

Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire

School of Creative Arts

THE IMAGE AFTER TOMORROW
DIGITAL CULTURE & THE FAMILY ARCHIVE

by

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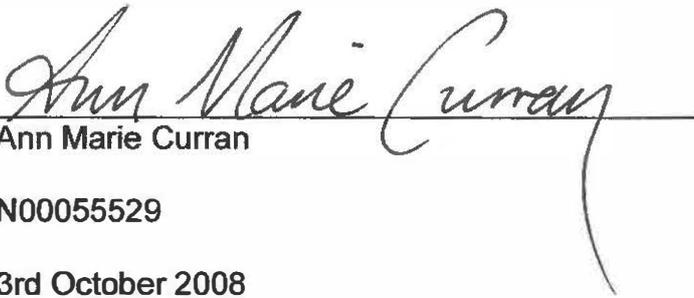
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Declaration of Originality

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ABSTRACT

Analogue photography has a rich history of putting into order the chaos of familial histories. Traditionally, the family album was dependent on object materiality for its existence. In its manifestation as book, memory-time could fly by at the turning of a page - one could pass through many years between album covers. That the same photographs might be in the collection of another and arranged in the same way was highly unlikely thus making the album personal, individual and something of a family heir(ess)loom. This is not to say that the analogue album was an unchallenged entity being as it was a site of multiple meanings, rather it was assigned stability status due to its situation as a gathering of meanings.

The advent of digital photography, with its emphasis on multiplicity and fragmentation, brings its own ordering system that is changing the visual landscape of the contemporary family album. This landscape is sometimes invisible but always present - a rose may be a rose but an image may be an algorithm. The different components of digital photography that impact on the concept and object 'album' - image production, distribution, use and collection - have been transformed as if born from that impossible demand of 'I want it *yesterday!*'. The digital organisation of family photography is in turn making its mark on memory, imagination, narrative, perception and most sensual of all, materiality. The analogue gathering is becoming a digital scattering and the photograph's 'what has been' - its indexical status - may be found in the twilight of the icons.

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PREFACE

WAKING THE DIGITAL

In 1851 the Irish artist William Willes painted *The Mock Funeral*.¹ This painting was a landscape scene depicting a crowd of people who were mourning the departure of relatives not because they had died but because they were emigrating. The painting was not commissioned by any of the individuals portrayed, rather it was an image created for exhibition and sale within more affluent circles. As a work of art it is representative of a type of artistic perceptualism as espoused by Ruskin² and created in a time of technological innovation that bore a certain kind of image as an entity of mechanical reproduction. However, I do not reproduce a photograph of a mock funeral within the text, for such a photograph eludes me. While the reasons for this may vary, I would suggest that such a social event (amongst many) was deemed to be non-photogenic in early photographic practice precisely because of the camera's predilection for mimetic exactitude.³ The realism of a photograph had not the 'romanticism' (cool distance) of the realism of a painting of certain subjects. Were there such a photograph of such a scene (indexical in its having been there but not as staged event) one would be inclined towards categorising it as a social documentary image and this from a time that is post non-documentary practice.



Fig. i William Willes, *The Mock Funeral*, 1851
Oil on canvas, 102 x 127 cm
Private Collection
Reproduced in *A Time and A Place: Two Centuries of Irish Social Life*, NGI, 2007

¹ (Fig. i) William Laffan, 'The Mock Funeral: William Willes' in Brendan Rooney (ed.) *A Time and A Place: Two Centuries of Irish Social Life*, Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2007, pp. 85 – 86

² See Norman Bryson, 'Semiology and Visual Interpretation' in Julia Thomas (ed.) *Reading Images*, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000, p. 89

³ In the same way that photographs of the Irish Famine have not come to light but sketches of starving subjects have been known to circulate - mimetic type sketches that do not 'present' the individuals while representing them.

exists an essence that transcends the technological innovations that would appear to impact on all other aspects of the photograph. Lev Manovich, in claiming that there is no such thing as digital photography so similar is it to analogue, appears to have the answer but relies on a history of perceptive pretence to support his claim.¹⁰ I will argue why this is problematic, situated as Manovich's assertion is in the familiarity of non-domestic photographic manipulation. The question of what one means by the essence of a photograph becomes an issue when such explicit interventions may be made while the 'photograph' looks like a photograph. What then of the ontological effects, for example, when is indexicality not indexicality?

In Chapter Three the emphasis is on the content of images. The portraits will be placed within a semiotic framework to determine whether there are differences in the subject's engagement with the changing technologies. That the making of early family portraiture was mostly confined to the realm of the professional studio influenced my choice of photographs. Hence I have chosen studio-based family portraits from the turn of the twentieth century in order to compare them to contemporary studio practice. An important aspect of professional practice was the building of a familial narrative within one saleable photograph. This was achieved by the process of encoding by the director-photographer, whether external to the subject (props) or in collaboration with the subject (a dialogue of gestures) and it is this encoding that will be decoded. This immediately raises questions: where does narration stand on the technological timeline of the twenty-first century? Even if it is significant (whether in professional or vernacular portrait practice) what or who is it for? Is there a definitive answer as to why one makes photographs at all? A look into the notion of the archive, a place of infinity and oblivion, may reveal the trace of an answer.

To archive photographs would suggest a keeping of signs – these signs may indeed carry indications of an innovative, exciting and frustrating time of digitally supported image-making. What are the signs of twenty-first century family photography? In Chapter Four, some of the themes of contemporary vernacular practice will be examined. The vernacular is quite literally home to the domestic, that is, it relates to

¹⁰ Lev Manovich, 'The Paradoxes of Digital Photography' in Liz Wells (ed.) *The Photography Reader*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 244 - 248

what may be termed the 'language of the native'¹¹. Geoffrey Batchen has argued that it is a practice within the history of photography that has been overlooked due to photography's history being subsumed into a dialogue within a History of Art.¹² This 'displacement' left behind the baggage of conformity that the vernacular practice would otherwise have brought to an art history dependent on 'innovation or subversion'¹³. However, I would argue that it is photography's innovative and subversive potentialities, revealed in part by the birth of digital photography, which makes the vernacular ripe for consideration within the 'bigger' picture of visual culture. For example, the categories of interest have broadened considerably since the advent of camera-phones. However on moving the focus onto the photographer, there appears to be paradoxically, a latent inertia inherent at the stage of taking images. This inertia is a symptom of contemporary digital culture and it will be discussed in relation to Virilio's writing on the 'static body'.¹⁴ The notion that 'inertness' might also be a cure for the more sinister side of everyday picture-taking is but a delusion - the reality being that a taste for camera-mediated 'realism' has created activities and subsequently images that are the polar opposite of the banal and the static. I would suggest that the timely introduction of the word 'vernacular' into digital culture is key to understanding the potential excesses of technological practices when one is aware of another aspect of the etymology of this word – from the Latin – *verna*¹⁵, home-born slave.

¹¹ 'vernacular' in C. T. Onions (ed.) *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 976

¹² Geoffrey Batchen, 'Dividing History' in *Source*, Issue No. 52, Belfast: Photo Works North, Autumn 2007, pp. 22 - 25

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24

¹⁴ For more by Virilio see Paul Virilio, 'The Last Vehicle', *Polar Inertia*, (Trans. Patrick Camiller), London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, p. 976

LOST WORLDS

An old photograph from the family album is an object that may be taken somewhat for granted, existing as it does in relative domestic safety. However, when searching for a cardboard box full of old family photographs at home, I realised that the keeping of photographs was as much contextually determined as their production, for the entire collection of the 'Oxo' box had disappeared.¹ The 'Oxo' collection was the matriarchal line of photographs, the youngest photograph being about forty years old and pre-dating my mother's marriage 'into' the Curran family and name. The photograph that I specifically wanted was of my grandfather as a very young child. It was to be an object of observation whereby I would make note of its size, shape, the paper it was printed on, any markings on the front or back, the photographer's stamp (if any), whether there was a date or text, what condition it was in and where it was placed within the 'collection'. Content-wise I would describe the clothes, the hair and facial expression of my grandfather and any background or props depicted.

My realisation of the precariousness of the existence of family photographs has been two-fold: photographs, taken for granted, may disappear through collective/individual neglect or individual/collective resolution. The former needs no explanation, the latter I would suggest is dependent mostly (though not solely) on emotional factors. Secondly, the materiality of images thought sacrosanct was no guard against oblivion in an age of digital deletion. Now I will have to rely on my memory of an old photograph that I have not looked upon for many years. There is no question of using a similar photograph from the patriarchal line as no such photographic history exists. My father, in light of a visual absence of his poverty-stricken childhood, enlightened his daughters by impressing images in our collective memory, through his many distinctive yarns in what he called his (quite photographically in an ironic way) 'Stories from the Dark Ages'.²

¹ Nancy Martha West has claimed that the keeper of domestic history and therefore memory has traditionally been the mother, while the father is named as photographer-producer. (See Nancy M. West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). I have known of no such gender bias in my family except that the males tended to destroy whole photographs while the females would merely rip part of a photograph removing an offending relative (usually a husband) in the process.

² One distinctive memory image is of a cabbage growing in a pot on the window-sill of a cottage in the Liberties of Dublin. This story was to illustrate the ways in which families within the area made use of everything – there was no such thing as waste – not space nor object nor time.

Such is the object-oriented character of memory: one remembers some-thing or some-body in a fusion of past and present. Photography's *noeme* is, as Roland Barthes has stated 'that has been' and photographs are the *noema* (things) of memory.³ The memory thing is always closer to the present than the memory itself, the latter more inclined towards the periphery of presentness or fading into the deepest recesses of pastness. To recollect the memory-thing of a memory that is not mine in the form of my grandfather's photograph becomes an act of faith (the memory signified belongs to others...all deceased now).

Faith in memory relies on memory's faithfulness to the past.⁴ While desiring to be faithful, the very act of remembering may indeed corrupt memory because like a photograph, memory is a polysemic event⁵. That is to say, as event it is in both the state and the process of 'ongoingness'. It may be stable as a memory *as* memory, a photograph *as* photograph, but may be active and mutable as recollected memory. Hence, memory (and photograph) transforms and is transformed by the inherent multiplicities within its surface oneness.

Sometimes the very knowledge of the photograph's inclinations towards what I will call 'instability' is enough to reject its indexical relationship to its referent. Looking at a photograph of a soldier (Fig. 1.1), Hélène Cixous 'unbelieves' the content of a rectangle piece of paper: *Am I born of this man who goes off? I myself do not believe it. Or rather: I unbelieve it.*⁶ Cixous, self-consciously contemplating the content of the photograph, decides that she has no faith in it, although it is identified as a portrait of her grandfather within her family album.

³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (trans. Richard Howard) London: Vintage, 2000, p. 77

⁴ The ambition of memory is to be faithful to the past. Paul Ricoeur 'A Phenomenological Sketch of Memory', *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. Kathleen Blaney and David Pellauer) Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 21

⁵ I borrow the use of the word 'event' from Peter Wollen's 'Fire and Ice' in John X Berger and Oliver Richon (eds.) *Other Than Itself: Writing Photography*, Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1989, pp. 2 – 3. Event which is named as a semantic category within 'Aspect' (as a way of establishing the signified of a photograph) is conceptually tied to the newspaper photograph. However, I am stretching 'event' to include the other categories of state and process, event then being on the same level as 'aspect'. I would argue that the art photograph can exist as event and be ongoing, rather than just 'state' and therefore stable and unchanging. NB. As page numbers are not given throughout the publication I have cited these paper numbers as if from the essay and not the whole publication.

⁶ Hélène Cixous & Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Albums and Legends', *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, London; New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 188

perpetual state of presencing absence, therefore opening the door to the actualisation that takes place in consciousness via imagination. This can be problematic in that it opens up the photograph to be perceived as a site of revisionism and unreliability. Indeed, the same accusations may be levelled at memory. However, when meaning is not fixed but deferred the possibilities for contradictory interpretations will always be possible.⁹

A photographic image may reveal or conceal the facets of its working-object. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger states that to be a work is to set up a world¹⁰. This world would not be a collection of things, real or imaginary, that would stand before us and could be seen. In fact, it would be something that we would be subject to, that we and all things would gain from, in the form of spaciousness. A work, in being a work, gives by making space for the spaciousness and sets up a world.¹¹ While Heidegger appears to refer to Great Works of Art as the 'work' I would argue that this limits the potential of a setting up of a world in other works. Therefore, it is my belief that the vernacular photograph has the ability to possess a similar working-object as a canonical work of art.

In setting up a world, a photograph of a small child, being similar in form and content to any other studio-type photographs of 2 year-old children, may be 'annihilated' by the impossibility of retrospective non-prophecy by which I mean the inability of a photograph to foretell what has already happened. Siegfried Kracauer, writing on the photograph's ability to 'annihilate' a person through its power of portrayal, illustrates his point with reference to a series of portraits reproduced in a newspaper. Half of the photographs were of children and the other half of adults under the heading 'The Faces of Famous People: This is How They Once Were – and This is How They Are Today!'.¹² Kracauer notes the impossibility of correctly matching the young and old version of each now famous person. In a similar vein, Walter Benjamin looked into

⁹ The concept of Derridean *différance* whereby meaning cannot be fixed because of the difference between object and sign, absence and presence – thus the image as text has a meaning that is always deferred. See Madan Sarup, 'Derrida and Deconstruction', *Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Harlow: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988, 2003, p. 44

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger (1935) 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in David Farrell Krell (ed.) *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, London; New York: Routledge, 1978; 2004, p. 170

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170

¹² Siegfried Kracauer (1963) 'Photography', *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (trans. Thomas Y. Levin), Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 57

photographs 'searching for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now'.¹³ Unlike the prophesies of Nostradamus that can be verified after the fact, there is nothing in the photograph of, for example, a very young Adolf Hitler which would signify the atrocities that would be committed under his command in the future, now past. It does contribute somewhat to illustrate what Hannah Arendt has called the banality of evil.¹⁴

It is at once the photograph's ambiguity, by virtue of its polysemic disposition and its indexical status that allows for multiple interpretations. It does and it does not just exist as a mere illustrated guide to who or what was once there. Yet, the photograph is more revealing and more concealing than that. Its very existence is an opening of spaciousness and a broadening of consciousness, always retrospectively as process, always futural as potential, while being grounded (earthed) in the present in its material mode as photograph *as* photograph. This earthing of the photograph makes it useful as a specifically manufactured piece of equipment. With this in mind I am picturing a rectangular piece of paper. It appears to show nothing except its materiality. It is a white colour-field, sensitive with silver halide crystals, for eyes under amber light. A mechanical finish has given its surface a smooth, glossy expanse. It has a slight thickness – like thin cardboard and dimensions similar to that of a postcard. It possesses a smell (the type I cannot bring to mind).

Now I am recollecting an image, palest sepia colour and faded with time. It is a photograph of a two-year-old boy. In keeping with the place and time, Dublin, c. 1912, the boy is wearing a dress and boots and has long hair.¹⁵ The photograph, in its capacity to depict in this instance an image of a child (my grandfather), is referred to as a portrait. The paper, the material matter, should lose itself in its usefulness as a memory-thing. It doesn't necessarily.

¹³ Walter Benjamin, (1931) 'A Small History of Photography', *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, (trans. Edmund Jephcott & Kingsley Shorter), London; New York: Verso, 1992, p. 243

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Penguin, 1994. See specifically 'Postscript', regarding how the human considered to be evil does not have the look of a 'monster', may simply look nondescript. pp. 287 - 288

¹⁵ This description reminds me of a piece of text written about Jean Paul Sartre, who as a child had long hair and how he had never forgotten the day that he had his hair cut short, as he lost all of his curls and with them, as far as he was concerned, his photogenic beauty. Source of story unconfirmed at time of submission.

When a piece of equipment causes its material to disappear, the material disappears into usefulness. It is usefulness that determines the creation of a thing that one recognises as a piece of equipment. Having the best of both worlds, the photograph holds at once equipmentality and materiality, the latter at once lost in subservience to content while at the same time, opening up a space as sensual object. One may reflect on the many hands that have held an old family photograph down through the years. The difference between the working-object and equipment is that of the former taking into service its matter.¹⁶ The photographic paper is a specific type of paper created to depict the image. In this it is a tool fulfilling its purpose. As a photograph this paper sets up a world.

Heidegger has argued that the actuality of the artwork is the way into the art. My understanding of 'way in' is that the 'actuality' is more of a portal than it is an entrance sign. The portality of art is that it exists as art because of what it gains and for what it gives – as opposed to the existence of the actuality of the work being a sign that points the way that could lead to (k)nowhere? With portality one enters into the artwork as an experience and the experience becomes the artwork whereas signs are necessarily spatially inclined and sometimes one gets lost in between the sign and the place signified.

The actuality of artwork is the way into the art. No actuality = no-thing. The actuality of the photograph is a way in (an aperture) sometimes to somewhere else. The actuality of the artwork possesses an equipmental mode that allows it to reliably hold the art. A canvas may be considered as existing in barefaced sensuality, via surface and depth, thus rendering it powerless to lose itself in usefulness. Yet the photograph's papery surface is not altogether relegated into mere usefulness by its overwhelming content. It becomes the intimate object when it exists as a memento of a beloved, often framed by gentle fingers, mindful as one may be of its evocative power.

¹⁶ Op. cit., Heidegger, p. 171

photograph but the devil is in the detail (and perhaps this is why the river *Lēthē* is in hell).

When we are remembering, we are prioritising. To remember is at once to forget. It is a Beckettian ‘birth astride of a grave’ whereby only time separates the prioritising of life over death and death over life. The narrator of *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* wonders why she can’t remember any details of a day-trip other than the ones depicted in the photographs that she had taken with her disposable camera.²⁵ It also makes her wonder what she would have remembered of the day had she not taken any photos. Roland Barthes, of course, would have told her that photographs block memory because they quickly become counter-memories.²⁶ Barthes ‘forgot’ when he looked at memory-things (*les souvenirs*) because for him they were not in essence memories except to function as reminders of irretrievable details.

There can be no doubt that Barthes informed Ugrešić’s thinking on the influence of photographs’ effect on memory. In a similar passage in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes found himself without memories from a time in his past, due in his opinion, to the fact that he had just been looking at his old photographs - this, in comparison to his friends, who had plenty of memories. Remembering Rilke’s line: “Sweet as memory, the mimosas steep the bedroom”, Barthes could not find consolation in the experience of the poet for the ‘Photograph does not “steep” the bedroom: no odor (sic), no music, nothing but the *exorbitant thing*.’²⁷

Dramatic but the truth is more shades-of-grey than that. While photographs may indeed serve to block memories, their function as memory things may be heavily relied upon as a link to the past and with some justification. Barthes does not attempt to prove that his friends’ numerous childhood recollections were not based on photographs - we must take this perspective for granted – for any photographic ‘evidence’ would relegate their fragrant memories to the bottom of the horticultural memory league. What Barthes demands of us is an act of faith: we must believe that the memories of his friends were never linked to any single photograph, from any collection, at any time.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 26

²⁶ Op. cit., Barthes (CL), p. 91

²⁷ Ibid., p. 91, italics Barthes’

While photographs link us to the past, it may not be our past – it may pre-date our being born but the photograph holds the prospect of others bringing memories to it from outside of the frame. True, they may have alternative details to the ones within photographs: the content of the photograph itself may be ‘unremembered’ but instead may act as a catalyst for other memories. I would argue that this is an important facet of the photograph as a memory. There are after all many types of memory and it is an unjust state of affairs that the photograph should be seen as ill fit to serve as a form of memory. I believe that memory is brought to the photograph (memory-thing) as much as meaning. In fact memory is essential to understanding anything, *souvenir* or not. As Steven Rose comments:

Meaning is a historically and developmentally shaped process...each time we remember, we in some senses do work on and transform our memories, they are not simply being called up from store and, once consulted, replaced unmodified. Our memories are re-created each time we remember.²⁸

Remembering brings with it an element of re-creation. Looking at a photograph is a form of remembering and therefore the possibility of re-interpretation should not be ruled out. A ‘frozen’ image does not a frozen mind make. While Barthes could not be consumed by the fragrance of memories in a way that his friends may have been, it is not inconceivable to suppose that without his photographs he may have had no memories at all. The very lack of photographic representation in childhood can manifest itself in a lack of childhood memories for the adult. This tends to be balanced by an excess of photographic representation in later life which suggests that remembering and the photograph are intimately and actively linked.²⁹

Ugrešić was wondering what she might have remembered had she not taken any photographs. I imagine there would have been very few memories with fewer details than her recordings, considering that the art of memory is now a prosthetic phenomenon. By this I mean that memory has been extended to include external technologies. Certainly, since writing was invented there has been a tendency to spatialise memory. The photograph, a manifestation of a technology with the capacity

²⁸ Steven Rose, ‘Metaphors of Memory’, *The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind*, London: Vintage, 1992, 2003, p. 104

²⁹ A reference to Susan Sontag’s notion of those robbed of the past being the most fervent picture takers. Susan Sontag, ‘In Plato’s Cave’, *On Photography*, London; New York: Penguin, 1977, p. 10

to record exact pictorial details, has been embraced as the external object-as-memory *extraordinaire*.

PARADISE FOUND...AND LOST

To realise a memory thing itself is to realise it in all of its secondaryness – reproduced yet detached from perception. To perceive the memory-thing would be to posit it as something existing. It does/did exist but not in front of me. In order to ‘see’ it, I must make an act of belief. Like an incantation, I realise an old photograph: a portrait of a boy, aged about two. A pair of boots. I’m so sure he had leather boots on. I think I remember this because he used to say (as an old man and four sheets to the wind): “I’ll die with my boots on”. I also heard from his sister, now also deceased, how he was the only child in the family who had footwear going to school. Absent photograph! Not a work of the imagination and yet transformed into one as I struggle to visualise every little detail in its non-presence.

This is the gift of materiality of the object: it makes my photograph exist as existent. It is real but it is real somewhere else in all of its pastness: that sepia-colouring! Yet, the material object that is a photograph of the 21st century – it is possible to have it scanned and made sepia in a digital lab. Make it more past than it already is, please. No need to have ‘silver-halide heavy’ paper for the traditional chemical process. In fact, any colour or indeed, black & white photograph can become a mono-toned (magenta, green, blue, etc.) inkjet print (photograph?). A photograph that depicts the real but not *that* real. A denial of reality that is blunt in its unreality. A concealing (of colour) that reveals what it is hiding in mono(tony).

Raphael Samuel sees the return to old photographs as a contemporary process of comparison between then and now, that is, the past as alternative rather than prelude to now.³⁰ The ‘making old’ of contemporary photographs reinforces this idea of contrasting and presencing past. However, it is the form rather than the content that is presented as alternative and any notion of implied pastness as prelude cannot exist.

³⁰ Samuel Raphael, ‘The Eye of History’, *Theatres of Memory*, London; New York: Verso, 1996, p. 322

What does exist in this kind of photograph is Samuel's double dialectic: re-printed period photographs, sees the past being 'made to seem simultaneously more and less remote'³¹. The periodisation of a modern day image shares this dialectic.

In the cracked and stained old photograph, there is something very physical and priceless to be found. It exists in an authenticity that sees the photograph marked through space and time. However, these marks are not considered photogenic attributes. Rather they are decidedly seen as flaws. There is little (if any) demand for this kind of implied disintegration in the digitally manipulated reproductions of old photographs. Perhaps this cosmetic issue is about the 'absence of truth [being] an inescapable fact of photographic life'³² thus concealing a family or individual's neglect or 'violence' to the image. While the content of a photograph is not necessarily fictionalised by such cosmetic interventions, they do have an impact on the space that invites abstract imaginings. In imagining, one is simply adding to the narratives that the photograph already possesses with a consciousness of the fictive nature of this process. To remove this space is to displace the fiction (an excess of real in the form of newness that conceals signs of aging) and neutralise facets of the photograph's sensual nature seasoned through the years.

The sensual is a desirable state and that is why the photograph should be thought of more as a memento rather than the deathly *memento mori*. A memento is to keep alive the memory of someone, something or some place - it is a guard against forgetfulness. Like repetition it is a reminding – a poetic 'learning by heart'. One doesn't have to re-learn a sunset³³ but perhaps one should re-learn one's photographs? Not if one wishes to banish imagination from the photographic world. Imagination and the 'evidential' photograph like to negate each other. This may be as a result of the former being seen as problematic in the realm of the real which has traditionally been the territory of the photograph. However, in the realm of the 'image' imagination can seem like a therapeutic tool. Picture this: a woman speaks of the lost love of her life, a tall man

³¹ Ibid., p. 357

³² Geoffrey Batchen, 'Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography' in Geoffrey Batchen *et al*, *Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age*, New York: Aperture, 1994, p. 47

³³ A sunset may seem unique on a particular summer's evening, or it may go without much notice. To know what a sunset is, is to remember it without re-learning. Op. cit. Ricoeur, p. 23. As Quintilian (1st C. AD) put it: 'A sunrise, the sun's course, a sunset are marvellous to no-one because they occur daily.' Frances A. Yates (1966) *The Art of Memory*, London: Pimlico, 2003, p. 25

to change our world(s) and imagination can change perception. It can sate the desire to know by animating a photograph, via consciousness³⁹, with a knowing that is a subjective reality and not information/non-thing. Imagination makes 'present' the object (content) of a photograph, in that the object represented is imagined through the photograph⁴⁰. It can make a found photograph - someone else's photograph (someone else's world) – a new creation that is a founding: a bringing into being in the form of a spaciousness that sets up a world in the unearthing of the sensual object by choice.

Digital technology thus affects memory implicitly though not exclusively through the gateway of imagination. In a reversal of the imaginative process, where once imagination was brought *to* the photograph, digital technology allows for the workings of imagination to be situated *within* the photograph itself. This applies to both digitally made and scanned analogue photographs in the most vernacular of practices: easy-to-use software packages come as standard with a new pc or laptop computer. Today, the photograph is calling for faith of a different kind, one that asks us to believe that photography's *noeme* really is 'that has been'. It is a contested faith. For the photograph's claim to the past is undermined as a truth because imagination made as a virtual reality posits itself as a memory-substitute and given time becomes the memory.

Rose has asserted that to record a person photographically is to change the nature of the memorial processes, in that it does more than reinforce memory – it is to impose a fixed, linear sequence upon it.⁴¹ For the photograph itself, yes, it is indeed 'frozen' as a memory but to *be* a 'memory' it needs to be more fluid and as one is already aware the photograph lends itself to a fluidity of connotations which supposes a contradiction of Rose's view of photography.⁴² The more critical changes in the memorial processes are due to digital technological photographic practices and include the subversion of temporal linearity by using computers as time-travel machines, the 'unfixing' of family histories by the removal, addition or transformation of signifieds, the fragmentation of familial 'collective' memory through a proliferation of technological gadgets and the loss of images due to passive dependency on the same technology that fails, corrupts

³⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre (1940) *The Imaginary*, London; New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 25

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiv. Indeed, if I were to find the photograph of my grandfather, it would show him with sepia coloured skin, hair, clothes and boots. In reality, of course, this would not have been the case.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, Rose, p. 70

⁴² Rose does not refer to changes in the photograph's meaning when it is situated in different contexts, preferring it would seem to 'fix' images literally in a very local conceptual site.

and finds itself lost. These concerns will be the subject of discussion throughout this thesis bound up as they are with the other facets of the photograph that are subject to contemporary critical debate: materiality and meaning. The following chapter seeks to foreground the question 'What is a photograph?' against the backdrop of these pertinent issues.

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS
ON BEING A PHOTOGRAPH

THE STAIN ON THE SILENCE

The ontological status of the photograph has become more problematic than ever before: transformations made to the processes of production, vision and manifestation of photographic images by new digital technologies have changed the fundamental nature of the photograph. While the ontology of the photograph has never been fixed by any one definitive explanation, the problem is now one of omnipresent uncertainty. It has reached the point that a photographic practice is referred to as a post-photographic practice therefore giving the impression of two photographs. There is truth in this - there are analogue and digital photographs both, however, producing what one could (and does) name as a photograph. This may be more out of habit in that the digital printout *looks like* a photographic print - and of course, the process of producing 'pictures' could be (and is) called photographic, dependent as it is on the action of light to create an image, latent or otherwise.¹

Anne-Marie Willis understands the appearance of digital technology as being the catalyst for turning photography into a state of living death - it will live on in a zombie-like condition, 're-animated by [the] mysterious new process'². Willis sees a new 'photography' that produces, cannibalises and regurgitates imagery that merely looks photographic but cannot be photographic because it produces images in a radically different way to analogue photography.³ However, one would not say that different musical instruments produce something that merely sounds like music but isn't music, although no doubt Stanley Cavell would point to a difference in the relationship between photograph and object; recording and sound⁴. It is true that the relationship between the instrument and sound would be considered as more stable than that of the visual sign and its referent. However, music/sound is as open to manipulation via technological apparatuses as much as any visual imagery.

¹ 'Photograph' from the Greek *phōto-*, *phōs* light + *-graphos*, written. See C. T. Onions (ed.) *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 676

² Anne-Marie Willis, 'Digitalisation and the Living Death of Photography' in Philip Hayward (ed.) *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century*, London; Paris: John Libbey, 1994, p. 198

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 198 – 199

⁴ Stanley Cavell, 'Sights and Sounds', *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 19

It is Willis' belief that photography was once 'stable' and therefore the end of photography is actually the end of stability.⁵ Willis is correct regarding the advent of instability where both meaning and materiality are concerned but not stability's ultimate end. Regarding the once clear divide between sign and referent I believe that what is happening is a more prolific acknowledgment of the possibility of flux within the seemingly fixed image and this divide is now being retrospectively afforded a clarity it never really possessed. Photography has not become a living death rather it is a reincarnation and it follows that any notion of death should be seen in the light of a new beginning.

Willis suggests that the image/real distinction be replaced with the immaterial/material as a more workable distinction⁶. The photograph is object/subject embodied, in the material sense of the word. Except that such physicality is not always evident in a tangible form not least because the digital image does not depend on materiality as such for its existence. Hence, instability pervades the very birth of the image. Does one look at a paper photograph in the same way as an image on a screen? The 'look' is the instigator of the photographic image's birthing process. Just like the infant who sees herself/himself in the mirror and is now the 'separate' being that is on her/his way to an identity, the look through the viewfinder/screen at the subject/object and the release of the shutter, gives birth to the event that was 'gestating' in front of the camera.

The photograph is born but what is a photograph? Is it a revelation via illuminated display and compressed time where once it was a pre-photographic⁷ image? For example, no memory image will make itself evident in the way that the photograph is made manifest. The memory image does not need light to be seen and its duration is fluid but it cannot be observed by others in the way one sees it in the mind. A pre-photographic image will always be literally a memory image until 'fixed' by technology. Here, no sign of materiality but in the meantime is there something else

⁵ Op. cit., Willis, p. 207

⁶ Ibid., p. 203

⁷ Referencing Peter Wollen's text, I have deliberately changed the pro-filmic event to the pre-photographic event in order to accommodate the happening before certain types of photographs, for example, the snapshot whereby the subject/object was not set-up just to be registered on film/sensor, as Wollen's use of 'pro-filmic' is in keeping with his writing specifically on cinematic codes. See Peter Wollen "Ontology" and Materialism in 'Film', *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, London; New York: Verso, 1982, p. 197

lacking in the photograph, other than or because of, the mechanically reproduced image's propensity to be 'food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty'⁸ – fulfilling the senses while failing to fulfil the mind? That it lacks reality because a reflected reality can tell nothing about reality?⁹

For every photograph taken/made, there is the potential for a more ideal image resulting in the presence of lack. This lack was reinforced by the unchanging 'stigmatum' – the presence of being-thereness: what was there was there in a form of presence of absence. Absence exists as the very projection of desire. (I want what I do not have). It is therefore knowledge unknowable (What can fill the void? Will *this* fill it?) and present without appearing (desire nor absence ever materialises). Hence, the viewer was free to project more idealised images on the photograph in a virtual layering process. The photograph as the thing itself may be heavy with the weightlessness of the many narratives of many generations of the what-may-have-been.

According to André Bazin the origins of the plastic arts may have been a mummy complex – the desire for immortality that lies behind the death mask.¹⁰ Many a theorist has pondered the function of the portrait photograph as a death mask. As death mask, the photograph is past-present-futural. The subject will always die. Roland Barthes reads this in photographic portraits of those already deceased: '*This will be and this has been*'¹¹. Whether photographs will outlive the contemporary subject is a matter of technological determination, for it is commodified memory, in the form of external technological consumables that the human is turning towards to be the memory keeper of the memory things of memory.¹²

⁸ Walter Benjamin interpreting Paul Valéry's conditions for fulfillment regarding the differences between painting and photography. Walter Benjamin (1939) 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', *Illuminations*, (trans. Harry Zorn), London: Pimlico, 1999, p. 183

⁹ Based on Benjamin's quoting Bertolt Brecht in Walter Benjamin (1931) 'A Small History of Photography', *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, (trans. Edmund Jephcott & Kingsley Shorter), London; New York: Verso, 1992, p. 255

¹⁰ André Bazin (1967) 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', *What is Cinema?* (trans. Hugh Gray), Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997, p. 9

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (trans. Richard Howard), London: Vintage, 2000, p. 96

¹² See this chapter, pp. 32 - 33

For now, the photograph 'embalms' the face.¹³ Would it make a difference to the plastic arts-mummy complex theory, that the brain, with its royal seat of memory, was removed from a dead body before mummification? It was not that the embalmers did not wish for the deceased to wake up in the afterlife without memory, rather that they believed memory to be situated in the heart. This information only makes a difference insofar that it reaffirms the notion of memory outside of the image. The body/body-of-work lives on as long as it refers to the familiar subject/object through the eyes of others. It is this memory-as-treasure that defeats Barthes, the last of the memory-keepers in his family. He acknowledges this (reminding me of a Japanese saying that 'tears are the sweat of the *heart*') when he realizes that the love between his mother and father, evoked by a photograph of them together, will be lost to an 'indifferent Nature', when he is gone.¹⁴

Like a relic that one may have faith in, the photograph as photograph, is imbued with a religiosity that is absent in Bazin's 'very faithful drawing'¹⁵. The latter is unable to produce the same grade of (optical) opium demanded by photography's followers. With reference to the ritual of embalming: this time it is photography embalming a *time*, as opposed to creating eternity (as art apparently does) and Bazin proposes the family album as the site of an earthly resting place by the 'impassive mechanical process'¹⁶.

Gazing at photography and pronouncing it impassive, Bazin writes to erotic effect when he tells of 'the impassive lens' (although he doesn't specify the size) 'stripping its object...is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently my love'.¹⁷ The interweaving of notions of eroticism and religiosity would appear to suggest that Bazin is humanising the very process, both physically and spiritually, that he claims is mechanical. It is worth noting here that mechanical as a word has been understood as being opposed to spirituality, metaphysics or idealism from the nineteenth

¹³ The commodified face. The origins of a potential memory-for-all has its origins in the factory produced *cart-de-visite* portrait photographs of the 1850's only to see an explosion of memory-making by those who had never used a camera before. George Eastman made these 'faces' his target group for the marketing of his easy to use Kodak camera ('You push the button, we do the rest'). See John Tagg, 'A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production', *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988, pp. 48 - 54

¹⁴ Op. cit., Barthes, p. 94

¹⁵ Op. cit., Bazin, p. 14

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 15

century and prior to this was used in a derogatory sense to mean routine and unthinking, long before 'machinery' as we know it was invented.¹⁸

Cavell both identifies with and critiques Bazin's theory of ontology thus having no difficulty with the notion of photography as an 'impassive mechanical process' citing the technology as being independent of the human agent in the task of reproduction.¹⁹ What Cavell does consider a troubling aspect of Bazin's theory is the idea of the photograph as visual impression. Troubling because 'molds' (sic) and 'impressions' are made at the expense of the existence of the original, 'whereas in a photograph, the original is still as present as it ever was'.²⁰ The notion of a death mask also suggests to Cavell that it is an object which should remain completely unmanipulated. For surely to make interventions after the fact would be at worst an act of perversion, at best a lie.

If not a death mask, one may give consideration to the photograph's origins being thought of in terms of an original stain. The 'blackening effects of light upon certain substances, and chiefly among silver'²¹ exposes, on paper, through the chemical bath of developer, that which had been unseen and yet was there in all of its potent latency. This revealing display of its body may have evolved into different shapes, weights, heights and colours since Elizabeth Eastlake's day but the photographic method is still a bringing-to-light process. Manipulated, treasured, forgotten, lost and commodified as the photograph often is by its maker(s), it may still be described as a bearer of knowledge as if from the tree that was 'desired to make one wise'²². Whether chemically or digitally brought to light, the photographic image is a perceptible reality in itself.

The idea that the ontology of the photographic image could be seen to be inseparable from the ontology of the model²³, that is, the transference of the being of the pre-

¹⁸ Raymond Williams (1976) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London: Fontana Press, 1988, pp. 201 - 202

¹⁹ Op. cit., Cavell, p. 23. This I find problematic. A cello is considered technology and does it play and record itself when 'it' is reproducing *Cello Concerto*?

²⁰ Ibid., p. 20

²¹ Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1857) 'Photography' in Beaumont Newhall (ed.) *Photography: Essays & Images*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1981, p. 84

²² Genesis 3:6, *Authorized King James Version of The Bible*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 5

²³ Quoting Peter Wollen's writing on Bazin, see op. cit., Wollen, p. 189

photographic event onto the being of the film, was a notion predicated on the belief that transference equalled re-creation – a realism to realism. However, a definition of the essence of a woman as actress and a definition of the essence of an image of the character being played by an actress, would surely present different descriptions of being/existence? It is the relationship between the indexicality of the image(s) and language via a visual-intertextuality that collapses the boundary between actress and character, between the real and appearance. That is to say, the look of the woman as a woman existing and the look of her as a character, appear to be the same on screen. This visual intertextuality between the real (woman) and unreal (character) which involves the bringing of life experiences to a role is read in the very finite time of screening and in sporadic residual memories of the film.

Cavell gives the example of a ‘photograph of Greta Garbo’ not being ‘Garbo in the flesh’²⁴ to demonstrate an ontological restlessness where image and reality is concerned. It also works in such a way that one could hold up a photograph of Garbo and say it’s not Garbo. This leads Cavell to suggest that ‘we don’t know how to think of the connection between a photograph and what it is a photograph of’²⁵. An image of a person is not the person even if imaged as ‘self’. Therefore the essence of the model and the essence of image can indeed be separate, though one can see the appeal of Bazin’s theory to those who are involved in virtual lives and events over the internet.²⁶



FIG. 2.1 'THIS IS NOT GRETA GARBO'
IMAGE © DAN GERMAIN

²⁴ Op. cit., Cavell, p. 17

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 17 - 18

²⁶ The internet is home to Second Life®, a 3-D digital world. At the time of access it had a virtual population of almost 13 million ‘residents’. The currency is the Linden Dollar. Residents may purchase land, start their own business, meet ‘people’ in nightclubs, etc. See <http://secondlife.com/whatis/> (23rd March 2008)

Thankfully there are such signs and it makes photography all the more relevant as a process. Depicting the family, whether formally through studio portraiture or casually through the snapshot mode, is a ritual. From the moment of pose, through 'capture', view/printing, storage/display, the practice is universal and the image is the offering, which in itself offers memories. In the case of family photographs the compilation of 'memories' tended to be added to on the basis of recording special occasions, usually culminating in a familial biography in the form of the family album. The chronological factor tends to be governed by the way in which the photographs are stored. If they are a fragmented collection such linearity must be considered inconsequential to members of the family. The opposite of such division is unity. To unify disparate images within an individual photograph (as image montage rather than within the collection) transforms the photograph into a site of chronological subversion as a symptom of digital technology's impact on the domestic photograph.

Montage pre-dates photography. It is safe to say it in itself it is not a symptom of digital technology. The symptom is the acceptance and application of photographic manipulation in the form of montage within the everyday. Digital technology, while being a global phenomenon, is cultivating a myopic view of the world we live in. Never before has society been granted such rapidity of communication of images over such a vast expanse, while on the level of the local it can be insular, for example when two images from a family album are spliced to make one final image for display.

First some background on the kind of image I have in mind. A family suffered a tragedy when their youngest child died. They had photographs of this baby. Now they were updating their album and were sitting for a new family portrait. The parents wondered if the photographer would 'photo-shop' a photograph of the baby into the new family photograph. Here is a situation where two realities exist: the photograph of the baby when alive and the photograph of the family after the baby's death. As individual photographs they are indexical. If brought together they are the image of 'that has been' but this holding of both within the one rectangle of paper implies another narrative. Roland Barthes, analysing the photographic referent, argues that it is the '*necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens' (unlike other forms of

representation) that makes a photograph.³⁷ For Barthes, there exists within the photograph a superimposition of reality and the past. Here in the photo-shopped family portrait there is a literal and conceptual superimposition, an imagined narrative because such a grouping never happened in front of the camera and yet still maintaining a degree of indexicality because of the subjects having *necessarily* been there in front of the lens but at different times. The technique of seamless cut-and-paste (as unseamless as the rather haphazard sounding term suggests) does not acknowledge the process of a reproduction of the new digital photograph.³⁸ However, the primary untruth is temporal and this affects the image's status as a fact-based, memory-thing perhaps not for the parents but for later generations.

The manifestation of the 'photo-shopped' technique in the form of the new image needs to be named. To say it is false as an image is not entirely accurate but to say it is truthful is problematic. For the moment, it is an image that was not trying to conceal anything nor change history nor tell a lie. It was an idea conceived from purely emotive reasons. There may be many other occasions for bringing such images into being – family members emigrating, individuals unable to attend family celebrations, long distance relationships...all individuals could be brought together as if they were here (we no longer have to wish...in the image world) and all in the name of inclusion. The photograph offers more options than a memory, it offers the presence of those absent at the time of taking.³⁹ For long-term memory's sake this needs to be acknowledged and therefore I propose naming it an *inter-image*. It would at the very least be a term of reference for a specific type of manipulation. All too often, where there is acknowledgement of digital intervention, what exactly is manipulated can be difficult to tell. 'Inter-' as a prefix means *among, mutually, reciprocally*⁴⁰ and as such is appropriate for application to images that have become a totality. This totality may not affect short term memory but for future generations of a family it will be a genealogical tangent in its capacity to undermine points in time if unreferenced. It will also see the

³⁷ Op. cit., Barthes, p. 76, italics Barthes'

³⁸ This is why the manual cut-and-paste techniques used in familial montages/collages sit innocuously with framed individual photographs. The transparency of this 'homemade' technique illustrates the collective-as-collective. Juxtaposing images would be seen (literally) as a novel method of presentation and with as much significance as the content of the collective.

³⁹ I can't help being reminded of the environmental 'carbon footprint' – with its indexically implied imprint although it is a many faceted and fragmented (spatially and temporally) collective of 'impacts'.

⁴⁰ R. E. Allen (ed.) *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 383

photograph losing its value as an object as illustration of the presence of absence, a touching expression of loss in itself.

To think about the ways in which the photograph is 'housed' is to consider its influence on the photograph as object. Family photographs have been stored in family albums or stored collectively, yet arbitrarily in boxes. They have languished in the processing wallets back from the 1-Hour lab or flourished as a collection of interventions in the form of a montage of 'cut-out' portraits, framed and hung on a wall. Individual photographs are sometimes chosen from the collection and given their own unique holding-place. The locket would hold a miniature portrait of the loved one and is worn around the neck. A portrait, marking some special occasion – such as the 'graduate' photograph, would find itself housed within a frame and placed on a mantelpiece or hanging on a wall. Sometimes, a portrait will find its home within the frame of a gravestone, quite literally functioning as a death mask.

A photograph, although chosen specifically for its significance to the bearer, may share its dwelling with less photographic 'stuff' by virtue of the conditions of this dwelling place – something made to carry other things - the wallet. The wallet is multi-purpose, generally carried on the person and therefore almost as intimate as the locket. The beauty of the wallet is that the photograph, lodged as it is between tickets, receipts and business cards, may be unexpectedly brought to one's attention as one searches for something else entirely, at any given time and in any given place. Another interesting aspect of this object-relationship within the wallet is the photograph's affinity with money, made explicit here. Jonathan Crary suggests that photography and money are 'equally totalising systems for binding and unifying all subjects within a single global network of valuation and desire'.⁴¹ The wallet is a store of storages of objects of exchange status.

These are descriptions of but a phase in the domestic history of accumulation and display of photographs. Preceding this predominantly 20th century practice was a time when the photograph was only part of a memento, often sharing the intimate space

⁴¹ Jonathan Crary, 'Modernity and the Problem of the Observer', *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1998, p. 13

afforded by a piece of jewellery - with a lock of hair⁴² (Fig. 2.2). Geoffrey Batchen has questioned the significance of including human hair with the photograph.⁴³ It would appear that it is a reflection of an apparent deficiency of the photograph to fulfil the function of ‘standing in...for the body of the absent subject’⁴⁴. Further in his analysis Batchen asks whether a ‘tactile portion of the subject’s body to his photograph [is] an effort to bridge the distance, temporal and otherwise, between viewer and person viewed and between likeness and subject?’⁴⁵. This Batchen likens to the extending of indexicality. At some stage in the early twentieth century, this practice of extending indexicality by the presence of a part of a physical body died out. A practice once so appealing, it would appear as though bridging the divide in this way became meaningless as the sense of touch of the ‘real’ slipped in ranking. Instead the emphasis shifted to the real as referent through the image. In an ironic move the photograph as a tangible object is now under erosion - or to use less ‘tangible’ vocabulary – it is ceasing to come into being in material form and it is digital technology that is helping to put the materiality of the photograph out of the picture.



Fig. 2.2 *Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1860s*
Tintype in Elliptical Metal Pendant on Chain, with Two Samples of Human Hair.
Private Collection.

⁴² Again, reference to Crary who states that ‘photography and money [became] homologous forms of social power in the nineteenth century’ and that both are ‘magical forms that establish a new set of abstract relations between individuals and things and impose those relations as real’. Ibid., Crary, p, 13

⁴³ Geoffrey Batchen, ‘Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery’ in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.) *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 39

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 39

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 40

THE SHORTEST SHADOW

Images no longer have to be printed in order to be displayed, exchanged, stored or destroyed. What does this do to the photograph and how does it impact on the family album? Regarding the matter of photographic properties, the acquisition of its own language was vital to the birth and structure of the digital image. This mathematical language made up of ones and zeros, permits the creation of the digital image via a built-in computer in a digital camera.⁴⁶ It also allows for an image crossover between different peripherals without ever having to be printed. The impact of algorithmic dissemination i.e. the ability to send photographs globally from the home computer via e-mail or by multimedia text from a mobile-phone, is one of an increase in the quantity of images made digitally but with a decrease in the amount of images made into hardcopy. The photograph of the digital era is weightless and in terms of its identity it is a virtual existent. No-one bats an eyelid when the question is asked 'Did you bring your photos?' and a shiny disc is flashed at them as confirmation. For now a family photograph is as much likely to be a screensaver on a PC as it is to be a framed print on the wall. That's not to say that framed images must be paper-based to be displayed in a frame. As a response (or an encouragement) to the non-printing of photographs, companies such as Kodak, Fuji and Philips have designed Digital Photo Frames. A memory card or key is inserted into the frame and various settings allow for stored images to be displayed as a series, with a choice of background music.

Technological memory is a phenomenon in digital photography. It's to be found in digital cameras and mobile phones. It is on sticks, flash cards, CDs, DVD's, USBs and 'picture viewers' (images the size of a credit card can be displayed on these portable devices⁴⁷). It is on the new MP4 player – a technology more synonymous with aural media as the mobile phone once was, now boasting the capacity to hold an astonishing 400,000 images (40GB of memory).⁴⁸ What this means for the family album is significant in so far as images being stored on a range of peripherals will make a very fragmented 'collection'.

⁴⁶ Tracy V. Wilson, K. Nice & G. Gurevich, *How Digital Cameras Work*, <http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/digital-camera.htm/> (30th October 2007)

⁴⁷ Connection to a television set allows for enlarged images.

⁴⁸ Source: Argos Catalogue, Spring/Summer 2006, p. 375

A side-effect of digital memory-making is a disorder called Digital Distress Syndrome (DDS). A survey in the UK commissioned by Adobe discovered that consumers were spending vast amounts of money on the new technologies they could not (or would not) find the time to learn how to use them.⁴⁹ Not only that but images had been permanently lost due to system failures while one in four respondents could not recall images because they had simply forgotten the names of the files that the images were stored in. Adobe has since set up a web-page informing consumers of ways to store and share their 'memories'.⁵⁰ Nokia's straightforward solution is to keep all your images on your phone, or as the representative Mikko Pilkama put it at a recent conference on photography (to some derision from the audience it must be added) Nokia's vision is for the individual to carry their life in their pocket.⁵¹ So in the end, life is a few gigabytes of technological memory on a mobile-phone.

The importance of materiality in a digital photographic practice has been transferred from the image to the image *technology*. The technological material will not be 'attacked by light, by humidity...fade, weaken and vanish'⁵² in the same way as the more vulnerable paper photograph. To remove an image will not necessarily be to experience destruction engaging with materiality⁵³ when a mere click of a button will make it silently disappear. Yet, the apparently stronger material of technological apparatuses may have a more alarming weakness in the form of their being at the mercy of (the tender sounding) software. Once, responsibility for one's collection of photographs was personal now it is global where digital images are concerned, as those not yet 'materialised' depend on the correct software to allow the opening and managing of files. At the moment, this is not a problem but technological advances are being made at such a pace that formats will be rendered useless in no time and domestic archive keepers will find themselves 'refreshing' files with ever new and (undoubtedly) expensive software packages. Indeed, almost a decade ago there were files that were

⁴⁹ Vincent Oliver, 'Digital Distress Syndrome is the New Sensation Sweeping the Nation this Summer' <http://www.photo-i.co.uk/News/JLY04/Distress.htm>, 2004, p. 1 of 2 (16th July 2007). My thanks to David Farrell for highlighting this issue.

⁵⁰ <http://www.adobe.co.uk/photoshopalbum> as mentioned on op. cit., Oliver., p. 2 of 2

⁵¹ Mikko Pilkama, Director: Imaging, Multimedia, Nokia. Presentation, 'Mobile Digital Imaging Usage' at *Shifts: Archives in Dialogue and New Identities in Documentarism*, Jyväskylä, Finland, 20th October 2006, from Conference Notes

⁵² Op. cit., Barthes, p. 93

⁵³ Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs as Objects of Memory', agreeing with Roland Barthes' notion that the rejection of a photograph demands its physical removal (Camera Lucida, p. 93) in M. Kwint, C. Breward & J. Aynsley (eds.) *Material Memories*, Oxford; New York: Berg, 1999, p. 227

already unreadable by new software. This even applied to files created by earlier versions of the same programs.⁵⁴

While digital technology impacts on the materiality of the image by actively promoting its virtualisation, it may be asked whether the photograph's relationship to codes remains unchanged when in its digital format. Barthes has stated that the photograph is an uncoded message because of its analogical status⁵⁵. However, the semiology of cinematic representation⁵⁶ associated with Christian Metz refers to photographic reproduction as a code of analogy based on recognition and a theory that I am inclined to apply to digital photography.⁵⁷

It would appear that non-photographic codes and photographic codes are relatively unchanged by digital technology. The latter codes that include framing and depth-of-field refer directly to photography itself. A photographic vision remains intact. The non-photographic codes are gestures, facial expression and narrative and belong to the pre-photographic events. They are pre-photographic because they are autonomous – they exist outside of the camera.⁵⁸ That they may be employed to be part of the photograph, that the camera's presence may dictate these codes (for a moment) is not enough to make them primarily photographic.⁵⁹

These 'non-photo codes' are inscribed into the photograph, by photographic reproduction. This is true for 'photographic codes' but to produce photographs about the latter codes, is to negate representation, that is, the content of the photograph. The photograph in the family album excludes all attempts to refer *only* to the material support of images. For example, it could be a case of holding onto photographs that came back 'blank' (i.e. without content) from the lab by storing them in the family

⁵⁴ See Pete Lyman and Howard Besser, 'Defining the Problem of Our Vanishing Memory: Background, Current Status, Models for Resolution' in Margaret MacLean and Ben H. Davis (eds.) *Time and Bits: Managing Digital Continuity*, Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1998, p. 12

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', *Image, Music, Text*, (trans. Stephen Heath), London: Fontana Press, 1977, p. 17

⁵⁶ Op. cit., Wollen, p. 196

⁵⁷ Besides, the passport photograph is no longer relied on purely for its 'analogical perfection' but is literally coded with information. This appears to be resulting in a degradation of image sharpness – many passports are being issued with blurred photographs.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 196

⁵⁹ Just like it would be a 'mistake to accord new industrial techniques primacy in shaping or determining a new kind of observer'. Walter Benjamin cited in op. cit., Crary, 'Techniques of the Observer', p. 112

album. Are these errors photographs at all? As an object in the world it is a product of the photographic process: of the light (whether too much or lack of) reaching the film, the chemical processing, the materiality of specifically produced paper and the thingness of the object. In this context the family album is not about photography.

Then there are digital images that never see the light of day on paper. They are wiped from the camera because of 'errors' established immediately, that undermine the aim of a photograph intended for the family album, which is to reproduce a (pixel) formation that looks like the person/people/place in front of the camera. Yet, where but in error does one find such a host of self-referential marks within the photograph? True, the framing, image angle, distance from subject can tell something about the observer/taker as Pavel Büchler has argued.⁶⁰ However, it is the matter of 'error' – like a lapse in coherent speaking whereby the 'babbling' reveals more (by the fact that the speaker wishes to hide something) than the words uttered – tells not only of the limitations of the camera – of any kind – but functions as a cenotaph⁶¹ to the photographic (under)taker especially in the form of the infamous protruding finger pictures.

When errors are the product of too much light, this excess and imbalance around the mechanical or digital camera manifests itself in excess or imbalance within the photograph. A case of symbolic displacement as Wollen would suggest.⁶² One of the outcomes of the digital technological design is the lengthened distance between the eye of the photographer and the viewing screen of the camera. It is enough of a distance for the light of the sun to come between human and machine - the camera no longer being in intimate contact with the human face. One may find oneself attempting to take a photograph by pointing what appears to be a blank screen towards a subject and 'shooting' - a process that can result in chopped heads, blurring and cenotaphic 'finger' photos. Albeit a rarity in digital imaging, I'm thinking of images made on the small screens of camera-phones when on holiday where re-shoots may be impossible because of time (those guided day trips) or exposure conditions (that blinding sunlight).

⁶⁰ See chapter 1 of thesis, p. 7

⁶¹ The photographer will always die.

⁶² Op. cit., Wollen, p. 200

The fact that the digital camera is held away from the body, usually at half an arm's length, also contributes to imperfections in the form of camera shake. I have witnessed people automatically drawing a digital camera screen up to their eye only to realise, not without a little embarrassment, that this is not the way to take digital photographs - the comfort of the elbows-tucked-into-the-ribs rule no longer being applicable to the new technology. Progress is seeing to it that camera shake will be a thing of the past (without the use of tripod) according to Sony and its Anti-Blur Protection technology. This was designed with a particular consumer in mind: one that wanted to keep 'having fun and [spend] less time understanding technology'.⁶³ Naturally, they designed a camera with 'intelligent, automatic features' to save us humans from thinking but which no doubt makes us a little robotic in that we can be 'automatic' without 'thinking'.⁶⁴

Excessive light⁶⁵ is never the fault of light. One may observe its effect but never enjoy it as it 'ruins' representation. The excess is the cause of an oppositional determinism resulting in the excess of lack which accommodates too easily a thing called desire. That is, too little content is the result of too much light and the desire for the photograph to carry meaning overwhelms this undervalued manifestation of the photographic process. This is the photograph's trauma and its mystery. One accepts the visibility of gesture, facial expression and narrative more than the erroneous visibility of such purely photographic codes. For some the mystery is something to be solved. Hence, digital HDR will put light in dark corners and detail where there is excessive light. HDR is High Dynamic Range and it promises that point-and-shoot cameras in the future will produce better quality image-making because of the broad latitude given in a much wider range of lighting situations.⁶⁶ I'm inclined to suggest that there is an anti-imperfection conspiracy in the world of technology.⁶⁷

⁶³ 'Sony Cyber-Shot DSC-T30, Thursday, 6th April 2006' on <http://www.dpreview.com/news>, p. 1 of 3 (15th August 2007)

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt railing against a consumerism that swallows up human life, strongly denounces the kind of human activity that imprisons the human within a robotization of a kind of knowledge that 'calculates' without 'thinking'. Julia Kristeva, 'Life is a Story', *Hannah Arendt: Life is a Narrative*, (trans. Frank Collins), Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2001, p. 7

⁶⁵ Applies to its opposite - a shortage of light that results in the underexposure of an image. The excess of darkness also causes a lack and a desire for want of knowable, visible, perfect images.

⁶⁶ Jon Meyer, 'The Future of Digital Imaging: High Dynamic Range Photography', www.cypergrain.com/tech/hdr/index.html, Feb. 2004, Minor revisions: July 16, 2006, p. 8 of 16 (26th April 2007)

⁶⁷ Once upon a time imperfection was a sign of being human. Even Persian rugs were made with a single flaw to reflect the impossibility of perfection outside of the Divine. Perhaps this is the secularisation of photography?



Fig. 2.3 Amman: 'Cenotaph', 2002, Private Collection



Fig. 2.4 Lalitha & Ilhaam, 2002, Private Collection

Light's association with photography is essentially the same in the digital era for the time being. In order to make a photograph with a mechanical SLR, a digital point-and-shoot or a mobile phone, the presence of light is required for any kind of visually representative registration. In this context there is something of a mutually dependent relationship. In keeping with the philosophical concerns of the essence of photography and on the issue of negation of reproduction as the aim of photography, it may be (and has been) argued that light is not the means by which the pre-photographic event is registered on the film/sensor.⁶⁸ While light is part of the material photographic process it is also part of the pre-photographic event. The medium for registration is the film/sensor - it is the film/sensor that exists for and because of photography. Light is

⁶⁸ Op. cit., Wollen, p. 197

autonomous but it does depend on a photographic means to make its illuminating, photographic mark and the photograph is after all light (*phōto-*) + written (*graphos*).⁶⁹

The photograph is a representation which must have a shape or form that presents it as a knowable entity. The photograph as an imprint like the shroud of the resurrected Christ is a very romantic idea. It is also quite practical - light and technology together make a sign of what has been - photography's *noeme* as Barthes put it. However, the *Shroud of Turin* is alleged to have been a clever medieval fake or at the very least as a shroud signifying the body of a man other than Christ. The ambiguity surrounding the shroud actually makes it more similar to a digital photograph than an analogue print.

Should the photograph be considered memory then it should be accessible. The loss of images whether through inaccessible files, lost camera-phones or 'crashed' PCs means that technology is as vulnerable, if not more so, than the paper that once was the royal seat of the photographic image. Although there are digital images being printed on inkjet paper (and paper technology is improving all of the time) I cannot help but question whether those early home-printed images will have a long life because of the possible failure of the (then) new inkjet paper to hold the inks. W. J. Mitchell might well attempt to put my mind at rest by pointing to the infinite amount of copies of 'original' quality images that may be printed from a file at any time⁷⁰ (should it remain accessible). However, Manovich has identified a problem with this infinitely printable image file in that it does not adhere to the standards of reproducibility of a negative because of the amount of degradation that occurs every time a compressed file is saved.⁷¹

Light exists autonomously and it is the only 'component' of photography not to have been changed by digitalisation. It is at the very heart of what a photograph is - no other visual medium needs light as crucially when making its 'imprint'. While the digital image as a binary code on a key/disc/card is upsetting the gathering materiality that one recognizes as an image it may be viewed as a potent stage in the digital process. The concern regarding this stage is that it stays at the level of potential and as time moves on

⁶⁹ From the Greek language, C. T. Onions (ed.) *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 676

⁷⁰ Op. cit., Mitchell, p. 49

⁷¹ Op. cit., Manovich, p. 243

these images get left behind. The following chapter looks closely at how the subject, photographer and archivist respond to the technologies of the past and present photographic practices. For the contemporary family archive it would be very ironic indeed if it were to mean more 'light writing' but fewer images seeing the light of day.

MYOUTERSPACE
ON BODIES AND ARCHIVES

THE INSCRIBED BODY POSED

∞

The idea of infinity was a source of great anxiety for me as a child when I realised that no matter what number I counted up to I could always add on '1' more. This made me fear heaven, for as good as it was supposed to be, the idea of living forever seemed like a nightmare. However, it had also occurred to me that I had been alive forever. There could have been no doubt that there had been a time when I didn't in fact exist. I had no memory of my mother's wedding day but there I was in the photograph, a dark-haired flower girl. The fact that I didn't look at all like the girl in the photograph (it wasn't me) was inconsequential. There was no room for other little girls around *my* mother. I was, always had been and always would be the centre of her world (without end). The wedding photograph was my evidence as a child that I existed before I was born, that is, before I knew my own self.

π

The addition of digits with every breath taken, to an answer that is always in the process of becoming *the* answer, appears to me as a form of mathematical death-drive. Unsolvability by stand-alone human standards, all hopes rest with man-made technology to put an end to this matter. The computation of π will go on by machine as the human body is archived, that is, the 'body totally imprinted by history' that will be exposed by the genealogical apparatus.¹ Knowledge of family is after all a component of self-knowledge² and like π we will rely on technology to solve our future identity by converting our memories into digits for the eyes of others and for infinity. This chapter will be an insight into some of the changes brought about in the making and archiving of family photographs on the cusp of the digital revolution.

Looking at photographs one might say that the pose may be at once captured and captivating. In the early history of photography, the sitter (quite literally) was one who

¹ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 148

² Heritage Council, 'Chapter 2: Term of Reference 2', *Towards Policies for Ireland's Heritage: The Provision of Genealogical Services in Ireland* on <http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications/genealogical/chapter2.htm>, p. 1 of 4 (8th January 2007)

could not move for approximately half an hour if a likeness was to be recorded.³ To solve the problem of ‘ghostly’ photographs also required the subject to sit in a neck-bracing contraption as any movement by the sitter would result in a blurred photograph - time’s melt indeed. The results of the early processes of conventional photographic portraiture were photographs depicting the body as if it were a ‘still life’. Even the facial expressions of those early sitters appeared ‘fixed’ as they prepared for their photograph to be taken - they would not have dared to relax until they heard the liberating sound of the shutter being released. The prolonged gaze into the camera turned the subject into a still life, an ‘I’ fixed on a mechanical eye. Although the photographic technology progressed rapidly to allow for shorter and shorter posing times, thus doing away with the need for a bodily-stilling device, the fixed pose appears to have become standardized, changing little for decades in family photographs. Thus contemporary photographs are not without depictions of the fixed body but perhaps they are without the eeriness that accompanies ancestral photographs. This haunting atmosphere must surely have to do with the signs of temporal distancing (the antique looking clothes and props that are bound to time⁴) in the old photographs.

Psychological interaction between human and the (then) new technology must also have played a part.⁵ Yet, as I have mentioned, the fixed pose still remains in photographs taken today. It is as if one gathers oneself together in a psychological net for a very fleeting moment of virtual capture. Barthes refers to his body as being created or mortified by the photograph.⁶



Fig. 3.1 ‘Modern’ Snapshot, c. 1970s
Reproduced in *Photography*, 1983

³ John Tagg, ‘A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production’, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988, p. 41

⁴ ‘Photography is bound to time in precisely the same way as fashion’, Siegfried Kracauer (1963) ‘Photography’, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (trans. Thomas Y. Levin), Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 55

⁵ Walter Benjamin has suggested that the ‘prolonged’ looking into the camera was inhuman, even deadly. Walter Benjamin (1939) ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, *Illuminations*, (trans. Harry Zorn), London: Pimlico, 1999, p. 184

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (trans. Richard Howard), London: Vintage, 2000, p. 11

This process begins in anticipation of the photograph as if there are two bodies to inhabit – one ‘profound’ self (without the presence of camera) and one ‘anguished’ self (when aware of the camera).⁷ A look through studio-based family images on the website of the *National Photographic Archive*⁸ (Dublin) shows an overall consistency of fixed pose and expression between sitters. While a great many images are from the *Poole Collection*⁹ they do not differ significantly from images of any other collection. Generally, they are middle-class families, c. 1900 and all appear to inhabit the photographic body, an observation similarly made by John Tagg when looking at a selection of images from the early nineteenth century.¹⁰



Fig. 3.2 *The Galway Family*, c. 1890 – 1910
 | Photographic Negative Glass Plate,
 25.5 cm x 30.5 cm, National Library of Ireland

Within the group portraits ocular engagement is usually not with the camera. Like Thales, the first philosopher, the sitters gaze into space, deep in thought as they are (as if) on less mundane things, for the alleged familiarity of the camera could only breed contempt. But like Thales they too fall into a trap that was not one: while the philosopher fell into a well, they fall into the banal because they have relinquished control of the pose and the look. To face the camera is to look into and yet beyond the camera. It is to eventually become a reciprocal gaze between the subject and the viewer of the photograph.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 11 – 12

⁸ <http://www.nli.ie> (13th March 2007)

⁹ From the NLI website: ‘This large collection of material provides images of the south east of Ireland, spanning the years 1884-1954, depicting social and economic life as well as a huge collection of studio portraiture. The family firm of A. H. Poole operated as commercial photographers in Waterford for the years 1884-1945.’

¹⁰ Tagg sees the photographic body as part of the legacy of a ‘complex historical iconography’ whereby ‘elaborate codes of pose and posture [were] readily understood within societies...’ Op. cit., Tagg, p. 35

To look at the overall composition of the family photograph is to see a jigsaw of organised poses. The harmonious group is a result of the director/photographer's arrangement with the co-operation of the subjects. Heads tilt, hands rest, feet cross, the age and gender of the subjects will dictate where they will sit/stand for the good of equilibrium. Even the most 'casual' photograph may be interpreted as an exercise in contrived capture (Fig. 3.2). One entry from the *Poole Collection* is for a photograph taken in a studio setting on 19th July 1900 (Fig. 3.3). There is an assortment of props within the photograph: plants, a table with book, ornate rug, a tied-back curtain and a plain background. Everyone looks stiffly and self-consciously to their left.



Fig. 3.3 *The Curran Family*, Bridge Street, Waterford, 19th July 1900
1 Photographic Negative Glass 25.5 x 30.5 cm, National Library of Ireland

The exception within this group is the youngest member of the family. While looking to her left (something is distracting her?) she seems somewhat baffled yet inquisitive if not a little cautious. The little girl subverts the collective formality of the event. The knowledge required to conform to the self-conscious pose and expression, to have the awareness that this is a document recorded for posterity is with those who exchange and understand the vocabulary of photographic rationality. The little girl, like almost all children of her age, isn't conforming via awareness of connotation procedures¹¹ – she just looks like a little girl in an unfamiliar environment. This highlights the paradox of

¹¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', *Image, Music, Text* (trans. by Stephen Heath), London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 20 - 25

the photographic event – collaborative and yet a play of binaries, giver of pose/expression and taker of the moment, submitting (she is still) and yet rebelling by being ‘natural’.¹²

Besides investigating this photograph as an exercise in looking at generic poses, I have an interest in it on the basis of a genealogical mystery. The family ‘Curran’ and I share a surname. There is nothing to suggest that we may be related unless by the most extended of extensions and yet, the eldest girl looks uncannily like one of my sisters when she was young. This similarity between the two girls born over 80 years apart is based on my belief in the indexicality of the older photograph lending credence to albeit a tenuous link between now and then in an imagined bloodline.

While the studio photographic portrait in the early 20th century would have been expensive for many people it was much less so than commissioning a painted familial portrait. I was stuck quite forcefully by the disparity between familial representations of the poor and the wealthy in the paintings of the National Gallery of Ireland and specifically by the absolute absence of representation of the Irish poor in the ‘Portrait Gallery’ of the Shaw Room, home to eleven paintings, dating from the 16th to 19th century and hung between sixteen pillars and under five ornate chandeliers. Two sweeping staircases complete the room.

The excess of props within the Shaw Room (the staircases ‘sweep’ - we have seen them in period films) serve as a sign of having arrived in a space for indulgent spectacle. The coding is so harmonious that these large scale paintings are ‘at home’ in their setting. I would wager that even if it was the case that a ‘formal’ portrait of a ‘poor’ individual does exist in the gallery’s collection it would not be exhibited in this room because it would jar with the materialistic excessiveness of a life lived in peripherally laden comforts. The objects work as projections of affluence but the titles accompanying the paintings reinforce it, being Lord...Lady...etc.

¹² For Nathalie Bell’s interpretation of an ‘anti-representational’ child in a Hapu Postcard, see Nathalie Bell, ‘Re-Rereading *Camera Lucida*: Viewing Barthes Through Victor Burgin’, *Afterimage: Journal of Media, Arts & Cultural Criticism*, Vol. 35, No. 1, New York: Visual Studies Workshop, July-August 2007, pp. 9 – 10

The props within these paintings precede and mirror the props in the images made in the photographic studio. Pillars, rugs, books, small tables, curtains, chairs, greenery (plants in the studio, distant trees in the paintings) are purposely placed by painter or photographer within the frame.¹³ They do not exist (with the exception of the functional chair) as books to be read or curtains to block the light from a window but as pure codes. These props in the space that houses but never is home to the photographic family push the photograph towards being a pure spectacle. It is the problematic of the real (the referents – they were there) embellishing, while fictionalising the reality in an apparent mirroring of the bourgeois interior that is in itself pure escapism – from the basic necessities of life, from material struggle (they are there – we have them).¹⁴

The significance of the use of props is one of projection. They simulate the alleged interior of the family home of the subjects and by connotation their humanity, with their plants (nurturing), drapes (opulence), furniture (practicality), books (learned) and Eastern rug (adventurous). It is also one of exhibition. Whether it is a true or fictive representation of the family, these props are on display as if nothing could be said of the family without them. Yet in their explicitly staged presence they symbolise more accurately the inability of photographic representation to make visible some facets of this group's history. The props tell us nothing concrete about the family.

Contemporary studio photography is more likely to do away with props altogether although a quick search on e-Bay will provide details of 'painterly' studio backdrops for sale with the obligatory pillars, greenery, etc.

However, the content of the images are now more likely to feature 'spontaneous' expressions and poses – the photographer working her/his magic at a (pre-meditated) decisive moment.



Fig. 3.4 *Photogenic Child Gallery*, Dublin, c. 2007
www.photogenic.ie

¹³ For Benjamin's view on 'accessories' see Walter Benjamin (1931) 'A Small History of Photography', *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, (trans. Edmund Jephcott & Kingsley Shorter), London; New York: Verso, 1992, p. 247

¹⁴ Didier Maleuvre, 'Bringing the Museum Home', *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 146

The point of this is to present reality as being more real. That is, the photographic shoot did happen and people were there and they did pose, smile, laugh but within an empty space (the white background) whose very nothingness signifies, if not emphasises, the photographic event. The pose and the expression are the props (our child is happy: we are good parents, etc.).

While the emphasis has always been on 'capture' in vernacular photography it can (and has been) 'capture' done badly as the emphasis is on holding onto the moment regardless of the quality of camera, the skills of the photographer, etc. The promotion of early digital cameras and camera phones for the domestic market relied on the experience of the vision of the moment of capture as 'the' photographic event. Pixel resolution and lens quality were substandard compared to the less expensive 35mm point-and-shoot film cameras at that time but consumers converted to digital very quickly. It wasn't just the 'instant' image that appealed to so many – Polaroid cameras had been around for years and weren't embraced with the same enthusiasm or at least didn't sustain it. Rather it was the accessibility of the camera especially in the form of the camera-phone, whereby images could be taken in unexceptional circumstances but transformed into a photographic moment.

Digital technology has transformed the everyday into a continuous series of photogenic events. In response the contemporary photographic studio relies on the definitive separatism of 'nothingness' by way of the white background in order to signify a special event. It contributes to the creativity (like an artist's canvas) behind the 'real portraits' of 'real' people.¹⁵ As Don Slater notes the point of the family studio portrait is to monumentalise, commemorate and reproduce an idealised person outside of the flow of practical everyday life.¹⁶ It does not rely on the power of the *sentimental* aspect of photograph-as-memory that a snapshot may be relied upon to deliver. There is too much orchestration behind the studio photograph and it is the role of the organised pose to neutralise any potential sentimentality and connote idealism (while denoting realism) in its place.

¹⁵ 'You will see real portraits of real Photogenic clients. We create portraits like this everyday at our Dalkey Studios', www.photogenic.ie (20th August 2007)

¹⁶ Don Slater, 'Domestic Photography and Digital Culture' in Martin Lister (ed.) *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, London; New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 135

Quite simply the pose may be in the form of a response to the photographer who asks her/his subject to 'lower the head a bit' as Siegfried Kracauer asserted when demonstrating the different photographic affinities.¹⁷ One affinity (of four) is unstaged reality. Kracauer argues that the boundaries between staged and unstaged reality are very fluid in the field of portraiture. To co-ordinate posture, even slightly, is to actively blur this boundary and it is as much of a benefit to the photographer as it is the sitter should the finished portrait be considered good, i.e. the 'portrait will look like a casual self-revelation'¹⁸.

The technology that records photographs does play a part in the overall pose and symmetry of an image, from the overly stiff portraits of large format images to the candid 'spontaneous' images of the handheld point-and-shoot 35mm to the mobile-phone. Many images of children taken by parents/adults still have the perspective-from-above vision. The portrait photography of the mobile phone is an expression-centred phenomenon, with the face filling the screen and cutting out all sense of place and dress of the individual. The fact that clarity of vision is limited on the screen of a phone-camera may have users instinctively 'going up close' to their subject or more precisely, an awareness of the lack of clarity when viewing a captured image. Past photographic practice would see ocular latitude covering the size of a viewfinder but with the expectation of seeing the resulting photograph in a much larger format (even if it was the standard 5" x 7" photograph).

There is no kinetic latitude present in the photographs from the *National Archive of Ireland*, the stiff poses being copies of copies of copies, as subjects do not even try to negotiate the intimidating technology that negates the profound self. Hands rest, fingers close, feet cross, heads tilt (and I repeat myself within the body of this text). Body language is directed by the photographer, who knows the codes of representing dignity, a virtue as a reality. The passivity of the subjects is an investment in the enduring qualities of form over content. Like the pillars in the Shaw Room and the pillars in the

¹⁷ Siegfried Kracauer (1960) 'Photography', *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 19

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19

paintings and the pillars in the photographs, the subjects sit and stand upright, pillars of the community.¹⁹

Unlike the painted portraits that are framed in heavily ornate gold frames with dimensions of approximately 90 x 50 inches (one must look up approximately 12 ft to look into their eyes) I do not know how the Curran Family or the Galway Family photographs were framed. The photographs may not have been on display at all but pasted into a family album. The size of these photographic images makes them more intimate (but not necessarily intimate) than the imposing scale of the ‘snapshot’²⁰ paintings. However, all have been removed from their original contexts and are housed in national institutions, one as an archive and the other as a gallery (which does have one photograph on its walls, portrait or otherwise). All await the eyes of strangers, a fate similar to those of family photographs uploaded onto the internet.

EMPTY SPACE AND POINTS OF LIGHT

The archive puts one in the picture. On researching his family history, the poet Michael Coady observed the ‘hurried Latin flourish of a dead priest’s living hand’ and felt that he, in the presence of a baptismal document dated February 1876 could ‘almost touch the particularity of that day’.²¹ The ink on page invoked imaginary images of a small infant, of ‘water and candles and chrism’²². The materiality of the information within this archive opened up a space for the poet’s imagination, his wonderment at something unseen, mysterious and yet he participated, like a ghost from the future, in a moment of his ancestor’s past. The space opened up for such a reflection came in the capacity to imagine – it is this that opens up the world - past, present or future. The ink on page (that writing – still flourishing as it fades) moves the observer. It moves him through time and it moves him emotionally. It is an intimate moment, filled as it is with his own thoughts, an encounter that is ‘personal but beyond the self’²³, an echo of the unknown.

¹⁹ Of course, not all images will present the ‘mortified’ body of the subjects with the same intensity. This is in part due to a familiarity with the camera lessening the degree of camera consciousness.

²⁰ Snapshot in content if not in technique (Tagg’s historical iconography). *Op. cit.*, Tagg, p. 35

²¹ *Op. cit.*, Heritage Council, p. 1 of 4

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1 of 4

²³ Quote from Coady, *ibid.*, p. 2 of 4

Old texts and old photographs are a return to the self. They invite one to indulge in a moment of self-consciousness. In no time one is placed in a temporal no-man's land, somewhere that is neither past, present nor future. Suddenly nothing is fixed as the intertextuality of a life lived makes for quicksand beneath the feet. Paradoxically, such movement fixes the notion of mortality. Like Barthes, looking at a photographic portrait, one can share the idea that we will all die.²⁴ Coady refers to this time-travel of the mind when looking at old documents as 'presequencing' – a return to the past from its own future.²⁵

Within the archive, information lies in wait to be discovered, not as information in itself – after all it has already been collected – but as revelation: that which will bring meaning to something external, something considered inadequate as it stands. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida writes about 'the act of *consigning through gathering together signs*'²⁶. The beauty of this line was captivating. Firstly, the act: of looking, of touch and dare I say, of smell? The archive is a place for performance, spontaneous or pre-meditated (I will jump for joy if I find that photo). To search the archive is to look backwards and go forward, to act by participating in fragmentation and gathering all at once.

The gathering together of signs: the only stability is the stability of place, that is, to be an archive.²⁷ When Derrida refers to the stability of the archive, he is suggesting that the functionality of unification, identification and classification gives the archive its solidity and its dependability. Many people would agree that they feel the need to belong – to a place, a family - a collective of some kind as a way of knowing who they are in a world of signs. Communication is a performative gathering and exchange but it does not necessarily bring stability. The family album was a place where a certain amount of unification, identification and classification functioned to suggest a family's historical identity.

²⁴ On studying the portrait of Lewis Payne, dated 1865, in op. cit., Barthes (CL), p. 96

²⁵ Op. cit., Heritage Council, p. 1 of 4

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, (Trans. by Eric Prenowitz), Chicago; London: University of Chicago, 1996, p. 3

²⁷ Ibid., p. 3

To *consign*: a tantalizing word. At once to entrust – all that is precious and yet to dispose - like rubbish. What makes the archive? Information out of sight until it is searched for, like a long-forgotten memory that is sparked by a name, a photograph. The glass-plate negatives from Waterford are housed in an archive. Their previous home(s) were a photographic studio, a parlour room? Were they entrusted to the archive or rescued from a ship to oblivion that is the builder's skip? The act of consigning through gathering together signs is an act of distancing. The archive is a gathering together of signs necessarily distanced from their original contexts for the production of other meanings within the archive and other sign systems. This cannot bring us the yearned for stability as the sign itself may be a *con*.

Looking at the photograph of the Tobin family (Fig. 3.5) I see a gathering of codes. What differentiates this portrait from the others in the *National Photographic Archive* family collection that I have seen is the context for the distancing present within the photograph. It is distance through confrontation with the camera. Victor Burgin names four basic looks in the photograph²⁸, most relevant here are the look of the camera as it photographs the 'pro-photographic' event, the look the subject directs to the camera and the look of the viewer at the photograph.

In the Tobin family portrait of ten individuals, nine look to the left at something or someone outside of the frame. The father, while his body is angled towards the left looks directly at the camera. To interpret the look as territorial is to mark him as independent of the group while placed firmly within it. Mr. Tobin defiantly goes against the harmony of the group (he roars, silently) and by default against the photographer. This photograph was no doubt 'built to last'²⁹. Every time the mother, a daughter or a son looked for and at her/himself within this image, their eyes would be drawn to the commanding figure of the husband/father.

As a stranger viewing this photograph, I found myself wondering if there are descendents of the Tobin's with a copy of this photograph or know of its existence in the archive and whether they have a different story that would counteract my

²⁸ The other two being the look of the viewer at the photograph and the look(s) exchanged between people within the image. Victor Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs', *Thinking Photography*, Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1982, p. 148

²⁹ Op. cit., Benjamin (*One Way Street and Other Writings*), p. 245

interpretation. My version is limited to a reading of cultural codes, imaginative speculation and of course, the caption.



Fig. 3.5 *The Tobin Family*, Tramore, Co. Waterford, Between 1890 – 1910
1 Photographic Negative Glass 25.5 x 30.5 cm, National Library of Ireland

In *A Small History of Photography*, Walter Benjamin asks whether the caption is to become the most important part of the photograph.³⁰ To have a caption is to have information. This was valuable to me on a personal level when the family ‘Curran’ was named as archival material. The fact that this studio photograph was ‘Irish’ narrowed down the geographical source of the image as it seems that most studio portraiture c. 1900 appears very repetitive, in pose and background. The clothing within the photograph would date it c. 1900 unless of course it was a set-up (not unlike the Fae Richards Archive³¹ and not unlike quirky themed ‘period’³² photographs). The caption gives a certain security in the form of a more stable meaning - there is more likely to be a collective affirmation regarding the content of the image.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 256

³¹ In the Fae Richards Project, photographs were made of an African-American film star that never existed. The photographs were a mix of studio portraiture, film stills and snapshots – see Fig. 3.6.

³² See Photo Flashback Franchise <http://www.retailfranchise.co.uk/flashback/> for details on a ‘themed digital instant photographic studio’ (17th August 2007)



Fig. 3.6 'Fae & Martha' from *The Fae Richards Archive*,
Reproduced on www.ejumpcut.org

The archiving of photographs is an investment in the repression of death. The photograph may indeed be referred to a death mask but it is one that disguises itself as such through the capture of the living moments. While the photograph may outlive its subject (the depicted members of the families Tobin, Curran and Galway, all dead now no doubt) it would not be uncommon for the photograph to eventually disappear due in part to its fragile nature. However, the photograph does not have to rely solely on its own materiality to survive. The process of digital scanning - the conversion of a document to binary code, may ensure eternal life of the image. While Freud may argue that the goal of all life is death³³ I would argue that the goal of a life is the archive. One is always investing in others investing in us and as Derrida noted 'the archive is never closed'³⁴.

When Kafka suggested that we photograph not in order to remember but in order to forget³⁵ perhaps he had Thamus in mind, the God-king who proposed that writing would be the birth of forgetfulness. However, I believe that we do not photograph purposely to forget (memory as burden?). In fact, we do not directly photograph for ourselves at all rather we photograph indirectly for ourselves. That is, we photograph for others so that we may entrust them with our memory. We consign our memories away. If photographs block memory as Barthes states, it is because they are blindfolds - they do not cover all eyes at once - one individual may remember nothing but the content of a photograph while for another, it holds a world of memories.

³³ Op. cit., O'Brown, p. 100

³⁴ Op. cit., Derrida, p. 68

³⁵ In Scott McQuire, 'The Crisis of Memory', *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera*, London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998, p. 126

When a photograph is transformed into someone else's memory (this is a photograph of my mother on her wedding day: my mother's memory becomes mine but different) there is space for it to become as is: a presequential event open to the possibility of many interpretations. My mother's photograph works for me by reminding me of how my mother looked on her wedding day although my memory is of the photograph and not the event. But it also reminds me of the stories that she told me about her wedding day and they evoke other memories. I also create my own imagined narratives from them. To someone else, a stranger, the unknown photograph would be the site of a suspended conversation³⁶ that is, a place of potential information for the preservation of a reality.

Thinking of the future and thinking 'indirectly' of the self, one has children ('I want children, I do not want *myself*' says Nietzsche)³⁷. It is the "longing for what is farther, higher, brighter".³⁸ It is the desire to *be* the archive that motivates the making of photographs but we need archive keepers so our lives do not enter into oblivion. Barthes' theory of a photograph not being a memory supports the notion that photographic image-making is always about the eyes of others. It is here that it loses its primary capacity as 'memory-thing' and instead is replaced by the power of depiction thus 'liberating' us from the alleged burden of carrying memories - not because we want to forget but because we want others to know we were here.

The domestic archive must exist in a knowable form in order to fulfil its obligation and the family album of transparent pockets and paper pages still persists as the site of the familial archive. Digital technology is making an impact on which images are stored, how they are stored and how they are viewed. This is because it is independent of the traditional archiving process within the domestic space. Undermining the formal stability associated with the archive because of its 'free spirit', digital technology is changing the content of the album. The crux of this issue is based around the use or non-use of materiality to gather the photographic family or - without materiality - to risk fragmenting it.

³⁶ 'Voices must be heard for memories to be preserved, for the album to fulfill its function'. Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, Montreal & Kingston; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, p. 5

³⁷ Op. cit., O'Brown, quote, p. 107

³⁸ Ibid., p. 107, author's quote

Part of the reason for this is the multitude of options to consider when digital photographic technology is at one's disposal. The processes of taking, storing, manipulating, printing and dissemination offer a range of alternative ways of doing things photographically that one may feel in control of the processes (present tense) while relinquishing control to technology (future tense). By this I am suggesting that the immersion of the self in the technological process alienates the individual bodily from others while being part of a community...virtually. There is a sense of parallel existences in digital technology. An image may exist on a CD but also on a camera, be stored as print in an album and also on a web page. The individual appears to be free to take control of all aspects of the photographic process, rather than depend on a visit to the professional photo-lab, while being bound to a very small space, on leisure time, in what is the domestic lab.

The domestic lab – computer, printer, scanner, cables, software, cartridges, paper, cables, internet, camera, video-camera, mobile camera-phone, CDs, DVDs and memory cards - is not necessarily one that is used regularly once the initial enthusiasm for the gadgets has abated. This would partially explain why images made on digital cameras and camera-phones do not get printed. This does not mean that images are not looked at because they are not 'hard-copy', if anything they are viewed more than ever before. Slater has made the point that '*[t]aking* pictures is a taken for granted part of leisure activities; but *looking* at them is marginal'³⁹. I would argue that digital images are and will continue to be looked at a great deal more if stored on camera-phones and digital cameras. Especially camera-phones, as it is a case of accessibility due to the very absence of the tangible materiality of images. Of course, technological memory very often gets 'full' and the tendency would be to delete some images to make room for others, so the same collection of images would not necessarily be viewed over and over again. However, the same may be said of digital cameras – when the camera is brought out in order to take images, there is an inclination to view/show images already stored.⁴⁰

³⁹ Op. cit., Slater, p. 139

⁴⁰ Full-time accessibility to the camera-phone does not mean that images can be taken on a whim. One does not just have to rely on the memory card to have space for images, one does have to depend also on the battery that powers the phone. Reliance on the image-making facility of the phone is habitual and yet I have often witnessed phones 'going dead' when pointing at (what must inevitably have been) a 'great shot'. Mild camera rage and vain regret often ensue. The very short battery life of a camera-phone and indeed a digital camera always seems to come as a surprise to users.

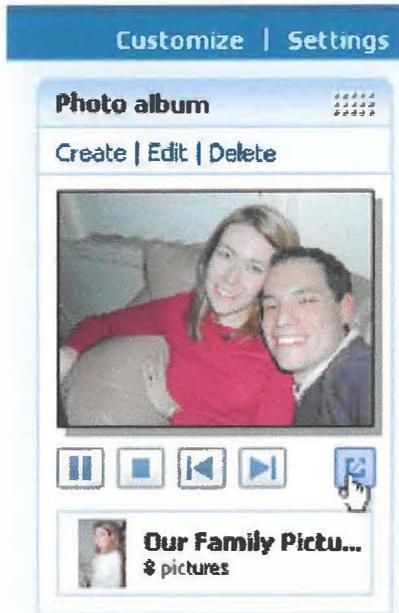


Fig. 3.7 Viewing Your Pictures on MSN Spaces
<http://www.microsoft.com/>

The act of looking at photographs is becoming a practice without the added sensuality of touch. Once to look at portraits was sometimes to trace the features of a loved one, hold the photograph that they held, for as Elizabeth Edwards has noted ‘photo-objects exist in relationship to the human body, making photographs as objects intrinsically active in that they are handled, touched, caressed’⁴¹. Now we show images of loved ones over the internet or on the ever present camera-phones.

While images uploaded onto the internet are seen as a convenient way for extended families to ‘see’ their relatives (compared to sending a periodic group e-mail), the images are open to the eyes of strangers. Not that this appears to be an unwelcome aspect of an internet album, in fact there is usually a virtual ‘guest book’ so that known and unknown visitors to the sites can leave messages. What was once the private consumption of familial images now becomes a public activity. On-line photo galleries such as MSN Spaces, Flickr, Shutterfly and MyFamily.com do offer permission options⁴², so to choose ‘private’ does allow limited access. However, this would still suggest that family photographs are becoming less consciously about being memory-

⁴¹ Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Photographs as Objects of Memory’ in M. Kwint., C. Breward & J. Aynsley (eds.) *Material Memories*, Oxford; New York: Berg, 1999, p. 227

⁴² Tony Northrup, ‘Create a Family Photo Gallery’ on <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/shareit/gallery.msp> (6th September 2007), p. 1 of 8

things and more about self-promotion (than ever before) especially considering the option for the eyes of a global audience to look upon them.

Burgin would call this the intentionality of phenomenological projection⁴³ which links in with his notion of the subject being an unending process of becoming.⁴⁴ Of course, potential for change does not just reside with the subject but also within the object. In photographic terms this applies to the meaning of images and nothing can have greater impact on the reception of an image than the passing of time. On a literal level, the embodiment of a binary language is always in the present as potential. However, it is this very freedom to choose that sees the digital image staying as a purely visual experience. The image will not be experienced as an image in any other way, whether by touch, smell nor (if one must) taste. All experiences will be mediated through technology. No doubt in the future we shall be offered tactile experiences in the form of '5-D' screens.

The sense that is hearing does not belong to the essence of the still image - one cannot hear its narrative. Rather the source of such narration may be the presence of a live narrator or a technologically recorded voice. The latter will do more to fix meaning, to illustrate the image as informational event in the form of the narrated DVD, because it is a potentially infinite presence with a potentially infinite audience. Picture H  l  ne Cixous watching her family album on a plasma television, hearing her grandfather's voice as he speaks about his photographs - would the thought have occurred to her to 'unbelieve' their connection as she did in front of his photograph? Is there something in the presence of the voice that situates one in a belief system that the mute visual image cannot hope to compete with? Or is the technological narration of the multimedia event that is the cinematic surround-sound experience of the filmic DVD, a victory for the ultimate control of virtual family photographs? In the final chapter I will discuss the changing landscape of contemporary visual narratives, both within and without the image and the connection between the public and private realms that sits on the digital fence.

⁴³ Op. cit., Bell, p. 9

⁴⁴ Op. cit., Burgin, p. 145

REMOTE CONTROL
PLAYING FOR THE CAMERA

In thinking of time as a possession, one thinks of it as something that may be used, for example, like a tool.¹ While time does appear to function in this way – to set the shutter speed on a camera is to utilise time – it is also something that controls us. Time is a tool insofar as the human being can be conceived of as a tool. To possess time: to think of it as being ‘on the hands’; to fill it; to not have enough of it - gives time a virtual materiality. Heidegger would suggest that the self who possesses time must be the self at once possessed by time², that is to say, we are time. When one is possessed by time, it is given its rightful acknowledgement. One has a heightened consciousness of time *as* time. The inclination towards temporal measurement is strong. What to do in a state of boredom, in the midst of an excess of time? Here time and the self appear to confront each other in a virtual disengagement from the world. The feeling of purposelessness, with nothing to distract, nothing to be done, coincides with time’s unveiling.

In Krapp’s Last Tape³, the boredom of everyday existence (although it is Krapp’s birthday it seems to be no different to any other day) is broken by the protagonist’s listening to self-recorded monologues in a play on memory, boredom and technology. As the tape plays, we discover that Krapp’s trip down memory lane is not all it seems. Rather it turns into a mapping exercise as he negotiates signs: words and vocal tones with his capacity to imagine, recollect and forget. There are moments when he seems to have no idea about the things he (as a much younger man) speaks of on the machine. The word ‘viduity’⁴ has him stop the tape, rewind, play and stop again, before sending him rooting for a dictionary as he cannot remember its meaning and therefore he must associate himself with it again.

The technology and listener become a contemporary, semi-embodied version of the early 20th century invention that was the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’, which had been likened

¹ Miguel de Beistegui, ‘Of Space and Time’, *The New Heidegger*, London; New York: Continuum, 2005, p. 69

² *Ibid.*, p. 69

³ Samuel Beckett, (1958) ‘Krapp’s Last Tape’ in Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, London: Faber & Faber, 2006, pp. 53 - 63

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59

by Freud to human memory in an externalised form.⁵ The Mystic Writing-Pad consisted of a slab of dark-brown resin or wax over which lay a double layered covering sheet. Writing was a series of ‘depressions’ made by a pointed stylus. On the wax tablet, faint traces of all that had been written (inscribed) were permanent. Page after page may have come and gone but what had gone before always remained on the resin block. As more and more writings were added, the traces became layered, entangled and de-contextualised. The traces’ memory found a home in the past as ‘the time that was’ while existing in the present, much like the recording and the listener who may or may not make sense of visual/audio inscriptions.

Krapp, listening to the pompous voice that was his own thirty years ago, hardly recognises himself. He finds himself detached from himself through the workings of time and duration (the ever new now⁶). The fact that his voice is also displaced, a ‘voice taken out of the body and placed into a machine’⁷ may indeed have contributed to Krapp’s perception of himself as another (‘that stupid bastard’⁸) in a phenomenological ruse of present (time), past (his voice) presence (himself listening to himself as past) at any one time. Time can make a memory a stranger to the self.

In the early days of audio-technology the voice and machine shared the present time and although physically separated, voice and listener were in the moment via telephone or radio.⁹ There was no latitude for any kind of revisionism except retrospectively as a human memory. With the invention of the audio-recorder, the listener was allowed the experience of a temporal estrangement between voice as recorded (the writing of the voice¹⁰) and voice as listened to on the re-playable magnetic tape. As exact and situated in the present as the recordings were, they were also open to future manipulation and decontextualisation. As Roy Walker, who worked on recordings in the 1950’s noted:

⁵ Sigmund Freud (1924/5) ‘A Note upon the “Mystic Writing-Pad”’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923 – 1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, (trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud), London: Vintage, 2001, pp. 227 - 232

⁶ Paul Ricoeur ‘On Memory and Recollection: Memory and Imagination’, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer), Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, p. 32

⁷ N. Katherine Hayles, ‘The Materiality of Informatics’, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 208

⁸ Op. cit., Beckett, p. 62

⁹ Op. cit., Hayles, p. 208

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 209

Anyone who has made a BBC recording and been in on the editing session may emerge feeling he can no longer call himself his own. Cuts and transpositions can be and are made. Halves of sentences spoken at different times can be amalgamated to let a speaker hear himself say the opposite of what he knows he said.¹¹

The present is a phenomenological technicality being as it is a part of the past and the future whereby one may indeed expect to 'call oneself one's own'. The photograph exists in the present but its materiality and its content ages as time passes – the latter by ironically staying the same. The photograph's realm is pastness - the moment of capture moves the image quickly into the 'has-been' - and as a memory-thing the photograph brings the past into the present regardless of it being a product of analogue or digital photography.

One futural aspect of the photograph lies in temporal manipulation whereby a new digital image replaces an old photograph completely but this is no mere duplication of an image onto new paper. The signs of aging – creases and discoloration are obliterated from sight thanks to a little digital botox. The content of the image may be left to remain in the past, that is, left un-manipulated. The more past it becomes the more it risks losing its meaning, or rather, the meaning encoded at the time of its making - its purpose for existing in the first place. However, another futural aspect of the photograph is that it always has the potential to be endowed with new meaning(s) by later voices.

Narrative identity is a construct of present conditions, past experiences and projections for the future.¹² It is the organisation of different moments in time collected together to give a sense of an individual life or indeed, to make sense of life. Unlike the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' with its permanent, illegible inscriptions and its temporary, intelligible texts, the traces of a life in narrative though layered, entangled and fragmented are somehow condensed to give a coherent, albeit gap-ridden, story. Like history, life-

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 210

¹² Richard Kearney, 'Where Do Stories Come From?', *On Stories*, London; New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 4

stories are descriptions of 'real time'¹³ and both share a mix of empirical recollection and subjective interpretation.¹⁴

Absence within presence in the form of the narrative gap is to be found in the moments that go unrecorded. Yet these moments, spent in boredom, contribute so much to the architecture of temporal frameworks. Paradoxically they darken in order to (en)lighten, for narration is not thought of as description rather as an *art* of saying and it produces effects not objects.¹⁵ Wolfgang Iser argues that gaps occur in every narrative and that it is 'only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism'.¹⁶ The production of a family album which was inclined to be descriptive and materialistic (as the tactile object) potentially produces effects beyond what it inevitably describes. These effects, depending on the context, will vary. One effect is that of boredom.

The banal is according to Eugenie Shinkle a 'problem of late capitalism' and an 'effect of material culture'.¹⁷ This comes as no surprise considering the perpetual eventing that is mass (re)production. The banal thrives in the over-familiar. Like the routine that breeds boredom, banality in photographs throws down the gauntlet to imagination. In a world of habitual image-making the 'already seen – already known' of vernacular images makes them at once passive in their banality and yet equally demanding in their right to be seen. Suffice to say holiday photographs are only of interest to those who are pictured in them; one has little interest in the holiday photographs of others. Such is the passive-aggressive violence of the photograph that, as Barthes noted it '*fills the sight by force*'¹⁸ especially when it is against one's will.

While the family album may be seen as a sentimentalised exercise in the banality of domestic aesthetics one must also consider the aesthetics of domestic banality. This

¹³ Ibid., p. 9

¹⁴ According to Aristotle even God cannot change the past but history has proven to be a history inclined towards revisionism, for better or worse. From lecture notes, Sandra Bonnato, *History: Narrative, Memory and Ethics*, UCD, March 2005

¹⁵ According to Michel de Certeau, 'Story Time', *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley; California: University of California Press, 1988, p. 79, italics de Certeau's

¹⁶ H. Porter Abbot, 'Narrative' in Lois Oppenheim (ed.) *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 11

¹⁷ Eugenie Shinkle, 'Boredom, Repetition, Inertia: Contemporary Photography and the Aesthetics of the Banal' from *Mosaic* (Winnipeg), December 2004, Vol. 37, Issue 4 on <http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com>, (6th June 2006)

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (trans. Richard Howard), London: Vintage, 2000, p. 91, italics Barthes'

may be achieved in the context of individualistic thinking which separates a collection of photographs locally from the world-weary collective thinking that kills any form of meditation on the already-seen. The collective is a neutralising force because of its hesitancy to see the much maligned 'uniqueness' of individuals. The speed at which a photograph may be 'read' is in keeping with a general sense of urgency regarding all matters in society as technological progress speeds everything up. Derrida gives a more nuanced reading (based on an essay by Jan Patočka¹⁹) on technology and the individual, when he states that technological civilisation relies on a misunderstanding of the unique self so that there is in today's society an emphasis put on the role of an individual rather than the person.²⁰ A role implies a category and categories were made to be filled by more than one. This has resulted in the individual (as individual) being veiled by a social mask whereas the individual as role player can lay claim to knowledge on all aspects of life – nothing is left concealed, everything is exposed. Therefore everything already known, everything already seen, bores.

II PAUSE

As imagined narrative and as descriptive image, the domestic photograph should not be forced into the theory of everything as information. This would be epistemological fascism. It is already the basis on which the media, at its most grotesque, can show footage of images – stills or moving – in the guise of the collective's right-to-know-because-it-is-information. Ethics go out the window when the real agenda of politics and viewing figures make the world a stage. I write this in light of the recent massacre in a college in America²¹ which was partly videotaped by the gunman and whose footage was shown as part of a news broadcast. It is also available to view on the internet (April 2007). The mantra bandied about is that people should be able to get an insight into this man's madness. This tragedy has not been restrained to the usual 'news' coverage but has been graphically illustrated so that the world can indulge in the

¹⁹ 'Is Technological Civilisation in Decline, and If So Why?' Title of essay by Jan Patočka as cited in Jacques Derrida 'Beyond: Giving for the Taking, Teaching and Learning to Give, Death', *The Gift of Death* (Trans. David Wills), Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 1995, pp. 35 - 52

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36

²¹ 'Virginia Tech Shooting Leaves 33 Dead', see The New York Times article, 12 April 2007, on <http://www.nytimes.com>, (24th March 2008)

Vernacular photographs have been described as ‘home-made artefacts [that] circulate as symbolic statements about membership, identity and lifestyle’³². If vernacular has a signature style it is proletarian in design and functionality. The aesthetic of this genre of photography has been one of inclusiveness rather than exclusivity – a consideration for content over form - flaws and all. That images were hardcopy before viewing made this aesthetic latitude possible but the ‘symbolic statements’ of contemporary digital practice imply a professional bias where the photographer is concerned. While images may literally be home-made, the aspiration of the image-maker is for professional, lab-standard effects³³. A rose is a rose by any other name and the vernacular is recognisable in a multitude of images made by non-professionals – content still reigning over form in images - even in those touched up with a digital magic wand. Pierre Bourdieu, making his assessment of popular photography in the 1960’s concluded that photography as a widespread practice did not necessitate an aesthetic experience in order to be popular.³⁴

Writing in the context of the moving image but applicable to photography, Judi Hetrick asserts that vernacular as a precise category describes a work that is ‘non-fiction’ made by ‘untrained’ individuals who ‘attempt to realistically reflect life around them’.³⁵ Either the term ‘vernacular’ must be widened to include the digitally manipulated image that has changed thereby differentiating itself from its referent or the notion of ‘realistic reflection’ must be dropped. It would appear as if the photographer of the vernacular genre does believe she/he is realistically reflecting their life or the lives of others when image-taking but the image-making at the computer-manipulation stage potentially negates any attempt at such a laudable endeavour. John Roberts has argued that such imaging techniques produce the ‘cultural displacement of the indexicality of the photograph as an *automatic truth-effect*’³⁶ and not the death of the truth of resulting images. So, there is fiction in the truth-effect or truth in the fiction which makes the photograph a more realistically overt object of (a) limited, subjective reality.

³² James M. Moran quoted in Judi Hetrick ‘Amateur Video Must Not Be Overlooked’, *The Moving Image* 6.1, 2006 on http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_moving_image/v.006/6.1hetrick.html p. 2 of 10 (30th April 2007)

³³ For example, the relatively affordable Epson Perfection 3490 PHOTO scanner gives 3 operating modes: Auto, Home and Professional.

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu cited in John Roberts, ‘Digital Imagery and the Critique of Realism’, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 224

³⁵ Op. cit., Hetrick, p. 7 of 10

³⁶ Op. cit., Roberts, p. 221, italics Roberts’

How often does one consider the photographer of these vernacular photographs? There have been occasions when photographs whose subject is known to me have caused me to wonder 'who?'. I return to the photographic life of my maternal grandfather, this time in his twenties. My grandfather poses, apparently dressed for the lens-based occasion, appears to flirt (with the camera, with the photographer?) and be thoroughly enjoying himself, in his visual monologue. This bare-faced event, something akin to a modelling session, has aroused rather wayward thoughts in my mind. The photographer was very competent. Exposure, sharpness and composition are all well executed. I remember my grandmother, gently mocking these images of my grandfather when we used to look at them. My grandmother was a great believer in 'memory-making' but never seemed to apply that belief to even the most basic photographic practice. I did suspect that it was my grandmother's brother who was the mystery photographer. This was the man who moved to London, never married and apparently never had a girlfriend. I could be wrong but there is nothing in the photograph or written on the photograph to convey the identity of the photographer.

While interpretation acknowledges and utilises subjectivity, translation tends towards a more collective-agreed, literal rendering of a subject. From treasured to destroyed, tolerated to dismissed, the relationship between owners/photographers and their photographs has always been open to change³⁷ and this process may have more than a little to do with the notion of translation. Of course, digital images depend on translation for their very existence. However, for the meaning of a photograph to be significant, whether digital or analogue, translation is, in the words of Ricoeur, 'a work advanced with some salvaging and some acceptance of loss'³⁸ and the intention of the translator/reader 'derivative, ultimate, ideational'³⁹ according to Benjamin.

To translate the content of a photograph then is to lay claim to something resembling the 'truth' of the object. Textual renditions that are of the image while accompanying

³⁷ One of the most stunning uses of duration and its effect on photographs via intervention is to be found in filmic scenes from the biographical *Mummy Dearest* based on Joan Crawford's life. Framed photographs of Crawford and her husband adorn the actress's house. When they split, Crawford displays re-framed photographs *sans* husband - he being crudely removed by the hand that rocks the cradle and a sharp scissors.

³⁸ Paul Ricoeur, 'Translation as Challenge and Source of Happiness', *On Translation*, London; New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 3

³⁹ Walter Benjamin (1923) 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', *Illuminations*, (trans. Harry Zorn), London: Pimlico, 1999, p. 77

the image aspire to be translatable as if in the process to discourage interpretation. For to paraphrase Franz Rosenzweig: to translate is to serve two masters - the producer-photographer and the reader-viewer⁴⁰ - which is an impossibility as Ricoeur emphasizes when he observes that the 'vow of faithfulness and a suspicion of betrayal'⁴¹ is situated at the heart of translation. It may be argued that the more time passes the more the image needs translation but must depend on interpretation, suggesting that the pendulum moves further from faithfulness and closer to betrayal. In looking back (as one must always do when looking at a photograph) one is involved in a process akin to 'reading time backwards'⁴² with all the disorientation and subjectivity that this entails. Sometimes this can mean the loss of the image because it is deemed to be insignificant when interpretation is not an option simply because the eyes of a disinterested viewer may be upon it, especially in the realm of the vernacular. Sometimes the image survives, never quite fulfilling its original intention, existing as an act of betrayal. This is not as gloomy as it may first appear in the Western world at least. The act of betrayal in Gethsemane gave birth to a whole new way of thinking about life, death and immortality.

>>FAST FORWARD

It must be said that the ability to 'translate' an image does not guarantee its longevity. Once to know a photograph was enough to keep it. That image-making was a periodic venture, and that the process included a waiting time in order to see the resulting photographs (sometimes a long time until a roll of film was used up, sometimes only an hour) endowed photographs with a certain captivating power. As photographic objects they were already historical, already ritualised. Like the plastic relics brought home from the pilgrimage, one kept them as memento and also because they were 'holy' having come from a holy place. To discard the object, the photograph that is memento, would seem a somewhat sacrilegious act to those superstitiously inclined. Time was the

⁴⁰ See op. cit., Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. 4

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 4

⁴² As though recollection inverted the so-called 'natural order' of time, as stated by Paul Ricoeur in Paul Ricoeur 'Time and Narrative: Threefold *Mimesis*', *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1* (trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer), London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 67 - 68

beholder of this particular photographic grail. Time in digital culture is an instrument where less is more.

The time between capturing an image and viewing an image has been dramatically reduced by digital technology. Even images from the Polaroid camera, marketed as 'instamatic' actually took an average of 90 seconds, depending on the surrounding environmental temperatures, to become visible. A digital camera allows for image-viewing in seconds albeit on a screen. I would argue that this is part of the reason that digital images do not necessarily make it onto paper. Virilio sees a temporal shift in what he has termed the aesthetics of disappearance as a result of the loss of the 'slow pace of the revelation of things' which has been replaced by that other sense of time: speed.⁴³ The image that appears so rapidly, in comparison to the time it takes to see images developed from a roll of film sates the ocular appetite for results. The image, in a matter of seconds, becomes the already-seen. Yet this sense of the image as rapidly appearing is at odds with the temporal quirk of actually taking the image – there is a time delay - between pushing the shutter-release button and the image's creation. This technological hesitation causes slight camera shake resulting in a blurred image, which on a small camera screen is indiscernible – the image looking as if it has been sharply registered. It is on enlargement that the 'irregularity' is most conspicuous. A consciousness of the inevitability of blurred images may deter the photographer from producing hardcopies.

However, there may also be a neurological reason for a reluctance to convert binary digits into material objects when technological time delays are not the issue:

Simple familiarity with a visual object – meaning that the object has been seen but is not associated with any positive or negative consequences – usually results at a neural level in a reduced response to that object on repeated presentations. Neuroscientists say the neural response has been *attenuated* or *habituated* by the prior presence of the object.⁴⁴

⁴³ Op. cit., Virilio, p. 34. In making a comparison between the impact of new technologies against the models of old, Virilio makes a rather nostalgic and telling comment on the 'moment' when the mechanical lift was acquired 'we lost the staircase'. Anyone who uses a wheelchair or pushes a buggy knows that staircases can work against the human.

⁴⁴ James T. Enns, 'Imagination: Visual Learning', *The Thinking Eye, The Seeing Brain: Explorations in Visual Cognition*, London; New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004, p. 328

While this may seem an extreme example of the affect of the 'already-seen', it appears to be actually contributing to the non-materialising of the replica image simply because of the repetition of the capturing process, which while familiar, is also (via screen) the 'ever-new'.

To save an image on technological memory is to make it disappear. People appear to be very careful with their family photographs as material objects but stories abound of camera-phones, USB keys, memory cards, etc. being lost, damaged and in some cases (especially with phones) stolen and usually with family images stored on them. The result is a gap in the family album. In some cases there is no material family album but a series of digital images stored on various gadgets belonging to various members of the family. This is part of a larger phenomenon that I will term, with its Virilioian reference, 'digital inertia'. Virilio's concern with new technologies and their role in environment control is based on the body that is static 'less a moving body than an island' which he terms a 'pole of inertia'.⁴⁵ Apply this to digital photography's 'home-lab' consisting of a computer (photographs can be stored, sent via e-mail, uploaded onto web-pages), scanner (for manipulation) and printer (for those who don't want a paperless album) and everything is indeed 'concentrated on the spot...space no longer stretches out ahead'⁴⁶. While this spatial inertia doesn't hinder production, digital inertia pauses if not stops the digital image being born into materiality.

In keeping with the concept of progress, new (and newer) photographic technologies are expected to affect the processes within photographic practice. Digital photographic technologies have revolutionised the way photography is thought about and used (and abused). A significant selling point for it was the promise of autonomy -- one was not just the photographer but an artist (manipulator), editor and printer. It did away with the 'middle-man' but such is the trouble with freedom, sometimes it's too much like hard work.

⁴⁵ Paul Virilio, 'The Last Vehicle', *Polar Inertia* (trans. Patrick Camiller), London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000, p. 17

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17

Kodak seems to be aware of the movement away from the printed image as they currently urge customers to 'Rediscover the picture book'⁴⁷. This concern is touching...or not - perhaps paper and ink-cartridge sales are down? No matter. Should the customer not wish for something so last-century (and static) they can help themselves to the Kodak EasyShare Digital Picture Frame. It is 'Life in motion – frame by frame'⁴⁸. Digital frames work by inserting a USB key into the frame, allowing for image files to be converted and displayed as pictures. The duration of each image displayed and the sequencing is set by the user with background music as an option. The latest version includes a remote control.⁴⁹ The digital frame does not require images to have a material basis for them to persist and as Hayles has noted, dematerialization is generally 'understood as an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence'⁵⁰. While Hayles believes that there is room for both pattern and presence, the prevailing view is understood as one replacing the other. My interpretation of this is that a digital image existing in 'pattern-ness' is not necessarily an image, in that it can be categorised as an image and filed in 'My Pictures' but as a file-as-image-in-waiting. To make it 'absent' is to have the file corrupted by randomness (noise) all the while the file exists but never to become an image therefore not being quite absent but inaccessible.

Using the camera-phone as an apparatus of dematerialisation and taking randomness at its most literal one may ask what exactly is in the digital family album? If ever there was a device that was home to randomness it is the digital camera-phone. Banned in certain public places (schools and community swimming pools, etc.), lauded in crisis situations (London bombings) the phone is home to an eclectic mix of images. The public is now encouraged to tell/sell their stories to the likes of citizen journalism agency *Scoopt* owned by Getty Images. Nokia hosts the 'Nokia Citizen Journalism Award' – last year's winner (who wished to remain anonymous) made a series of three photographs taken immediately after the Tavistock Square suicide bomb blast in London and were published internationally.⁵¹ Whether moving in the world of celebrities (Kate Moss and cocaine) or simply making the journey home on the Luas

⁴⁷ 'Photo Books' on <http://www.kodakgallery.com> (26th February 2007)

⁴⁸ 'EASYSHARE Digital Picture Frames' on <http://www.kodak.com/> (26th February 2007)

⁴⁹ 'The Perfect Way to Display your Digital Photos!', Argos Catalogue, Autumn/Winter 2007, p. 945

⁵⁰ Op. cit., Hayles, p. 29

⁵¹ 'Photo Opportunities INSIDE Story', *Independent Online Edition* on <http://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/article2640862.ece>, 11th June 2007 (17th August 2007) p. 1 of 3

space of time. What does it mean when eighty years after a photograph is taken of a barefoot child, that child's grandson walks into a laboratory in Dublin and asks for a reprint that includes shoes? Is he not making contemporary the most past of past photographs? Ireland's thriving economy may be casting a long shadow over our underprivileged ancestors. A revisionist domestic history via manipulated photographs may not end there.

Geoffrey Batchen considers the notion of the human under erasure because of procedures such as cosmetic and prosthetic surgery, genetic engineering and cloning.⁵⁶ Of course, cosmetic surgery as manipulation is a pre-photographic event so it follows that body as referent and photograph as index become epistemological rogues. The body, like the photograph, has already shared a history of manipulation but this particular link sits close on the level of the surface as screen and skin, and skin is beginning to mean different things to different people. Active skin technology is a project currently being researched by the BT futurologist Ian Pearson.⁵⁷ Pearson believes that layers of nanoscale circuitry could be ready to be built into human skin by 2015. The electronic circuits would enable moving images in the back of the hand. It may also revolutionise the cosmetic industry by replacing actual cosmetics with cosmetic programmes.

Every consumer who buys a product buys a story. That the stories remain hidden in this hyper-visual world of image production is a little ironic but not at all unexpected. My Hewlett-Packard 7 ml cartridge has 'Product of Malaysia' printed on its black, off-white and blue plastic wrapper. It implies a collection of stories regarding the individuals involved in the cartridge's production which I am unlikely to ever hear about or see but I can imagine. The production of a family album has something in common with the technological consumables that enable it to become the product 'story'. Yet, the conditions of technological production in the factory environment cannot be compared to that of the self-initiated image-maker – in the factory there are hierarchies, rules, schedules, dress-codes, no ownership of the technologies and the list goes on...

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997, pp. 214 - 215

⁵⁷ 'What Next?: Active Skin' in Paul Parsons (ed.) *Focus Magazine*, April 2007 #175, Bristol: Bristol Magazines Ltd., (BBC), p. 94

The similarities begin and end where time and ideologies meet. To make an image is potentially an act of labour (even if of love). It involves time in its guise of repetition and vision that is short-term. Factory targets, in general, are kept at very short-term periods – it helps keep the momentum if workers are consistently reaching or close to reaching them. Digital technology is similar in its application to vernacular image-production. A wide range of consumables and processes are available to invest in and utilise in order to produce the societal product ‘family album’. However, the thinking stops at the short term vision, another reason why an excessive amount of images are ‘produced’ but are never made because of the ‘take-and-view’ habitual process – habitual via 24/7 accessibility. The long-term effect being the forgetting of a sensuality, intimacy and history of the vernacular photograph that was an existent entity.

CODA

HOCUS PHOCUS

Digital culture bestows a gift of magic to those who possess its technologies. A few clicks here and a few taps there and one's images appear to virtually materialise in the eyes of an audience of global proportions. Welcome to a world (wide web) that has quite literally become a stage for those who want to play virtual parts in a *Second Life*¹ and whose curtains never fall. However, digital technology allows for a little voodoo. Sticking pins into a photograph may indeed hurt memory. 'Remove this', 'add that', 'age this' are commands that have the power to alter family histories and in effect construct what become in time new memories for the later generations. Thus revised denotations will connote imagined narratives and become part of an untold story about histories, the message being in the manipulation.

Should one suspend one's concern regarding the 'magical' content of images, one may approach the notion of familial photographic history as proving to be more comprehensive than ever before. Websites such as *Bebo*, *MySpace* and *Facebook* provide virtual pages that may be constantly updated with images of an individual's or a family's 'everyday life'. However, the images of the everyday will move like currency in the 'visual economy of repetition'². Not that such websites are imagined to be the be-all and end-all of the contemporary family album. The internet is only one facet amongst many, of the virtualisation and spatialisation of the cultural entity 'album'. Hence, the possibility of an on-going fragmentation sees the familial archive becoming an 'ahistorical' narrative. For there is something of a geographical displacement occurring when one considers that images travel through a virtual space but in real time, being here and there, in public and private realms, meaning one thing to one individual and another, to another.

Dislocation does not have to be negative when one considers the views of the 'evangelistic proponents of digital culture' who claim that digital images are liberated

¹ See <http://secondlife.com/whatis/> (23rd March 2008)

² Quote by Patrice Petro in Eugenie Shinkle 'Boredom, Repetition, Inertia: Contemporary Photography and the Aesthetics of the Banal', *Mosaic (Winnipeg)*, December 2004 on <http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com>, p. 2 of 13 (6th June 2006)

pictures, freed from their material containers.³ To argue that digital is liberating is to suggest that analogue is imprisoning. While every digital image is potentially a global phenomenon, crossing space in 'no-time' and may be in many different places at once, it does so as part of a material container that is in the form of the technological medium that may or may not be accessible, reliable or permanent. This may be applicable to the paper photograph (and its storage space) in different ways. Therefore both have their limitations in materiality - the photograph as a photograph and the digital image as a binary code situated within technology-as-container. The photographicities of digital and analogue share some other attributes. There is the possibility of image manipulation being ever present. In the domain of memory the photograph may play many parts – as souvenir, reminder, site of evocation, post-memory object. To interfere with the indexical status of the photograph is to disturb (indeed sometimes obliterate) the affective-ness of the referents, thus undermining the 'what has been' and therefore the photograph's relationship with memory. This is a pertinent issue in digital culture as historically the action of manipulation would have been located outside of the domestic realm whereas now it operates comfortably within.

Regarding the photographicities' respective manifestations of digital image and photograph, there is the notion of an image being a photograph in the eyes of those who see what they want to see. Regardless of the process of production, the 'photograph' will show the referent (the face/trace of a beloved...) therefore fulfilling its function as a visual link in their absence. That a screen will display images will not lessen the impact of seeing, for sometimes looking suffices to be considered seeing even in the anti-detail of the small camera-phone screen. As for the photograph, it is no less worthy of being looked at for not being present in pixels within a digital culture. The significance of this perspective for the viewer/holder may be traced back to the reason why they made/have the portrait in the first place. Again it is linked to knowledge of the person posited in memory, and the portrait serves to 'presence' them.⁴

³ Marcus Banks, 'Material Vision', *Visual Methods in Social Research*, London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001, pp. 62 - 63

⁴ A reference to Sartre's phenomenological questioning of what it means to have an image. See Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, 'Historical Introduction' in Jean-Paul Sartre (1940) *The Imaginary*, London; New York: Routledge, 2004, p. x

Hubert Damisch in his *Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image* attempts to analyse what it is to be a photographic image.⁵ That a print may be obtained from film exposed to sunlight without the use of a camera is problematic but a print obtained from the use of the machine without direct human intervention is less so, contributing as it does towards defining the ‘photographic situation’.⁶ While I (and many others) have argued for the problematising of this notion of the human-less photography, ignoring as it does (for example) *photogenia*⁷, it may actually contribute towards understanding what it is to be a digital photograph(y). Consider the portrait work of Aneta Grzeszykowska.⁸ There is no camera involved in the composition of her ‘photographic’ portraits but they are not photograms nor scans for there are no referents being as they are portraits of people who do not exist.⁹ The images are detached from the process of photography in that the artist uses pixels to invent the portraits. As computer-generated images they are that in themselves but they *look* like photographic portraits, as if made by a camera in a studio, the implication being that they are the result of a photographic situation. When shown to a group of students and presented as indexical-less photographs they were dismissive of any photographic reference once informed of the production process.¹⁰ Here is human intervention with the utilisation of every pixel. So it is with the manipulative aspect of digital photography in that the referents (as collective) may not have been there at the same time - the intervention of the human in this context blurs the boundary between traces that were there (in the image) and traces that were temporally exclusive (referents as singular – in front of the camera).

When one looks at the application of the words ‘smart’ and ‘intelligent’ to the technology that enables image reproduction, at worst it is at the cost of the implication of a ‘dumb’ human user, and at best it suggests an ‘almost autonomous’ consumable. This in comparison to Kodak’s ‘You push the button, we do the rest’ which lacks the

⁵ And ‘the source of the supposition of “reality”’. Hubert Damisch, ‘Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image’, in Liz Wells (ed.) *The Photography Reader*, London; New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 87 - 89

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87 - 88

⁷ See Roland Barthes, ‘The Photographic Message’, *Image, Music, Text* (trans. Stephen Heath), Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 23 - 24

⁸ Exhibition at Raster Gallery, Poland, 4th February – 18th March 2006. See http://www.raster.art.pl/gallery/artists/grzeszysamga/aneta_portrety.htm pp. 1 - 2 of 6 (1st April 2008)

⁹ On seeing these works the (unnamed) writer on the Raster Gallery website was prompted to ask ‘how does it feel not to exist?’. *Ibid.*, p. 2 of 6 (1st April 2008)

¹⁰ The general consensus was that they might be acknowledged as digital paintings.

judgmental connotations of contemporary marketing vocabulary. In a climate of individual and collective camera surveillance¹¹ Fuji is promoting *Fuji FinePix* 'Face Detection' technology.¹² In practical terms this translates into the ability of this particular camera series to have every face in a group portrait as being in focus – the technology as digital 'detective'. In the realm of professional photography, Hasselblad have designed the H3D II, a digital SLR camera equipped with a Global Image Locator.¹³ This feature records the camera's exact 'geographic co-ordinates' at the time of exposure. Through the use of Hasselblad's new imaging software *Phocus*, images can be located via Google Earth (which is built into the software) to 'view the GPS tagged images to fly between and even into them'¹⁴. While this is exclusive to Hasselblad, I would see this eventually being adapted by domestic market-targeted camera manufacturers, no doubt as a 'smart location target' for the intrepid family of shooting soldier-tourists blazing their carbon trail.

DIGITALIS

Digital photography is proving to be an embarrassment of overtly commodifying practices singing its neon hymn in the digital family album-world. I would therefore suggest that vision will become even more of a product in the shape of a camera with 'perfect prophecy'.¹⁵ Through the screen-viewfinder a perfectly symmetrical image will be found, perhaps limited to a portrait or a landscape, which the camera will be programmed to 'know' exists and will locate through a mathematical system like geometry. For this to happen the 'photographer' will move the camera screen, much like using a rangefinder in target practice, so that the technology will judge and expose for the most perfect image. Indeed geometrically affiliated vocabulary has already

¹¹ Since the 1990's, the USA, Canada, England, Australia and New Zealand have used the Echelon system of surveillance – via satellite and the scanning of networks, supposedly as an anti-terrorist strategy. Europe set up its own surveillance system, Galileo, based on the report of a Council of Europe commission of inquiry that found the Echelon system was actually used to intercept private and commercial communications on a global scale. It is telling that there was American resistance to the development of Galileo. Hervé Fischer, 'The Digital Angel', *Digital Shock: Confronting New Reality*, Montreal & Kingston; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, pp. 147 - 148

¹² <http://www.fujifilm.com/products/digital/index.html> (26th February 2007)

¹³ Hasselblad H3D II | Digital Camera Review on <http://www.letsgodigital.org/en/16874/hasselblad-h3d-ii/> p. 2 of 5 (27th November 2007). The cost of the camera, approximately \$34,000.00 is keeping the 'Hassie' out of common use.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2 of 5

¹⁵ Although it is not in the realm of phenomenology to 'predict' I feel the obligation to do so as my impression of digital technology is something that is always futural, constantly about 'what's next?' as if distancing itself from the past-present as quickly as possible.

entered digital culture - the lambda print, a type of digital hardcopy surely has its roots in *Lambda*, the Greek name for two series of geometric progressions.¹⁶ That *volume*, in Platonic essential forms, is imbued with the power to shape the material world¹⁷ makes credible the notion that a secularised form of a once sacred geometry will shape the formal content of a family photograph.

With the possibility of technically perfect photographs on the horizon, the routine presence of cameras in everyday life, with memory that was once personal becoming a commemorative event and private diaries becoming online journals, the transgressing of the final boundary of commodification of the family portrait is highly probable. The open doors of the image banks of 'ordinary' photographs beckon for a materialistic society used to being the object of observation. On the matter of ethical considerations, one would hope that the prospect of a plethora of potential contextualisations and therefore alternative meanings would be a deterrent for the selling of 'perfect' family photographs. However, as Paul Frosh states, the stock photograph is made up of 'instantly recognisable iconographic combinations, which rely upon, and reinforce, 'clichéd' visual motifs and stereotypes'.¹⁸ The universal, family-of-man type connotations (making up a commercial family archive) translate into the notion of the innocent image, while context may not be factored in until after the event.

The family album-world within digital culture is becoming an archive of diverse components and as if a safeguard against the fragmented, ahistorical album that it may well become, there exists the personal data-bank (the word...bank...always implies charges) which consists of a glut of information. One personal data-bank compiler-investor is Gordon Bell, a Microsoft researcher, who has been recording a phenomenal amount of data for his memory project *MyLifeBits* since 1998.¹⁹ This has entailed the scanning and saving of all of his documents and photographs, the recording of conversations and the saving of all of his e-mails, web-pages and text messages. Currently he is making use of Microsoft's prototype 'SenseCam', a camera worn around

¹⁶ Robert Lawlor, 'The Practice of Geometry', *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 7

¹⁷ 'The Genesis of Cosmic Forms', *ibid.*, p. 94

¹⁸ Paul Frosh, 'Introduction: The Making of Ordinary Images', *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry*: Oxford; New York: Berg, 2003, p. 8

¹⁹ Ian Taylor, 'Total Recall' in Paul Parsons (ed.) *Focus Magazine*, #174, Bristol: Bristol Magazines Ltd., (BBC) March 2007, p. 27. For further information on Gordon Bell's project see <http://tinyurl.com/yuw2b4>

the neck that automatically takes photographs throughout the day. Thinking futurally Bell sees this project as an identity databank and wants “[o]nly one thing: have it be accessible to my progeny in 10, 20 or 50 years”²⁰. The cult of the past is metamorphosing into the cult of the future.

Maurice Halbwachs noted that the Christian prefers life beyond life which is the life located in the future.²¹ It may be that the concept of the afterlife permeates much of cultural production, while operating within progressively secularised societies. In response to the death of some members of *MySpace.com*, an archival site - *MyDeathSpace.com* - has been set up with online obituaries and a comment system for visitors to pay their respects.²² The archive includes a death-map whereby skull-like icons may be clicked on to reveal details and/or an image of a deceased individual. Unlike the death notices in the local/national newspaper that are sometimes accompanied by a photograph, this notice is global and potentially everlasting.²³ Containing on its homepage some advertisements - for land investments, a party poker site, and an ‘intimate’ dating site, *MyDeathSpace.com* cannot help but frame the portrait as a sponsored death mask.

It also frames the portrait in information. The impact of digital culture on the family album materialises within a technological system that reveals the real, by virtue of its typically concealing nature when it stores an image as a series of digits, is a site for the imaginary or a mask for the darker side of human nature. While holding the possibility of ‘meaningful narrative sequences’²⁴ thanks to the ‘depthlessness of digital memory’²⁵, this memory also carries the potential to cause anarchy with its capacity for dislocation, loss and corruption. If digital culture is to offer contemporary image-making a gift it is

²⁰ Ibid., p. 27 (Focus)

²¹ Maurice Halbwachs (1941) ‘The Reconstruction of the Past’, *On Collective Memory*, (trans. & ed., Lewis A. Coser), The Heritage of Sociology, 1992, p. 51

²² <http://www.mydeathspace.com/> (18th April 2007)

²³ Motivated to make burial sites more informative about the deceased, Elliot Malkin designed a device, *Cemetery 2.0*, that allows for a visitor to a grave view digitalised memories of the deceased, via on-line access in a ‘next-generation cemetery’. See *Cemetery 2.0* by Elliot Malkin, March 2006 on *ibid.*, pp. 1-2 of 2 (23rd April 2007). See also Regine Debatty, ‘Ashes to Ashes, Data to Dust’, *Art Review*, Issue 09, London: Art Review Ltd., March 2007, p. 130

²⁴ ‘To remember, then, is precisely not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences’. Paul Connerton, ‘Social Memory’, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 26

²⁵ Chris Locke, ‘Digital Memory and the Problem of Forgetting’, in Susannah Radstone (ed.) *Memory and Methodology*, Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000, p. 35

a *pharmakon*²⁶ being at once a cure and a poison for memory, imagination, image content and form and image dissemination, and its impact on the family album is to have transformed it from an object of the cult of the past into an on-going state of multiplicities in the cult of infinite tomorrows.

²⁶ From the Greek, meaning both a poison and a cure. See 'pharmacy', in C. T. Onions (ed.) *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 674. See also Jeff Collins and Bill Mayblin *Introducing Derrida*, Cambridge: Icon, 1998 for the god-king Theuth's verdict on writing as a poison, pp. 26 - 31

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