hundreds of images. However, another possibility emerges; that overexposure to images doesn't result in numbed disengagement, but in pleasurable drifting across networked photographic streams.



Image 126, 127 & 128:

Compilation of Instagram photos taken at Penelope Umbrico's *Suns from Flickr*





The Sunbaker

For the networker who missed the photo opportunity of a Friday sunset, the glow of many uploaded suns is comforting, not disengaging. Browsers are drawn to the light of images on their phones and to familiar visual tropes that are easy to read through a shared photographic literacy. The recognition of certain types of repeated images creates a sensation of belonging to a social network of shared cultural knowledge. In this way a lingua franca forms around often repeated photographic tropes. Hashtag sunset becomes an example of what Barthes terms the studium, which unlike the wounding affect of the punctum generates an "*average* affect, almost from a certain kind of training" (Barthes 1981, p. 26). The studium develops around photographs that are legible through accumulated cultural knowledge, and it relates to "that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like/I ∂on't like*" (Barthes 1981, p. 27). Familiar and repeated tropes online receive many likes, which shed a communal light on networkers' uploads, and sustain a sense of togetherness.

As hashtag sunset gathers together multiple images of the same star, "likes" affirm that networkers are co-present on the social media platform, and all share an understanding of the images circulating. The like as a symbol of social connectivity burns stronger than the subject matter of the photograph itself. The sun of #sunset is there with the dream of telepresence: to say, "We are here together, now, under this sun." With so many networkers online, there is comfort that a sunset will inevitably be captured. It will not be lost or missed, because each networker is part of a shared scene that keeps it aglow on social media. The affirming gazes of a network work to keep each user inoculated from the metaphor of a sunset as the end of life.

Margaret Olin's description of this relationship with photography is that the generic and recognisable can help the photographer to feel authentically a part of the event, and under the same shared light of the sun. This is the kind of seeing she describes as basking:

> We bask in an image to obtain what we need from it, much as we bask in the sun or under a sunlamp, to obtain the benefits of light. Only a certain kind of image can keep this therapeutic connection open. There has to be less to look at (Olin 2012, p. 197).

Many sources of light will not pierce but bathe me in the radiation of everything here simultaneously, right now, onscreen. This is an indulgence in the overflow of photography's light.

I watch people browsing across the feed in times of inactivity. On buses, trains, in cafes and on sidewalks, they float through the screen's array of sights. It is a mode of perceptual distraction used to counteract the tedium of waiting. They are not looking to be pierced by a wound in time. They are looking to kill time, by basking in photography's continual motion. On the train, a woman sitting in front of me skims through her Instagram homepage. The pace of her glance is a skipping-stone motion, where two or three photos rush by, a brief glance alights on something (maybe she taps the like button), and the stream continues. Uploaded fragments are played at the casual speed that suits light engagement. It is not the steady process of turning pages in a family album, or the chronological click-and-hold of a slide show. The motion of these digital images exists somewhere in the space between stasis and fluidity, much as the light of the liquid crystals works to shift between fixity and motion. One shot is never a stopping point but a thing about to be replaced by another, and another, of something similar yet different. I turn to my own Facebook profile, and glide past:

> an ad for shoes,
>
> next to a photo of a friend's graduation,
>
> next to a cat meme and
>
> a shot of ibis birds riffling through city garbage.
>
> Children being dropped off at school;
>
> a pug deflating at someone's feet, rain on a windowpane.

I look around me at passengers bent over their smartphones, heads bobbing with the sway of the tracks, everyone half-aware of their surroundings. Across the tracks, a parallel train skids by with its crowd of morning commuters. Their figures rush smoothly by, forming a recurring pattern of viewers, all in identical poses with identical digital devices lighting up their sleepy journey into the regular motion of everyday.

When Instagram introduces their new feature Instastories, the basking relationship with photography is evoked through a visual display of constant, luminous motion. On this application there is no need to initiate the movement of light, because an automated flow of Instastories unfolds of its own accord. It forms a rapid current of images that washes over me, and all I have to do is receive.

The first time I experience this cascade of light, I'm curled up on the lounge room couch with my housemate and we watch the screen glimmer with "stories." "It's wonderful," she says. "So fast and smooth." A mix of video, photography and text appears in quick succession, presented on a screen display that rotates the images as though they were imprinted on a spinning cube. The effect is akin to a PowerPoint presentation, where 2D are shown as though printed on a moving 3D object. The box rotates and shows a prawn platter, which is spun away to show:

a video of a small child skipping down the road,

buses parked at a terminal,

footage of someone typing at a keyboard,

an empty apartment waiting to be sold.

I look at the glow of the screen cast on my housemate's face; she has evident pleasure in watching the light change.

Around and Around

After a prolonged time of watching this virtual box cycle through endless images, any pleasure I feel gives way to frustration. The basking sensation has transitioned to aggravation. The box spins about a now that is always replenished and never dies. It repeatedly show a different face with a view of yet another networker's mediated experience, and by the time it returns to the place where it began, the display has changed. It is as though it had become another completely different cube, but no, it is the same eternally rotating object, spinning with images that are not completely identical but are so mundanely similar. Which side of this photographic box began the Instastory display? I am in a disorienting loop, stuck on the same axis of perception. Each version of the captured now is without a trajectory, and my

attention buffets against the wall of sliding monotony that radiates from the screen. Perhaps that is the intention, to be boxed in a form of photography that generates enough newness to be distracted, but never grants enough time to feel each photograph's entwinement in time itself. This is what Eugenie Shinkle describes as the effect of banality, "a kind of perceptual stasis" (2000, p. 177). I am somewhere between change and stagnation, somewhere between mad and tame photography.

My frustrated feeling of entrapment in the uneventful is not limited to Instastories. It can also emerge from an extended period of browsing Instagram and Facebook pages at my own browser's pace. As I repeatedly slide my finger from top-to-bottom of the screen, I sense a compulsiveness urge to continue further, to see more, and despite the sense of light gently moving at my touch, I feel stuck in a motionless sameness I do not wish to escape.

The sensation is not dissimilar from the one or two times when I have sunbathed at the beach for too long. The heat seeps into my pores and a languid ennui slackens my muscles and thoughts. Somewhere in the back of my mind I know that it is time to get up before I burn, but the sun has lulled me into inaction. These summery days leave their marks on me for a day or two afterwards, where the raw red of my body begins to itch and peel.

My father succumbed to this beach heat much more in his childhood, and now regularly visits the doctor to have small black or red marks cut or frozen from his skin. He was a beachside boy burning with his brothers on the Adelaide shore, and the traces of sun from years ago keep re-emerging in the present, as spots that loitered beneath the surface.



He had another mark removed last week, on one of the days we had our repeated conversation:

"What happened today dad?"

"Nothing. Nothing always happens."

The sun goes up and down again, and it is no longer a point of wonder to which the small child of that tinted studio portrait might have raised a small outstretched hand and looked agog. Time bafflingly rolls on in its continuance of routines with slight variation: wake up, eat, drink, walk, converse, relax, sleep with the disappearance of day. Scrolling around and around familiar photographic tropes online, the warmth of basking sometimes dissipates into a restlessness against generic repetition. I have not entrapped or seized the light but have become caught in its endless spillage without variation. Is this boredom? What Patrice Petro describes as the waning of affect brought about by the "unbearable experience of being in the everyday"? (Petro 2002, p. 61). The feeling is that there will be no arresting image to jolt me out of the visual loop in which I'm caught.

The Boomerang app on Instagram exemplifies this sensation. Many people use it as part of their Instastories, where it acts as neither still nor moving imagery. Boomerang takes a rapid-fire sequence of photos and stitches them together in jolting animated form. This reconstructed motion is then rewound, and plays forwards and backwards rapidly. One small splice of time returns to its beginnings again and again. The platform's promotional material for this feature states you can:

> Capture a friend jumping off a diving board, defying physics as she flies back and forth through the air. Transform an ordinary selfie with your friends into a funny video. Get that exact moment your friend blows out his birthday candles, then watch them come back to life again and again (Instagram 2015, para. 3).

Those last words linger in my head, as a dream of light that doesn't go out. It's pulled back from the dark before it can even mark that impossible wound: "I am dead."

I watch the Instastory of some acquaintances on Christmas eve, in which three girls sit amongst rumpled wrapping paper in a room of glinting fairy lights. They take a series of Boomerangs:

one rips open her red and gold wrapped present again and again;

another raises a champagne glass and winks,

raises a champagne glass and winks,

raises a champagne glass and winks.

These loops are the articulation of a wish for a never-dying now, for a sun that floats over the edge of encroaching night, and instead of vanishing for hours, instantly reappears in the East to begin its daylight dance all over again. I start to crave something other, some sense of newness. A quiet struggle plays itself out in my browsing compulsion, in which the very same light which lulls me also drives me to resist the perpetually similar. It propels me to continue looking. Looking for what?

Barthes suggests that the endless appearance of photographs may create a form of irritation at the heterogeneity of images, but that among an overpopulated sphere of pictures, some "provoked tiny jubilations, as if they referred to a stilled centre, an erotic or lacerating value buried in myself (however harmless the subject may have appeared)" (Barthes 1981, p. 16). From the midst of the tamed studium, he discovers the image that stings some part of him, penetrating the banal subject matter and overflow of photos. This is the accident or "roll of the dice" that draws the punctum into being.

It is precisely when I am lulled by the seriality of the everyday that I am burnt by an unexpected, searing light. Such moments of chance must emerge simply through probability, where the sheer number of vernacular snaps pouring through the internet is bound to capture something that unearths that buried lacerating value in me. It happens one Friday afternoon when I'm cycling through the live feed of this and that, when Facebook's "On This Day" draws a photo from my database. It is an upload from eight years ago, and the moment it alights onscreen a strange ache runs through my solar plexus.

> A casual glance at a friend's birthday party, and in the midst of a crowded room, my twenty-three-year-old self is laughing as her boyfriend sits heavily on her lap.

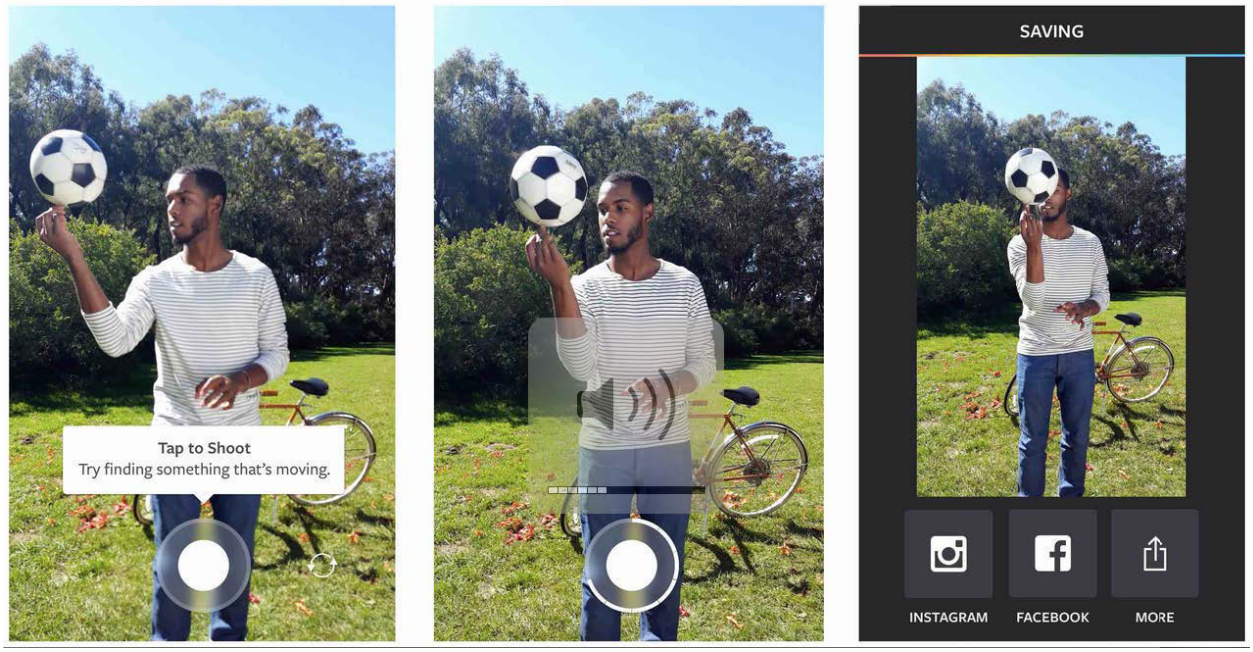






Image 129:

Collage of advertisement for Instagram's "Boomerang" application



That tiny fragment is wrought with the contradictory remembrances of my first relationship, in which times of such playfulness and friendship were also spiked with regular jibes and put-downs, a paradoxical behaviour I enabled in the belief that it was the best I deserved. The photo now hits the present with a sense of regret and a smarting pain.

When I look over the bobbing figures of browsers on trains I wonder how likely it is they will be hit with such a strong ray of light from the myriad of images that generally glide by unnoticed. Is the browsing experience informed by some hidden longing to be lacerated in this way? Is the skipping stone motion of the browser in fact some continual roll of the dice, that invites accidents which one both desires and fears? When I browse my agitation stems from a dual desire, trapped between the hope for the predictably same and the quiet wish to be pierced by something affectively forceful. This endless cycle of looking stems from a simultaneous urge to watch the sun go down, but also to keep bringing it back to life again and again, so that nothing will change.

Hashtag Minus Index

The category of hashtag sunset implies that the sun's photograph can always be revived, and as such the departure of its light need not be felt. As an indexical term it stirs the image of a tapestry of sameness, or a sun dotted in regular patterns across the screen until the central energy source of the solar systems begins to lose its force of life/death. The celestial star could be tamed through an act of labelling, as something blandly predictable. I gather together all my collected screenshots of hashtag sunset from Instagram to see if this is really the seriality produced. Some predicted collages form:

> couples with the glow of the evening in their sunglasses;
>
> bodies lounging in warm beach sand;
>
> the dark silhouettes of women,
>
> and plants against an enflamed sky.

For the most part these familiar image types are not broken by anything apparently startling. Nevertheless, I frequently discover a rupture to my expectations of a serially produced travel brochure aesthetic. Amidst tinted clouds, children's sandcastles and burning lakes, appear indoor selfies and shots of food. Some snaps are clearly taken in early hours of the day or long after the sun has set, and many are not staged in the traditional landscape scenery. There are displays of newly bought bicycles, snakes tattooed onto biceps, and household cats. The sunset label does not seem indexically related to these images in any clearly visible way.

Further exploration of these misplaced "sunsets" reveals they are also labelled with a litany of other apparently unrelated hashtags, all of which make a regular appearance on websites devoted to increasing Instagram viewership. Some of the most commonly used are the hashtags "dog," "hair," "nature," "pretty," and "one direction." These appear with:

> men's selfies displaying exposed abs;
>
> drab close-ups of take away calamari,
>
> and tinted pictures of elaborately painted nails.

I discover that hashtag sunset is one of the most commonly searched terms on Instagram, and so the use of this tag with any photograph whatsoever is a strategy for ensuring uploads will be reach a vast audience in a competitive attention economy. To play the hashtag game, a networker taps into knowledge of the relational dynamics between the human and non-human workings of social networks. The user knows how their photographs become enmeshed in the movements of data, and they take advantage of the entanglement of image, label, information and viral online motions. Hashtag sunset is part of a game of probability where the more frequently a labelled photograph is liked by social media users, the more likely it is that other browsers will come across it by chance in their distracted online wanderings. Strangers will unwittingly encounter a non-indexically labelled shot which reaches them through the robotic and social logic of trending data. Maybe they will like what they see, and keep both the hashtag and the profiler's timeline relevant, sustained in the electronic light of billions of phones.

In My Light

Chronic hashtaggers hope to keep their profile pages glowing in real time through the repeated attention of distant onlookers. The like economy of social media has turned sunset photographs into portals through which to be seen, not images in which to see. Networked attention can be herded to the profiler's timelines, and thus socially mediated photography constructs the photographer as author of their images, and the origin of their own tamed and captured light. Each shot at a passing moment is uploaded to display the unique perspective of its maker. Sunset pictures are snapped to transform the photographer into a star, and so deflect attention from the sun that first authored photography's light-writing.

Anabella Pollen suggests that the claim of owning a unique photographic perspective is what gives a photograph its power, more than the aesthetic content in the frame. She refers to the statement of one popular blogger, Paul Butzi, who writes:

> The world is supped full with photos of children blowing out the candles on their birthday cakes. You know it. I know it. And yet, the world is not suffering from a surfeit of photographs of *your* child blowing out the candles on *his* birthday cake on *his* third birthday (Butzi cited in Pollen 2012, para. 23).

Photographs of calamari, tattoos, and household cats labelled as hashtag sunset are displayed to photographically assert: "I see it this way, and only I do." Yet in this pursuit of a unique photographic point of view, vernacular shots end up strikingly alike. Under hashtag sunset, each snap caught in each smartphone seeks the same relationship with the singular image, as it is intended to be unlike any other, and yet to coexist side-by-side with shots that are apparently much the same. Nothing too unpredictable or disarming appears. Very few act as images that stand out in a piercing light. The content is all designed to be pleasantly enjoyed, or liked. But the subject matter of the image is almost irrelevant compared with the forceful claim to a unique and singular perspective on the everyday.



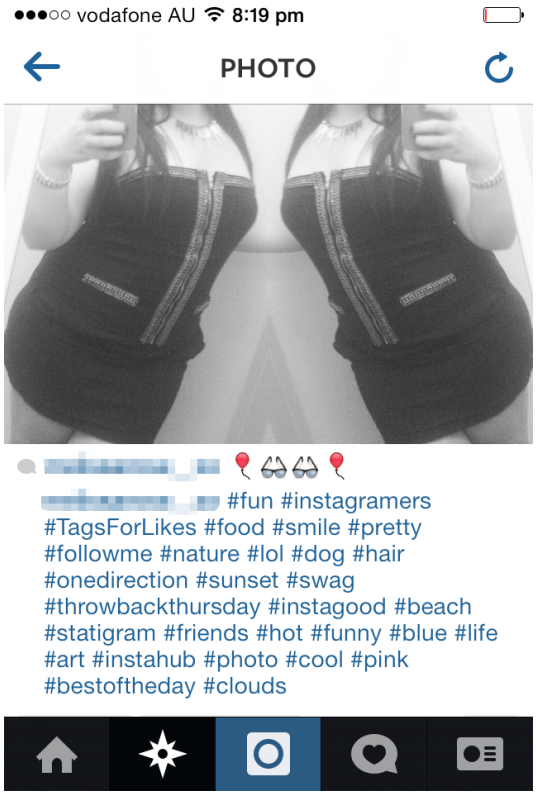


Image 130, 131, 132 & 133:

Hashtag "sunset": a compilation.





Here Comes the Sun King

It's the end of 2016, and Facebook releases their annual "Year in Review" application. Each December, the platform comes up with a newly designed template which algorithmically selects photographs from the profiler's timeline. This year the presentation is a 3D animation that begins with the numbers 2016, which drift before a dawn coloured horizon. The round zero of the date frames the networker's profile portrait and smoothly rotates to become a bright yellow orb. This suspended pixelated sphere is stamped with the caption: "Another trip around the sun." The video begins to move amidst a series of photographs, all of which circle about the central gravitational force of my image, which is framed as the sun. This is a rendition of the orrery, in PlayStation style aesthetics. Orreries were small clockwork constructions made of copper or brass, designed to mechanically map and predict the cyclical motions of planets in the solar system. Here, the photographs of a networker rotate in planetary motion around the user as central star. "Thank you for being here," read the parting words of the animation, which finishes on my portrait's primary position at the centre point of many other images.

Over the last few weeks of December 2016 this same visual template repeats for different networkers, each one pictured as the sun at the centre of their photographed memories. With so many profilers as depicted as the original sun, it becomes evident that none of these photographs are intended to burn with the starry exclamation of a truly singular image. As I watch the repeated yet different planetary cycle of others' photos from 2016, it strikes me that the medium has always been an interplay between generic banality and intense singularity. Every year the social media site will generate a similar photo display where the scenes of day-to-day existence are presented to the user as both comfortingly familiar, and yet singularly important.

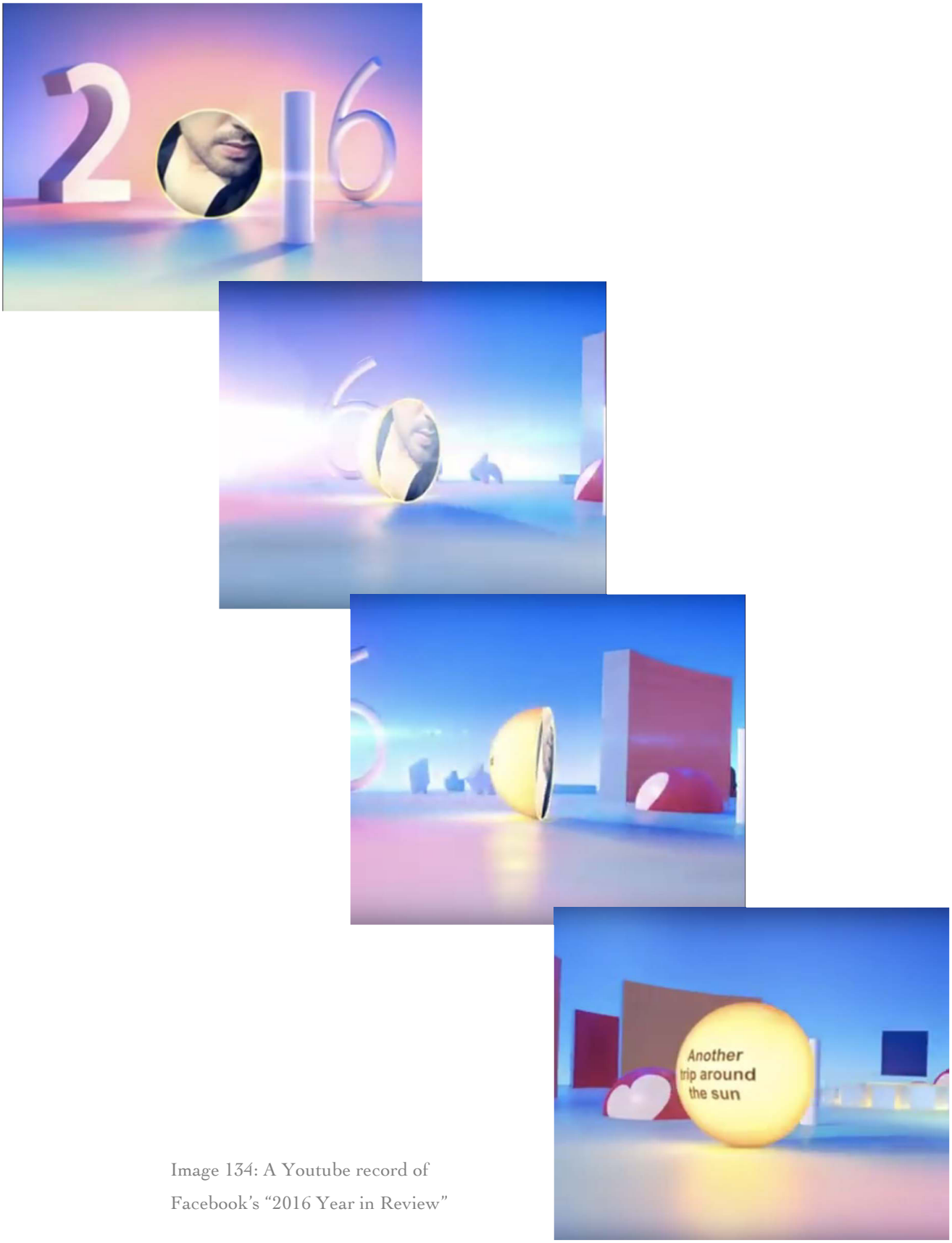


Image 134: A Youtube record of Facebook's "2016 Year in Review"

Counting Down to Sunrise

On New Year's Eve 2014, I'm standing on a city rooftop breathing the smell of gunpowder and champagne. Sydney Harbour fireworks are crackling above the silhouettes of sailing boats. Burning shards pierce water and skyscraper windows. Smoke billows in the still summer heat. The crowd stands with their arms raised and the spectacle of light cloned in real time on phones. In the wash of light across a crowd I catch how the punctum erupts in the shooting action of a camera. The need to photograph is awake in each and every person photographing. Each blink of light is one person's instantaneous desire to catch something from the currents of time. The flash, the instant of the camera shot, is lightning-like. A sting that scars the steady movement of lived experience. The city counts down to the stroke of midnight and in the darkness a rapid-fire succession of white flares make an artificial pre-emption of the sun that will rise next year. All these almost identical snaps have been produced from a knowledge of singularity: it will have been like this, uniquely, once and for all. A mass glow of photos testifies to our presence at the turning point between yesterday and tomorrow. The global milestone of New Year's Eve renders one particular rotation of the sun about the Earth more socially notable than many of the day-to-night cycles that have been and will be. When considered without the framework of a calendar system, this is in fact the same old sun moving in the same old way, but for a moment it is seen anew.

Under hashtag sunset a frozen star paradoxically remains yet ceaselessly slips away. The sun stays poised above the horizon in a live stream of photos. Each version of it disappears in the crowd of images yet stays dormant in cyberspace amongst kindred shots of many similar yet distinct skies. I have tried to locate the one and only sun from amongst this litany of repeated stars, and have searched out its heat in sunset labelled snaps of vernacular banality; in uploads of calamari, selfies, tattoos and pets. I could choose to experience the accumulative effect of these benign instants as an excess of light, a calming glow, or a continual stream of "now" and "now again."

Derrida's writing on singularity reminds me to approach the networked image as a paradoxical temporal force. He asks:

> Is not time the ultimate resource for the substitution of one absolute instant by another, for the replacement of the irreplaceable, the replacement of this unique referent by another that is yet another instant, completely other and yet still the same? (Derrida 2003, p. 60).

With this in mind I turn to my family album, where each shot is an integral moment in the weave of past, present and future. Recurring photographic tropes repeat in albums worldwide: a child is welcomed into the family, a wedding is captured, there are birthdays, Christmases, and holidays. On Facebook and Instagram this invariant condition emerges via the multiplication of

meals,

smiling faces,

garden close-ups,

travel snaps,

bike rides,

crammed study desks,

cats and dogs,

rainy skies

and cloudless days.

Things recur with subtle variation as the world spins on its axis and every single photographed experience slips away, along with a piece of mediated life. In the networked photographic scene, seriality doesn't divide studium from punctum, or the basking in the banal from the volatility of blinding flash. The punctum needs the generic repetition of the studium to come into being. According to Derrida, the punctum belongs to the studium "without belonging to it and is unlocatable within it; it is never inscribed in the homogenous objectivity of the framed space but instead inhabits, or rather, haunts it" (Derrida 2003, p. 41).

The frequency and output of snapped moments forms a fabric out of which one tiny photographed second can chance upon a viewer in a singular way, and reveal the death/life of things immersed in duration.



The Light Burns

At the end of the day, as the sun slides into the other hemisphere, I may take some comfort knowing the light has been digitally preserved and that a vast network has caught the sun. If there is an empty moment in tomorrow, I could kill time by taking out my phone to see what has been snapped. The casual browser's pace of scroll, slide and skim is relaxing. The endless conglomeration of related and unrelated shots may come to feel like a shopping spree, where aimless looking is my purpose. Then again, data sometimes spins itself into unpredictable forms, and the wounds of time pierce a usually habitual landscape. There is always room for chance in high numbers, and the volatile side of photography draws some heat from the randomness of data. A friend of mine was casually browsing Facebook when a photograph of her father appeared under the title: "you may know this person." Her father is dead. He had a heart attack just one year earlier. There it is: the untameable wound, the roll of the dice.

Conclusion

or

A Palinode with a Chorus

from T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' (1971)

The end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now.

Where does a photograph begin or end? The question surfaces in the midst of an idle moment. I'm absent-mindedly washing my hands in a public bathroom and the white-tiled space begins to ricochet with my solitary echoes. I am alone in the sudden loudness of my own quiet presence, thinking of nothing in particular, and settling into the sound of water that rushes over my hands and bubbles down the porcelain sink. I look up and catch my own gaze: I'm standing between two opposing mirrors, somewhere in the middle of a long corridor of refracted selves. They curve out in a far-reaching dance of light-to-light.

In the spillage of returned looks, I see the refusal of an image to be confined to one single existence or interpretation. For an infinitesimally small moment, my mirror-images become familiar yet foreign: they are simultaneously the same as this present self, and they are other. Each refraction is identical to the presence who stands here, who wants to take her own photograph; yet each is cast off from that unfixed moment, which resists complete capture, even as I long to pin it down as a fixed image. *I am here.* I was her. She is gone. An impossible testimony becomes an echo of itself. I raise the smartphone and snap at an image that will mean something different to me in the future. She is my future stranger, a photograph I will know again. Suspended in this unfixed potentiality, she is a still image and a site of memory, imagination and transformation that has yet to come.

She first appears on the cover of this thesis, and she will return again on the very last page as a mirrored echo, as a palinode, so well defined by Jay Prosser as a "recantation (homonym for palinode as a 'singing back or again') of a prior position on photography" (2005, p.12). The palinode is not a re-articulation of signs that have been lost, and it does not claim to uncover deep meanings behind illusory surfaces. Rather, the palinode is a return of the real, in the psychoanalytic sense of the "inexpressible" and "inarticulable" given by Prosser (1999, pp. 83-84). The palinode

revisits the past not to secure the plain truth of what has been lost, but to present the inarticulable and inexpressible aspects of the then-there that persist in the here-now. Correspondingly, the photograph neither shows nor hides; rather, it produces a positivity of re-presentation in which "we can't tell the difference between screen and referent, what's there and what is added in the 're-'" (1999, p. 83).

For a long time now I have connected with photography as a way of understanding the resonance between past and present, and therefore as a medium that captures the way bereavement develops in the now. This thesis has sung back my prior position on photography, and in the process, revealed the loss in photography as a kind of vitality. It is the medium that continues to teach me about mourning as a subtle but generative part of the everyday.

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable

After taking this portrait of mirrored selves, I begin to look for what might have prompted my compulsion to shoot. This is my now familiar search for some retrievable point of origin for the image, as though I could trace the photo to a latent and lacerating acorn within my memories. It is as though the picture is not enough on its own, and further acts of rescue must be performed if I want to hold onto that tiny slip of time. I burrow into the remembrances of mirrors that have been reflected throughout this thesis.

My father has told me that one of the mirrors in my work has been twisted into a reinvention: "It's only a small thing, but the lounge room mirror where you took our selfie… It was put together by your grandfather, when I was a boy. Sometime in the 1950s. That isn't the mirror that stayed in the family for generations." It seems I have confused one mirror with another. The oldest reflective surface in our possession in fact belonged to my grandmother Nora. Her vanity looking-glass is set in a carved oak frame, and this was her inheritance from predecessors long gone. *This* is the mirror which witnessed countless motions of bodies passing through everyday domesticity: the grooming of newborns and partners, of intimate nakedness and

clothing, of eyes that met their own gazes and looked for silent answers in their questioning reflections. This is the mirror that knew my grandmother's face: the way she smoothed her make-up over her skin, and brushed her hair, and disappeared. It's now in the front room of my parents' apartment, and in it my father has seen himself as both a silver-haired figure and the child who played with his mother's lipstick. This mirror has seen the girl with the odd face, and her moments of stillness with an unwanted secret. It has seen the backs of many photo frames, each of which has held the portraits of us, fixed in front of our ever-changing present. Somehow I have written the wrong mirror into my memory, replaced one reflective surface with another. I have identified with something misidentified. "It doesn't matter," says dad. "You don't have to change which mirror it is. It's not what's really important." Is it not?

I contemplate this question of mistaken memory-writing for some time, and wonder whether to cut and change the part of my thesis made from this false yet strikingly sharp perception. No doubt there are other moments in these pages which have merged recollection and mirage, but neither I nor my parents have discovered these misnomers. I will never know for sure what has been missed or mistranslated because photographs cannot point to the borders between fact and remembrance. My misplaced story of the family mirror has reinforced an appreciation of how much of this thesis has been about resting in uncertainty, or staying open to the liminal space where memory meets photography.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

This project began with a search for singular photographs within the vast streams of online uploads. I wanted to find an image that could affectively mark me with its evocation of the past within the present. This quest was founded on a strong desire to rediscover the medium I had come to know from family images and digital snaps stored in my parents' attic. An extensive and scattered photographic collection has

contributed to my perception of loss as a dynamic force in my present experience, where each image holds both the life and death of an unrepeatable moment. The techno-social environment of Facebook and Instagram seemed a strange place to forage for such a piercing affect. On these social media sites an abundance of real-time uploads are consumed as fleeting pronunciations of the now. My initial response to the networked ecology was to wonder if photography had lost its relationship with loss. Were singular photographic encounters with personal history still possible in this context of ephemera and plenitude? Could a networked photograph ever return my gaze in the way of the odd face?

Images online appeared to pool into similitude or a space of monotony, banal in their serial repetition of visual tropes. It was Geoffrey Batchen's work on vernacular photography that reminded me to look for the spark of contingency in these apparently everyday pictures. "The more banal the photograph, the greater its capacity to induce us to exercise our imaginations" (Batchen 2005, p. *74*). So this reimagining of vernacular networked photographs began, drawing me into the haunting capacity of any photographic image, even the most visually unremarkable. The process of creating 'Photography's Album' has shown me that a live photo upload can one day wound the future with a touch of time past. Every photograph has this potential because of the medium's ability to return history in an unexpected flash, and thus form lightning correspondences between the present and the past.

Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?

Each time a photo returns, it is both what it always was and what it never will seem again: it is a repetition of what the camera first produced, and a deflection of that original grasp of time. The girl in the mirror is herself, and not herself; she is many others. Like her, no photograph in this album is completely still, nor completely fluid. 'Photography's Album' is full of mercurial matter, being the site where vernacular traces are drawn into the currents of memory, imaginings and half-dreams. Thus photographs illuminate the very impossibility of their own representative acts, for nothing can be held still in the endless fluctuations of change. And yet, in the stillness of a single photograph I see the past. I point a finger at the lost moment preserved as

an unchanging testimonial image, but it does not point me directly to the original instant of its capture. Instead, it leads me to my own knotted existence in duration as sparks of correlation form between disparate points in time. I can see the co-existence of non-chronological moments in the relationship between images and beholders.

An image taken in 1946, shows a baby boy,
and as he raises his finger
to point at a monkey,
the portrait recasts itself
in the gaze of the 76-year-old he is now.

The photo of my mother as a child, seated
on a pew in a small church,
reverberates with the story of her now,
sitting in St John's.
I take her picture, and together we think
of her mother who sat beside her.

The digitized shot of my grandmother
transforms her body into a landscape of
pixels, and recalls the scattering of her ashes
at Dubroyd Point.

The photo of a girl with the odd face echoes in
the mirrored picture I take
now, in the corridor of
self-become-others.

These photos are rewritten in memory as they emerge through this act of writing, and in this developmental process, serve as reminders that photography studies must always recall the experiential return of images. Through a constellation of daguerreotypes, polaroids, cartes des visites and smartphone shots, I have shown how photos are subject to re-apparitions, in personal experience and across media forms. An image has the potential to be unexpectedly read anew, under different sets

of technological affordances. I share Batchen's view that photography "is a logic that continually returns to haunt itself. It is its own 'medium'" (Batchen 1999, p. 216). As photos of the present slide across a constantly changing screen and enter data storage, they create sites of return. Current photographic practices and social exchanges will haunt the future techno-social forms of the medium, just as daguerreotypes taken in the late nineteenth century now flood cyberspace, and the faces of long departed strangers from the Victorian era re-emerge as data configured on screens of moving light.

Despite perpetual techno-social change, the structural form of the photograph, be it digital or analogue has one point of continuity: it is still an apparition of something disappeared. What each historical articulation of photography reveals is the dance around the medium's presentation of absence. In the non-chronological history of this thesis, different photographic practices and technological affordances are shown as the desire to understand how time both erases and produces itself.

> It's 1839, and a Parisian crowd photographed in Boulevard du Temple disappear in a slowly exposed daguerreotype. Bodies too fast for the camera's eye are erased from the image and a bustling street appears abandoned. One man stands still long enough to have his boots polished and cut a dark silhouette in the mirage of an empty city.

> It's 2016, and an Instagram community photographs themselves together on a beach in Florida. They use an online exchange known as Instameet to arrange their photographic gathering in advance, and the camera reveals all their smiling faces to a watching network of thousands. But only for one lithe moment in a stream and then their bodies slip away.

It's 1854, and the writer Balzac expresses his fears that photography is a thief. The opening of the shutter will steal away some spectral layer of his self; a "leaflike skin" spectrally "removed from the body and transferred to the photograph" (cited in Nadar 2015, p. 4). His presence peels. He is gone.

In 2015, a crowd gathers in Brooklyn, Massechussetts for the premiere of the film *Black Mass*. Amongst the many photographers is an older woman, the only person without a camera. A picture of her goes viral: "this woman was spotted actually enjoying the moment how it was meant to be enjoyed—in real time" (Haikel 2015, para. 3). Photography: again the thief that peels away the presence of its users.

It's 1859, and a woman sits in the lit studio of a portrait photographer. She folds her hands neatly on her, and holds still as her self image imprints itself on silver nitrate. In her mind, the lines of a poem: *Remember me when you see this, Or I shall be forgotten* (cited in Batchen 2004b, p. 47).

> It's 2016, and on a bustling Sydney street,
> a young woman in clacking boots
> suddenly stops mid power-walk, pulls out
> her iPhone, and raises it above her head
> like a portable mirror. She flashes a white
> smile, and pauses to send her new selfie to
> her network. *I am here.*

Through an experimental history, I've watched how photographs across different times and spaces, have repeatedly exposed subjects and beholders to their existence within duration, and to the losses that have a charged presence in daily life. Photography is still the chase after presence which captures absence. Vernacular images show an oscillation, sometimes denying, sometimes yielding to the unnerving symbiosis of the departed within the present. In this thesis, I have turned my attention to the ways photographs can be used to orchestrate absence and presence, in a networked ecology that moves between comforting and disquieting affects. Uploaded vernacular photos are at times boring, painful, pleasant, or uncanny. Photography can be used to mute the loss of experiences; it can be practiced to heighten the beholder's sense of being in the moment; it can irradiate the mourning of that which has gone, and announce the vivacity of one captured second in time.

Quick now, here, now, always -

The young woman in the mirror leans forward, tries to catch herself, and ends up capturing the hunt for photography itself. The many faces of her reflections end up concealed by her very quest for their revelation: each one is masked by the photographic apparatus that looks to pin-point the woman, but instead loops back to its own glass eye. A long smear of iPhone cameras winds into vanishing point. She has photographed the chase for a tamed piece of lost time. The picture will always show the time depicted on her watch: 6:10pm. A drip falls from the tap where she has just washed her hands. The artificial sound of the iPhone shutter clicks. It is this

moment, here and now, and also all the moments of its re-adaptation by future onlookers, where it departs from itself. Perhaps she has caught nothing more than her own photographic desires to orchestrate transience. The question, "What is photography?" has looped back upon itself, returning me to my own searching gaze. There is no single point of arrest to pin down the ontology of this medium, but there is the unravelling of a continual space of becoming, in which photographs are continually repurposed and re-iterated to perform social and personal relationships with transience, pastness and futurity.

Nevertheless, I come across a recurring temptation to discover a theory that says "this is photography here," to "fix" a theory of the medium as the first photographic practitioners sought to fix a moment in time. The more I have looked to do this, the more the singularity of photography has escaped me, and this impossible search is one that has produced many other theories of a declarative nature. Such statements on photography's temporal structure have often led to binary conceptions of the medium, in which photography's ontology is split into either transience or fixity, time or space, representation or reality, original or imitation (Batchen, 1999). As discussed in the introduction, recent studies on the current networked ecology tend towards conceptualisations of photography as "this rather than that." Photography has been situated as life rather than death, presence rather than pastness, signal rather than index, and spatial rather than temporal mediation (see earlier references to Kember & Zylinska 2012; Sandbye 2012; Dijck 2007; Shanks & Svabo 2014; Thomsen 2012; Villi 2015).

This thesis has sought a renewed understanding of the medium that holds all the above conceptions in paradoxical simultaneity, and shows that networked photography can be known as the mutual entanglement of these productive forces. Binary conceptions of photography as "now-not-then", or "live-not-dead" have blurred, revealing their mutual constitution. Photography can show the vitality in death and the productive forces of mourning. It is a medium that offers a form of survival; it carries images of the past into the present and so shows the perpetual becoming of memories. Photography's image of personal history is not deadening, it is life affirming in its bereavement of what has been. As Eduardo Cadava reflects, the

medium's form of "survival asks us to think not of the impossibility of a return to life but of the impossibility of dying, not life or death, but life and death, or perhaps, even more precisely, 'life death'" (Cadava & Cortés-Rocca 2009, p.107). This contradictory conception of the medium is what has transformed my apprehension of vernacular photographs online.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement.

The chapters of this album have reflected upon the ways presence and absence correlate in the networked medium, and thus perpetuate historical understandings of how photography mediates time for the purposes of remembrance, presence and forgetting. In 'Glass,' I have studied how Facebook photographs provide both a memorial space and a site of transience, where everyday snaps at the instant have the capacity to haunt the future via their unfixed digital composition. Portraits of the dead are posted continually, showing the departed are still in the midst of the living. Through the chapter 'Shadow,' I have revealed how the co-presence created through live uploads is still founded on photography's evocations of a distant other. As each shared image appears and disappears, it carries with it the potential for temporal distance to form between networkers. 'Air' has shown how singular photographic encounters still emerge through chance interactions between onlooker, image and computerised information. Data recapitulates pictures from the past into the present, such that photos unexpectedly illuminate the way every instant is permeated with the multiplicity of duration. In turn, 'Light' has illuminated the way these sudden bursts of photographic singularity can arise from the network's repetitions of everyday banalities. A wounding photograph needs the serial landscape to mark the on-and-on of living with the sudden poignancy of death within life.

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

Who will pick up this text in times to come? My hope is that its appeal will be cross-disciplinary, being a non-traditional hybrid of history, autoethnography, and memory work. The many themes it raises could speak to readers generally invested in the broad field of photography theory, in questions of memorialisation, in the qualitative knowledge of mourning, or in understandings of time as duration. Academics interested in creative writing-as-research may find this an interesting way of approaching digital media studies (an area of study that is more regularly addressed through sociological methodologies). The connective threads formed between photographic technologies will speak to the concerns of media archeologists who are interested in the correlations between different techno-social forms. Theorists in new memory studies may find points of interest in the exploration of remembrance and presence in mediated exchanges. People working in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) could find insights into how human-computer exchanges cultivate remembrance. This thesis may also have relevance to a burgeoning discipline which Google has recently termed "Design Ethics." This is a multidisciplinary field in which philosophical explorations of media and memory are used to consider the affects of online systems on perceptions of time. For those in this new field of work, this thesis works to show how the real time interface acts in tandem with unpredictable qualities of memory, gestures of presencing, and an awareness of futurity.

Over the course of writing and researching I have become aware of academic studies which could take the ideas of this thesis to new conceptual places in the future. One key discussion which falls outside the scope of this project is how photographic practices shift across different cultures to produce and reflect nuanced experiences of time's flux. This album is primarily situated in a Western conception of the medium, with much of the historical focus drawn from European stories and my own auto ethnographer's position as a non-Indigenous Australian woman. It would be very interesting to see creative practice, experimental history and autoethnographic writing applied to studies of photography from different cultural perspectives. The springboard for this future research would begin with the work of Christopher Pinney and his studies of analogue photographies in South East Asia. The mobile media studies of Larissa Hjorth and Helen Grace [6]would also inspire further thinking

[6] (See Pinney's *Photography and Anthropology [Pinney, 2012]* ,and *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs [Pinney, 1997]* . See also Hjorth's and Moon's *Visual Afterlife: Posthumous Camera Phone*

into how the networked medium in Asian countries corresponds with historical forms of photography.

In addition to this, the pursuits of 'Photography's Album' would gain critical insight by venturing deeper into the work of contemporary feminist scholars interested in the medium's potential for illuminating gendered history. Many of the questions and thoughts introduced in chapter one invite further investigation into the work of Melissa Miles and Cathryn Vasseleu, who explore the power of light, as a metaphor and a burning affect that can expose trauma, illuminate mourning, or disrupt claims to evidentiary knowledge.[7]

What might have been is an abstraction, remaining a perpetual possibility only in a world of speculation

These gestures to other research act as an invitation for further autoethnographic explorations into networked vernacular photographs. There is an opportunity to use creative writing-as-research, to produce further understanding of how smartphone photography effects the ways we remember, forget, and continue living in the wake of things departed. There are many scholarly resources which could be used to expand on my questions regarding the networked medium's temporal structure. My thesis has turned to the writing of Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, and used their experiential accounts to query the subtle affects and temporal registers of personal images. Their methods have been reworked in a contemporary context, thus allowing analogue theories and current mediating practices to mutually defamiliarise one another.

Their writings have inspired me to use the concept of writing-with-light, in which photographs and text play off one another so as to rediscover images of the past inflamed with immediacy in the everyday. Each shot presented is here to discover how shadows of absence can emerge in energetic sparks of presence. Benjamin and

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Practices [2017] , and Grace's *Culture, Aesthetic and Affect in Ubiquitous Media: The Prosaic Image [Grace, 2014]*.

[7] (See Miles' *Rephotography and the Era of the Witness [2016]*, and Vasseleu's *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau Ponty [1998]*.

Barthes both use such a fragmentary writing style, where meaning is "only a flash, a slash of light" (Barthes 1989, p.83), or it is a magnesium shock which ruptures the reading space and opens the way to unfixed meanings. Through such a constellation of non-chronological flashes, I have sought to reinvigorate their concepts of mourning and loss, and thereby adapt photography's capacity to wound in a generative and luminous way.

But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves?

Through photographs, I have returned to stories that sting. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say these stories have returned to me, as photographs. Writing with these revenants has been transformative, not regressive. I take into my arms the losses that family photographs deliver, and as I honour the remembrance of the past, I also allow space for the past to enmesh itself in new insights of the present. The past is reconceptualised through a delicate balance between remembrance and release. This is a form of photographic encounter which both honours what has been, and allows the continual movement of change to show the ways the past returns with variation.

After the kingfisher's wing has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still at the still point of the turning world.

My opening mirror portrait now returns in this photographic palinode, and it comes back with a difference. In another act of transformation, this selfie has become part of an older form of albumisation: I've repositioned it within the cover of an antique Victorian album, which like many of its kind, had a small mirror on its front. These nineteenth century vernacular objects, made of lush velvet and embossed metal trimmings, were placed on small stands at enough of an angle for the viewer to catch their own passing image across the looking-glass surface. The vernacular photos inside could be folded down from top to bottom, much like a small filing cabinet. The design was "presumably to let viewers compare their faces to the representations on

the page" (Batchen 2004b, p.49). The liquid temporality of the mirror acted as a reminder of photography's relationship with transience, and situated the collection of still images as part of the beholder's continual embroilment in change, which unfolds alongside visual testimonies of what has been. This autoethnography is thus positioned somewhere within that endless corridor of searching gazes, in the midst of revelatory and concealing reflections, dislocated in a form of expansive recurrence that spirals outward and becomes other.

In this visual convergence between an album from two hundred years ago and a smartphone photograph, I recall the thesis' approach to the techno-social history of the medium, which reinforces a non-chronological understanding of how experience is mediated. Over the course of writing this project, the platforms and technologies for smartphone technology have changed rapidly, and my research challenge has been to keep abreast of the many transformations. Many of the platform interfaces, technological structures, and social trends recorded in 'Photography's Album' have already been outdated, and so this research preserves something of their disappearance from the online scene.

On a broader scale, many technological innovations are underway to alter prosthesis with the photographic device and the frequency of online uploads. A quick purview of the latest photographing devices suggests that what I term networked smartphone photography is already in the flux of becoming other.

> A new smartwatch has entered the market, called *Arrow*. Its circular frame is embedded with a networked camera. With a spin of the clock's round rim, a tiny lens rotates to take pictures in 360 degrees. In less than a second, the user takes a selfie, followed by a landscape shot.

> The most recent version of photographing glasses is designed by Snapchat, and is called *Speculates*. A small round camera lens sits in the front hinge of the frame, which the user gently taps to take and upload images.

> A small group of young innovators in Sweden have raised billions on the website Kickstarter for a brooch-sized camera called *Memoto*, designed to be pinned onto its user's clothes. Every two minutes the device takes a shot and instantly uploads it on social media platforms. "Remember Every Moment" is the company slogan.

> Another Kickstarter campaign has transformed the camera into an aerial device that can float away from the body. *Airselfie* is a small drone that slots comfortably into a smartphone case. These bird-like cameras rise into the air, take snaps of subjects below, and return homeward to their owners.

With many inevitable changes on the horizon, it becomes apparent that if photography has an album, then it has no end. When these covers close, they will not have closed the work of this book, which waits to be opened again and again in the sight of different future beholders, where the present creates ever-expanding forms of meaning from traces of the past.

When the networked ecology is considered part of the medium's continual becoming, swept into the far-reaching permeations of time, the future of uploaded images become one of ghostly traces, of experiences that live and die every second. An influx of images pours into server daily and lies there dormant, disposed of by the live feed, until some past shot penetrates the future like a long-dead digital star. So the girl in the corridor of mirrors will become another form of the odd face, another of photography's ghosts, returning to me in ways I cannot anticipate and catching sight of me in some unsuspecting moment. When she does come back, the technologies and practices of photography will have altered again. One might well ask, with so many changes afoot, what is the purpose in trying to capture this one brief socio-cultural moment of a medium? I do it for the same reason that I take a photograph: because I know the subject matter *will* change, and the only way to understand connections and ruptures in the fabric of the time past, present and future, is to take a picture of what is about to disappear.



Image 135: The album never closes

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