REMEDiating Photography
Re-Imagining Ethics In-Light of Online Photo-Sharing Practices

by

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ABSTRACT

Photography has been exposed as an infinitely complex series of intersecting technologies, industries, discourses and socio-cultural desires. Figured as an image-making medium that bears the direct trace (light) of reality, it has become a fundamental method through which we construct identity, capture memories, communicate knowledge and reflect and shape reality. Its resulting conceptualization as a discourse-laden visual language, that enables the (co)articulation of subject (self), object (device) and truth, has located it as a central locus of ethical consequence. While there has been a significant amount of research into an ethics of photographic representation, there has been very little consideration of the importance of reconsidering the intersection of photography (in and of itself) and ethics in light of digitization. While this thesis will function to map out a number of theoretical and practical trajectories, its central purpose will be to draw upon a rich understanding of analogue and digital photography in order to critically re-imagine ethics in light of digitization.

This thesis begins by mapping out a series of continuities and discontinuities in the technological, sociological and practical engagements of photography as a result of digitization. Following in this vein, it will engage in a comparative review of past and present (analogue and digital) photographic practices and theories in an effort to expand the conceptual frames of these trajectories further through an inter-disciplinary and sociological lens. Following this review, and in response to a number of proposed digital novelties, this thesis will revisit past conceptualization of photographic ethics, demonstrate and legitimize their short-comings in the digital age, and begin to imagine alternative means of tackling the ‘impossible possibility’ of digital ethics.
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PHOTOGRAPHIES
A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

The Geotaggers’ World Atlas #10: Toronto – Eric Fisher¹

Photography is an infinitely complex series of intersecting technologies, industries, discourses and socio-cultural desires. Figured as an image-making medium that bears the direct trace (light) of reality, photography has become a fundamental method through which we capture memories (Sontag 1973; Van Dijck 2005, 2007; Van House & Churchill 2008), construct identity (Barthes 1982; Bourdieu 1990; Haraway 2004; Nancy 2005; Butler 2009) communicate knowledge (Benjamin 1969; Murray 2008; Van Dijck 2008;

¹ This image represents a collation of images, posted to Flickr and Picassa, with APIs (geographically located tags) in Toronto, Canada. The image is being used with the permission of the photographer, and has been designated as “approved for free cultural works” by Flickr’s copyrighting function.
Manovich 2008) and reflect and shape reality (McLuhan 1967; Deleuze 1989; Mitchell 1994; Frosh 2003.) As such, photography must be approached as both a discourse-laden visual language and an assemblage of expectations, ideas, and practices (Marien 2006).

The capacity to employ photography reliably, in a diverse set of manners, has located it as a preferred idiom within a number of mediative fields (Wells 2004). Photographs have arguably become a ubiquitous feature within the fabric of past and contemporary visual landscapes as they circulate as commodities, memories, information and documentation within newspapers, art galleries, magazines, advertising spreads, and photo albums (just to name a few). Because of its diverse applications, photography has a long history of being “deeply at odds with itself... [as] it was conjectured to be variously an art, a danger to art, a science, a revolutionary means of education, a mindless machine, and a threat to social order” (Marien 2006: 14). Each of these responses have arisen in relation to particular sets of genre-bound practices, as well as being indicative of suggested ‘eras’ within photographic practice and criticism.

While the diverse and multifarious applications of the medium preclude an exhaustive exploration, a revisionist history of photography suggests four major subsets, namely: art, advertising, scientific and personal photography (Rosenblum 1997). In recent years there has also been a significant amount of focus placed on the role of photography as a tool for advancing militaristic rhetorics, particular within the field of surveillance. (Blitzer & Jacobia 2002). While these over-arching categories of practice share many similarities and have all enjoyed widespread application and significant academic exploration (see for example: Bolter & Grusin 2000; Marien 2006; Wells 2004), of

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1 It should briefly be noted that a number of these intersect, such as art photography and advertising in the case of fashion photography.
particular interest in the case of this thesis are the structural forces, practices and consequences surrounding personal photography. Increasingly configured as an amateur pursuit, personal photography involves capturing and sharing the significant (and yet often mundane) moments of people’s everyday lives (Murray 2008). Frequently presented within the form of a snapshot, personal photographs have repeatedly been construed as non-political, non-significant and non-ideological sites that do not merit discursive analysis (La Grange 2005); from this perspective, they are merely windows into the lives of “ordinary” actors (Barthes 1982). And yet, as a number of sources have exposed (see for example Sontag 1973 and Bourdieu 1990), this is far from the case. Personal photographs, like those of scientific discourse, have become central to the (co)articulation of subject (self), object (device) and reality.

This construction of photography has become increasingly significant in light of digitization. While photography, right from the moment of its inception, has always been a medium of and for the masses (Rosenblum 1997), the converging forces and networked industries that constitute contemporary digital practices have facilitated the rapid proliferation of “ordinary” photography, transforming the medium and its object into a ubiquitous presence within the visual landscape. Photographs and their corresponding devices are virtually everywhere from the traditional camera, to cell phones, televisions, mp3 players and car interiors. There are at least three times as many images circulating in

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1 Drawing upon Latour, articulation here refers to the, performative “coming into being” of Beings. It reflects post-structuralist “iteration,” in so far as it construes being as being-in-language (or being-in-a system of signifiers). According to Latour, it is through the process and attribution of naming, and subsequent (re)articulation of and by that named thing as such, that beings become knowable and recognized as “having” being.

2 It should quickly be noted, in a move toward transparency, that it is precisely the photograph’s articulatory capacity that has located it historically and contemporarily as an ethical agent.
online environments than there are people in the world. This type of photographic ‘omnipresence’ paired with the performative and integrative capacity of photographs to reflect and shape reality locates photography as a rich and necessary area for critical inquiry. The inter-disciplinary nature of the forces that constitute and support the photographic medium paired with the “social” nature of personal photography, situate a “sociology of photography” as a superior methodological (if not quasi-disciplinary) approach for this line of research.

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There has been a significant amount of academic and non-academic research into the practical and theoretical tendencies of analogue photography. Within this field of research, two distinct trajectories of criticism have been traced and asserted through 19th and mid-20th century iterations of photography. First, early photography engendered a series of inquiries into the nature of photographic representation (largely in relation to art, documentation, scientific realism and journalism) and its corresponding technologies (Baudelaire 2004; Benjamin 1969; Latour 1990). The second trajectory is generally attributed to post-WWII employments of the medium, despite its roots at the turn of the century, and is primarily concerned with the means through which photography functions to construct and maintain particular personal and social discourses (such as identity, memory/knowledge, representation and an assortment of social institutions such as family and government) (Sontag 1973; Barthes 1982; Murray 2008). In all of these cases, critics have construed the simultaneously reflective and constructive function of the photographic

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1 This assertion has been compiled through the addition of multiple online statistics that detail the number of images uploaded and circulating within photo-sharing communities (such as Flickr, Facebook and Photobucket.)
image (Marien 2006) as a favorable attribute of the medium, while also exposing the means through which this trait engenders significant anxiety as the photograph (inadvertently) becomes a central locus of ethical consequence.

While a number of the aforementioned trajectories (or themes) have continued through digitization, a significant amount of the contemporary work on (digital) photography seeks to establish the novelties of digitization and assert what is different about the medium ‘now’ (see for example: Rubenstein & Sluis 2008; Van Dijck 2008; Manovich 2005; Mitchell 1994). Central lines of inquiry that have emerged within this area of thought revolve around issues of authenticity (Mitchell 2005; Frosh 2003), informational subjectivity (Poster 2001; 2006), privacy (Moore 2005), and representation (Murray 2008; Butler 2009). While these lines of thought are key to understanding contemporary experiences of photography, they have either failed to acknowledge the ethical weight of the image, or respond to it in a fashion that is not (ethically) compatible with the current (performative) practices that are associated with it.

The following project will take up this omission, or misstep, as its central area of exploration, analysis and critique. It will review and develop a rich picture of past and present (analogue and digital) photographic practices and theories in an effort to expand the conceptual frames of these trajectories further through an inter-disciplinary and sociological lens. Following this review, and in light of a number of proposed digital novelties, this project will revisit past conceptualization of photographic ethics, demonstrate and legitimize their short-comings in the digital age, and begin to imagine alternative means of tackling the impossible possibility of digital ethics.
Opposing Technological Determinism
Situating a Discourse of “Progress” Within the Terms of Remediation and Accretion

One of the key theoretical challenges, when approaching this thesis, has been the degree to which technology is repeatedly thought of as a separate, distinct sphere; its relational enactment with and through other agents ignored in favor of conclusive thought (or language). The difficulty arises in so far as this separation amounts to a form of theoretical determinism, in which technology is reduced from a diverse (and messy) set of converging practices, industries and institutions, into a unilateral and “autonomous” entity that affects other agents a-directionally. This problematic will be revisited throughout this thesis but, before continuing on to the chapter summaries, it is necessary to outline two concepts that have tempered the approach of this thesis, grounding it firmly within a project of deconstructionism. Although the history of photography is frequently framed in an orderly fashion, with one technology building on another in an exclusive and progressive manner, delineating the medium is in fact quite complicated; its invention involved the messy convergence of multiple newly articulated scientific processes, a modernist desire (born out of the Renaissance) for increasingly accurate and real-looking representations of reality, and a series of social, political and economic structures that were primed to support and proliferate the novel technology. Instead of heralding the invention of photography as a wholly novel, or rupturous, introduction, I would like to consider the “invention” and development of photography in relation to the double logic of remediation and as a result of accretion rather than deletion. Not only will this approach serve to acknowledge the simultaneous experiences of continuity and discontinuity within the past and present history of the medium, but also, as I will discuss further below, adopting an accretive
perspective will both facilitate and necessitate a deconstructive vision of photography. This is important in so far as it recognizes the multiple phenomena that make-up and support the medium, and will also legitimize teasing these phenomena apart in order to ascertain what exactly is going on and the consequences that it might pose to those involved.

Drawing upon the contemporary work of Bolter and Grusin (2000), remediation refers to a historical trajectory of competing and corresponding logics, which they term *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*. Immediacy refers to a historical program and desire within visual culture to erase the visibility of mediation (making the image “transparent”) and create “a sense of presence... as close as possible to our daily visual experiences” (3). Hypermediacy, or the hyper-mediated origins of photography, is harder to delineate within the early days of the medium and as Bolter (2009) acknowledges has become a more prominent feature as a result of digitization. The logic of hypermediacy counterbalances the erasure facilitated by immediacy by acknowledging multiple acts of representation and making them explicitly visible. “Hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tried to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience” (15). It reminds the viewer both of the presence of media and of the desire for immediacy, propelling a deep rooted “need” to develop increasingly accurate methods of representation.

In addition to locating photography within a the double logic of remediation, I would also like to assert that the invention, history and trajectory of the medium be considered as a genealogy of accretion rather than as a linear series of continuities and discontinuities (ruptures.) Moments of technological “progress” (or invention) are, for a variety of reasons, frequently heralded as rupturous events that mark the end of one thing and the beginning of another, novel, other thing. While “photography” has certainly come
to facilitate a number of novel interactions and engagements with reality, if only ever in performative terms, the discourses and phenomena that have contributed to and converge within this medium are best approached through the metaphor of accretion. Accretion refers to growth that arises through the gradual accumulation of additional layers or matter. Within this model, there is nothing that is entirely novel as significant discursive and/or material connections can always be made between the old, the new and the imagined. Additionally, nothing is ever entirely deleted or lost, as traces of the old provide the underlying infrastructure of the new. Drawing upon Foucault (2002), the order of things is only ever accretion, sedimentation that gathers, amounting to something only through the collection of disparate particles.

To consider photography as a technology of accretion, insinuates that rather than discontinuous (or “novel”) advancements, it is a multifarious medium that is the result of numerous direct and indirect contributors. The perpetual layering points to the fact that photography is not simply a point of convergence, but is instead a spaceo-temporal gathering and layering of multiple convergences. Once approached through the lens of accretion, photography is transformed from a straightforward image-making method into a messy system of interlocking social, political, economic and technological forces. As a result of this transformation (or revelation) any meaningful discussion of “photography” needs to acknowledge and tease these factors apart in order to move beyond the immediate and expose the rhizomatic undergrowth of a medium that has become a central mediator, if not determinate, of social reality.
SUMMARIES

Chapter I
Historicizing Photography

Chapter One maps out a series of canonical digressions on the history, practice and philosophies of photography from inception to digitization. Its disparate sections will begin to tease apart the prominent practices and theories of film-based photography in an effort to develop a detailed image of the rhizomatic undergrowth of the medium and ground future claims regarding digitization and its points of continuity and discontinuity. The chapter will begin by demonstrating the messiness of technological invention, in order to deconstruct notions of technological determinism and linear or rupturous progress. Following this section, the chapter will outline three prominent expressions of early photography namely, stereography, cartes-de-visites and snapshots. Not only have each of these practices fueled the photographic imagination and industry, but the chapter will also reveal that they stand as antecedents to contemporary employments of the image as information, a tool for social-networking and a means of upholding various social, political and economic institutions. The final section of the chapter will identify and advance a number of canonical and theoretical responses to photography. It will pay particular attention to ontological and subjective arguments and will reveal the ethical weight (or under-pinnings) of the medium. Fundamental to this section will be an assertion that photography functions to structure identity, memory and epistemologically delineated reality. Not only is this section intended to further explicate the performative employments of the medium, but it, too, will function to develop a rich image of photography pre-digitization in an effort to ground (or provide a point of comparison) for future claims.
Chapter II
The Continuities and Discontinuities of Digitization

The second chapter maps out transformative points of continuity and discontinuity within photography as a result of digitization. It will forgo the tendency to claim that one set of practices has replaced another, in favor of historicity and drawing both practical and conceptual connections between the old and new. Central to this approach will be the sentiment that digitization was not rupturous but has instead functioned to reveal elements of the image that simply were not visible prior to this transformation. This is not to say that digitization has not engendered a number of novel practices; instead, these novelties are tempered by an acknowledgment of the deconstructive ‘nature’ of the photographic medium.

With this in mind, the chapter will begin by exposing how the constellation of social, economic and technological forces that constitute photography have shifted in light of digitization and will demonstrate how the contemporary convergence of networked devices, performative spaces and theoretical sentiments have facilitated the purported “rise to ubiquity” of the digital image (on and offline). Following this trajectory, it will continue by detailing one of, if not the, central means through which people are engaging in photography within the contemporary digital age: online photo-sharing platforms. Not only is this section intended to explore a series of structurally novel means through which people are engaging with photography, but it also exposes the essential role that software has come to play within contemporary experiences of the medium. In this vein, the chapter concludes with a detailed account of software as a novel, and invisible, yet fundamental,
actor within digital photography. This section will not only reveal the ‘affective capacity’ of software, but it will also demonstrate how, once in the throes of software mediated articulation, photographic images adopt a form of novel ‘agentialism.’ Following within the tradition of ethical concern (regarding photographs) that ended the preceding chapter, this chapter will end by suggesting that the photographic agentialism facilitated by digitization necessitates a re-configuration of past conceptions of photographic, or representational, ethics.

**Chapter III**
Re-Imaging Ethics in Light of Online Photo-Sharing Practices

This chapter begins with the claim that an ethics of representation, born out of analogue photography, will not suffice in the age of digitization. The chapter details a series of tenants that have been construed as appropriate means ofethically engaging in and disseminating representational photography. While these propositions should not be dis(re)garded, as the previous chapter will have demonstrated, their attempts to close-off and ‘control’ the image will only function to cast a wider net of ethical consequence within the digital age. As a result, this chapter will draw upon (and together) alternative modes of ethical thinking, namely those borne out of Levinasian and post-structuralist schools of thought, in order to imagine and propose a series of novel approaches that might successfully function as an ethos of digital photography. This chapter will conclude with a few final thoughts and suggestions for future areas of research.
CHAPTER I

GROUNDING THE IMAGE
A HISTORICAL DIGRESSION ON THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL
AND ECONOMIC FORCES THAT CONSTITUTED
PHOTOGRAPHY

As the introduction revealed, photography is more than an image-making technology, it is a constellation of multiple (converging and diverging) practices and phenomena. While the intensity of each point varies, at times seeming pivotal and at others tertiary, and while I do not expect to give an exhaustive recounting of the medium, it is my intention to this chapter will paint a rich picture of the practices that are considered under the moniker of “film photography.” I will begin by mapping out the multiple simultaneous events that constituted the “singular” invention of photography as a technology and social practice. Drawing from this introduction, I will discuss three prominent early applications of the technology (stereograph, portraiture and snapshot) in an effort to expose the multi-modal propensity of the medium and explore the social, economic and political practices that arose in symbiotic unison with the technology. The chapter will end with a series of philosophical responses to the medium as theorists and critics tried to discern the nature of the photograph and account for its social and political implications.

While this chapter will follow the narrative structure of a review, tracing through various canonical analyses of the medium, my intention is to map out a rich and detailed vision of how photography was conceptualized as a film based practice in an effort to
ground a series of questions and claims that I will be putting forward in the upcoming chapters of my thesis. Of particular concern are the following two trajectories: First, with the event of digitization, the historicity of the photographic medium changed, as “photography” was diametrically re-conceptualized as a dying “film” medium or a novel “digital” medium. In line with a number of other social discourses, photography was neatly fit into ongoing debates regarding a purported “digital revolution” that saw technologies shifting from analogue to digital forms (see for critical examples Barney 2004; Mosco 2009; Webster 2002). By mapping out the film-based practices that now constitute “analogue” photography, I will expose points of continuity and discontinuity between film and digital practices. I hope to provide a convincing account of photographic remediation and accretion in an effort to counter assertions that photographic history is one of technological novelty and chiasmic rupture. While digitization has certainly altered the photographic landscape, it is important to approach this as another level of mediated engagement as opposed to a paradigm shift.

Following Baylis’ assertion that photography is more than a particular technology of image making, the second purpose of this chapter is to begin mapping out the shifting configurations of cultural, political and technological forces that make-up unique experiences of the medium.
The Multiple Births of Photography

Early experiments and techniques involving photo-graphesis (translated from Greek to mean light-writing) date back to 500 B.C. Mo-Ti, a Chinese man, discovered that light, when channeled through a pinhole onto a dark surface, could produce a duplicate vision of a surrounding scene. Centuries later, this discovery and its corresponding “technology,” were refined and developed into the Camera Obscura (later, also the Camera Lucida), a tool employed by artists, draftsmen, and scientists to enable the production of accurate (in some cases considered objective) depiction of reality with greater ease. By the mid-18th century, the Camera Obscura had been transformed from a room-sized reflector of blurry images to a portable tool facilitating the precise rendering of an aesthetically accurate depiction of worldly realities. The images that resulted from tracing the 18th century Camera Obscura’s reflections were already considered by philosophers and critics alike to be mimetic and perfect copies of the worldly scenes that they came to represent (Davenport).

While the photographic capacity of the Camera Obscura proved to be a very useful tool, there was a growing desire as early as the late 18th century to develop a means of arresting the duplicate image that it projected. This urge was rooted in a seminal piece by John Locke (1690) that successfully positioned “sight” as the supreme determinate of truth.
Locke’s essay gave rise to an epistemological approach that located visual perception as a vehicle for perceptual mastery of the natural world and resulted in the now age-old adage, “seeing is believing.” One of the initial critiques of relying upon visual perception to determine truths was that the processes required to record and communicate these sensations opened the possibility of obtrusively discursive intervention. The invention of photography would not only alleviate these pressures but would strengthen their validity as it presented an objective vision of reality and revealed invisible truths.

Joseph Niepce. View from the Window at Niepce.

Inventor and lithographer Joseph Nicephore Niepce was the first to create a properly photographic image. Though not completely stable, his development of what is now called a direct positive image making process resulted in what is recognized as the first photograph (Niepce termed it a “heliograph” which, translated from Greek meant sun-writing), “View from the Window at Gras”. Unfortunately, while he tried to garner commercial support for his heliographic process, his efforts failed. Not only was he secretive about the chemical processes required to produce the image, but there were also
concerns regarding the clarity of the images that his process(es) produced. It wasn’t until Niepce was introduced to, and joined forces with Louis Daguerre, a French dioramatist, that his photographic endeavors would become convincing and, eventually, marketable. While an early and sudden death kept Niepce from realizing the full potential of his early discoveries, Daguerre was quick to take up and develop his research further.

Drawing from Niepce’s experiments, and his use of iodine fumes to intensify the heliograph’s image, Daguerre focused on the possibility and potential of creating a “latent image.” In this case a chemically altered, and camera obscura loaded, silver plate would be exposed to light, but would not immediately reveal an image. Instead, this plate would be treated and developed with mercury fumes, exposing a finely detailed image. Daguerre also discovered that immersing this plate in warm salt water would permanently affix the image and keep further development/exposure from taking place. While the process was (slightly) altered, Daguerre’s photography, much like Niepce’s, did not offer the possibility of producing multiple copies but instead resulted in the production of a single, positive image.

Daguerre moved quickly to patent and publicize his newly articulated photographic process, the “Daguerrototype”. The first series of attempts, in 1837, were not successful. His prominent involvement in the production of Set Designs for Diorama theatre caused many to view his photographs as another form of trickery and optical illusion. On January 7th, 1839, after pursuing and receiving the sponsorship of several scientifically acclaimed institutions, including the French Academy of Science, Daguerre re-introduced, and asserted the originality, of his Daguerrototype. Not only did the second announcement garner significant attention from the French public, but it also prompted several individuals,

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6 Dioramas were type of theatre that relied on tricking the crowd through a series of special effects and illusions. Daguerre’s involvement in this type of theatre initially worked against him as early photo audiences believed that the image presented another opportunity for Daguerre to work his “magic.”
who had been working on similar photographic processes, to bring their discoveries to the fore. One such individual was Henry Fox Talbot, a British scientist who had demonstrated the ability to permanently fix a light-induced image six years earlier. Talbot’s process, which he eventually named the Calotype, involved the production of a “photogenic drawing negative,” which would then be used in conjunction with light sensitive paper to produce a positive print. While the image that resulted was often of a lesser quality than that of the Daguerrotype (due largely to the smudgy quality of the paper that was used) one of the beneficial attributes of Talbot’s process was that it offered the possibility of creating multiple, if not infinite, copies of the desired image (Elkins 2007). Talbot, motivated by Daguerre’s announcement and impending patent, mobilized quickly and introduced his process to the world less than three weeks later on January 25th, 1839. What ensued was a series of politically charged debates regarding authorship and ownership. Initial public success was accorded to Daguerre, although history has sided with Talbot, whose calotype afforded the possibility of multiple prints and greater dissemination. While it is impossible to ascertain conclusively or reductively, the success of Talbot’s method appears to corroborate the assertion that reproducibility and easy dissemination were (and still are) key attributes of the photograph and photography as a medium.

While several different photographic processes and techniques had been developed and made publicly available, the Daguerrotype and Calotype were the most consequential. Although the processes differed significantly, the end result, an exposed and

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1 This push brought numerous “photographic” technologies to the fore, exposing the simultaneity of “invention;” not only was the advent of photography as a medium not “rupturous,” but it also did not lie outside the realm of social consciousness as individuals from a wide variety of cultures and geographical locations developed similar technologies to tackle the same set of “problems.” The success of one technology over the other had largely to do with the commercial, social and political push of each device.

2 One of Talbot’s personal journals has a note in it, that he left to himself, dated 1834, reminding himself to patent his “photographic drawing” process.
developed image, was the same. In both cases, light was used as a hinge between the present and the representational, as its movements worked to inscribe an exact image of (external) reality onto a two-dimensional surface, saved for future reference. In both processes, a shutter would be released, and light that had reflected off of worldly things would filter through an optical lens into a box loaded with a light-sensitive plate. The light would hit this plate, cause a series of chemical reactions, and leave an imprint of sorts on the plate’s surface. As a result of this process, each image insinuated the presence of its subject and was considered to therefore bare a direct trace of the real. The photographic image was seen as being inseparable from the referent that it mnemonically re-presented.

What was more, as Talbot’s publication, “The Pencil of Nature” asserted, the camera “is not mere an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary, it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself.” The “unquestionable” trace that the camera established by, in a sense, eliminating the handiwork of the person releasing the shutter, established photography as the primary method through which to truthfully and objectively document reality. It should be noted that, as I mentioned earlier, the value of this connection between the camera, nature and ensuing photograph was both emblematic and in support of public (though inherently scientific) discourses that located vision as “the” means of accessing and relaying truth. Because the photographic image was deemed inseparable from the referent, it became, for all intents and purposes, inseparable from the nature of truth; it became the preferred tool for objectively exposing and relaying scientific truth. Interestingly, as Kelley Wilder (2009) notes, the relationship between

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9 Saussure said that language, the particular words that have come to signify that which they represent, is incidental if not accidental; any “word” or arrangement of signifying elements could have come to stand in the place of the thing itself. This is very different from photography which is directly and intentionally related to that which it comes to “represent.” If you don’t fit it in later comment on Barthes “window” or transparent envelope.
camera and science was fairly reciprocal. Not only did its early success rely upon discourses of objectivity and empiricism professed through scientific rhetoric, but it in turn strengthened these discourses by providing visions of their purported truths. As Andrew Murphie and John Potts (2003) suggest, a particular “truth effect” was recognized and relied upon in 19th century engagements with photography; it did not only re-present truth but also revealed it by arresting moments that were, as of yet, invisible to the human eye. Early engagements with the image revolved around this truth effect. According to Armstrong (2002), many initial viewers were frightened by the reality presented in photographic images; the representations were so novelly accurate that they appeared to be present as opposed to re-presented. This photograph-induced fear passed quickly as the photo was employed as a means of disseminating accurate information to a growing audience of spectators. In the following section, I will detail three of the fundamental developments within early popular photography. All three of these trajectories did not only rely on the photograph as an accurate image of reality, but also used this image to advance and corroborate various truths about their subject matter, whether it be for informational, commercial, personal or communal purposes. These early photographic trends played a central role in determining the parameters of the medium within past and current social consciousness and engendered significant philosophical explorations of the ontological grounding and epistemological impact of the photographic image. In addition to this, the practices that I have selected, namely stereography, portraiture and early snapshot photography, represent forms of ‘proto-practices’ that are now, arguably, embedded in different systems and networks. While there are certainly differences between these photographic practices and the contemporary practices that constitute digital photography,
the following three sections should be read as antecedents to today’s practices. The intention here is to begin exposing the multiple points of intersection between analogue and digital practices, dispelling the notion that the event of digital photography was rupturous or that the similarities between practices lie simply in the continuation of “image-making” processes.

I. iPhotography: The Stereoscope

While, as Walter Benjamin noted, the advent of photography signaled a shift towards the democratization of methods of representation, in its initial stages it was still focused on a limited range of subjects and was practiced by an elite body of professionals who were familiar with and had access to the technologies and development processes required (Rosenblum, 2005). Given its propensity toward producing accurate representations of reality, the earliest implementations of photography were directed toward the documentation of cultural artifacts (largely archeological, architectural, and
artistic), landscapes and scientific discoveries. It was largely marketed as a means of disseminating knowledge and making novel visions of the world available to mass audiences. The early success of the stereograph, a technology that brought photography and advancements in the science of vision together, corroborates this assertion. The stereograph was a card that displayed two slightly different perspectives of the same scene side by side. When inserted and seen through a stereoscopic viewer the image would appear three dimensional, giving greater (if not perfect) depth to its representational ability. The stereograph was seen as having immense educational benefit, as it enabled an increasing number of people to visually encounter and therefore “know” realities that had previously been reserved for the privileged. Individuals and organizations compiled and disseminated stereographs as portable “featherweight museums” that were capable of revealing the mysteries of distant worlds. While a working-class individual might not have the fiscal means to visit Egypt and view Pharos’ sarcophagi, through the affordable stereoscope, he, too, could come to know it well and accurately. The intersection of institutional (cultural/archival/political) endorsements of the stereograph and a growing social and cultural interest in science and its organizational systems resulted in the proliferation of stereographic consumption. This had a number of effects. First, it corroborated and strengthened discourses privileging vision as the driving force of objectivist realism while simultaneously locating the photograph as the preferred vehicle through which to access this vision; the photograph was revealed as not simply representational but also informational. Second, the institutional support fueled the production of a thriving photographic industry that funded the basic economic infrastructure that would support future photographic endeavors and growth. Finally, the
widespread popularity of the stereograph, whether institutional or personal, served to transform photography from a difficult scientific process into an easily accessible medium made for the lay-user (Marien 2006)

II. Cartes de Visite: Photo-Sharing in the 19th Century

While the preceding section located scientific discourses and social or cultural ‘appetites’ as the reason for the popularity of photographing and disseminating images of inanimate scenes, it should be acknowledged that technological short-comings were partially responsible for the limited subject matter. Early Daguerrotypes required lengthy exposure times ranging from three to thirty minutes, making it virtually impossible to capture a crisp or accurate image of subjects that couldn’t remain perfectly still (Rosenblum
1997). This had a significant impact on the performative space of photography as movement was rigidly limited and stances intentionally choreographed. The earliest studio portraits, dating back to the early-mid 1840s, employed head grips and body clamps when taking photos of living human subjects in an effort to produce the best possible image, in both formal and discursive terms. The resulting pictures were often stiff and relatively austere. The early dominance of the straight-faced pose was largely the result of the ease with which it could be held for long periods of time (Manovich 2001). A point of interest here is that the stabilizing devices were in fact noted as being quite uncomfortable (Rosenblum 2005), producing images that inadvertently document the discomfort of the sitter.

While portraiture is often conceived of as the central purpose of photography (Rosenblum 2005), it wasn’t until over a decade after its first introduction that photography really became seen as a tool for establishing and disseminating an image of “self.” Not only did the technology progress and become “faster” over this time period but also, largely as a result of the burgeoning stereography industry, there was sufficient infrastructure to support its public proliferation. The publicly funded stereograph industry resulted in a number of professional studios that offered a space for customers to come and sit to have their photo taken by capable photographers. Developing rooms and facilities were regular establishments and had perfected the process of fixing a photographic image. In addition to this, early anxieties regarding the uncanny realism of the photographic image has subdued as a form of “photographic vision” became accepted and swept over the visual

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10 Early photos of the dead did not only speak to the desires to “keep” their memory post-mortem but also, inadvertently, acknowledged their rigour as a necessary attribute of good photography.
11 Photography at this point had yet to become a fully accessible medium and still required professionals who were trained in the art of both taking and developing photographic images. As such, it remained a privileged medium.
landscape of the time. By the 1860s, the age of portraiture, and what would come to be known as “Cartes de Visite,” had begun.

According to Rosenblum (2005), “photographic portraits reflected from their origin the conviction that an individual’s personality, intellect, and character can be revealed through the depiction of facial configuration and expression” (39). As a result, photography became a reliable means through which a visible and tangible image of personal identity (and inner being) could be developed and potentially disseminated. This trajectory had significant consequences within the performative space of photography as some “sitters” were photographed with the intention of reflecting the “best possible character and finest expression of which that face and figure could ever have been capable,” (38) while others were captured in ways that facilitated the continuation of discursive oppression” (Rosenblum 1997). One of the primary means through which portrait images were shared, was through the production and dissemination of commercially manufactured cartes-de-visite. Individuals would visit studios that were stocked with both the necessary technologies and, typically, a series of props and bourgeois costumes, have their pictures taken and then send these images to friends and loved ones. Not only would people develop collections of friends’ and acquaintances’ portraits, but the practice of photo-sharing also became a commercial pursuit as individuals began having the option to “collect” images of (unknown) others, namely celebrities and sexualized/pornographic women. An interesting twist was that, while there was a “legitimate” photo-sharing industry (both in personal and commercial terms,) the majority of the images that circulated as commercial commodities

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12 One such example would be the large body of photographs documenting the bodies and distortions of people suffering mental illness. Many of these images highlight the motions of the body that set this individuals apart from others. Instead of representing them as beings like any other, early photographs of people with mental illness accentuated a form of “crazy” disposition in line with discourses about normalcy and abnormalcy.
were in fact photos of individuals who had not consented or intended their images to be used or circulated in this fashion. Often times, images of attractive women would not arrive at their final destination as they were plucked out of the postal system, reproduced and framed as commodity goods (Thrift 2005). This form of unwitting re-appropriation exposes the long-standing precariousness of image ownership, and the ease with which they are constituted as commodity items.

The strategic positioning of the Cartes de Visites within the commercial sphere, as both an industry and commodity, has permanently situated elements of photography within the cultural economy. According to Crary (1990), photography was one of the new technologies of reproduction and circulation central to the rise of advertising in particular, but also in terms of producing ‘serially produced objects’ (13) which later characterize Fordist modes of production. In this sense some have argued that the development of photography was not only allied to positivism but was inextricably shaped by an emerging ‘commodity culture’ in the 19th century (Tagg 1988). As Kracauer puts it:

In nineteenth century France the rise of photography coincided with the spread of positivism - an intellectual attitude rather than a philosophical school which, shared by many thinkers, discouraged metaphysical speculation in favor of a scientific approach, and thus was in perfect keeping with the ongoing process of industrialization (1965: 5 in Haris & Taylor 2005: 93)
III. Social-Networking:

Personal Photography and Communal Reminiscing

The material practices of photography transformed gradually in the late 19th century, as the snapshot was marketed as a superior means through which to capture and conserve essential memories (Murray 2008, van Dijck 2006). While portraiture continued to play a central role within photographic discourse, in both professional, and increasingly non-professional terms, the visual landscape captured and disseminated through photographs began to shift away from the studio towards the everyday spaces of people’s ordinary lives. With the introduction of the Kodak Brownie, a portable and (more importantly) affordable camera, in 1900 (West 2003), photographic practices were increasingly used to document the rituals of everyday life. According to Sontag (1973), photography post-Brownie was less about a specialized or artistic form of representation and became instead a widely practiced social rite, defense against anxiety, and a tool or technology of power (14). Cameras were increasingly employed as a means of pictorially...
establishing family; documenting tourism and the productivity of leisure time; and framing what was worth seeing and keeping, inadvertently “making the event” (Sontag 1973). While these weren’t the only applications of photographic technology, they have garnered significant critical attention and have been located, almost uniformly, as the central practices of non-professional photography through this period in the medium’s history.

In the 1950s, these practices, which have come to be known as ‘personal photography,’ are considered to have come of age; the technology was ideal for circulation as it had become increasingly portable and, partially due to the introduction of 35mm film-rolls and proliferation of commercial developers, required less technical savvy. The growth of this newly “personal photography” marked a shift away from the commercial studio and professional documenter, as a growing number of individuals gathered, filtered, and organized personal photos into albums, and saved them as pictorial references, or for the purpose of communal reminiscing. While the documentation of coming-of-age moments and practices surrounding album-making have been located as the key features of personal photography in the early to mid-19th century it should be noted that the medium was not reduced to these practices but was still employed in divergent ways. While professional ventures are not the focus of this thesis, they have always run along-side personal or amateur practices. In addition to this, a cursory survey of photo-archives reveals a large body of work documenting mundane, everyday scenes or (non)events, the kitchen counter, a panting dog, a moving car, etc. While the prevalence of these images in public archives rather than cherished family albums may speak to their inconsequential disposability, the images were still captured, attesting to the diversity of personal amateur practices.
The expansion of personal photography was in large part due to its commercially initiated pairing with the domestic sphere. The Brownie was marketed as a technological pursuit that was so simple that everyone, “even” a woman or child, could partake in it (West, 2003). This technological ease was paired with marketing that framed photography as an instrument through which “good” families could document significant shared and coming-of-age moments. Images were increasingly shot from within the private sphere employing domestic interiors as a scenic backdrop for images capturing birthdays, holidays, and life-long milestones. While the contemporary ubiquity of photography insinuates that cameras belong everywhere, the Brownie didn’t simply “slip into” family life but instead, through strategic marketing, carved out a space for itself, constructing new alignments of what it meant to act, look like and be a family in the early to mid 20th century. The portrait chronicles that families built, over the years did not only serve to document important events but also stood as a testament to shared, or communal identity. Photography, in the early 20th century became a significant means through which communities could be documented and visually asserted (see Kaplan 2005 and Hirsch 1997.) While this has in many cases been looked upon positively, such as in the case of representing families, school classes, or military contingents, this employment of the photograph has also been employed exploitatively as in the case of documenting and asserting the inferiority of culturally marginalized individuals. I will discuss this in greater detail below in relation to photographic ethics.

While the rise of personal photography marked a number of novel photographic applications, a final, but crucial, development that I would like to touch upon here is the growing conceptualization of photography as a means of capturing “memories.” While past
employments of the medium focused on scientific realism, knowledge dissemination and (personal and public) identity formation through portraiture, a key attribute that was exposed through the personal snapshot was the photograph’s strength as a tool for memory. The albums that individuals compiled did not only stand as a discursive testament to personal and shared histories but were also actively employed as means for preserving moments. Individuals would gather around albums, or later slide shows” to share, remember and re-remember the experiences captured within the photographic frame. According to Susan Sontag (1973), the photograph works to establish what counts as “an event.” In some cases this refers to the question of what is worth remembering, and in others, as Sontag exposes through a discussion of the omnipresence of photographic voyeurism, it refers to the possibility that the camera is what produces the event as a coherent event at all. While there has been significant debate regarding whether or not images cue or “make” memories, this has long been and intrinsic (and marketed) function of photographs (see for example: Sontag 1973; Barthes 1982; Rosenblum 1997; Lury 1998; Van Dijck, 2005; Murray 2008).

Grounding the Image: Towards a Philosophy of Photography

Early photographic practices sparked significant interest and critique from a number of philosophical, artistic and political sources. The photograph’s growing employment as a means of disseminating knowledge, constructing identity, representing social discourses and facilitating commercial gain located it as a rich domain for critical social and philosophical thought. While I will not set out to develop an exhaustive review
of photographic theory, there are a few key developments within this line of thought that have been thoroughly explored and compared through analogue and digital photography. The following sections will briefly outline a series of treatises regarding the photographic medium: democratization, social structuration, ontological grounding, and subject formation. The purpose of the following digressions is not only to develop a rich understanding of early theoretical approaches to the medium but also to provide a vision of how analogue photography was initially conceptualized. While many of these theoretical underpinnings are still relevant within the “digital age,” the second chapter will reveal that they are insufficient and require revisions, or the addition of supplementary trajectories, in order to expose the nature of digital photography.

**Dissipating Democracy**

While debates regarding the artistry of photography have continued, the prominence of these debates receded as photography became recognized as a multi-purpose discipline. As the above sections suggests, “photography” has never been a uniform medium but has instead been practiced and conceptualized in relation to its shifting spatio-temporal context. While this might give the faulty impression that history or “progress” is causally implicated in shifting perceptions of “photography”, it should be noted that in this case, historical presentation provides a means of organizing the mutating configurations of social, political and economic forces.

In his seminal pieces, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1969) and “A Short History of Photography,” (1972) Walter Benjamin engages in a hopeful yet critical discussion of various technological processes that facilitate the mass (re)production of
cultural objects or goods. He employs photography, as both a metaphor for and prime example of these forms of technology and demonstrates how they harbor both positive opportunities and negative consequences. By dismantling of the “aura” that surrounded privileged forms of representation, Benjamin demonstrates how reproductive media have the potential to facilitate either the democratization of mediated representation, or, conversely, to provide political actors with an additional and more subversive means of disseminating information (propaganda.) In this sense, Benjamin marks the beginning of two key themes within photographic discourse: democratization and discursivity.

According to Benjamin, the rise of photography facilitated the dethroning of the auratic experience that had been attached to painting and other cultish art objects. Historically, the aura, a quality that arose purely within unique and authentic works of (high) art, had been considered a necessary component of any proper/moral, aesthetic engagement. While an encounter with the aura was often perceived of as a “spiritual” engagement, it also worked to facilitate the elevation of certain works, typically of a bourgeois or religious inclination, to positions of prominence, importance, and increased dissemination. By dismantling the centrality of the aura to “true” artistic engagements, the newly developed, technological methods of representation were presented a means through which the proletariat would be able to represent themselves and circulate their own discursively inclined vision of the world with equal authority. As the success of the Kodak Brownie suggests, everybody could take pictures and document the meaning and weight of their own lives. The price of the Brownie, commercialization of the developing process and active marketing to women and children redistributed the modes of representation from the privileged to everyday, middle-classed actors. Whether as a result of an inherent desire
to document and share one’s story or in response to active marketing of the medium, everyone was encouraged to take and share photos as documentation of their surrounding realities. This notion of democratization, while initially asserted in responses to differences between photo and painting, has been transformed into a thematic principle throughout the history of the medium and has always involved dismantling representational hierarchies and providing an increasing number of individuals with a voice to share “their side” of things.

While on the one hand this presents a promising opportunity to deconstruct class divisions and provides a more equitable means of representing reality, Benjamin’s work serves simultaneously, as a warning to the proletariat of his time. No doubt in response to the propagation of fascist ideologies that had taken hold in the political climate during his final years, Benjamin warns that “equalizing” technologies, such as photography, and their resulting forms of representation can easily be assimilated within the capitalist system and used against the proletariat to maintain, solidify, and deepen their position of subordination. Indeed, Benjamin bemoaned the rise of advertising and its use of the potentially critical form of photography, transforming photography into a myth making enterprise rather than a form of critique. He argued that photography was in danger of simply replicating capitalism, but that it could be shifted toward ‘revolutionary use value’:

The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. The world is beautiful – that is its watchword. Therein is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists, even where most far-fetched subjects are concerned with salability than with insight (Benjamin 1999: 526)
As a number of theorists and critics (see for example: Barthes 1982; Bourdieu 1990; Butler 2009) have since acknowledged, the photographic frame has repeatedly been employed subversively to push and disseminate discursive agendas. Benjamin’s analysis appears to provide one of the first accounts of photography as discourse-laden rather than simply “realistic.” What becomes exceptionally troubling to him is that photograph facilitated political or economic appropriation goes easily unnoticed within the flurry of “objectivist” visual culture. Not only do photographic technologies have the capacity to give the false impression of empowerment through their apparent facilitation of personal(ized) production, but also, as a result of the sheer explosion in the number of representations, the affective capacity of each singular image is diminished, making it a game of subtlety in numbers as opposed to one of singular significance. While this in a sense diminished the significance of individual snapshots, it also functioned to conceal, or de-emphasize, the discursive capacity of images making it more difficult to counteract and resist their message.

**Structuring Social Image-ination**

Benjamin’s concerns regarding the promise and threat of photographic reproduction exposed photography as a discursive medium (regardless of the image’s referential accuracy, it could always be exploited as subversive propaganda) with significant potential consequences within the social sphere. Photography as a socially implicated technology that both establishes and maintains various social structures has been explored by a number of sociologists and social critics. While the empirical accuracy of his general claim is highly

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14 With this warning in mind, it becomes important to note is that while kernels of resistance and hierarchical reorganization along increasingly democratized lines can be excavated from Benjamin’s texts, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not Benjamin provides these nostalgically as he laments what could have been or demonstrates instead a continued hope and promise.
contested, Pierre Bourdieu explored the connections between photography and social engagement thoroughly in his book *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (1990). According to Bourdieu, there is nothing essential to the photograph; like Roland Barthes, who will be discussed in greater detail below, he argued that the photograph erases itself “as such” through the mere act of being envisioned. As a result, the photo-object peels away, revealing photography as a practice that exists only as a performative extension and demonstration of social involvement. In this sense, the photograph becomes a site upon which social structures, such as class and community, can be visualized, negotiated and reinforced in an effort to establish allegiances and disseminate visions of appropriate social configurations. The camera, in this case, becomes a discursive prosthetic, outfitted with a keen ability to maintain hegemonically inclined power relations. Bourdieu’s central concern was to then locate people’s apparently arbitrary tastes for this or that photograph within class cultures and their ‘habitus’. The boundaries around different photographic genres and between amateur, serious amateur and professional photography are expressions of class positions, rather than artistic or objective elements.

Susan Sontag (1973) has also been a central critic within discussions of the role of photography in structuring social reality and various “subject” positions. Sontag explores a number of popular photo practices in order to demonstrate their social, economic and political consequences. Through a discussion of the development of family photography, Sontag demonstrates how photography served to uphold standing social structures (such as gender roles) while actively constructing others. According to Sontag, the performative interactions encouraged by the camera were both defined and proliferated through the commodification of the personal photograph. Kodak, the defining force in commercial
photography, marketed the Brownie by offering actual images of what “good” families looked like while also, more subtly, implying that to be a good family you too would need to be in possession of similar images. In this sense, the infiltration of photography into the space of the home, and family, exposes it as a technology of power and worked to validate its presence and the particular types of interactions that were attributed to it (Sontag, 1973). This had two primary (or intended) effects. First, photography became a necessitated practice of ongoing consumption and production. And second, Kodak’s manufactured image reconstituted the photograph as a guide through which people could reflexively transform their performative tendencies within particular social spaces (Sontag, 1973).

The conceptual pairing of photography with 20th century experiences of consumption and production is furthered through Sontag’s discussion of the increasingly entwined relationship between tourism and photo-taking. While Sontag’s discussion of tourist photography often refers, quite literally/directly, to travelers’ desire to photograph the various sites and scenes of their vacations, her intention is to demonstrate how all individuals, when directed through the lens, become metaphorical tourists within the lives of themselves and others. According to Sontag, the work-driven feel propelled into photographing the passing moments of their lives and extraordinary experiences. While this conjures images of Barthes’ desirous death mask, (I will miss the presence of this moment in an effort to hold it, to have it, again, not again, in the future) to Sontag travelers

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*Kodak in fact actively constructed these family engagements as being important moments and provided productive images to demonstrate to families how best to go about these celebrations (Kotchemidova 2005). Sontag suggests that these familiar photographs facilitated the construction of “portraits/chronicles” which served as visual signifiers of the family, attesting to its existence as a particular social object.

*According to Marien (2003) the current conception of the “family” is in fact intricately linked to photography marketing campaigns and the performances/actions that they encouraged and espoused.
take pictures in an effort to ease the anxiety felt as a result of not doing work; photographing, in this case, is a friendly imitation of the work that bodies feel perpetually compelled to do. Not only can its material and (a)countable results can be used to measure efficiency and worth but photographic re-viewing points to individuals “need to have reality confirmed and enhanced by photographs ... an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted.” In this case, photographs have turned the past into an object for consumption as a cult of image-junkies look onward, transforming experiential reality into a systematic grid of photographic vision.

**Identifying Photography**

Much of the aforementioned work theorizing the photographic medium relied on a historically established belief that representational images would not only be viewed passively but would also affect their audiences. The primary intention within these affective discourses was typically the image’s capacity to influence perceptions of identity, both in terms of those depicted and those engaged in the acts of looking. As I mentioned above, in relation to professional portraiture, photographs were believed to reveal the inner character of their subject matter causing many individuals to go to great lengths to ensure that their images reflected a favorable impression. While in many cases this has been discussed in terms of self-identification in positive terms, the nature of many of these images suggested that they be shared with other individuals, transforming them into vehicles for public as well as private identification.

Philosophical discussions regarding identity formation and photography have relied upon two fundamental assumptions. First, that the ontological constitution of the
photograph enables it to abide to the realist claims that the photographic image is an accurate, if not direct, re-presentation of reality. And second that the photograph plays an active and effective role within the throes of subject formation. These two qualities, and their philosophical digressions will be the focus of the following pages. Not only have they occupied a central position within the canonical discourses on photography, but the philosophical explorations of the ontological and subjective thrust of photography have provided the medium with a conceptual basis within philosophical and collective consciousness alike. A point of caution is to recognize that while ontology and subjectivity are conceptualized as diametrically opposed, the photograph acts as a bridge between these two phenomena; the performative capture phase exists affectively prior to (or within the throes) of subject-formation, while its representational image provides a grounded testament to the existence of a particular, articulated, subject. In this sense, the distinctions between the ontology of the image and its employment as a vehicle for subjectivity will often blur the distinctions between the two. In the following section of this chapter, I will begin by detailing a prominent conception of photographic ontology, as put forward by Roland Barthes (1982). Barthes’ conception of photographic ontology is key not only because it is central to canonical understandings of the medium, but also because it once again connects the image to its referent, providing it with authoritative, subjective claims. Following this, I will discuss “subjectivity” as a metaphysical claim and demonstrate how the photograph acts as both a facilitator of and infrastructure to subjectivity. While these sections are, on the one hand, a review of seminal photographic discourse; on the other hand, they become necessary in order to both begin thinking about the ethical weight of the
image and, perhaps more importantly for the following section, provide an image of the “photography” to which digitization has been placed in opposition.

**Onto-Photo**

In Part I of Camera Lucida (1982), Barthes engages in an examination of the photographic medium and tries to establish what is ontologically essential and phenomenologically distinct to this form of representation. An immediate difficulty that arises in this reductive endeavor is Barthes’ realization that the photograph (as a material object) facilitates and necessitates its own erasure, as a discrete entity, within the throes of signification. According to Barthes, the image that the photograph projects is tautologically and inextricably adhered to the referent (or depicted subject matter.) As a result, the photograph itself becomes invisible (Barthes likens it at times to a weightless, transparent envelope and at other times to a window) as it is absorbed into a mechanically facilitated rearticulation of a past, or other, instance of existence; all that is seen is the referent itself, not the photograph as such. This transformative erasure makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish an ontological foundation that is unique to photography as this form of representation is involved in a continual process of self-effacement and sign deferral; there is nothing particular or consistent to consider ontologically.

Numerous other intellectuals engaged in photography studies have reiterated this sentiment within slightly different terms. This level of thought, or project of reasoning is imperative to discussions of the social impact of photography and its capacity as a tool of subjection insofar as it re-affirms and legitimizes the relationship between the image and its referent. In this case, because the photograph is seen as a weightless envelope, or a
selective frame of reality, its relationship to that which it “signifies” is direct; it is transformed into a placeholder, a demarcation of purported or potential absence. The photograph is metonymic as opposed to mimetic. Barthes’ (non)ontology of the photograph has not only been widely adopted, but has repeatedly been deferred to in debates regarding digitization as the authoritative text on the image; purported changes in the medium are repeatedly asserted and measured in relation to Barthes’ conceptual claims.

**The Subjection of Photography**

As a mere window into nature and social reality, the photograph simply provides access to an embalmed vision of real-world and existential moments. It serves as a grid of intelligibility that filters and persuades particular visions of a reality that exists autonomously beyond its printed surface. The effect, to which Bourdieu (1990) pointed, is that the photograph becomes a fundamental means through which to organize social actors, often termed “subjects.” In order to develop this photographic theme further, I will briefly indulge a necessary digression on the nature of the philosophical subject in an effort to ground future discussions about the interaction of photography and subjectivity (or identity).

The modern philosophical “subject” refers to the “conscious or thinking subject, as self or ego, as that to which representations are attributed or predicated” (Critchley 1999: 51). It is a form of placeholder that satisfies a desire for a sense of personal or self-continuity. Figured as the protagonist of metaphysics (Deleuze 1989), the Subject marks a break between a kind of Being that is constituted by its (co)existence (mitsein) or ‘being-
there’ and another kind of being that is established in language and emerges through processes of discursive essentialization. While the first form of Being is often conceived of as ontologically inessential, the second, ascribed with “subjectivity,” is a historically located and continuous “self” that becomes intelligible through the psychic internalization of power structures and subsequent affections. According to Judith Butler (1999), who draws heavily upon Foucault and Freud, these exertions of power are typically presented to the subject in the form of discursive texts such as narratives and images, and signifying events. The power that is exerted on the subject works to structure the interior of the subject by modifying the discursive narratives that it has attached to its sense of self and by in turn transforming the subject’s sense of (performative) agency within her future power practices. An important consideration when approaching the notion of the subject is that the subject should not be considered synonymous with the individual. Instead, the subject presents a site within which the individual is able to exist intelligibly to himself and to the social world within the structures of language. This becomes important because it necessitates not simply the role of discourse within subject formation but also the recognition that the subject is never entirely the “self” because it must succumb to the categorizations of the other in order to persist as a social (or even personal) being (Butler, 1999). In other words, coming into a state of social being involves the subjugating pressure of being named, categorized, and classified according to another’s construction or perception of those groupings.

As a result of the supposed “immateriality” of the affective component of the image, the means through which photographs are read or decoded has largely been ignored; the image itself isn’t being read; instead, it is simply opening an avenue for (re)considering social events. While more formal attempts have been made by semioticians
at discerning the rhetorical components of the image, and assessing what counts as a unit of photographic meaning, these discussions have gained little attention outside of the realm of calculated advertising. Regardless of how it exerts meaning, the ability to read a photographic scene appears to come quite intuitively. Like any form of performative or textual interaction, the photograph has a propensity toward affecting those who are a witness to it. As a result, it has been recognized and implemented as an efficient means of prompting subjectivity. Individuals are both the subject of photographs and a subject to photographs as the visual frame represents its content in particular, often intentional, ways.

Referring back to the sections on stereographs, portraits and snapshots, photographs were employed in all cases as a means of constructing knowledge and identity. Representations of distant lands, friends and family, and a series of social actors provided individuals with access to knowledge concerning realities other than their own. The purported connection between photograph and referent legitimized these images and provided their discursive claims with empirical authority.

Roland Barthes outlines the multiple ways in which photographs subjugate in the later sections of Camera Lucida. His first area exploration is concerned with how the subject is interpolated through the act of photographing. According to Barthes, the process of subjectivation begins as soon as the individual recognizes that they are within the grasp of the camera lens. The desire to establish and maintain an ideal image of themselves (both in terms of a self-reflexive “profound self” and to the photographer as an “ideal subject”) results in the metaphorical transformation of their present self into the photographic image that will be seen and disseminated upon development. This anticipatory projection engenders a series of acts, performances, and postures as the individual manipulates their
body in an attempt to maintain this desired, and perceived, self. Barthes sees this process as not only uncovering the faulty and imitative nature of subjectivity but also as a moment that marks the subject's first encounter with photographic death; the subject is not only othered from himself as he projects his image into the future but in this act of ‘imaging’ himself he is also self-objectified.

As I mentioned above, once the photo has been taken and developed, the image of the previously articulated subject can be seen and considered. This act further subjects the individual(s) within the frame as they are viewed within a set of finite parameters. Established social frameworks determining desirable and undesirable qualities can be excavated from the image, providing the viewer with a socially situated perception of self. While writing after Barthes, Deleuze (1989) argues that it is the “revisitations” facilitated by (collections of) differing and deferring photographs that a sense of linear time and continuous ‘subjectivity’ comes to rise. What becomes interesting in Barthes case is how the experience of the photograph marks a series of additional small deaths. Not only does it point to a lost version of the selves that are depicted upon its surface, but the viewer also experiences a petit-morts upon the realization that the desired subject within the photograph can never be fully (or properly) possessed. While the photo can be held, the subject slips away as a result of the realization of absence, or non-existential presence, and initial imitation.

While photographs have been conceptualized as means of formulating an image of an isolated subject, whether it be of one’s self or of an other, they also, arguably, facilitate the coming-into-being of a shared or communal form of being. According to Nancy (2005), who will be discussed in greater detail in the last chapter of the thesis, the being-subject that
arises through photography is never just one, but always at least two. While Barthes’ four-fold process of photo-subjection acknowledges the desire of the subject to appear favorably to the photographer, Nancy acknowledges that in the act of being photographed it is not only the subject of the image that comes to recognize its being, but always at least one other, the photographer. In this case, the realization of subject-hood, does not only arises retrospectively through the viewing of photographs but also occurs performatively within the shared throes of being-photographed. Drawing upon his constitution of transcendence, Nancy asserts that photography offers a vehicle for realizing that one cannot “transcend oneself” in favor of the other. In the act of being photographed, the limits of self and other are (re)established in relation to one another, revealing the shared and communal nature of being.

While the ontological and transcendental thrust of his argument suggests a form of “neutral” articulation, Nancy acknowledges the performative and therefore discursive nature of this encounter. The originary motive for photographing influences the terms of the event, encouraging the coming-into-being of a being in positive or negative terms; the photograph can either serve as a means of establishing a co-articulatory bond, or it can facilitate a desire to constrain and possess the other in one’s own terms. The difficulty here is that while in some cases these underlying drives are explicit, in others they are not.\footnote{Nancy touches on the consequences of these two patterns of rising forth, and the issues of explicit and non-explicit “oppression”, in his chapter on the violence of the image. This will be touched upon further in later sections.}
Subjugating Subjectivity
Photographing Within Negative Terms

As was demonstrated above, photography and the photograph present convincing mediums through which to facilitate the emergence and rearticulation (reification) of particular subject identities. While this can occur within what appear to be harmless or inert terms, the camera also has a demonstrated propensity towards being used as a tool for the establishment and maintenance of oppressive discourses. Within these cases, visually identifiable beings are framed in ways that limit their subjective capacity to act (freely); as is outlined in Foucauldian conceptions of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1978), these (re)presentations facilitate the emergence of “weaker” (or unfavorable) subject positions in an effort to reinforce the position of a select few. While in some cases the single presentation of an individual might depict them in an unfavorable or condemning light, in many instances the position(s) of inferiority come about as a result of compounded articulations of a similar vein.

In “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” Donna Haraway (2004) draws upon an analogy that likens photography to hunting with a camera. She tells the story of Carl and Delia Akeley’s safari, and their implication in an elephant mauling in British East Africa in 1910. Haraway uses this narrative to demonstrate the means through which photography tempts the eye, shoots, captures, lays bare, and upholds particular visions (truths) about the world. She teases apart the signifying elements of a trophy image to show how they establish visions of race, gender, and humanity that reinforce patriarchy and whiteness. Black arms protruding from the photograph’s sides are amputated from their bodies, as they hold the arched tusks of an absent beast. A woman is christened, her head bowed to a man spreading the blood of game across her forehead (Haraway 2004). While the images that resulted from the
hunt may simply be seen as a series that documents the various legs of the trip, a visible subtext can be traced through the images as they quietly iterate and articulate the order of things (and bodies that matter.)

While Haraway is concerned with the ways in which photographs implicate particular bodies and entities within systems of knowledge and discourse, Butler (2009) deconstructs the state of images and subjects further by revealing how photographs do not only produce particular knowledges but also establish what is worth acknowledging. Her particular point of concern is the way in which photographs work to determine the parameters of “grievable life.” In other words, she argues that photography is a principle means through which the question of what counts as a body and a life gets answered (privately and publicly.) This draws upon Sontag’s conceptualization of the photograph as a frame that establishes what counts as “an event.” Through several of the book’s articles, and a lecture titled “Torture, Sexual Politics, and the Ethics of Photography” that she delivered at Stanford in 2006, Butler demonstrates how the popularized images of torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib worked to dehumanize the detainees transforming them in objects lacking in ethical consequence (and therefore consideration.) In this case, the “subjects” within the parameters of the image are not only pictured in such a way that facilitates abjection and abasement but they are also effaced, their existence as living bodies erased. The prisoners at Abu Ghraib do not only demonstrate beings that lie at the periphery of opportunity and privilege but they also come to define the parameters of life and death, human and inhuman(e). This has the double effect of reaffirming what counts as a human body (which points to the precariousness of “human” and begs the question of

"The image in this case not only likened to a death mask, but also points prominently to its capacity to act as an interface between life and death."
inside/outside) while simultaneously erasing the need for responsibility and accountability inside and outside the frame (Butler 2009).

The infamous images taken at Abu Ghraib have also provided a platform through which to explore a third space for photographic exploitation and subjective harm. The depiction and re-presentation of traumatic events has long been a concern for those studying photography. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth has explained the experience of trauma as existing solely in the structure of its experience or reception. The traumatic event is “not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth in Lieberman 2008, pg 8). In this sense, trauma becomes an immediacy that is a belatedness; it involves a temporal delay that enables the individual to move beyond the shock and awe of the initial, painful moment. If the individual survives, the trauma will subsequently manifest itself as a repeated suffering of the initial event and persistent “psychic leaving of its site.” This repetition is the effect of the initial non-experience (by-passing) of the event. Because the event was never fully constituted as “an experience,” it becomes a recurrent source of pain as it transformed into a site of perpetual reinterpretation (reengagement.)

According to Ulrich Baer (2003), photographed trauma marks an abyss of meaning that lies between the actual and the (parameters of the) representational. While he sees the photograph as providing a means of re-facing the moment in question and potentially coming to terms with it, this sentiment has been highly contested and has sparked concern regarding unexpected encounters with traumatic photographs (Lieberman 2008). In a discussion about accidentally coming across a series of images of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau at the age of twelve, Susan Sontag demonstrates the way in which the mechanical camera apparatus has the capacity to affect
the experience of traumatic suffering on unsuspecting voyeurs. This experience has led Sontag to make several observations regarding photos depicting pain and or trauma. First, Sontag reveals that photos of traumatic events do not only mark the limit of horror but can also elicit a sense of irrevocable grief and injury within the viewer. In this sense, while Baer sees the image of trauma as potentially providing an end to traumatic re-visitations, its “closing of the event” has the capacity to inflict and preserve unintended pain on its viewer; closing the event in this case might not be favorable to vague re-visitations. (I knew it was bad, but I didn’t realize that it was that bad.) An important note is that the photos of trauma that get selected for circulation might encourage hegemonically inclined perspectives that, again, may be more harmful and painful to marginalized or oppressed populations. Second, Sontag demonstrates how this sense of pain and traumatic suffering facilitated by the image actually has the capacity to close off opportunities for recognizing and affecting (ethical) responsibility. Through a discussion of Barthes’ concept of the “painful labor of the witness,” a challenging attempt at recognizing and facing the photographed “other” in terms of ethical responsibility, Sontag shows how the depiction of trauma can be so injurious to the viewer that they retreat, and question the presentation of the image rather than presentation of the event (Sliwinski 2008).

Summary

In this chapter, I traced through a series of historical digressions on photography in an effort to develop a detailed image of amateur snapshot photography from inception to digitization. I discussed how a history of technological innovation was facilitated through a dense supporting network of social, political and economic forces that manufactured and
maintained numerous, culturally borne desires and discourses. I traced through the widespread adoption of the stereograph, cartes the visites and snapshot (album) in order to demonstrate how photography is not merely a discrete means of image-making, but is instead comprised of a diverse range of unique, discursively structured, practices that articulate a number of interconnected “photographies”. Photography is a performative medium. Each photographic engagement (as representation, token of memory, visual commodity, etc.) involves shifting configurations of supporting infrastructure and enacts multiple different “scripts” of performative engagement, articulating multiple distinct modes of photography, within the overarching medium. Drawing upon the multiple experiences of photography I then outlined a series of philosophical responses the medium. Key themes that arose in this section were those of democratization, referential realism in light of ontological erasure, mediated subject formation in positive and negative terms, and the employment of the image as a vehicle for memory and meaning-making.

The purpose of this section was two-fold. First, I sought to map out the rich landscape of film-based photography and demonstrate the multiplicity of practices and discourses that constitute the medium. As I mentioned above, I worked to expose the ways in which film-based practices organized key photographic experiences of information, communication, identity and memory. Second, this “mapping-exercise” was meant to not only develop a detailed understanding of how the medium has been conceptualized, but it is also intended to ground the upcoming discussions, which, while covering numerous divergent topics, take-up the analogue-digital shift as their point of departure. In order to comment on the novelties of digitization, it is important (if not necessary) to have a firm understanding of analogue practices, its point of comparison.
CHAPTER II

DIGITAL NOVELTIES
EXPOSING CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN LIGHT OF DIGITIZATION, NETWORKING AND ONLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

In the following chapter, I will explore the transformation of photographic practices as a result of digitization. While drawing upon instances of accretion and mediation, this chapter will map emerging photographic constellations in light of the convergence of novel phenomena such as the participatory Web, networked devices, and an increasingly “digital” economy. A key argument to be made will be that while the points of continuity between analogue and digital photography greatly outnumber the points of rupture, current practices affiliated with digitization are (re)exposing elements of photographic discourse that simply were not visible prior to digital transformation. I will make this very clear in the first section of this chapter as I employ digitization and online photo-sharing communities to dismantle canonical constructions of photographic ontology as “inessential.” I will demonstrate that the “truth effect” of the photographic image has always been contentious, regardless of digitization. While images continue to stand as a testament to reality (and for good reason), digitization has exposed the discursive nature of photography’s previously asserted “ontological” grounding, inciting a new pursuit of the phenomenologically distinct and ontological essential elements of the photographic image.

In the second part of this chapter, I will outline the contemporary convergence of
networked devices, performative spaces and theoretical sentiments that have facilitated the purported “rise to ubiquity” of the photographic image within current visual culture. While this “ubiquity” is a novel feature in and of itself, the purpose of this section will be to expose how contemporary forces, largely external to the image-making processes of “photography,” are shaping the performative and discursive trajectories of the medium, establishing “what” photography is, “how” it can be practiced and what its underlying infrastructure is made of.

The third portion of this chapter is dedicated to “photo-sharing,” as a central and structurally novel means through which photography and images are being engaged. Photo-sharing is not only a testament to numerous elements in photographic convergence, but an exploration of the infrastructure and practices that are inherent to it will serve to illuminate the ways in which people are actually engaging in the various component of “digital photography.” Of particular concern in this section will be discussions of long-standing photographic practices and desires: photo as information, photo as commodity, photo as memory token and photo as a tool of identity formation. I will not only reveal the ways in which past practices have been employed to structure current experiences but will also begin to expose the novel (infrastructural) layers of contemporary digital photography.

In the fourth and final portion of this chapter, I will discuss a key and yet invisible actor, often overlooked in discussion of digital photography, software. Software is increasingly being conceptualized as a form of affective infrastructure within all digitally mediated environment (which, as we will see, means nearly all environments in technologically rich societies.) It does not simply enable “interfacing” but has also become a central actor within the throws articulation. Its construction of and impact within photo-
sharing environments is having a significant impact on the ways in which photography is practiced and conceived of. Not only is it facilitating a novel means of interacting with and through images, but software has also enabled a type of photo-agentialism, online. While this, in some ways, facilitates richer and denser networks of exchange online, it also means that we are “losing control” over our images. This “loss of control” can amount to a number of significant and ethical consequences. In the closing portion of this section, I will provide a three cases where images traveled “freely” and were encountered by unsuspecting audiences or employed in unintended ways. While this will, on the one hand, serve to ground claims regarding the “uncontrollable lives” of images online, it will also act as a segue to the following chapter that will begin to map out a series of ethical novelties that have arisen in light of contemporary digital photography practices.
Epigraph: The Death and Resurrection of a Medium

In 2004 Canadian photographer, Robert Burley began pictorial recording the closing and demolition of manufacturing facilities dedicated to the production of film-based photo technologies. He traveled internationally from Canada to the United States to France and Belgium to digitally document closing plants, abandoned technologies, and human onlookers in an effort to record a medium on the verge of change or worse, disappearance. In the mind of Burley and critics alike (2008), the resulting series of photographs “Disappearance of Darkness,” and particularly the image above “The Implosions of Buildings 65 and 69,” are a testament to the material and metaphorical effects of the “Death of Photography” as they demonstrate the terminal impact that digitization has had on the social, technological and economic industries that have traditionally constituted the medium.
Coding Vision

It is undeniable; digitization has significantly altered the practices and processes that constitute photography. According to Russell Kirsch (2010), it started over fifty years ago with a fairly innocent question, “what if the computer could see the world the way that we see it?” This line of inquiry laid the foundation for numerous important technological developments (satellite imagery, CT scanning, virtual reality, etc) including the basic building block of contemporary aesthetics and visual culture: the “pixel”. Pixels, or picture elements, are the smallest visually discernible unit within a digital image, and appear as miniscule squares of uniform color or shade. They are composed of binarial bits of data (0, 1) that are determined algorithmically by assessing tonal averages and intensities within a particular field of vision (Couchot 2002; Van House et. al. 2005). Once the pixel values are determined, they are positioned within a spatially determined grid that ensures, much like in the case of a puzzle, that everything is where it is supposed to be for the desired image to appear (on screen.)” The development of the pixel enabled computer scientists of the seventies to “scan” film images and transform them into bits of data that could be read and

" According to Kirsh, while the visual landscape facilitated by the pixel has succumbed to a form of squared aesthetic, the shape of the pixel is in fact incidental, if not accidental. The software that determines the value of each two-dimensional plane could just as easily have been applied to a non-square-shaped area, transforming how we view, conceptualized and judge digital representations.
displayed on a computerized screen. The first digitized image was of Kirsch’s son and comprised of a mere 176 by 176 pixels, approximately one one-thousandth of the information captured by today’s digital cameras (Kirsch 2010).

The importance of the pixel was not only its facilitation of the digitization process, but, as a discrete computerized unit, it could also be isolated and manipulated according to a user’s whims and desires. Because pixels were recognized as distinct units, they could be programmed to change in particular ways which meant that with the click of a button, an image could be resized, colors altered, blemishes fixed and, for the more adept practitioner, subject matter could be seamlessly added into or removed from the image (Mules 2000). While many of these functions were not novel, the photographic image has always involved, if not employed manipulation; digitization heightened the ease and rapidity of the process; image development and editing was no longer a skill that required years of training to perfect, but could instead be achieved quickly as pixels leant themselves to computerized and uniform transformation.

NASA scientists, first employed the practice of image manipulation as a means of heightening the visual data that they were capturing of distant planets, and altering colors in an effort to better determine different geological landscapes (Mitchell 1994). Because the early development of digital photography coincided with advances in space technology, it became a superior means of translating grainy and indecipherable images into vibrant pictures of distant planets. Much like Muybridge’s early motion studies that revealed truths that were not visible to the human eye, digital manipulation facilitated the production of images, drawn from reality with dramatized clarity, constructing a favorable image of newly visualized territories. While this instance of manipulation was largely to increase the
“visibility” of the image, discourses surrounding NASA’s manipulation of newly digital images also appears to have acknowledged the use of the photograph as a means of visually constructing unknown territories; sources were not concerned about rigid adherence to reality as very few members of their audience would “know” the reality to which they were expected to adhere.

The ability to alter a photograph digitally challenged the historically established hallmark of photography – that the subject of the image must have been in front of the lens when the shutter was released and scene was imprinted. The photographic image no longer promised the “absolute material accuracy” (Baudelaire in Wells, 2004) of its subject matter as it was liberated from the restraints of immediate re-presentation. Even when the authenticity and discursive neutrality of the resulting image were questionable, the connection between image and referent had always been taken as a definitive quality within the ontological grounding of the photographic image. Its birth and conceptualization during a heightened period of modernity, located it forever as a realist tool for capturing, critiquing and documenting objective reality. While this is still a wide-spread and necessary application of photography within a number of fields, such as medical imaging, digitization challenged the accuracy of this quality, along with a number of other ontologically based characteristics of the medium. As a result, it did not only, as Burley’s exhibit suggests, facilitate a ground-breaking shift in photographic industries, but it also prompted various sources to assert that photography, as an ontologically and historically established medium, had died somewhere around the mid 1980s and that visual culture was now entering a “Post-Photographic” era.

It is hard, if not impossible, to deny the significant impact that digitization has had on
the practices associated with photography and image making. As Liz Wells (2004) notes, “the late twentieth-century convergence of audio-visual technologies with computing has led to a profound and ongoing transformation in the ways in which we record, interpret and interact with the world” (12.) This being said, the contention that photography is “dead” ignores a number of continued components within the comprehension and practice of the medium. First, photography is still a practice that is concerned with image making and disseminating. Second, to assert that photography has died necessarily requires that one actively overlook the proliferating technological and cultural industries that fall under its moniker. Finally, the “death of photography” insinuates that it is an a-dimensional and self-contained medium that could be targeted and eradicated. As I asserted in the last section, photography, right from its inception, was not a medium in isolation but rather necessitated a recognition of the “socially constructed knowledges and discourses that enable[d] the technology to function” (Lister 391). Just as the eventual success of the Calotype (over the Daguerreotype), and later the Kodak Brownie, suggests, it has always been a medium comprised of messy and competing intersections of social desires, technological possibilities and economic affordability. The culturally and historically shifting parameters of photography have always arisen not only through the aforementioned convergences, but also as a result of the accretion of multiple phenomena and transformative processes. Photography, digital photography, has never been a matter of invention but has instead always signified a moment in which the “end of a long process of proliferating mediators, a process in which all relevant subprograms, nested one into another, meet in a simple task” (Latour 1999).

In the following sections I will “un-nest” several of the key components that have
served to reconfigure and determine the parameters of amateur photography in the digital age. By teasing these elements apart, I hope to demonstrate that photography continues to develop through accretion (as old film-based practices and desires have been folded into current experiences of the medium,) while simultaneously contending that digitization has functioned to challenge several canonical conceptions/assertions (about) of photography by exposing elements of the image that were not previously visible. While digitization has not marked the end of photography, it has necessitated that critics of the medium re-consider long-standing assertions regarding its ontological grounding and epistemological impact; in this sense, digitization marks a simultaneous continuity and discontinuity within the evolving history of the medium. My exploration of these simultaneous and competing forces within photographic discourse will be facilitated by a tripartite discussion of the photograph in the digital era. My first area of consideration will trace through early experiences of and responses to film digitization with a particular focus on the increasingly contentious relationship between the photograph and its referent. This will be followed by an exploration of the consequences of the convergence of photography with Web 2.0 and a myriad of other techno-social developments. I will tease apart the messy system of intersecting technologies, affective environments and interpolative practices that have become key components of contemporary photography, in an effort to gain a better understanding of the ontological and ethical grounding of the photographic image in the digital age. In the closing section of this chapter, I will draw some loose connections between digital photography and Karen Barad’s (2003) conception of non-human agentialism in an effort to segue into a discussion of novel ethical opportunities and concerns facilitated by online photo-sharing practices.
ONE.

The Ontological Crisis of Photography in the Digital Age

While it took nearly three decades for digital cameras to become the ubiquitous consumer goods that we are familiar with today, the widespread digitization of photography within the professional realm was first achieved through the use of high-resolution film scanners that transformed the continuous data of film into binarial bits of information that could be read, manipulated, and stored by a computer. According to Edmond Couchuot (2002) unlike film prints, the intersection of photographs with computers casts the digitized images into the throws of diamorphosis, as their bits of information pass continuously from one form or flow to another, eliminating the possibility of establishing a beginning or an end. Not only do digital images go through a series of transformational steps as they are translated, stored, transferred, read, displayed, and re-stored, but they also lend themselves to further modification by users as they are easily manipulated through computer editing software. With the aid of programs like Photoshop, the need for years of training in the darkroom diminished, as images could suddenly be effortlessly, or even automatically, edited to depict a (more) desirable representation of reality. With the click of a mouse or dash of a key, images could be resized, colors could be balanced, and subjects could be altered. As artist Orlan demonstrated in her early digital works, central elements of the image could be

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While film scanning presented the first means of digitizing the image, there were also a number of early devices that ventured to apply the same principle, transforming continuous visual information into bits of data, within the capturing process. The resulting images were also of extremely low-resolution, at times appearing similar to ultra sounds screenshots, and were captured by technologies that appropriated functions and designs from other media devices/fields rather than developing a whole new technological framework.
replaced, deleted or inserted as photos were easily doctored in a fashion that was reminiscent of a seamless-montage.

The ease with which digital images could be modified was of central concern to early critics and on-lookers. From its inception, photography has been conceptualized as a reliable means through which to document reality. According to Charles S. Peirce (in Houser & Kloesel 1998) photographs belong to the class of “indices,” as their mode of production forces them to adhere, point by point, to nature. While the camera’s keen ability to capture the trace of light and render an image of exact likeness located it as a superior tool for realist and objectivist meaning making, it also concealed the discursive intentions and constructions that lay behind the resulting image. The photographic image, while necessarily marked by a sense of absence, was positioned as an unquestionable/unhindered testament to existence. With the onset of digitization and growing ease of photo-editing software, the indexical claims of the image were challenged, as the photograph was no longer required to represent a particular referent (Mitchell 1994). The ability to intervene in the composition of the image, whether it be for aesthetic or thematic purposes, meant that photographic claims could no longer be trusted without contestation and critique. The ties between the photograph and its referent, a relationship that many had located at the heart of photography's ontological grounding, were forever severed. The novel artificiality or malleability of the digital image, was singled out by a number of theorists as the characteristic that both defined digitized photograph and differentiated it from its film counterpart. This challenge to the traditional conceptualization of photography caused many to usher in an era of purported “post-
photography” where the image no longer laid claim to truth and was at best nostalgically viewed as representing photography rather than the subject of its gaze.

While this line of thought/argumentation was once of pivotal concern within discussions that tried to discern the novelties of digitized photography, the validity of its terms has increasingly been criticized and debased (Rubenstein & Sluis 2008). As Jose Van Dijck asserts quite frankly “let’s be straight about one thing: digitization never caused manipulation or artificiality” (2008). The initial assertion that the digitized image marks a departure from “photography” as a result of a digitally induced and insurmountable chasm between referent and representation fails to acknowledge both the discursive or rhetorical persuasions of all images (even those that do represent “unaltered” depictions of reality) as well as a whole body of film photography that worked to intentionally challenge the purported relationship between photographs and objective truths. In the following section, I will take up this debate, through a discussion of famously altered images, in an effort to expose the long-standing contentiousness of the relationship between photograph and referent. It will do this for two reasons. First, because debates and anxieties regarding the diminishing authority photographic “truth” were central to early experiences of digitization and therefore should not be overlooked when discussing contemporary experiences of photography. And second, because these debates engendered a series of critical explorations into photography’s ontological grounding, exposing a series of faulty, if not discursively established, assumptions within canonical conceptions of the nature of the photograph. In addition to this, I hope to demonstrate that while digitization does not mark a wholly new form of (non)photography, it has served to expose elements of the image that were either not previously seen, or incorrectly assessed. While this isn’t to say that past
theoretical discussions of the image were wrong, it does locate them as historically contingent and therefore not ontologically apt.

**Rhetorical Value: Exposing the Versatility of the Index**

In 1840, after the French government refused to officially recognize the role that his “direct positive” process played within the development of “photography”, Hippolyte Bayard took and disseminated his first staged image, “Self Portrait as a Drowned Man.” The front-side of the image depicted Bayard slumped against a wall with closed eyes and crossed hands in an attempt to appear as a photograph documenting his death by drowning. On the backside of the image, Bayard incorporated a short text that clarified and corroborated this “fact.” The scope of the image’s circulation is unclear but what is important is that individuals (viewers) initially believed that Bayard had in fact died. While there have been numerous readings affixed to this image, a widely held understanding points to Bayard’s desire, perhaps out of spite, to challenge one of the qualities that had afforded photography early attention and support. By demonstrating that the photographic frame did not necessarily produce an authentic depiction of reality, Bayard was able to challenge the photograph’s claim to truth. While this did not effectively sever the relationship between referent, photograph, and “truth”, it does provide an early example
where the image was already subverting the “objectivity,” or “truthfulness” accorded to it (Rosenblum 1997).

There have been countless other high-profile incidents where images have intentionally or unintentionally challenged the photograph’s connection to its referent and claim to truth/veracity. Perhaps one of the most striking journalistic incidents was the use of stock photography to depict the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. Rather than disseminate original images, the Ukrainian government controlled the representation of the incident by providing international news sources with images of an explosion that took place at an Italian cement factory. According to W.J.T Mitchell (2005), the ability to ascertain the meaning and truth of an image relies upon the position within particular discourses. The plausibility, believability and personal importance of the image is “relative to an ideological framework and an existing knowledge structure” that determines the boundaries of what counts as new knowledge and corresponding evidence.

(37) The growing collections of commercial stock photography are an additional testament to the widespread presence of substitute images within visual culture. According to Frosh (2003), stock photography is a form of cultural production and a mode of signification that transforms photographs from personal “memory” items into consumer goods. Within this turn, images are employed to engender a particular mood or concept of a good or context. The direct representational value of the image is no longer, necessarily, its primary function as the photo is instead employed to enforce a sense of pleasure and desire to be associated with the marketed good. As a result, many of the images stored in image banks are visually “representational,” while simultaneously being forcefully dislodged from the particular referent that they represent. The image eschews
the subject. In addition to this, or because of this, nearly any form of “representation” can be substituted in for the concept that is being relayed as long as it can be tied into the desired message.

**Artfully Dismantling Referential Bias**

In addition to examples found within the fields of journalism and advertising, there have also been several bodies of work within the fine arts that have challenged the connection between photograph and referent. While professional or semi-professional artistic endeavors are not the focus of this project, citing a few examples from these photographic genres will serve to further establish the contentiousness of this relationship.

Rosalind Krauss (1982) draws attention to this indirectly when she discusses the insertion of artists’ hands (as a disembodied/amputated form of self portraiture) in many photographs from this period. According to Krauss, and many others, the proliferation of the camera asserted a new type of objectified vision that sought to erase the subjectivity of the being behind the lens in favor of envisioning photographs as the irreproachable output of a truth-bound machine. The insertion of artist-photographers’ hands into the frame was not only intended to reintroduce the presence of an “author” within the formulaic moments of picture taking, but it was also intended to assert the autonomy and authority of the author throughout the process. In a sense, while the artist-photographer relies on a sense of connection between the photograph and its referent (if only to ensure that the

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* The use of stock imagery can be traced to the early 19th century as media sources, such as the Illustrated London News, began employing generic etchings in its weekly review. The paper owned a limited number of “building sets” for pressing and would, as a result, employ them repeatedly, switching out the scenery or changing the name on the building sign in order to give the impression of authenticity and accuracy; a single press set might be used to represent an orphanage one week and a prison the next. The image in this case we employed to give a visual impression rather than as testament to the event.

* As Krauss explains the symbolism of the hand inadvertently draws attention to the camera, in its initial conceptualization, as a tool for light writing, an activity that requires/necessitates subjective interference and artistry, as opposed to as an objectifying machine.
viewer understands the relationship between the hands in the image and the hands of the artist), in this case, the relationship is also challenged insofar as it comes to be established through the discursive whims and desires of the photographer rather than through a natural or technologically objective relationship. Referring back to the function of immediacy in Remediation, the camera’s superior claim to truth has relied largely upon its capacity to erase the presence of the artist and assert an image of automation. The aforementioned examples provided by Surrealist photographers and expanded upon by Krauss consciously contest and oppose both of these factors and therefore point to early critiques of the photograph’s objective/definitive connection to its referent.

Within more contemporary terms, Canadian photographer Jeff Wall has dedicated several of his medium and large format backlit projections to what he calls “near documentary.” As seamless montages of imagined scenes, these images give an impression of depicted reality without being tied to the particularities of a single event. He cites his images, The Giant and Dead Troops Talk (1991-1992), as examples of this type of work. Instead of photographing a scene in one frame, Wall takes several photographs of a scene in which he has directed his subject(s) to act in particular ways. Once the series of images have been captured, Wall edits them (in some cases digitally while in others he has done it through the means of a darkroom) collapsing the several exposures seamlessly into one print. To Wall, this becomes an important means of challenging the camera’s (or photo’s) use as a realist/objectivist tool insofar as the seamless montage conjures an image of a reality that never fully existed (Galassi, 2007).

The aforementioned examples of amateur, journalistic and artistic photography are a testament to the tenuous relationship that has always stood between the photograph and
its referent. Digitized photography did not sever the ties between representation and referent but instead served to expose the faultiness of the image’s claim to objective truth.

**Exposing the Truth in Online-Fauxtography**

While it might be the case that photo editing software is increasingly accessible and easy to use (promoting the opportunity to alter photographs and tailor the subject matter captured within the frame), what is interesting is how increased fluency with this type of software paired with the convergence of digital photographs and online sharing, or blogging, networks has generated a series of feedback mechanisms that work to expose edited or faulty images. One particular area of interest in this case, is the pairing of photography, the internet and militaristic, or political, rhetorics. As I mentioned in the introduction, photography and the military share a long history as images have repeatedly been employed to bolster political tactics. While recent years have seen a rising concern about Intelligence Agencies use of photographs as a method for surveying, and keeping secret records of, un-knowing citizens (*Washington Post*, July 19th 2010), there has also been a significant amount of concern regarding the ease with which faulty and politically daunting images are being produced and disseminated. In the summer of 2008, Sepah, the media arm of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, released a four-
missiled image to the press that was intended to alert international political actors to Iran’s recent advancements within the field of nuclear weaponry. The image depicted four missiles, presumably shortly after lifting-off, surrounded by smoke. While the image initially garnered international coverage and concern, occupying the front-page of several large newspapers including the LA Times and Chicago Tribune, online photo enthusiasts quickly began declaring the image a fake. Several online photography communities, using their shared knowledge of photo-editing software, demonstrated how the image had been doctored; the original image had three missiles as opposed to four and also documented the presence of a military vehicle. According to further investigations led by the American Intelligence office, only one of the missile bodies had nuclear capability, which also challenged the original rhetoric surrounding the image.

What is interesting about this case is not simply how photography is becoming increasingly transparent, but also how online environments are generating feedback mechanisms through which the truth or non-truth of images can be ascertained and disseminated. As in this case, once image-faultiness is exposed, these images, instead of being cast outside the institution as deviant, are instead folded into it, affecting the historicity of the medium and becoming an important cipher through which to determine the validity of future images and means for more accurate alterations. While the purported “Iranian Missile Crisis” served to evoke continued suspicion of digital images, it a precedent for both the necessary standards of future edits and ways to catch these manipulations. A cursory search on Google for the photograph in question reveals numerous image options, most of which have been manufactured in photography classes as a result of a lesson on editing. This awareness and reflexive consideration of photography
relates to Mitchell’s (2005) notion that a photograph should not be critiqued in terms of its loyalty to an assumed/imagine referent but should instead be judged in terms of what he calls “coherence.” Within this line of thinking, the veracity of photographic discourses is critiqued through a consideration of how the various components of the photograph relate to themselves, to other photographs and to the established knowledge structures of the viewer. This method challenges the possibility of a uniformly “true” image by prying the different formal and thematic elements of the image apart to demonstrate how certain elements are “objectively” accurate while others are the effect of discursive or technological manipulation. This approach is starkly contrasted with critiques that try to verify or falsify the photograph’s commitment to a unitary extra-pictorial reality. While this form of adherence marks a modernist conception of indexicality, Mitchell’s coherence parallels post-structuralist conceptions of linguistic meaning and acknowledges the recent transformation of images from selective representational objects to ubiquitous modes of communication.

While early critics were concerned about the potentially negative consequences that digital manipulation might engender, the Iranian Missile Crisis image speaks to the possibility that digitization, and the development of photo-centric networks online, has in fact increased the transparency of the “blackbox” that has historically obscured photographic practice and discourse. According to Bruno Latour (1999), technological actors are frequently “black boxed” in an effort to obscure their inner workings, individualized arrangements, and co-articulation with other human and non-human entities. While this form of shrouding makes the ‘objects’ easier to know, and their connections with the world less messy, it is also responsible for eliminating the possibility for critique
and educated judgment. In the case of editing software, while the proliferation of its use can be used to challenge photo’s truth claims, it has, in fact, also sparked the formation of intricate feedback mechanisms that have revealed the faultiness of some images. In this vein, while digitization might facilitate a higher rate of image doctoring, users’ increased awareness of this possibility and fluency with its tools serves to produce critical, if not suspicious, viewers. The more that people engage with editing software, or the more that people are made aware of the characteristics of edited photos, the better they become at assessing the truth claims of images and detecting faulty representations of reality. As was mentioned earlier, the truth of the image has always been contentious. While film photography concealed the image’s capacity to represent faulty depictions of reality, digital photography has both exposed and called attention to this possibility.

An interesting observation is that the anxiety that resulted from photographic digitization had less to do with the general possibility of image editing and more to do with the new capacity for everyday actors to edit even the most mundane of their personal snapshots. As I mentioned in the introduction to my thesis, snapshots are typically conceptualized and viewed as non-political, non-significant and non-ideological sites that do not merit discursive analysis. This is sharply contrasted with the growing realization that in the digital age, even the most mundane elements and intentions of images can easily be reconstructed along more discursively appealing lines. If, as I discussed in the preceding chapter, snapshots are a fundamental vehicle through which meaning, memory and identity are established, the possibility that an increasing number of these images be faulty representations of reality appears to hold dire consequences for those who turn to them to gain a better understanding of the world and themselves. And yet, this perception continues
to demonstrate a modernist disconnect between nature and subject a disconnect that is to be bridged through mediation and communication. If, as both Deleuze (1979) and Baudrillard (1994) suggest in their own terms, that “reality” as such is only a function of our methods for representing and communicating “it” through an assortment of mediums, then the question becomes not one of truth but instead, as McLuhan’s seminal “The Medium is the Massage” (1967) asserts, demands us to consider how contemporary media reorganize our perceptions of and (coarticulatory) engagements with “reality” and “subjectivity”.

While past photographic practices were certainly adept at altering the image that was developed and disseminated, the digital era presents a wider variety of easily accessible alterations that are often applied to the most mundane of images. As Van Dijck (2007) asserted, this isn’t to say that these functions are novel or distinct but instead have been brought to the fore by digitization. This touches upon an important conclusion to draw from this preceding section. While digitization didn’t cause photographic manipulation, it has exposed it, attesting to the discursive nature of the image, truth, and performative articulations. This is an important thematic principle throughout my thesis insofar while digitization hasn’t necessarily marked a rupture from past experiences of photography, it has, in many cases, laid faulty perceptions of the medium bare, exposing past theoretical error and demanding a reconsideration of the ground of images in light of digitization.
It wasn’t until 2001, nearly thirty years after the first prototype, that the images produced by digital cameras were able to rival those of its analogue (or film) counter-part. Regardless of technological equivalence and increasing affordability, it was another several years (some reference 2004 while others suggest even later) before digital photography would surpass film-based practices and reach a state of purported ubiquity. As I mentioned briefly above, digital cameras altered the required methods for capturing an image. Light still filtered through a camera lens but in this case, light sensitive film was replaced by a series of sensors that would record and transform the input into binarial data and save it immediately on memory card. Each subsequent revision of the image would require a piece of software to organize this information into a recognizable photo frame. In a sense, while light was still a necessary element of the image-making process, the celebrated “trace of light” that legitimized film photography was no longer an inherent element of the photograph.

In the six years since its rise to technological and representational equivalence, digital photography has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life in techno-rich societies. Not only are camera (or image-making) devices appearing in increasingly small and pervasive packages, but digital images are literally everywhere as they stream freely through computer monitors, TV screens, electronic billboards, cell phone interfaces and many more digital dissemination platforms. The rise of digital photography has

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And yet, as Burley’s series suggests, this quality may have always been misguided as darkness was in fact the determining and universal quality of photography and that which has been lost as a result of digitization.
significantly affected the landscape of visual culture and communication as the mundane elements of people’s every day lives are increasingly captured (at astonishing rates) and employed as the preferred medium for communication and phatic exchange in the digital age. While traditional practices, such as portraiture and album making continue to prosper, the communication and dissemination of the mundane has become the key feature of digital photography, weaving it (as a series of devices, practices and ideas) into every crevice of contemporary culture and society.

The rapid proliferation of digitized photo-technologies has in many cases been attributed to the exponential growth (or restructuring) of web-based (digital) infrastructures and a series of novel intersections between cameras and an array of increasingly networked devices. Much like in the case of the earliest photographic technologies, the invention of a new photographic device was not sufficient to elicit widespread adoption. Instead, the success or proliferation, of digitized photography has been exposed as the function of structural convergences. According to Henry Jenkins (2006), contemporary accounts of “convergence” treat it as an umbrella term that accounts for a series of divergent and intersecting phenomena. It refers to the “flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries,” and the shifting relationship between producer and consumer as the “circulation of media content depends [increasingly] on consumers’ active participation” (2-4). In this case, photography and all of its corresponding technologies, have no inherent value, “outside of [their] mobilization in specific practices, institutions and relations of power” (Baylis 2008). While the remainder of the chapter will move between intersecting phenomena that make up contemporary experiences of photography, I will begin by briefly outlining the convergence of a series of
theoretical trajectories, industries, devices, and discourses that paved the way for the rise of ubiquitous photography\(^2\). Although these industries are difficult if not impossible to tease apart, I will discuss them in isolation in an effort to capture and designate a few of the fluctuating social, political and economic dynamics of contemporary photography.

**I. Networking Information**

In 1974, sociologist Daniel Bell argued that Western Societies were witnessing a significant shift in social infrastructures as they entered into a post-industrial age characterized by an economic re-orientation around information, information based technologies and the service industry. Post-Industrial society had moved away from “past” socio-economic alignments that focused on human and mechanized manufacturing, as it transformed the economy into an industry driven by the commodification of knowledge, packaged and marketed by a series of service providers as “information.” This reorientation towards service industries, which Darin Barney (2004) locates as trade, finance, transport, retail, health, recreation, research, education and government, was “accompanied by a series of white-collar service occupations relative to blue-collar jobs in industrial manufacturing” (6). As a result, the basis of socio-economic alignments shifted away from the ownership of property or means of production towards the control over systemic information and knowledge. In this case, a new class of techno-savvy laborers, adept at both harvesting and disseminating particular forms of “scientific” knowledge, emerged and rose to the top of the social, political and technical hierarchy. The formation of this industrial base (in terms of producer and product) expanded significantly in the 1970s, and relied heavily upon the

\(^2\) I have named these: Networking Information; the Camera; and Democratization and the Participatory Web.
development and diffusion of various technologies, particularly the computer. In 1981, a series of reports were released that suggested that computers and telecommunications be increasingly “networked” in order to facilitate further industrial development and ease. As a result, a number of state-sanctioned recommendations (first in France and then, progressively, in other Western nations) were set into action that worked to standardize networks, launch communication satellites, create linked data banks and encourage privatized endeavors of computation and communication. With this, the “Information Age,” was both born and became immediately entrenched within contemporary social, political and economic alignments.

It should be noted that the materialization of an information-based society was both celebrated and critiqued. To some theorists it held the “potential to overcome the more degrading and unjust aspects of the industrial era” (Barney 2004: 6), while to others, it promised to democratize both the production and reception of knowledge, obstructing the possibility of further entrenching the oppressive power of “Grand Narratives” (Lyotard, 1984.) From the other side of the debate, there were also a number of theorists affiliated with the Frankfurt School and a certain breed of technological fatalism, who saw the “Information Age” as a means of developing a “one-dimensional” society, that would experience an intensification of capitalist alienation and succumb to more sophisticated, if subversive, forms of domination (Marcuse 1991). While his philosophies came decades earlier, Benjamin’s concerns regarding the proliferation of “idle chatter,” facilitated by the explosion of technological reproduction and dissemination, is akin to this in that the information age threatened both the proliferation of phatic communication and the subversion of oppressive discourses.
The line of thinking affiliated with an era of information-based post-industrialism has been developed further by Manuel Castells (2004) as he details the transformation of the labor-based “Information Society” into what he has coined an information-based “Network society.” “Networks” are systems comprised of three main elements: nodes, ties and flows (Barney 2004). A node is a distinct, central or connecting point that links up with at least one other point. Ties, are that which connect these “points” or nodes together. Once drawn together, nodes and ties are laid over existing social, political and economic as a layer of infrastructure that facilitates the flow of traffic (whether human, non-human, informational etc.) between points. According to Castells, “as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture” (1996: 469).

Contemporary “Network Societies” rely upon high levels of digitization as networked forms of communication, information management and technologies form the underlying infrastructure that supports and mediates an increasing number of social, political and economic interactions. Network Societies are technologically-saturated environments which, as a result of the increased prevalence of networked information technologies, are characterized by embeddedness, nonlinearity, flow, space/time compression, real-time circulation, and use (Lash 2002). As this list suggests, one of the key attributes, if not drives, in this form of social organization is the impact that these ties have had on “time.” While this infrastructural model relies upon a series of material nodes,

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An example of this trinity might be city as node, highway as connection, and the vehicles and people that travel on the highways in between cities as flows.

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whether they be people, homes, cities, media conglomerates etc., the compression of space and time and sense of immediacy facilitated by information technologies are blurring traditional distinctions between presence/absence, materiality/immateriality, local/global, and public/private, just to name a few.

It should be noted that the rise of the network society has happened in tandem with a form of “merge-mania,” resulting from an increasing conglomeration of industries, as companies merge (or are taken over) in an effort to “better control the production, distribution, and exchange of communication,” while also limiting “competition and therefore the diversity of information [...] available to society” (Mosco 2009: 158). While this form of “corporate concentration,” (158) better enables companies to control their share of the market, it also facilitates the construction of larger, denser and more immediate networks of information. This can be seen within many online environments as organizations such as Google have acquired and partnered with a number of alternate platforms and software such as YouTube, Blogger, Sony, AOL and MySpace. Each of these merges facilitated the increasing integration of web platforms, and search quotients with home video, film, written content, music, news and personal chat, providing Google with a greater role within the structuration of these media networks.

Castell’s Network Society also involves realignments of power. This can be understood in two ways. First, drawing upon Foucauldian lineage, “networks,” much like Delleuze’s rhizomes, involve decentralized, horizontal flows of power that originate non-hierarchically from a multiplicity of human and non-human agents. This differs significantly from top-down models of power hierarchies that rely upon binarial existence and bodily consequence. This is not to say that one form of power replaces the other. Instead, the
dispersed, rhizomatic flows of networked power become an additional means through which power circulates and affects agents. While this line of thought seems like an intuitive re-organization or mirroring of power in relation to networking, Scott Lash (2002) has offered a second and alternate concept of power in the information age. Because networks compress or collapse “time,” Lash argues that the speed and immediacy facilitated by these connections work to dissolve traditional senses of power, removing any space or opportunity for discursive “exchange.” Rationality and reflexivity are muddled within information rich societies as traditionally informative mediums are no longer simply representational but are enacted as the “thing itself.” According to Lash, this form of informational agentialism (which will be established in greater detail at the end of this chapter), paired with an acceleration of exchange, or collapse in space/time distinctions, eliminates the discursive moment by removing the time to “think.” As I will discuss in greater detail below, when exploring the impact that software has had within contemporary photography, despite the apparent speed, flippancy, or even apathy facilitated by software mediated platforms so long as there is an underlying infrastructure that suggests, encourages or offers particular ties then there “power” is at work. What the network society requires is that individuals begin accepting that power does not only travel between human actors but that it also comes to play between human, non-human and technological actors.

There are numerous parallels between the conceptualization of “network society” and contemporary practices of photography. Not only are images being organized, viewed, and inter-acted with through the basis of an increasingly dense network of nodal connections, but the image making devices themselves are being networked together through the merging of multiple media into one device. The medial convergence will be
discussed further in the following section on cameras. It should be noted, briefly, that it is not the “network” society that has caused current experiences of photography. Instead, this is a reciprocal relationship insofar as the connecting and flows of images constitute and reiterate the types of social organization (networks) that make the “Network Society” possible.

II. The Camera

I. Popular photography magazines had long imagined a camera that would shorten, if not eliminate the delay between taking a picture and (re)viewing it. This imagined device would not only eliminate the risk of retroactively realizing that one had missed the proverbial moment but was also expected to reduce the financial drain of bad photos. In 1995, a camera was introduced that offered both a back screen for viewing exposures immediately and a delete button so that individuals would be able to rid themselves of shots that did not please them. According to Beer (2009), the novel ability to review and critique one’s shots and potentially readjust the composition or settings in order to take another, superior, photo, has enabled amateurs to produce images that near, if not exceed, the caliber of shots taken by professionals. While popular knowledge suggests that simply having the ability to take a number of shots and then choose the best to keep and potentially share is what gives the allusion of a decreasing gap between amateurism and professionalism, Beer also suggests that the ability to review and adjust has simultaneously accelerated photography’s learning curve; because individuals are able to take, critique and re-take more shots than was convenient and/or affordable in the film era, they are developing an intuitive connection with photographic vision more rapidly, foregoing the years of training that this purportedly required in the past. Although the screen and delete
button have been heralded as positive additions to the field of photography, “the ability to edit in camera means that pictures that are deemed unsuccessful disappear forever, thus eliminating the possibility of returning to them... to discover redeeming qualities. The delete button reduces the chances of discovering hidden truth...” (Beer 2009).

II. Cameras are no longer exclusively employed as single-purpose devices; there are “cameras” everywhere as photographic-technology is embedded into cell phones, computer screens, and nearly every Apple device available. The intersection of these technologies is arguably one of the most prominent forms of convergence in contemporary culture, drawing together dispersed devices, mobile industries, and medium specific desires to push photography into the realm of ubiquity. While these camera devices are still employed as image-making machines, they differ significantly from past technologies insofar as the hardware that enables them encourages different, if not novel, forms of photographic practices. The pairing of camera and cell phone, perhaps the most explored multi-modal device with camera technology to date, has affected the “way that people socialize and interact and by extension the way that they maintain and consolidate relationships” (Van Dijck 2008). While a focus group study that looked at the things that people “do” with their camera phones suggests that the underlying photographic drives (creating and maintaining social relationship, constructing personal and group memory, self-presentation, and self-expression) have remained quite stable, this is not to say that a change in hardware does not alter individual’s performative interactions with the medium. I do not have the time to fully develop the impact that the convergence of camera technology with an array of previously non-photographic devices has had on the medium at large, but,
before moving on, I would like to briefly detail a few of the novel phenomena that are arising as a result of these intersections in order to further develop an image of contemporary photography both on and offline.

First, as a number of individuals have observed, multi-modal devices enable photography to take place without the intervention of a camera, which works to diminish the sense of mediation within both the environment and the resulting image. Drawing connections once again to Bolter and Grusin’s work on remediation, this parallels a basic desire within the development of “representational” technologies, insofar as it does not only erase the impact of the author but also in a sense erases the presence of the mediating device.\(^a\) The irony here is that while the device might not engender a series of performative gestures that would ordinarily follow the presentation of a camera, the images produced by these devices are typically of lower quality (whether in terms of formal quality or simply resolution) drawing attention once again, back to the presence of a mediator with a particular set of limits and tendencies. What is interesting is that the lower image quality offered by most of these devices is often re-framed as a testament to the image’s faithfulness to what it captures; not only does it speak to the absence of photo-editing software but there also appears to be an underlying assumption that images that are shared despite reflecting substandard formal quality are done so in an effort to communicate a particular, empirically accurate, message.

Secondly, according to Okabe and Ito (2003), the ubiquity of camera devices within contemporary Eastern and Western cultures is changing the aesthetic

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\(^a\) This isn’t to say that there was no “camera” but that because the device maybe isn’t recognized as a camera it doesn’t alert its subject to its presence. My sense is that as a result of this relative “invisibility” its presence doesn’t encourage its subject to act in particular ways if only because it could be doing one of any number of potential tasks. This may change as subjects become increasingly aware of the many forms that camera technologies may take.
tendencies of the images that are getting captured; while in the past, photographs were generally saved for celebrated milestones, family chronicling and tourist attractions, today they are more likely to be casual, immediate moments that reflect the mundanities of everyday life. This sentiment, or assertion, that photographic content is shifting toward the mundane and everyday has been reiterated by numerous scholars of contemporary photography (See for example: Murray 2008; Rubenstein & Sluis 2008; Van Dijck 2008; Van House 2007; Couchot 2002; Lister 2000).

A final point that has arisen as a result of convergence and quiet ubiquity is that while camera devices are not immediately recognizable, their omnipresence is creating a new kind of personal awareness as individuals are almost always within the range of a camera and potential photo that could lead to both positive and negative consequences. Images captured through mobile capable technologies do not only have easy access to the aforementioned methods of circulation, namely print dissemination or networked travel online, but are also easily disseminated from one device to the next through cellular networks.

III. Democratization and the Participatory Web

The intersection of photography and the personal computer did not only alter photographic discourse in relation to truth claims, but also, more importantly, provided users with a cultural interface through which to view, disseminate, and share captured images to an increasingly broad audience. Although this has not eradicated past practices that involved the fabrication of physical albums and familial sharing, many studies have shown how this has shifted the focus away from these types of engagements towards those of online photo-sharing communities and archiving databases. Within the early stages of
digital photography, computers were employed largely as desktop storage devices. While it was fairly common for individuals to share images through email, or, in the case of web-savvy users, post their pictures to personal websites, the over-priced and sluggish pace of the Internet, paired with small storage drives, kept online transactions to a minimum. Though not exclusively the cause, this changed significantly as the cost associated with uploading and downloading online data decreased, and device’s storage capacity increased. The increased use facilitated by these shifts in technological infrastructure, was essential to the “re-branding of the home computer as the centre of digital lifestyle” (Rubenstein and Sluis 2008) and worked to transform a sparse but functional “web” into what is currently termed, “Web 2.0.” According to Van Dijck (2008), the term Web 2.0 refers to a participatory culture which increasingly demands room for ordinary citizens to wield media technologies (the technologies that were once the privilege of capital-intensive industries) to express themselves and distribute these creations to potential audiences. Sites that are affiliated with the Web 2.0 movement, and as a result promote the addition of user generated content (UGC) such as images, videos, blog posts, wikis, etc., demand involvement by coaxing particular kinds of responses and rearrangements of users’ performative connections with technology (Van Dijck 2009). Within these environments, users’ engagements are logged, additional content is saved, and their contributions are shared either as digital objects unto themselves or as “meta-data” that realign online flows of information. In each case, the voice and perspective of an increasing number of individuals is materialized and disseminated as potentially meaningful. These forms of contributions, while facilitated by affordability and popularity, are often encouraged through discourses relaying a “community ideal,” that relies upon organized cooperation
between voluntary participants (Prieur et. al. 2008). This approach is explicitly promoted by social networking sites such as Facebook and Flickr and exclusive file sharing platforms such as indietorrents and what!? wherein the constitution and maintenance of the “communities” takes place through the sharing of information (as both data and personal tidbits); individuals must “share” in order to maintain the “community” and keep the lines of exchange open. To conceptualize UGC as a community driven exercise differs greatly from arguments that locate it as a narcissistic form of self-promotion. While, as I will discuss further in relation to Flickr and Facebook, online participation does arguably contribute to identity formation and dissemination, to reduce engagements to this fails to recognize the multiple drives that persuade user participation. By acknowledging the impact of “community” oriented discourses online, users are cast out of self-producing isolation as they are integrated into dense and dispersed networks of converging desires, industries and forces.

In addition to the proliferation of user generated content, Beer (2009) asserts that Web 2.0 also marks a shift away from desktop storage to web top access. Within this formulation, “information moves from the private device out into the network allowing for it to be access from an arrangement of mobile and desktop interfaces at anytime and from anywhere” (Beer and Burrows 2007: 2.6). Drawing on Lash (2006), this has not only facilitated an “age of the portal” where data is increasingly “finding” users as opposed to the opposite, but it is also making online information more accessible as (private) information is posted and made retrievable within the public domain.

The encouragement of UGC and accessibility of information has paired Web 2.0

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As Beer and Burrows highlight, “we are frequently confronted with recommendations, news specific to our interests or about our friends, suggested purchases and other things of supposed interest” (2007: 2.6).
with a rhetoric of democratization as it purportedly facilitates empowerment and liberation by encouraging and mobilizing individuals to reclaim the internet through their shared collective intelligence (Beer and Burrows 2007). While this push towards democratizing the web has been heralded as a positive force, assertions that the Web is in fact “democratic” and accessible are somewhat short-sighted. There have been a significant number of debates regarding variable access to the web and over-arching censorship practices. While platforms encouraging the contribution of UGC serve to disseminate the stories and perspectives of an increasing number of individuals, this is still a privileged practice. As Beer (2009) demonstrates, despite the presence of additional “voices” online, these perspectives are not necessarily weighted equally as the internet fails to uniformly dismantle discursive constructs; it remains a space with social, economic and geographic barriers to (web) access, and privileged representation. In addition to this, the web has also proven to be a space where a “virulent form of consumerism can easily undermine ‘democratic ideals’” (Beer and Burrows 2007: 3.8). An important note to make, particularly in light of recent international affairs, is that the concept of a democratic web is also geographically and culturally specific. As the Globe and Mail documented over the course of several months from January 2010 to July 2010, Google and the Chinese government underwent a series of meetings and disagreements as they tried to negotiate what kind of information would be acceptable for Google to make available to the Chinese public. The Chinese government has long regulated access to information purportedly in an effort to maintain power. This form of censorship challenges the supposed “democratic” nature of the web as information, access and outlets are controlled prior to engagement. Interestingly enough, while Google’s stand against Chinese censorship has in
some cases been spun as a moral stand, much of the media coverage has in fact revealed Google’s advances as an effort to “maintain a toehold in one of the internet’s most promising markets” (Liedtke 2010).

THREE.

**Being-Image:**
*Re-Imagining Photography in Light of Online Photo-Sharing Practices*

While recent research suggests that the number of individuals contributing new content to the web (a characteristic that is seen as being fundamental to the construction and maintenance of “Web 2.0”) is declining rapidly, what is undeniable is the exponential growth of online image culture. According the Van House (2008), the number of text-based blogs, a fadish practice that fueled the early push for user generated content, has dropped-off significantly since its heyday at the turn of the century, only to be replaced by easier and more convenient image-based methods of communicating or sharing experiences. This is challenging, or altering notions of users’ engagements with the Web as their practices become increasingly about distributing content rather than generating content.

While shifting away from the narrative, mnemonic or indexical value traditionally prescribed to the snapshot, online images are increasingly being promoted as the preferred idiom in mediated communication practices as they are employed as tools for peer bonding and interaction (Van Dijck 2008). Within this context, images are becoming less
about special or rarefied moments as they are increasingly used to document the immediate and fleeting moments of mundane everyday life: a night out with friends, a bike trip to the beach, breakfast at a new restaurant, morning light filtering into the living room. This isn’t to say that “old” practices are being disposed of or that novel, internet-based practices don’t rely upon past constructions of the medium; instead, sharing environments are providing an additional, increasingly popular, means of interacting with photographs and one another. As a number of theoretical sources have foretold and asserted, this is not only changing the very grounds upon which “photography” as a medium has been based but is also affecting the performative exchanges between images and people.

There are billions of images online, and as I will discuss further below, the numbers are rising, daily, at an exponential rate. These images are, for the most part, uploaded to online image-hosting environments where they are transformed into streaming digital data that can be analyzed and remapped to new contexts via algorithms and hyperlinks. While there is a large variety of means through which to upload and host images online, two of the predominant methods employed are Facebook and Flickr. At 5,000 new images per minute and 3 billion photos per month respectively, photo-sharing platforms, are not only leading gateways to online visual (photographic) culture but have also become central to individuals’ experience of the web. While even the quickest stroll down a department store crafting aisle suggests that traditional practices, such as those of album making (now typically referred to as scrap-booking) are still alive and well, the introduction of and growing participation in online photo-sharing communities is presenting novel opportunities for additional practices of photography. Facebook and Flickr provide a range of built-in features, designed to make the viewing of photographs into a concrete, traceable
activity. As a result of both the traffic attracted by these sites, and the concretization of individual's interactions on or through these sites, hot-spots like Facebook and Flickr “allow us to observe what ordinary users do when given the ability to more readily incorporate images in their everyday activity” (1). Photo-sharing environments are enabling people to incorporate images into their lives and social interactions in ways that were not entirely possible before. While traditional uses of media outlets are still feeding into current practices, as images continue to be employed as means of communication, identity formation and memory capturing, the impact of social networking softwares and an increasingly dense network of corresponding technologies and industries, is changing the materiality of these processes and is persuading different forms of performative engagement. As a result, sites like Flickr and Facebook provide a hot-bed of opportunity for researchers, like myself, who are interested in mapping out medial shifts and sociological consequences as a result of digitization.

**FLICKRnomics**

Flickr is the best way to store, sort, search and share your photos online. Flickr helps you organize that huge mass of photos you have and offers a way for you and your friends and family to tell stories about them. The best way to learn about Flickr is to upload some photos, explore the site, join some groups and make some friends.

flickr.com :: General Flickr Questions

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* It should be noted that both sites offer a variety of means for textual and non-textual interaction with other users and/or isolated pieces of software. This being said, while these interactions have proven to be interesting sites for critical inquiry, the focus of this thesis will, for obvious reasons, be limited to the photosharing functions offered by these sites.
Flickr, a large-scale photo-sharing and archiving system (Stvilia 2009), is one of the most popular image-hosting sites online (Murray 2008). Part of the Yahoo! conglomerate, Flickr was first launched in February of 2004 and has grown steadily since, claiming to host more than 4 billion images as of October 2009. According to the blog maintained by its developers, Flickr is a community of citizens, members of the flickrverse, which is brought together through the individual stories that members share via photographic images. It provides a medium through which participating members can upload images to the web, organize them into corresponding sets, add textual references to them in an effort to clarify meaning and make images retrievable, and it also enables users to share photographs within both public and private spheres. Apart from the sheer mass of images that flickr accumulates, there are two additional traits that have been located as features that set it apart from other methods for online photo-sharing. First, while the addition of text to the

\[29\] The site has recently introduced video capability. This happened very recently and is not the focus of the paper.
image, largely through metadata “tags” (a term that will be unpacked in the following section,) is a necessary component of Flickr as it serves to organize images and make them retrievable, Flickr is perceived to be one of the few sites where text is used to further clarify the image as opposed to the reverse case in which the image is provided to clarify, or further develop, a textual reference (Van House 2007). In addition to this, images that are stored and shared through Flickr are generally designated as “public” and can be viewed by anyone, regardless of whether or not they are members of the Flickr community. While for sites such as Facebook, which has repeatedly come under attack as a result of weak or uninsured privacy regulations (Kelsey 2010; Weiss 2008), the publicity that accessibility affords images might be seen as posing negative consequences to the contributor, the public element of Flickr is often framed as an asset of the site, garnering image owners a greater audience for their pictorial “vision.”

**metadata, tagging, articulation**

In American Exposures (2005), Louis Kaplan discusses the ways in which photography has been employed historically to develop a sense of community. The book traces through a series of photographers (including Mole, Bearden and Goldin,) and philosophers Levinas, Derrida and to demonstrate how the photograph facilitates the coming of “being-in-common.” In other words, photography, as both act and site, engenders a sense of self that is entangled with others. Kaplan draws upon various prints of “living images,” photographs shot from above that depict large groups (communities) people organized spatially to depict intricate patterns and images in a near “pixelated” form, to demonstrate how the photograph brings these individuals together to function as
an effective/cohesive unit. This does not only occur through the act of photographing, as individuals organize themselves in a highly organized fashion, but it is also facilitated through the resulting print that acts as a witness to the event. Kaplan also draws upon a series of Nan Goldin images in order to demonstrate how her body of work has constructed an evolving portrait chronicle of queer communities in 1970s New York. In both of these cases, the image, both in the taking and through its capacity to represent, is employed as a testament to the existence and limits of a particular community.

In the case of Flickr, it is not so much the representational capacity of the photo that establishes community and community membership; instead, these determinants are indicated through participation in and contribution to the continual growth of a wider and denser web of networked images. According to Susan Murray (2008), “[o]n Flickr, each member’s page is part of a decentralized network of similar pages, that contributes to the construction of a community and a larger collection of photographs.” Flickr members are encouraged to upload images through their account to a personalized photostream, that is handily named “you,” transforming the images from external, “owned” objects into public reflections of individual’s “self”. In a study of Flickr users, conducted by Van House (2007), active members saw the site as a realm for social interaction and described their contributions as collections of transitory and ephemeral streams of images, best thought of a “throw-aways.” While the site is often conflated with archival discourse/rhetoric, contributors shared that they used other, more traditional, archiving services, and engaged in Flickr as a means of communicating and sharing the immediate with both “friends” and unknown voyeurs.
By posting photos online, individuals are involving themselves in a collaborative process whereby constitutions of the everyday are repeatedly re-imagined as the relationship between subjects (objects) and the temporal shift and are never fixed; the point of subjective anchor that theorists ascribed to photographs is increasingly fleeting as a constant stream of new photos initiates a continuously prompted need to redefine previously established truths, knowledges, and identities. In an effort to make sense of this surge of photographic data, Flickr, along with most photo-sharing websites, presents the option of providing clarifying text, by way of a description, or adding metadata “tags” to images. Tags “act as metadata operating behind web pages enabling them to be organized into classified networks (Beer and Burrows 2007 2.14). The result is that tagging “links” images, through software, with other nodal points facilitating lateral search and “travel” abilities. By adding tags, users create hyper-linked networks through which individuals can begin to navigate the web in a non-linear fashion, “from one page onto pages that have something in common” (Beer and Burrows 2007 2.14). This engenders a substantially different way of viewing and interacting with photographs as compared to the more traditional matter of sifting through shoe boxes or turning the pages of an album.

What is interesting is that while Flickr began by organizing images through traditional monikers, such as “album,” they have slowly transformed their language so that it fits more closely with digital imagery; “album” has been transformed into (data) “set,” and “collections” have been reframed as “streams” of images. The shift in terminology appears to coincide with the continuity between “laterally” organized sets, the near constant uploading and replacement of images, and the time compression facilitated by digitization.

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The metadata tag is in some ways reminiscent of the graffiti tag; both provide a means of marking and contextualizing territory, demonstrating “ownership” and adding a semi-permanent imprint of one’s presence.
According to Besiki Stvilia, tags can be organized into two classes of “metadata”.

They are either inherent, determined through a(n informal) content analysis of the collection by the uploader (or photographer), or they are assigned by external viewers based on formal impressions of the image as opposed to the inherent content of the photograph. In other words, tags are either concept based, or content based. While descriptors are often employed as a means for providing general context to the image (Stvilia 2009), “tags” function as hyperlinked keywords that facilitate knowledge formation and clarification, enable the ability to search and retrieve specific images, and create a broader denser network of images attesting to the qualities of particular subject matter.

Although tagging has typically been considered a human-driven practice, content-based tags are increasingly being assigned technologically and algorithmically. Not only are there cameras on the market, or in development, that are internally capable of assigning a number of tags such as subject based tags and geotags\(^2\), but once uploaded, flickr automatically ascribes a number of tags such as the specifics of the device and device settings that were used to take the image, and a number of basic tags such as color and dates. These automatic tags are not necessarily visible to users, but they can be employed as searchable features. While the automation of tagging is in many cases seen as a positive development, as it removes the need for human laboring and classifying (which is a particularly desirable possibility when archiving or sorting large collections of images,) these tagging mechanisms can only “recognize” pixel-level attributes, often times missing

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\(^{a}\) Metadata is any form of digital data that has been appended to a digital object in an effort to categorize, contextualize and or organize it within networked environments.

\(^{b}\) Geotags have become increasingly common as individual devices become aligned with a series of networks, namely those of tele-communication which operate through satellites. When an individual uses the camera application on an iPhone, they are given the option to “geo-tag” it which means that the phone attaches the coordinates of the location at which the image was taken to the data file. When this file is uploaded to a computer or the web, this information serves to situate the image in its “appropriate” geographical location.
significant image details. Conversely, human derived tagging and indexing processes, which draws upon conceptual knowledge, results in the assignment of terms to images in a fashion that that represents “higher-level concepts and semantic relationships that are as yet unable to be parsed in the machine environment.”

Image tagging is essential to incorporating and embedding images within online sharing/networking environments; tags are the means through which images are both conceptualized and, perhaps more importantly, accessed by others through searchable quotients. According to Thomas Gruber (2007), it is only through tagging that online search engines/software stand a chance as far as sifting through the mass amounts of visual data held within Flickr’s storage system. While online images are often seen within the terms of fleeting encounters, the continuous re-presentation of affective opportunities such as tagging (and also commenting, “liking”, rating, and untagging) makes agents’ actions thoroughly (and visibly) traceable. Users are not only asked, given the opportunity, to face the image in an ephemeral way but are also able to impact the image concretely. As a result, each image becomes a site of contestation as individuals negotiate the appropriate terms through which the image should circulate. Each affection of the image recontextualizes it, potentially impacting future materializations by casting it into different realms of retrieval or imparting a different vision of its meaning. Drawing upon Hegelian philosophy, Judith Butler makes an apt point here when she comments on the irony of “closure” in her talk (now podcast) at Stanford in 2006. While photo tags might, in some senses, represent a way of closing off the image by providing language to clarify and

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This brings up a number of issues. The first is that it locates the grounding for one’s desires to have an image circulate within favorable terms. The second, more a point of clarification, is that Flickr’s tagging mode, until recently, presented as less person-centered and more about subject matter and increasing traffic, whereas facebook has always circulated images as a means of expressing oneself/demonstrating oneself to others.
categorize, these nodal “ends” simultaneously open the image by making it searchable and accessible to others. In other words, by engaging in the process of naming elements of the image, teasing its coherent subject matter out from a mish-mash of pixels, users are at once “controlling” the image while simultaneously activating its potential to circulate agentially through various circuits on and offline. 34

The mass accumulation of images and tagged notations facilitated by online environments such as flickr has resulted in a kind of vast public archive, as images are offered to prying eyes and friendly authorities as meaning is both attributed and made explicitly traceable. As Latour (2007) recently remarked, with regards to digitization, “it is as if the inner workings of private worlds have been pried open because their inputs and outputs have become thoroughly traceable.” In this vein, much is being made of the notion that the private lives of others are becoming increasingly public, as they are voluntarily made visible and retrievable through the uploading of images to online environments. This has been associated with a broad array of issues in social and cultural theory such as identity-formation in the digital age (Van Dijck 2007), practices of user-generated content in an era of prosumption (Beer 2009; Beer and Burrow 2007), and the commercialization and commodification of the mundane details of everyday life as a key aspect of “knowing capitalism” (Thrift 2005). The appropriation of photographs by capitalistic ventures will be discussed further in this section while the impact that their involvement in online photo-sharing is having on subjectivity will be discussed in relation to Facebook.

34 On one of Flickr’s FAQ pages, dealing with the viewing statistics of particular user’s photo-streams, Flickr encourages users to tag images in order to up the number of views that their photos receive. Drawing from personal experience, as a five year member of flickr, images that have been tagged with popular tags, such as large cities and travel hot-spots, receive significantly more public traffic than images that go-untagged or receive community/friend specific mention.
Folksonomies and the Immateriality of Labor Online.

The use of tags to conceptualize particular images, and draw connections between collections of images, is a fundamental characteristic of what has come to be known as a “folksonomy” based systems of knowledge formation. Folksonomies are a “Web 2.0 application for collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorize content” (Cameron & Mengle). Contrasted with the top down tendencies of “taxonomy”, folksonomies are a “bottom-up, aggregated, non-hierarchical, collaborative, and ever-changing form of online information organization” (Tiessen 2009). While the emphasis on collaboration and sharing among users offers interesting new ways to categorize information based on the needs of a particular digital space and the users that frequent it, this system of categorization also presents drawbacks in terms of imprecise search quotients and difficulty when searching rather than browsing; because images/data are only searchable through the appended tags, it often requires users to search multiple, similar, terms in hopes of ascertaining how the information was archived (Cameron & Mengle). This form of user-determined tagging and organization is not only a key (and necessary) factor within the exponential growth and development of the Web, but it is also to be “understood in broader terms as a part of the ‘changes in the form of the commodity [that] point to the increasingly active role that the consumer is often expected to take’” (Thrift 2005 in Beer and Burrows 2007). According to Beer and Burrows (2007), fully understanding the forms of knowledge production facilitated by folksonomies requires “attention to be focused on [a] transformation in the nature of the relations between production and consumption as they become simultaneous and even ambient in the routine activities that generate the content of Web 2.0” (Beer and Burrows 2007) This collapsing of roles within the cultural
economy online has prompted some (Van Dijck 2009; Lueders 2008; Manovich 2008) to assert the birth of an era of "prosumption" wherein which online users consume the products of others’ labors while simultaneously producing content themselves. The forms of production that are encouraged and capitalized upon within these environments have a tendency to take one of two forms. As will be discussed later, with specific attention to Facebook, one of the products that result from folksonomies is user or demographic-specific data that can be mined, sold, and/or employed as a means of generating more effective advertising and personalized advertising within future web pages. The second form of production that is capitalized upon has largely to do with harnessing unacknowledged, unpaid, man-hours in an effort to organize and "network" large bodies of un-annotated information. The following anecdote details a particularly illustrative example of this form of online production:

In January 2008, The Library of Congress started a project on Flickr, titled “The Commons,” that involved uploading and circulating thousands of historic photographs, with the intent to have the general public draw upon personal and shared histories in an effort to excavate meaning and add grounded metadata tags to the images. While this was in many ways framed as a means of “democratizing history,” hidden behind the rhetoric were the hours of unacknowledged and unpaid labor that were required in order to classify and contextualize the images. In a sense, this project, though packaged well, was a means of harnessing hundreds of “man-hours” without having to recognize them within fiscal terms. While users were, in a sense, giving a broader perspective on the histories held within the photographic frame, their acts of sifting through images and tagging recognizable phenomena also served to organize a massive archive of mundane images and make them
retrievable based on recognizable characteristics. Although this might seem to be a unique case, it draws attention to the unrecognized work involved in widespread engagements with digital photography. Tagging and commenting, within online photo-sharing environments, is both a method of clarification and communal “meaning-making” and a requirement for the nuanced expansion/growth of the Web. While the “success” of the Library of Congress Commons project has never been declared, since its inception a number of other museums and galleries from around the world, with equally large repositories of unorganized images have followed suit, submitting their collections to the site in an effort to tag and organize images that rarely see the light of day.

In addition to the laborious task of sorting images, Flickr has also (perhaps inadvertently), once again, reconstituted the photograph as a commodity, expanding discourses of production into the realm of “leisure activities.” Flickr recently paired up with Getty Images, a leading international image bank, so that individuals with high-traffic images can begin receiving financial compensation for the photographs that they produce. The company will purchase partial rights to these images and then market them to advertising agencies. If an image is used the photographer will receive royalties. While individuals can submit images to the company in hopes of getting licensing, Getty Images also approaches members with popular collections to enlist them in the commercial program. The “reward-based” relationship between Flickr, Getty Images and users does not only encourage broadening audiences but also re-frames amateur pursuits as potentially

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For this year’s MayWorks, Festival of Labour and the Arts, I submitted and exhibited a new media installation that drew attention to the simultaneous materiality and immateriality of photo-sharing platforms online. The piece was a projection that flashed a gridded series of images on a white wall for forty seconds. After this time period, a bright white light was shined at the wall to reveal a series of white pins and networks of fishing line. While the images were visible, the pins and lines were difficult to discern but when the images disappeared, they stood out against the wall as a testament to the materiality and laboriousness of the infrastructure that lies behind and draws together the images that circulate online.
professional endeavors as the photograph is construed as a cultural and economic commodity.

**FACEBOOK: Cartes de Visites in a Digital Age**

Facebook is an online social networking application that “allows users to create [a] profile, accumulate and connect to friends met both online and offline and view each other’s profiles, and is ranked as the seventh most popular site online” (Papacharissi 2009). Mark Zuckerman, a computer sciences student at Harvard, and two of his fellow classmates, first released the online giant in 2004. Modeled after an annual publication put
out by his high school collegiate titled “the facebook,” early versions of the site were limited to publicizing small amounts of visual and textual information about oneself (through profile pictures and appended information quotients such as religion and political views) while simultaneously creating networks of friends and acquaintances who hailed from Ivy League schools. As the site’s popularity grew, Zuckerman decided to expand the criteria for new members, adding other college networks, high schools, and finally opening membership to anyone over the age of 13. Since its inception, Facebook has emerged as one of the most popular destinations online. With just under a 465 million members, the site expects to reach the half-billion mark before the end of summer. Interestingly enough, as a recent Globe and Mail article exposes, nearly half of all Canadians (47.9%) are members of Facebook, making it one of the most “plugged-in” countries in the world. In addition to (and as a result of), the sheer volume of traffic that Facebook attracts, it has also become a financial giant, suggesting that its revenue for the 2009 fiscal year will be between $700 to $800-million. According to an unnamed source in a recent Globe and Mail article, (Facebook has apparently always been hesitant to release their membership and financial numbers to the press,) this year’s return was double what the organization posted as their revenue in 2008. While Facebook’s financial success is by no means of great concern here, it is important to quickly note how these returns are (largely) achieved in order to further elucidate the terms of “prosumerism” within the digital age and begin tracing the impact of the digitize image within shifting experiences of cultural economy. Facebook employs an updated version of Google’s AdWords (also sometimes referred to as AdSense), a subsidiary that couples advertising and page views according to individual users’ online tendencies and metadata additions. In this case Facebook harvests the information
contributed by particular users (whether it be metadata tags, key words from blocks of text contributed to the site, or simply their traffic patterns) and either sells it to various agencies or uses it to offer a superior advertising method to companies wishing to publicize themselves through the site. According to Mark Zuckerman, Facebook offers “really good, relevant advertising to people because they tell us exactly what they are interested in, and who they know, and those people tell us what they’re interested in... just having all those different ads in the system makes it so there’s more to draw from and people get more relevant ads.” This system is paying off as Facebook has quadrupled its number of advertisers over the course of the last year and a half. While shifting notions of private and public will be discussed further in forthcoming sections of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that this type of user specific advertising has been at the centre of several debates regarding Facebook’s adherence to various privacy laws.

Facebook has evolved repeatedly since its inception. Not only has the interface changed regularly, but also the breadth of functions offered by the site have been expanded, altered, tweaked and at times discarded. The main objective promoted by the site is to facilitate social networking by “giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” While “social-networking” has always been of primary concern to Facebook developers, the methods or avenues through which this is facilitated have been renegotiated repeatedly through the construction of various software applications. These applications serve to “prompt users to externalize everything from mundane tasks to complex emotions” (Gordon 2007) exposing the tiny details of everyday lives to prying eyes and friendly authorities. According to a promotional clip that is posted to the Facebook recruitment page, “Life at Facebook,” the photo-sharing application
offered by the site has become the most popular and “productive” facet of its social networking thrust. The developers featured in the clip share that Facebook facilitates the uploading of 2000 photos per second, or 40 million photos per day sparking billions of page views by online users. Much like in the case of Flickr, users are encouraged to add metadata tags and comments to these images in an effort to categorize, conceptualize, and network their visual content. While Flickr has yet to release a version that focuses on linking photos to other member’s profile, tag options on Facebook are largely limited to tagging members that individuals (typically uploaders) have established as online “friends” (connections). The high number of friends and family in people’s images suggests that images are not simply used as a means of capturing memories but are also employed to maintain existing relationship and even create new ones. “Photos were valuable not only for themselves but for the connections among them and among the people represented, and for the active role they played in relationships.” When users upload images to Facebook, they are repeatedly prompted and encouraged to link these photos to other users’ accounts and the body of (visual) content that has come to develop (be/stand in for) that user’s on and offline identity. In this sense, the photographs that are uploaded to Facebook are conceptualized as a means through which to develop a richer image of individual users’ identity both on and offline.

The self-ish employment of images (that idea that images are shared for oneself and not for the recipient) appears to be a novel turn in the way in which people are engaging with photos online. In 2004, before sites like Facebook attracted much attention, Nancy Van House conducted an interview-based study that sought to ascertain the reasons why

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* An upcoming version of the site has increased the “personal” thrust of people’s engagement by giving the option of linking photos to others’ streams as a means to creating a “richer” personal profile.
individual users employ certain digital technologies. In this study, the majority of users engaging in online “photo-sharing” practices explained that the images that they shared were often for and about the individuals described as recipients. Their preferred methods for exchanging images did not involve large online hosting environments but were instead generally limited to direct transfers (such as emailing) or posting images to personal websites and providing friends and family with the link. This shift from a purported preference for close-knit exchange, towards the massive “sharing” models offered by sites like Facebook parallels a series of social changes, with roots that can be traced as far back as the late 60s or early 70s which emphasized individualism and “personhood” over family and community (Van Dijck 2005).

While this sentiment has been widely documented within a variety of social spheres, the irony of its foothold in online environments such as Facebook is that these are spaces driven by a rhetoric of communal sharing. This being said, it is difficult to ascertain what exactly is being “shared” and with “whom.” The easy, or immediate response to this line of inquiry might simply be photos, but the picture becomes much more complex through the consideration of a number of intersecting philosophies and empirically based research projects. While the internet was generated through regimented martial means, Facebook, and other photo-sharing environment alike, have been conceptualized as a form of “gift economy.” Repeatedly approached through a Mauss-ian appropriation of the potlatch, the “gift economy” of the web refers to a system of immeasurable and infinite exchange in which social relationships are established and strengthened and subjectivity is, perhaps inadvertently, co-determined. Photographs, digital data, are not simply uploaded commodities, superficially devoid of ontological consequence. Instead, the gift economy of
the web transforms the photograph into a co-articulatory mediator (vehicle), giving rise to a form of shared-being (being-in-common). While often circulated, shared, through self-ish means as a re-presentation of (Barthes’) ideal-self, as past theories of photography asserted, each image, regardless of subject-matter, has the capacity to enact the “subjectivity” of another. As a result, what is shared through photo-sharing platforms is not solely an “image” but “being”, being-subject. The convergence of affective software, rhizomatic materialization, and dispersed memory works to facilitate the emergence of explicitly communal/shared beings. While the notion of being(s)-in-common has been thoroughly explored within post-structuralist philosophies and acknowledged within various political systems, what is different in the case of online communities is the explicit presentation of these “in-different” encounters and the ability to revisit, or retrace, collective processes of subjectification.

This shift towards a form of digitally shared subject formation has sparked some interesting discussions regarding altered subjectivities and photographic performativity. The continuous sequence of pictorial data that is facilitated by photo-streams, slideshows, and image feeds, throws the status and significance of individual images into a state of flux. Drawing upon other theories of digital-subjectivity (Poster 2006 & 2001), this alters the way in which individuals identify with these pictorial cues. Images are no longer primarily kept as embalmed mementos but are instead transformed into an illocutionary transmission of fleeting moments. As a result, the individual who turns to the digitized photograph in an

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* The relative permanency, or ability to repeatedly revisit, of information in this case makes it difficult to forget certain elements, if not all elements, of particular events. While this may be heralded as a positive consequence, insofar as it alleviates purported weaknesses of the mind, as Van Dijck points out, the ability to “forget” is, in fact, a necessary means through which we are able to emotionally and psychologically protect ourselves. This argument has been documented repeatedly in relation to traumatic events, that are forgotten in an effort to continue being functional within the world.
effort to establish subjectivity is also cast into the fleeting throws of impermanency. Much like the streaming image, this brand of interpolated subject is of a malleable nature and demands continuous re-modeling as each pictorial iteration alters its conceptualization of ‘self’ (if only through a minor strengthening or weakening of past iterations). While identity formation has always been an intrinsic function of photography, digital images change the parameters slightly by not only casting the subject into a realm of explicit post-structuralist relativity, where binarial existence is always in the process of imploding, but also by offering an opportunity for added reflexivity. Digital photography facilitates the implosion of Barthes’ four levels of photographic subject formation as photographers and subjects alike are able to imagine, play, view, and re-enact various intended representations until it is deemed adequate. In this sense, as Hansen (2006) argues, “the collapse of time-delay between these various facets is moving mediation towards a form of presencing as opposed to extension/or whatever else insinuates absences and delay.” While “presence” has always been lost within the necessitated retrospection of both modernist and post-structuralist “subjectivity,” the collapse of temporal-delay within the on and offline realm of contemporary photography draws attention to the phenomenological limits of mediated articulation. While much of this takes place during the capturing phase, the addition of the internet and various feedback mechanisms provided by photo-sharing sites further extends these sorts of engagements as images are uploaded, shared, tagged, re-tagged, and further disseminated, forever re-creating the agents that come into contact with and are affected by them. It should be noted that it is not only the past and present which collapse into one another phenomenologically, but, as was mentioned briefly above (in the section on flickr) the omni-presence of images has also facilitated a type of photographic self-awareness that
prompts individuals to intentionally tailor their present behavior with the expectation that it be viewed by an unknown audience in the future, in photographic form. This, in a sense, collapses the future into the present moment as well, explicitly obstructing any sense of the traditional difference between past, present and future in favor of necessarily considering it, or sensing it, all at once.

What this trajectory of thought amounts to is a necessitated recognition of not simply the “shared” nature of subjectivity between articulating subjects but also the role of the digital photograph, as a distinct agent, within these throws. As I touched upon briefly above, and as I will develop further below, tagging does not only organize photos but also presents a means of “enabling” them to act agentially within digital environments. Images are not only shared and employed by human agents, but as a result of tag pass, freely and repeatedly, through the persuasion of the softwares that organize online environments as a whole. Drawing once again upon Butler’s use of Hegel, to tag an image closes it off whilst simultaneously opening it to the throws of software mediation. As post-structuralist philosophies of language profess, to name allows us to speak of sensual phenomena as coherent entities (Derrida 1982). While this enables communication and “vascularization” of reality, is also enables others to speak, reconstituting these phenomena through each utterance. In this case, it is not only “human” users who reconstitute images through the addition of alternate tags, but software programming draws upon these tags and materializes itself through the re-presentation of images in unexpected ways and contexts, transforming them into “autonomous” agents. Photographs are not simply mediators of communication and subjectivity; through the agentialism facilitated by software and “tagging,” they become agential actors, “sharing” “them-selves” in the act of co-articulation. While this will be of
central concern in the closing section of this chapter and the entirety of the following chapter, before returning I would first like to touch, briefly, upon another key photographic experience that has been re-configured in light of digitization, knowledge formation through memory.

**DISTRIBUTED: EXPOSING THE MATERIALITY OF MEMORY**

What is at stake through the processes of tagging is not only the negotiation of the representational elements or connections of the image, but also what the image is communicating. While communication can, in its moment of articulation, be a fleeting expression, the accordance of retrievable depictions and textual annotations to pictorial events transforms each image into a semi-permanent recounting. According to Jose Van Dijck (2007) the practices that surround online photo-sharing have a significant impact on the experience and approach to memory. In 1945, Vannevar Bush, concerned with the effects that an impending explosion of knowledge would have, drew upon the philosophies of Leibniz and Babbage in an effort to conceptualize a memory tool that would enable the storage and retrieval of a wide range of information and documents. His response, was the conceptual introduction of the “memex,” a computational device that would store information as well as making it retrievable through associative annotations. Acting as a prosthetic of memory, the memex liberated the mind by externalizing and adopting the function of a human memory; mass amounts of information became manageable as human
memory would simply be required to memorize systems of annotation and retrieval rather than the information itself (Van Dijck 2007).

In this vein, while photo-sharing (and its concurrent practices) has been framed as a means of communicating or organizing images, it has also been construed as an intricate technology of externalized memory; photo-sharing processes have facilitated a new materiality of remembering (Van Dijck 2008). The collaborative and interactive processes involved in photo-sharing and social networking sites have resulted in a dispersed or communal memory. The explicit (visible) tracing through communally established networks facilitates a performative version of memory based on the interactive joining of (potentially) different perspectives. While the re-formulation of memory in the act of remembering has long been a recognized function of human memory, tags and comments make this process explicit as each affection of the image reconfigures its movement within cyber-space and leaves a (semi) permanent trace of commentary that would otherwise be oral and fleeting. While annotation has always been a function of photographic memory, for example through notes in an album, these processes were typically of a private function as only certain individuals would have access to and authority over these pictorial texts. Communal access to the annotational infrastructure of memory blurs the distinctions between what counts as public and private memory as memory is shared between numerous participating sources. Again, this transforms the act of photo-sharing from one of a-dimensional image exchange into one of coarticulation and shared meaning-making. What is at stake in this case is not simply nostalgic reminiscing but also the systems of meaning and knowledge that get constructed around the memories that one has of particular events. As the section on negative subjectivity in the preceding chapter suggested
and as I will discuss further in the following chapter, there is a distinct if not heavy ethical weight that gets placed on the interaction and reconstitution of images in this case as each affection of the image has the capacity to alter perceptions of communication and events in both positive and negative ways.

:: FOUR ::

The Affective Turn Meets the Informational Era

*I believe that software constitutes a new actor in the world: as a kind of mechanical writing it is gradually producing a whole new informational ecology that is forming a dense undergrowth of muted but potent cause and effect, which is present in the background of most events and which, because of its increasing extent and almost baroque complexity, is producing all kinds of large emergences and small hauntings, different densities and queer intensities, whose exact origins we can no longer trace.*

*Nigel Thrift (2005: 206)*

**Software: An Affective Digression on Interfacing**

It is through the materialization of software coding that the various phenomena associated with digital photography will take on an approachable (visible) reality and work to affect engaged individuals. As a result, while software cannot be said to be the originary point of any digital engagement (much like with the question of semiotics, it becomes difficult to ascertain what is the most basic, but still meaningful, unit of software), it does provide a means of accessing the digital realm and thinking about human-techno interaction beyond the superficial level of subject-object. Software sinks-in, it goes without recognition, and yet it provides the underlying language that facilitates and enacts the technological devices that have become integral actors within contemporary life. Without
an acknowledgement of its tendencies and suggestions, a discussion of digital photography and its corresponding technologies would ignore much of the rhizomatic undergrowth that makes the digital era rich with conceptual possibility.

The impact of software has become increasingly pervasive in the 21st century as it circulates ubiquitously through progressively smaller and unremarkable objects. It has become an integral actor within the articulation and organization of everyday life. Designed as a (degenerate) hybrid of archival order and biological systems, software has produced a new layer of causality in the world as it provides a technological infrastructure through which digital and non-digital actors can intersect and be “co-articulated.” Software has become “...an ordered system of cognitions [that are] making things happen in the world” (Hayles 2006).

According to Hayles (1999) human behavior, once entangled within software mediated flows of data, “is increasingly integrated with the technological non-conscious through somatic responses, haptic feedback, gestural interactions, and a wide variety of other cognitive activities that are habitual and repetitive and that therefore fall below the threshold of conscious awareness.” Nigel Thrift (2005) shares this sentiment as he asserts that software exists “outside of the phenomenal field of subjectivity.” Both instances result in a perception of software whereby its performative transmission and interpolative tendencies are considered to take place through an affective encounter. This affective capacity (which has been cited as the characteristic that enables it to withdraw from our

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*a* "To Latour, it is through the processes and attribution of naming, and subsequent (re)articulation of and by that named thing as such, that beings are knowable and recognized as having being. Existence, in this case, does not only precede essence but essence can only ever exist and be known in epistemological terms. An important clarification to make is that Latour does not strip non-articulated things of presence but instead discusses these entities in relation to their having less being, or being less real; the grey substance in the corner of Pasteur’s flasks had presence but lacked the being of yeast until it was enacted through propositional trials."
conscious/visible perception) is of growing interest to critics and STS theorists alike. Discussion of techno-affect has become a key means through which to access the conceptual impact of software within the environment and throws of subject formation.

To Bergson (2002), affect is the process of being struck by another’s existenz, internalizing this encounter in a pre-subjective manner (as sensation or emotion) and then having the level/threshold of personal affectivity determine whether or not these phenomena are meaningful enough to be conceptualized. Affect here becomes the experience of an intermediary stage, between sensorimotor intake and conscious (re)action. It exists prior to the work of interpretation and understanding as it determines what demands responsiveness. Though not transparent, or knowable, affective encounters become a fundamental element of existence as they shape individuals’ engagement with and conceptualization of reality. That which remains within the affective realm is easily forgotten, as it escapes the processes of knowing (or meaning making). This is contrasted with stimuli that surpass the threshold of affective impotence insofar as they will be experienced as a historically and discursively established emotion or state of being. Judith Butler explains in a recent publication, that these affective encounters are “structured by interpretive schemes that we do not fully understand,” and yet, much like a Foucaultian web of intelligibility, they impact the way in which worldly phenomena are encounter and experienced and influence the subject’s capacity to (en)act within these spaces. In relation to this, Bergson argues that while affect may stand outside of interpretation (which Butler refers to in a witty, inter-textual fashion, as against interpretation – an homage to Susan Sontag’s aesthetics), its consequential tendencies are developed historically through repeated connections between actions, sensations, and understanding. The outcome of
affective encounters, in this case, develops in a fashion that is similar to post-structuralist theories of language and knowledge formation. Drawing upon this conceptual framework, it could be argued that the materialization of differing and deferring affective stimuli results in the repetition of particular parings (when “a” then “b” ad nauseum). This gives the impression that particular connections are stronger and more likely to be experienced similarly and in a consistent fashion. The tracing between these repetitions gives a sense of continuity, history and understanding.

A number of philosophers have argued that without the affective turn, “Being” would go without recognition as it is through surpassing an affective threshold in this or that way (repeatedly) that performative realities materialize, and traceable (subject) identities emerge. Deleuze explored this notion thoroughly through his discussions of affect and image (Trifonova 2007). According to Deleuze, affect marks a nodal assemblage of contextual elements and images that, once pieced together, give rise to the perception of an apparent but only ever momentary “subject.” He draws upon reels of cinematic discourse to illustrate how the manifestations of affect do not occur “naturally” or internally but are instead disembodied processes through which a potentially infinite number of rhizomatically arranged images (“stills”) are encountered, waded through, passed over, and forgotten as individuals trace through these phenomena in an effort to piece together a narrative of personalized continuity.

Considering software within these terms reveals it as more than an interface between immaterialized code (binaries) and screen; it also situates it as a foundational means (conduit) through which individuals and digital phenomena are co-articulated.

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This shares significant conceptual similarities with the way in which tagging mechanism or software mechanism are currently working online.
(shared). The overt materiality of technological hardware gives the faulty impression that it is “the” actor with whom other actors engage. While it is certainly a necessary component, without the directives provided by software, hardware devices would appear as inert, or potentially broken, machines.

It should be noted that while software provides a series of scripted codes that enable the interaction of computing device and user, these scripts do not determine definitive courses of action and reaction. This is important in terms of conceptualizing software as an affective mediator as opposed to a means through which pre-determined (coded) series of events will invariably unfold. Software is not absolute; as was briefly mentioned earlier, it provides algorithmic means of establishing possible reactions to data input. How this transpires or develops, in most cases, relies upon a series of unique user interactions. The structure that it provides is suggestive rather than absolute. In addition to this, discourses surrounding biological or organic processes are also increasingly being folded into software design initiatives. This amounts to the “intentional” possibility of “accidental” outcomes within interactive environments.

**Everyware // Noware**

**Invisible Affection**

What is interesting is that while we engage, and are arguably “coarticulated” in relation to software mediated interfaces or environments, we are typically unaware of the presence of the software. Software is largely invisible. As Bolter (2009) argues, the opacity of binary code and incongruence in terms of script and material presentation, enables software to “sink-in” to various environments and become an unrecognizable agent. Within current experiences of social reality, software mediates almost every imaginable
environment in some form or another. And yet, it never, or rarely, presents as itself. While a digital watch employs a (basic) software-based computing system to keep time, the software, as such, withdraws leaving simply the perception of the object at hand, the face of a watch. The same can be said of numerous software-facilitated devices, such as stoves, washing machines, gas pumps, ticket boots, etc. This, like in the case of photo-editing processes, reveals the function of technological “black-boxing” as the complexity, discursivity and “co-articulatory” capacity of these devices is shrouded in an effort to make them easier to “know.” The trouble in this case is that the inner workings of the devices is obscured, impeding the ability to approach them critically or with “respect.”

Following a similar conceptual trajectory, not only does software have a propensity toward “sinking-in,” but we actually, typically, do not have access to see or know the performative articulations of software itself or as such. The recognizable presentation of software functions much as a Deleuzian close-up, reducing the underlying algorithmic digital information to a material/recognizable “face”. The face of interfacing erases the affective complexities of software in favor of a knowable/approachable/accessible encounter. In this sense, software can never be known as such but can only ever be engaged conceptually through the mediation of a reductive interface. While some might argue that software is accessible to those who are able to “read” and write the code that enables it, as Katherine Hayles (2006) has exposed how coding language is so complex, unique, and historically contingent that even those who write it are often unable to “read” it after the fact. In addition to this, software coding is often times written and rewritten by multiple individuals. (Open source software is a perfect and accessible example of this as a community of contributing individuals, with different backgrounds and expertise, are
constantly updating and rewriting public/shared programs.) So while one person might be able to read a segment of the coding that makes up a software program, they are often unable to fully read and comprehend other segments**.

** Back to the Web: Affective Software and the Exposure of Agential Photography **

Online photo-sharing software establishes the means through which images are presented, engaged and re-presented. The rhizomatic undergrowth that makes up the quasi-foundation of photo-sharing websites, and what I have asserted is the impossibility of controlling the outcome of online engagements (if only as a result of unintended consequences,) presents images as slippery, dispersed, public, and potentially in need of control. With each unique materialization of digital data (each unique presentation of a web page, data stream, etc) users are thrown into an affective realm in which they are explicitly faced with (in)decision. Prompted by a series of software attributes, each digital iteration provides an opportunity to engage in a discourse of authoritative closure (in terms of meaning and future contestation) or conversely, in an open-ended mediation of continuous in-difference and negotiation. As was mentioned repeatedly above (in relation to Flickr), the trouble with “controlling” the image, tagging it down, or locking its meaning into place through comments, is that as soon as the image is “named,” it is immediately subsumed into a network of similarly and dissimilarly named images, that is “controlled” by software. Once incorporated into the affective environment of software, it is impossible to

** It should be noted that while some individuals have access to the coding that underlies various software programs, even when faced with the basic code, this is still a reductive encounter with software. Not only does it reduce software’s performative potential to a series of linguistically based binaries, but it also fails to recognize (see/excite) the accidental, or unintentional, articulations that the code incites.**
control their materialization and trajectory. We might engage images, recontextualize them, close them off in particular ways, but there is always the possibility of an otherwise that might evade us. In a sense while control is the goal, every attempt to control the image in fact facilitates increased circulation of the image in unintended or undesirable ways. (As I mentioned above, software facilitates semi-scripted outcomes insofar as some interactive functions rely explicitly on a command-retrieval basis while others develop organically through repetition and accident.)

The throes of affective software have worked to reveal online images as performative agents unto themselves. While past configurations of photography framed the medium as distinctly representational, digitization has exposed the materiality and performativity of the image (unto itself). Materiality in this case is not to be confused with “physicality” as materialization comes to denote a stabilizing and destabilizing process that works, over time to produce the appearance of boundary, fixity, and “surface.” The digital image is constituted as matter (with materiality) insofar as it comes to be “known” as a distinct, and conceptually fixed entity with particular performative tendencies. The materiality of online images has also been paired with a novel sense of photographic “presencing” put forward by Hansen (2006). The ontological distinction between representation and nature is still an active form of spacing within the context of particular encounters with the image, (it would be short-sighted to assert that photography is no longer representational,) and yet, the increasing immediacy of pictorial “re-presentation,” and performative trajectories of online image objects, is collapsing the spaceo-temporal interval between presentation and representation, transforming the image into a

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Whilst the photo-object, print, has always demanded a recognition of its material form, the photographic image itself, as a result of being framed as a glass window, has never required a material form as it becomes a mere gateway onto the world.
mechanism of “presence” rather than delay or deferral. The capacity to inter-act with the
image directly and impact its ability to circulate or be circulated draws the notions of
materiality and “presencing” together as the image becomes a distinction object that,
drawing upon canonical conceptions of photography, articulates subjectivity whilst
simultaneously being articulated, or alternately re-articulated, itself.

To ascribe “agentialism” to a non-human/non-living entity may seem counter
intuitive, and yet the contemporary composition of photography (the photograph), as a web
of converging forces and performative practices, shares many similarities with the proposed
constitution of “agents.” A number of theorists have acknowledge the presence and
centrality of non-human and technical agents within the throes of articulation. Latour’s
(2005) actor-network theory exposes the necessity of “objects” within the transcendental
articulation of “existence”; Haraway’s “cyborg” trope (1991) enables the deconstruction of
bi-partisan enclosures that favour human over non-human in an effort to expose the
importance of non-human actors within constitutions and experiences of reality; and more
recently, Barad (2003) has argued that technological apparatuses demonstrate a form of
dynamic agentialism insofar as agency is not a quality or “attribute;” instead, agency refers
to the capacity to affect the ongoing reconfigurations of the world (as a performative
metaphysics.) In each of these cases, there is no primary (epistemological) unit, with
inherent boundaries but rather, a series of affective phenomena which become delineated
and “meaningful” through performative intra-actions. It is in the throws of intra-action
(which refers to the transcendental move of co-articulation), a relation without pre-
determined relata, that agentialism is both enacted and retrospectively recognizable.

42 This sentiment is rooted in the Heideggerian centrality of “techne” as employed by Hansen (2006) when he
asserts that the determining factor of humanity is its evolutionary co-respionse to shifting technological
actors (tools). I will discuss this in greater detail at the end of the last chapter.
Drawing on Barad (2003), photography and its corresponding images appear as individuated, agential actors in and of themselves while simultaneously attesting to the agential potential of software (and the hardware enacted by it). While there was always the capacity to impact photographs through annotation, framing, organization, or inclusion within an album narrative, current human/photo (information) intra-action and exchange provides increased mobility and individuated agency to the image as it is enacted within an affective environment (software), outside of the direct grasp of human action. Through the introduction of pixels and attribution of tags, software-driven hardware can now not only “see as we do” but also organize information in a similar fashion as the human mind (through repetition and retrieval) with little direct cueing (or command.) Within this system, we have lost control over images as they often materialize in strange and unexpected places as a result of their involvement in the affective throes of software. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will map out three examples in which images materialized in unexpected and (in two of the cases) undesirable ways.

**Demonstrating Agentialism:**

**I. Finding Oneself**

There has long been a certain amount of cultural intrigue surrounding the possibility of discovering oneself in the background of another’s image. While this possibility has for some become a reality⁴³, before digitization, as photographs sat stored away in shoeboxes and family albums, the probability of this happening seemed very unlikely, in not near

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⁴³ There was a recent incident in which a couple that had been married for nearly thirty years, were flipping through the woman’s old family album, from when she was a child, only to find her husband, as a child, seated in the background of a picture depicting the woman’s family at Disneyland. It would be another fifteen years before they would meet and get married.
impossible. Within the throws of digitization and photo-sharing, photographs are immanently on display. In addition to this (as has been mentioned repeatedly above,) as a result of tagging photographs are constantly materializing in a fashion that is not controlled or necessarily intended by the original author. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, recognizing the likelihood of the accidental or incidental transmission of online images is key to beginning to imagine a “photo-ethics” that can approach the agentialism and multifariousness of contemporary digital photography.

STEPHEN GUY “FINDS HIMSELF”

The following example demonstrates the image’s capacity to materialize to unexpected audiences with unintended, albeit in this case inert, personal consequences. The fellow tagged in the background, blurry and barely recognizable, was unaware that he was being captured. Days later, when perusing Facebook, he received an update that one of his was tagged in an album that had been published by another (unknown) person. He
decided to look at the album (this inadvertently points to one reason for privacy concerns online), flipped through, and coincidentally happened upon this image of himself. Not only was he not the “subject” of the image, but he also did not have any direct ties to the image as the photographer/uploader was a stranger to him, as were the intended (central and tagged) subjects of the frame. In this case, not only did this image appear to an unintended audience in a roundabout way, but it also, arguably, served to facilitate a number of consequential processes as this individual “saw himself” (subject/identity formation) as he had existed at a particular moment in time (memory.) In addition to this, the original image appeared with a number of tags and comments, which contextualized the event and gave it meaning apart from that which the fellow had already constructed for himself.

II. Girl Finds Dead Mother Hawking-Cure All on Facebook

In an article that ran in the October 12th edition of the Globe and Mail fifteen year old, Shelby Breimer of Nova Scotia, tells the story of happening upon images of her mother being used to promote a colon-cleansing product. According to Breimer, “someone” hacked into her mother’s account and used a series of images of her on horseback to pair alongside the “cure-all” cleanser. What is particularly disconcerting in this case is the fact that Breimer’s mother had passed away nine months earlier as a result of a long and arduous battle with cancer. In this instance, the re-appropriation of Breimer’s mother’s images does not only speak to uncontrollability of images online, but also demonstrates how, even in death, it becomes nearly impossible to close down the meaning and (re)presentation of images. There is always, even in death, the possibility of an unexpected otherwise.
III. Making it Personal // On and Off Screen

An important point to make is that the appropriation and unintentional re-presentation of images is not restricted to online circulation. Once again drawing upon personal experience, I would like to discuss the following set of images:

I currently hold the position of staff photographer at Modern Fuel, an artist-run gallery in Kingston, Ontario. This position involves documenting exhibits for the gallery’s records, and photographing openings and events to be posted and shared online. I took the first of these images in February at a Valentine’s Day event. The image was later posted to my flickr feed and tagged with “Modern Fuel” and the name of the event. Flickr offers a copyrighting feature, which enabled me to list the images as “full rights reserved.” Two months later, I picked up the year-end copy of the Queen’s student newspaper, “The Journal,” to find this image used in a montage featuring the best events of the year. Not
only was the image used without my consent, but also I am also not “friends” or acquainted with any of the contributors at the paper. This case speaks to a number of challenging issues that have become increasingly apparent throughout the digital age. The first issue, and introduced focal point of this section, is that the unintended re-appropriation of images is not restricted to online circulation but can also involve a number of offline reproductions as well. So, in a sense, while an individual might be able to limit the intended circulation of a particular image offline, the ease with which most uploaded images are copied, downloaded, and printed presents an alternate realm of circulation with almost an infinite number of ends. The ability to virally circulate scandalous images of celebrities, through multiple mediums provides an additional example of the uncontrollability of images both on and offline. The second issue that arises in this case revolves around image ownership rights in the digital age. The image in question was uploaded with clearly displayed copyrighting and yet, this did very little to limit or control its use. While some might argue that the concern in this case has more to do with the illegal appropriation of images as opposed to the uncontrollability of the image, the insight to be gained from this situation is that the current legal framework regarding copyrighting and online content does not, in most cases, have the capacity to control appropriation and circulation, particularly when “use” has little fiscal ramification for the creator. As a number of the contributors to “Peer-to-Peer File Sharing and Secondary Liability in Copyright,” a book edited by Alain Strowel, remarked, online copyright laws concerning the use of images posted within “public domains” is currently without many precedents to draw upon. In other words, the library of jurisprudence concerning images online is currently extremely limited. While there have been a number of cases concerning copyright laws and file-sharing, the case of
“Girl Talk” and Napster often times coming to the forefront, there have been very few cases that grapple with the circulation of digital images on and offline.

Summary

This chapter has taken the transformation of photography in light of digitization as its central area of investigation, conceptualization and critique. Drawing upon a number of empirical explorations and theoretical digressions, it has traced photographic discourses through a number of converging practices, technologies and industries in order: to develop a rich understanding of the many complex practices and phenomena that constitute the photographic landscape in the digital age; to draw connections between “old” and “new” employments of the medium in an effort to expose accretion and expel notions that digitization is rupturous; to explore new methods for engaging with the medium as a result of digitization and unearth ways in which the practices facilitated by these methods have revealed certain elements and attributes of photography that were not visible within film-based practices; and finally, drawing upon notions of “affective software,” to demonstrate that while images continue to be employed as representational, they also possess an agential potential as they stream on and offline in uncontrollable, autonomous ways.

The photograph’s established propensity towards subjectivation, knowledge formation and stimulating memory, paired with the purported “uncontrollability of images” becomes a matter of great ethical concern and consequence. Following this trajectory will be the topic of the following section. Not only will I discuss photographic ethics as an historically established field of thought and consideration, but I will also, drawing upon the
novelties of “agentialism,” demonstrate that the parameters of a “representational ethics” will not suffice in the age of digitization as efforts to control the who, how, where and what of images enact them in unintentional and uncontrollable systems of dissemination.
CHAPTER III

ETHICAL (RE)VISON
MOVING BEYOND REPRESENTATION IN AN EFFORT TO LOCATE AN ETHOS OF AGENTIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

At the end of the last chapter, I detailed three instances in which photographs were uploaded to online communities, tagged and re-appropriated in a fashion that was not expected or intended. These examples did not only expose what I purported to be the “uncontrollability” of images online, but were also meant to corroborate the assertion that “photography,” as a series of practices and ideas but mostly in this case as a material phenomena online, demonstrates a form of performative agentialism that is novel to the medium. In addition to supporting this thesis, each of the tagged and re-framed images inadvertently introduced key issues within canonical explorations of photographic ethic, namely (personal) identification, traumatic encounters and image ownership. In addition to these three areas of concern, photographic misrepresentation and image modification have also been located as areas of ethical contention. While photographs continue to be experienced as representational objects, demanding an ethical exposure and acknowledgement of its discursive frame, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, digitization has facilitated the appearance of an additional layer of agential photographic experience and opportunity. An ethics of representation will not suffice in the age of digitization; as I have mentioned before, closing down the image (even if done in ethical terms, if that is possible) simply opens it to new avenues of circulation and new (intra-active) audiences. What this suggests is that sociological and philosophical approaches to
photographic or visual ethics have yet to “catch-up” with technology and practice. The point of ethical concern here lies in the likely possibility that the image materialize to unintended or undesired audiences (which becomes ethical for a number of reasons, which I will explain later in the chapter), or amount to negative articulations (interpolations) of known and unknown audiences. The ethical weight of the image has become increasingly potent as the frequent encounters with the image in online sharing environments opens the opportunity to reconstitute it, and cast it into a new or denser network of “recollection.” If, as I asserted in the second chapter, the photograph acts as a “gift,” derived from and, in turn, facilitating a contemporary form of online “gift economy,” then, as Derrida argued, practices revolving around image circulation inherently, and always, involve the suspension of the ethical; not only is there no way to ensure that the disseminated image remain limited to desired recipients, but also, as the philosophy of the gift suggests, there is no way to ensure, in the act of giving the gift, that its reception will amount to a positive or desired experience of (personal) subjectivity. Building upon the three examples provided in the last chapter, I will begin this chapter by discussing the ethical weight of a recent Google initiative, Street View. This software provides an additional platform through which photographs have not only been (knowingly and unknowingly) circulated but also where the act of circulation and making the images searchable/retrievable and “knowable” through metadata tagging amounted to issues of significant ethical concern. While Street View and its corresponding images have been developed in a different fashion than the personalized (and largely amateur) growth of the photo-sharing communities that have been discussed thus far, it marks a novel intersection of several of the factors, forces and industries that I have brought to the fore as key contributors to contemporary experiences
of photography. In addition to this, although the “street view” provides the basic visual
grounding of this software, as I will demonstrate, this foundation is linked up with and
provides a gateway into a number of alternate photo-sharing sites, including Flickr.
Following this example, I will engage in a discussion of varying means of considering and
approaching an ethics (or ethos) of photography. While this will begin with canonical
examples of “representational ethics” (as it has been applied to photograph), this discussion
will segue into post-structuralist means of considering an ethos of photography. I hope to
demonstrate how the ethical thinking put forward by this school of thought is compatible
with conceptions of the image online as a performative agent unto itself. In closing this
chapter, I will employ the connections that I have drawn between post-structuralist thought
and online photo-sharing practices as a means of beginning to critique the merit of a “post-
structuralist” ethics.

**Digital Flaneurism: Imag(in)ing the Landscape with Google’s Street View**

In May 2007, Google launched a new initiative, “Street View,” that would enable
users to explore the world through 360 horizontal and 290 vertical panoramic street level
views. Google collected images of public streets and spaces by outfitting a series of vehicles
with a platform that included nine direction cameras, and a GPS unit for positioning, and
driving these vehicles through the spaces whilst capturing a series of photographs. Once
captured, these images would be stitched together to form “moving” though “distinct”
visions of (primarily) cityscapes. This initiative has been framed within personal and

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\text{The sense of movement facilitated by Street View is enacted through a giff-like transition between frames and a recognition that the series of images being viewed progress in line with a form of “movement through space.”}
\]
economic means. When employed for personal reasons Street View purports to enable users to explore the world, envision destinations in an effort to prepare for arrival, check parking availability and “disabled access”, provide a means of sharing an image of your location with friends and family, and finally, it also enables users to “preview” their vacation accommodation. From an economic perspective, Street View offers means of business promotion (highlighting views of building facades, nearby amenities, landmarks and lesser known attractions), shows real estate listings, conducts virtual field trips, shows the location of news stories (constructing discursive connections between space and event), and enables planners to scout-out event locations. While the capturing process differs greatly from the amateur driven photography that the previous chapter detailed, the application and practices that have arisen around it share a number of similarities.

While Google’s mapping exercise was met with a significant amount of excitement, interest and support, there was also widespread public and political back-lash as issues of privacy, (mis)representation, and “framing” came to the fore. While Google asserted a strict set of privacy regulations, including “blurred” faces and license plates, a number of individuals and regions expressed concern as compromising and “recognizable” images became accessible through the mapping platform. The June 19th 2009 edition of the Globe and Mail featured an article exposing a number problematic images and employments of the site; the site documents individuals in compromising positions (the British tabloids nicknamed the platform “Cheat View” as it revealed a number of men engaging in adulterous acts), provides views into numerous homes and buildings, and, through the appended geo-tags, expose exact details of individuals’ location (which, as the Globe and Mail rightly points out, poses significant risk to vulnerable populations such as
children and individuals accessing shelter services.) While a number of corresponding critiques concern the representational value of these images, there has also been a significant outcry as a result of the uncontrollable circulation of these images. Since its inception, Google Street View has given rise to a number of photo-streaming sites whose mandate it is to collect and publicize funny, strange, and compromising “street shots” drawn off the site. According to the same *Globe and Mail* article, this was of particular concern to Robert White, a man who “stepped naked in front of an open window after taking a shower just as a Google camera car rolled down the street.” White’s acknowledgment of un-moderated dissemination practices online had him concerned, for months apparently, that the image(s) would be widely circulated, garnering him unwanted attention as an “international sex symbol.” There have been a number of similar examples. One particularly troublesome incident was when an image, taken by Google, of a woman captured in a square Spain was copied and employed as the directive for a Flickr image group; the group’s mandate was to take and share images of the same young woman. According to Prieur et. al. (2008), the young woman was not internet savvy but was made aware of the site after it garnered significant public interest and contribution. She logged on to the photo-sharing website and became quite dismayed to find her “private moments” (in public spaces) documented and shared by apparent strangers.

The copying, re-appropriation, and re-circulation of images from Google Street View is only one way in which this platform and its corresponding images have resulted in

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45 In addition to this, while Street View has established a series of “privacy” regulations, each pictorial frame is linked, through geo-tags, to a set of images (posted to other websites) that shared the same GPS coordinates. Not only do these links provide a hyper-mediated experience of the city-scape, but they also provide gateways to alternate, though parallel, collections of images that may not share the same privacy regulations.

46 This is interesting because while Street View is composed of numerous images, it also aims to produce a multi-dimensional view of captured space. As a result, selecting an image from Street View to disseminate becomes akin to a strange form of “hyper-mediated” photography.
unintended connections and consequences. Paired alongside street scenes, are a series of corresponding images that have been linked to the site through the automatic retrieval of geo-tags. If you “stand” at the corner of Kingston’s Princess and King street intersection, Google does not only provide you with its manufactured “street view” but also exhibits a series of images that have been uploaded and marked as “public” within online photo-sharing communities. At any given moment, there is the ability to access Google’s resources, extend one’s vision through the additional representations of the scene and also access a broad array of lay user’s online photo collections; when you click on the lined images, you are brought to that user’s photo-stream where you typically, particularly in the case of Flickr, then have access to their complete collection. This does not only support the assertion that individual’s images may appear in unexpected or unintended environments but also demonstrates how unsuspecting viewers may happen upon a scene with negative consequences. Street View images are not only re-appropriated but also offer a form of ‘rabbit hole” through which one can inadvertently happen upon undesirable environments and images that “subjectify” within negative terms (or are ethically dubious.)

**Ethics and Representation**

The photograph’s ability to establish truths, subjectify individuals, and perpetuate discourses of oppression and trauma has resulted in an urgent demand for the development of a series of ethical criteria concerning (performative) photography and the photographic image (Sontag 2004, Butler 2009). Ethics, as it will be employed for the sake
of this thesis, refers to the philosophical consideration of what constitutes responsible behavior (in relation to one-and-other.) It proceeds from a condition of alterity, as difference comes to articulate either a space for respect and hospitality or a restrictive position of “otherness,” predetermined by those who have been historically more privileged (Critchley 2000; Derrida 2005). The first movement of difference has engendered an ethical principle that welcomes the opportunity for sustained openness towards the irreducible alterity of the Other. Ethical consideration in this case arises within the affective throws of subjectification; it is a movement of the in-between that encourages B/being to exist in its own terms. Within this line of ethical thought, ethics is not a sentiment or a “post-factum reaction to an event” (Zylinska 2005), it is instead pre-ontological and pre-political as it makes demands on “the order of being” (Zylinska 2005.) This approach does not reside within a set of “ethical parameters,” as these pose the danger of violent attribution, but instead welcomes respectful negotiation and mindful indifference. The second movement of ethical consequence, that responds to processes of “othering” has developed ethical tactics for negotiating the terms of potential subordination and harm. This approach situates the realm of ethical consideration after discursively inclined articulations of being. Ethics in this case become the vehicle through which one “does it better” next time by acknowledging points of oppression and mediating their production and consumption.

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*This conceptualization ethics, and the further details that follow, represent one of many schools on ethical thought. Born in Greece and maintained as a central area for philosophical consideration, there are countless ways of conceptualizing and ‘applying’ ethical thinking. The following school of thought was selected because it, arguably, reflects the “performative” image (and its corresponding practices) most accurately. Given that a number of the theorists whose works has been cited as fundamental to this thesis, have sighted post-structural thought and Levinas as central inspirations to their work, it seemed like the appropriate place to begin.*
As a result of the historically reinforced coupling of the image/photograph with an ontology of representation, ethical approaches to photography have typically fallen within practices that control and negotiate images as points of closure and establishers of truth. When conceived of as a representational object, the photograph is likened to the proverbial death mask. It marks the limited and definitive embalming of a historically situated moment that from thenceforth exists within the discursive field of knowledge. This perspective necessitates an ethical approach that manages the potential effects of these determinations and acknowledges their propensity towards being disseminated as “fact” (Rose 2005). As the final throws of the first chapter demonstrated, while there is the possibility of establishing identities within positive terms, there is the equal possibility that the photograph present individuals in negative terms as well.

An exploration of researchers’ delineation of appropriate uses of photography and depiction within their methodological approaches demonstrates the way in which an ethics of representation (closure) has been proposed and definite practices imagined. According to James Lull (1990), the first means through which to approach photography ethically is to establish and maintain a disinterested eye. Within this line of argumentation, the camera is seen as a neutral piece of technology that has the capacity to capture authentic and accurate truths about the world; it is the photographer that risks manipulating these visions along discursive lines (Lull 1990). This sense of “dis-interested” observation relies heavily upon modernist discourses of objective and empirical realism, discourses that I have demonstrated, through a critique of “post-photographic theories,” are discursively rather than objectively established. In addition to this, it treats the camera and photographic medium as distinct and isolated tools, with a propensity toward neutrality. As I have
demonstrated repeatedly over the course of my thesis, photography is not simply an “impartial” image-making (or documentary) technology; it is instead comprised of a number of practices founded within a series of social, political and economic arenas. As such, the photograph marks an articulated point of intersection, as various “forces” meet to produce a choreographed image.

If the photographer fails to or is incapable of ensuring this form of disinterest within the originary movements of the image, a series of safeguards have been established, and prescribed, in an effort to determine appropriate limits around what kind of photographs are ethically sound and therefore suitable for dissemination. These suggested practices are generally framed as methods through which to reduce the potential harm that the photo might bring about for those depicted. Photographers are typically urged to consider matters of anonymity and privacy, informed individual (or personal) consent, selective and controlled circulation, and cultural differences that would implore different ethical expectations (Pauwells 2008). While these points are framed as a way of ensuring ethically appropriate engagement, they also work to free the photographer from absolute (personal) responsibility as the subject’s informed and agreed upon engagement implicates him within the ensuing representation.

There are many (perhaps countless) other proposed ways of approaching the representational facet of the image in ethically appropriate ways. Kaja Silverman (1996) outlines how particular acts of looking have the capacity to reconstitute the photographic image in ethical terms. While the image might demonstrate and perpetuate narratives of subordination, by engaging in a “revisionary re-reading of the image”, a way of looking differently and critically, there is the potential to (re)articulate the self in ways that are more
sensitive to the issues of those depicted. In this sense, while the image itself might be unethical, it does hold the potential to engender ethical behavior in the future (Silverman 1996). Gillian Rose (2005) also demands an ethics of representation and goes on to question notions of authorship, voice, and appropriation within the photographic field. According to Rose, the representational elements of photos can work to reclaim particular (marginalized) spaces, recasting them in a favorable light. These images, or representations, become ethically positive as they hold the potential to re-imagine the frameworks of oppressive discourses (Rose 2005). Rose is unique in proposing this form of photographic “re-imagining” as a viable, ethical space. The majority of contemporary photo-critics use Sontag (1973; 2004) as a point of departure for considering the photographic as an “ethical” text. According to Sontag, while the event of photographing hold the capacity for ethical engagement (which she argues is, in fact, always un-ethical engagement), the image does not; it is an after thought. While it might engender moral response, the image does not have the capacity to incite ethical engagement. To Sontag, as to a number of other philosophers (drawing on Levinas), photograph as representation, is a point of closure, forced to re-mediate moments past.

Each of the preceding approaches to an appropriate ethics of (and for) photography is situated within a discourse that attempts to manage the potential consequences presented by the representational elements of the photograph. In each case, the ethical criteria is determined in relation to the idea that the photograph marks a point of closure, a definitive space that can be grasped, contained, and used to communicate bits of (positive or negative) truth. While I would not argue against considering the image in this way, or employing an “ethics” of reaction, as the last section demonstrated, “closing” off the image,
“controlling” the dissemination of its content, is not a sufficient tactic in light of digitization. Points of “closure” offer new points of departure; while individuals might seek to manage their online photos, as I demonstrated, they often slip out from under them as practices of posting, tagging, and commenting, (each of these things transforming them into representational objects,) work to recast and redistribute the image in unexpected and unaccountable ways (Couchot 2002). While the representational elements of the photograph are often still at play, images don’t simply “stop” signifying in a representational manner because they are “online” (which in many ways necessitates the continuation of an ethical approach that is aimed at these attributes); what is needed in the case of digital images is an ethics that does not require a series of definite terms in order to be enacted, but instead necessitates an ethics that acknowledges the near infinite potential of the digital image and works instead to persuade particular practices of openness, responsibility, and hospitality prior to the image becoming a means of representing.

Past conceptions of photo-specific ethics have overlooked the possibility of considering photography in this way; the school of philosophical thought that is compatible with this form of ethical approach excluded the photograph from the realm of ethical possibility insofar as its “representational” function thrust it permanently into the realm of epistemological response. While the photographic encounter, the act-of-being-photographed, might be ethically charged, the resulting image itself was not. (This follows in the same vein as Sontag’s response to the (un)“ethical” capacity of the photograph.) With the event of digitization and acknowledgement of the performative agentialism of images online, the photograph is no longer wholly re-presentational as it becomes a central “actor” within the affective throws of coming-in-being (of both human-being and non-
human/techne-being.) As a result, an ethics that “responds” to the image will, in a sense, arrive too late. While past conceptualizations of photographic or representational ethics were strong positions, they are coming up against their limits as a result of specific constellations of technology and image-making that are being performed and practiced via software. In the following section, I will map out three, canonical, though updated, senses of “ethical engagement” as a means of beginning to think about or approaching a pre-ontological, performative and transcendental “ethics of photography”.

**Loose End and Open Opportunities: Grounding an Alternate Ethics of (Digital) Photography**

**I. Facing Photography**

The point of departure for an ethics of hospitality, sustained-openness and responsibility is typically located within Levinas’ conception of facialization and being-towards the Other (Critchley 1999). According to Levinas, to come face to face with the other is to experience an insurmountable alterity with the other, to accept it, to remain open to it, to forgo the violence of reducing the other to same or other, to this or that knowable thing. Ethics in this case becomes an acknowledgment, or an awareness, of the importance of this openness and responsibility towards the other even before the process of ontology and knowing (Levinas 2000). To Levinas, ethics is the first philosophy; its movements are aroused before Being is being-as-such or being-in-common to ensure moderation of the affected self. The favorable outcome of this form of awareness is an individual (being) that remains hospitable to the visit of the unknown and or unforeseen other. Drawing upon Derrida’s notion of hospitality, this individual greets the other in open
friendship, ready to engage with the other without engaging in processes of knowing or asking for (differential and marginalizing) attributes (race, religion, sexuality, etc.) The hospitable individual advances with an air of blindness, listening and welcoming” (Derrida 1994).

The irony of situating an ethics of photography within Levinas’ ethical philosophies is that Levinas felt that the image marked an absolute end to the possibility of an ethical face-to-face meeting with the other. He perceived the image, photograph, as inherently representational. As a result, he, like many others, saw it as a point of closure that provided a limited representation of a moment that once offered infinite possibility. To Levinas, photograph, appeal to a preexisting or pre-given set of principles and rules, and as a result are doomed to ethical failure if not even to violence. Because of this, the photograph can never offer the possibility of experiencing the boundless alterity of the other as its frame provides an immediate set of limits to both the moment that has passed (if only by defining it as a moment and as a passed moment) and the subject(s) depicted upon its glossy finish (this do not stretch through the scene but de-mark particular bodies). This being said, this is a particular, ontological and in some senses phenomenological, construction and constitution of the image. This form of ontological grounding for the image has been revealed as faulty; not only does the photograph not denote a metaphorical “death mask,” but it is also not a closed field of representation. In the digital age, the image is repeatedly altered, reconstituted, recontextualized and subject to a series of discursive forces. It becomes an “agent” that is enacted performatively through the articulation(s) of software.

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“Derrida does acknowledge a need for risk assessment within the throws of hospitable welcoming. An ethics of hospitality does not require one to open one’s door to visible harm but instead suggests a form of Spinoza’s moderation, where closures would never be absolute or definite but would leave room for reconsideration and amendment.
When it is reconsidered from the perspective at hand, that the image is not solely a representational field but also an agential actor, connections between Levinas’ ethical possibilities and the image become apparent. Our engagements with images (re)constitute them just as they (re)constitute us. An application of Levinas’ philosophy in this case would suggest that “we” acknowledge the image both as an agent unto-itself and also a means through which to inter-face with technology and each other. Approaching images ethnically would require respect for the function of the image, and a form of “letting-be” that will be elaborated upon later in the chapter.

II. Exposing “Nous Autres”

Jean-Luc Nancy has also approached the possibility of a Levinasian encounter with the other through photographic means. According to Nancy, it is a cry that rises forth out of this capturing of evidence, this act of documenting a moment of fleeting, but now apparently certain, existence. What is important is that despite the unary nature of this cry, the being that rises forth out of the photograph is never just one, but always at least two. In the act of photographing, it is a “we” that is suspended together; it is a “we” that comes forth. The moment that is captured, saved, lies both inside and outside the captured frame and therefore functions as an articulatory (or interpolative) call to all who stand within earshot of the lens. As the shutter releases, all are grasped, brought together to share a moment of being towards limit of their existence and then being returned, unable to transcend themselves in favour of the other. (An important note is this moment does not only exist in the experience of the present, but also through an anticipatory projection of
the photograph that will come.) According to Nancy, it is in this return that the self from whom the “I am” escapes is re-established (Nancy 2005).

In the case of a non-representational ethics, the photograph rises out of the moment in which the not-yet-being of being-in-common affects its retrospectively recognized articulation. In this sense, while the photograph might later function as an oppressive (and definite) text, in this present-ation it instead provides a means through which ethical suspension (facing the other) is encouraged and potentially affixed (Nancy 2005). While this transcendental move appears to happen without persuasion, in a neutral manner, Nancy acknowledges that its movement is easily seized by discursive temptation. Much like in his conceptualization of love, this coming into being through being-in-common can be one that occurs on self-ish terms (self-love and oppressive discourses), through a desire to full-fill one’s own sense of lacking, or it can arise through a self-effacing love of the other (Ware 2008). The photograph can either serve as a means of establishing a sensed co-articulatory bond, or it can facilitate a desire to constrain and possess the other in one’s own terms. Following in this vein, an ethics of being-photographed would likely entail a photographic engagement that forgoes the desire of self-constitution in favour of being towards the other in a manner that encourages their being-thus (taking place) in their own terms despite the self-effacement that this requires of oneself. If one’s existence is always an existence for the other then this requires the acceptance of a shattered existence that forever oscillates between self and other as one is shared. An important note is that Nancy’s philosophy acknowledges both the potential need for an ethics of representation when it comes to the photograph and a realization that in the act of photographing, an ethical encounter can and is encouraged to take place.
Within the throws of Nancy’s photograph, the performative processes involved in image making are an obvious realm in which to acknowledge a shared form of photo-being. What is promising and interesting is that through the methods of online inter-action (between humans, non-humans and image) and dissemination, the capacity to engage in this form of shared being is given another realm of opportunity. While there is, as always, the capacity for this to go awry, there is also the equal possibility that it will not. As Nancy would suggest, by “letting go” of oneself, or one’s desire for “self” in positive terms, which inadvertently involving a willingness to exist in a state of “incompletion” (disappointment, possibly), allows for the other to come-into-being within as positive and self-fulfilling terms as possible. With regards to online photo-sharing practices (in this case I am referring largely to the addition of metadata in the form of tags, comments, or any other form of ordering principle) this would suggest that individuals not concern themselves with “controlling” images in their favor (as this can, and likely will, inadvertently result in negative terms for another) but should instead let the image “be” so as to maintain as “neutral” or intended a trajectory as possible.

III. Excessive Photography

While the aforementioned ethical pursuits recognize ethics as pre-ontological and ethics as evident prior to and in the throws of articulation, Lyotard also locates an ethical “excess” offered by the image. According to Lyotard, encountering an image has the capacity to elicit a momentary sensation of “pure perception” in which consciousness is affected without the assertion of ascribed or inscribed meaning. This non-identitarian experience, Lyotard’s sublime, marks the limits of reason while simultaneously affording
the viewer an evanescent glance at the eventing of their being-as-such. Unlike like the limitations posed by a purely representational approach to the image, this vision of the photograph reveals the supplemental potential of this type of aesthetic encounter. In this case, the photograph is conceptualized as an inessential supplement (surplus) that facilitates the transcending of the limit of Reason and therefore re-exposes the ‘exhausted’ individual to the possibility of being otherwise; what was finite is again infinite as the exterior collapses within the limit (Trifnova 2007). In this sense, the image provides a space for coming into being through non-identitarian means. It provides a perspective of one’s self that is not definite, or articulated through discursive means, but instead arises aesthetically. While this might be perceived as an ethical encounter in and of itself, it could also be argued that by coming into being through non-linguistic or communicative (un“knowable”) terms, the resulting “self” detaches, if only slightly, from the grasp of discursively mediated power structures, increasing the possibility of a face-to-face encounter at another time.

Acknowledging Lyotard’s conception of the image eases the discomfort that Nancy’s approach suggests. While “letting the image be,” for the sake of the other, may be disconcerting, re-configuring the image as a realm of “excess,” a vehicle to an otherwise (which given the status of “online environments is, in fact, more apt that unrealistic) rather than a “just this once,” alleviates the need for control and instead celebrates the image as a realm of additional possibility.

**Let it Be:**
**Ethos and Online Photo-Sharing Practices**

Each of the preceding “ethical” approaches describes an ethics of “encounter” rather than response; it acknowledges the agential (or pre-subjective) capacity of the
photographic image and locates the ethical capacity of the image at the moment of affective encounter. An ethos of the encounter is one that acknowledges and is respectful of (post-structuralist conceptions of) radical intersubjectivity, interconnectivity and interdependency. While, when limited to representation, the image marked an absence rather than an opportunity, the conceptual transformation of the image (online) into a form of performative agent, ascribes a sense of “presence” to it, locating it within the exchange of an event rather than as a nostalgic afterthought. As I outlined above, re-conceptualizing ethics and photography in this light becomes necessary as a result of digitization in so far as it encourages ethical consideration prior to the processes of establishing meaning (and resulting circulation.) Levinas’ (via Derrida) philosophy suggests a form of hospitality be paid, both to the image and to the assumed audience. It is hard to ascribe a certain series of practices to this approach (in fact inscription is counter-intuitive to the basis of the philosophy), but it does require participants (citizens) to acknowledge that their actions online will garner undue attention and encourages “hospitable” practices in terms of the means through which they communicate and interact with the visual landscape. While some would assert that the image still marks a form of limited materiality, casting it outside the realm of infinite alterity or facialization, an important realization is that all existence is conceivably “limited” in the same regard. As Butler (1997; 1999) asserts in her discussion of performativity, all existence, in the act of being-materialized, takes place within the parameters of a “script.” Despite the need for there to always be the possibility of an “otherwise” within the realm of (pre)articulation, nothing has the capacity to “be anyway” as the phenomenological experience of affective materiality always limits one’s engagement
with reality: I am not capable of flying, nor can I enact a “gender” that my body has not been predisposed to.

Considering the image in relation to an ethos of encounter requires an approach that Introna (2009), terms “letting be.” Contrasted with “ethics,” which Introna (2009) argues is nominal and based on the will to power, an ethos of letting be shifts away from a human-centered ethics that transforms all beings from objects for a particular purpose towards a form of “being that lets all being be” (Introna 2009: 3). It suggests that we:

silence habitual and calculative modes of thinking and open ourselves to the promptings that come from the ontological depth of other beings. This openness clears a space for the Being of the other to emerge as it is in itself...

preserving the other’s irreducible otherness. (Carey, 2000: 27-28)

Introna does not only situate this as an over-arching “ethical” approach, but instead proposes this approach as fundamental to an “ethos of things,” transforming a historically anthropocentric line of thought into one that extends to all modes of being. Central to his argument is a recognition that “we are the beings that we are through our entanglements with things -- we are thoroughly hybrid beings, cyborgs through and through” (3). This is more than a theoretical assertion of human and non-human co-articulation. In fact, both Introna and Hansen (2006), argue that it is our engagement, employment and exchange with things, namely tools, that has historically and socio-biologically set us apart from other species, making us “human” (as such). It is from and through this space, that encourages respect and acknowledgement, that we can begin to “demystify” and become mindful of the
“things” (or tools) that come to designate the parameters of our subjective existence (16). Introna warns that a failure to look beyond the superficial and recognize the ethical capacity of things, does not only amount to “wastefulness” (sometimes reconstituted as “pollution”) in which everything becomes disposable but also points to “our tendency to ‘fall away’ from our possibilities-to-be, by losing ourselves in the busyness of everyday life” (16). As Butler (2006) reminds us, when drawing upon Sontag, the superficial or merely representational treatment of images conceals the “final narcissism of our desire to understand the other and [enables us] to refuse to see how we might be seen to be, as it were, objects in the scene as well.” While it might be frightening or uncanny, by recognizing the ethical weight, meaning and capacity of things we can be reminded of the tenuousness of our own existence. In addition to this, Introna suggests a form of “mindfulness” as the appropriate means of engaging in an ethos of letting be. “Mindfulness” in this case is reminiscent of Heidegger’s ‘meditative thinking,’ in which the thing-ness of the thing is faced in a poetic turn towards a thinking of the thing as thing (unto-itself.) Where it deviates is that Introna draws connections between his ethos and Levinas’ philosophy of ethics in an effort to conjure the double requirement of both ‘allowing’ the thing to be a thing and also acknowledging the weighty responsibility of all worldly actors in any given moment; “letting be” does not simply mean retracting, drawing away from the world, but instead involves continued engagement along increasingly responsible and “mindful” lines.

There has been no shortage of claims made about the importance of ethics when approaching photography. As the ending section of the first chapter revealed, the photograph’s capacity to facilitate the construction of personal identity, memory, and
meaning located it, almost immediately, as a medium with ethical consequence. While a number of ethically charged parameters have been established around the terms of representation and dissemination, none of these have acknowledge that agentialism of images and have instead attempted to constrain images within “adequate terms.” Not only is this not sufficient in the digital age, where images are easily and unexpectedly reconstituted, but it also limits the image within self-ish, though maybe altruistic, terms according to one or many individual’s conception of what is, in fact, discursively appropriate. Approaching the image in a manner that parallels Introna’s “ethos of letting be” would not only, presumably, incite a respect and mindfulness towards the image as an object unto-itself, but would also deter individuals from re-constituting them in ways that expands their capacity to materialize unexpectedly. While Introna suggests a series of loose parameters around an ethos of “things,” a category often saved for the traditionally “material,” his detailed and convincing argument can easily be transposed onto, or traced within, digital photographs and online photo-sharing practices. While photos continue to provide a window into the realities of the world, as I have argued repeatedly over the course of this thesis, they can no longer be approached as mere representations of these realities and must instead be recognized as agents unto themselves. With this recognition comes a necessary acknowledgement that although digital objects are not necessarily “physical,” they are material with material consequences.

As I suggested at the end of the section on Levinas, images are entities with significant ethical weight, as they exist as relatively autonomous agents while simultaneously providing a means of inter-facing with technology and each other. In this sense, to “let images be” would require one to become mindful and respectful of them and their ethical
impact. While, given Levinas’ claim that ethics exists as first philosophy, or as a mode of being-towards the ‘other’ prior to the articulation of self/other, the ethics of this approach does not exist within a calculative moment of mindfulness or letting be but instead conditions actions prior to consciousness within the moment of affection. This parallels Nancy’s construction of the ethical moment of photography as one that arises, or is presented, within the throws of a transcendental (non) return. Adopting a form of mindfulness or “letting be” as an ethical approach to photography would necessitate that one stop producing, consuming, and (re)constituting photographs without much thought for potential consequences or in an effort to manufacture a particular image of oneself or an-other. The desired consequences of this approach are two-fold.

First, this form of suggested mindfulness encourages individuals to become aware of and consider the many layers and potential consequences of engaging in photographic practices both on and offline. Introna’s ethical propositions suggest that by acknowledging the image as a point of complex convergence, and forcing oneself to imagine its potential trajectories, the “black-box” that in many cases obscures the inner complexity of photo-technologies and photographs, will be disassembled, exposing the discursive and agential tendencies of all images; even the purportedly “neutral” or innocent snapshot would be unveiled as a site of discursive intention and contestation. While this form of awareness is presented as a means of increasingly “ethical” engagement in and of itself, it has also been paired with a necessary outlet for practical engagement. Unlike other practical ethics that have sought to provide a series of determined parameters or rules around what constitutes ethical engagement, an ethos of letting be can only suggest a series of possible tactics for beginning to imagine what would constitute “more ethical” photographic interactions. The
suggestion that individuals forgo the desire to employ images as a means of establishing selective visions of self and other, requires that practices of adding metadata and restructuring images in line within existing systems of knowledge be critiqued, if not minimized. Because each affection of the image re-constitutes and casts it into altered, and often additional, streams of circulation, each of these engagements risks the ethical. Just as theories surrounding the consequence of a gift economy suggest, every decisive act, every “giving of the gift,” from the moment of capture to the decision to tag, comment, or re-constitute, involves a suspension of the ethical; as I have asserted before, regardless of intentions, one is never able to ensure the consequential outcome of these (en)actions. As a result, if ethical engagement is deemed worthwhile and pursued, the desire to control the image, regardless of perceived subject matter, must be repressed.

This proposition has significant consequences for both active human engagement and the ways in which devices and software are (being) programmed to attribute predetermined data automatically. As I outlined in the second chapter, a number of devices have been and are being programmed to allocate metadata without the immediate interference of human actors. While some of these automated processes are rigidly deterministic (such as the attribution of date and time, or arguably the addition of a geotag), others progress “naturally” as they develop through the repeated (human-centered) pairing of particular data (pixel) attributes with certain tags. Although arguably a fairly rudimentary example, Facebook has recently begun employing a feature that displays untagged, personal, images, in the right-hand side-bars and prompts individuals to “tag” the faces in the image; the faces in the image are highlighted by a transparent white box, suggesting that the software “knows” what grouping of pixels is typically tagged when
attributing the name of a corresponding user. The last several generations of Canon’s digital “point-and-shoot” cameras employ a similar form of “intelligence” through an automatic camera option that prompts users to check each photograph by highlighting the faces with a similar transparent box and asking (in text), “did someone blink?”

While I don’t intend to push a fatalistic or pessimistic view of technology, there is something ethically daunting about the relativ(istic) automation of metadata attribution. It is a difficult enough task to critique, resist, counter-act or “control” current outlets for the discursive construction of knowledge and identity. The suggestion that individuals ebb their desire to tag or control images for fear of negatively impacting known and unknown audience is a testament to this; the only way that one can fully control the ethical (or subjugating) weight of their engagement is to disengage. By facilitating or developing a means of automatically ascribing characteristics, categories, subjects or meanings based on data attributes, regardless of how “naturally” it comes into being, we are providing yet another avenue through which discursive and inherently unethical constitutions of knowledge and identity can take place. This may appear like a fairly evident and widespread observation, (the discursive convergence of power and knowledge is always conditioning particular conceptions of or engagements with reality) and yet, in this case, the coding and implementation of these forces at the affective level of software paired with the proficiency of digital recollection (memory) through explicit and relatively permanent tags and the purported ‘uncontrollability’ of digital images makes this avenue for discursive subjection particularly efficient and difficult to resist. This observation suggests the importance of critically considering the ways in which devices and software are designed and what forms of engagement they stimulate. While the employment of the photographic
medium and affections of software have the capacity to engender negative experiences of reality, knowledge and identity, the assertion that they are not fatalistic but instead arise through (co)articulation, convergence and accretion also suggests the capacity to intervene and (re)design an underlying structure that prompts alternate, more ethical, engagement between a broad array of actors.

The intention in this case wouldn’t be to establish definite parameters around what constitutes the ethical or how exactly beings should act in order to maintain an ethical relationship but would instead need to encourage sustained openness and hospitality toward the other. The series of philosophical pursuits that I outlined above, stemming from the works of Levinas, Nancy and Lyotard, provide a good starting place for imagining how this might begin to take shape. The further suggestions regarding mindfulness and selfless release, drawn out in response to Introna’s conception of “letting be,” offer more practical means of (conceptually) approaching the same philosophical trajectory. While an ethos of letting be may provide a means through which to forgo the risks of constraining the other (within negative terms), there are three significant challenges to this approach: the first is philosophical, while the second and third refer directly to the status of contemporary digital photography.

First, the philosophical terms that ground this approach have been criticized for enacting and offering an “ethical aporia.” An ethos of letting be relies upon the possibility of an impossible possibility. It assumes the possibility of a wholly ‘otherwise’ if provided with the opportunity to distance oneself from discursive regimes of power. This necessarily ignores the ways in which a move to exist in an otherwise (outside) in fact reifies the
existence of the (inside) problematic discourses" while also failing to acknowledge the role that purportedly unethical discourses or forms of knowledge play both in engendering a sentiment of “letting be” and the making sense of affections from this perspective.

Second, while becoming attuned to the complexity of the photographic medium and considering consequences of interacting with and through images on and offline is arguably a necessary component of responsible engagement, the push to “let the image be,” or to restrain the addition of metadata tags in an effort to reduce one’s potential impact functions, in a sense, to negate the need for this form of ethical approach. If the image is not paired with metadata that enables it to materialize both strategically and in a relatively unrestrained fashion, then its agential potential diminishes significantly, reducing the need to situate an ethics of the image within the realm of first philosophy; without metadata, the image sharing would arguably revert to ‘old’ practices of emailing, web page hosting, or incidental viewership as a result of being paired with other (largely text based) online data. While all image objects can and should arguably still be approached through an ethos of letting be (Introna’s propositions are after all intended for the realm of ‘objects’.) it is the convenience and prevalence of capturing devices, paired with the networking of these devices, and a series of popular software applications that encourage the addition of metadata, that have transformed this technique into a necessity.

Finally, a cursory review of images that have arguably been “allowed” to exist, and potentially circulate, within the parameters of an ethos of letting be in some ways challenge the merit or value of this approach. While much is being made of the affectivity of software, the pairing of social-feedback methods alongside images, and the increasing

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This is a sentiment that is reminiscent of deconstructionist diference.
employment of images as the desired mode of communication, there has been very little exploration of the increasing visibility of, (what might traditionally have been passed over as,) “failed” (Halberstam 2006) or “merely interesting” (2008) images within digital landscapes (Jackson 2001; Mitchell 1994). Frequently presenting as missed moments, unrecognizable shots, accidental misfires, or images that depict the limits of particular technologies (Lister 2007; Miller 2008), the proliferation of these types of images, easily ignored on hard drives or quickly passed over within online environments, provides an interesting critique of the merits of “letting be.” While some might argue that this type of image reflects the utmost representation of “idle chatter” (Villa 1996), others have reconstituted this form of representational failure as a meaningful political position (Halberstam 2006) that resists hegemonic constructions of vision (Ngai 2008). Although both perspective provides a meaningful way of approaching these images, what I am particularly interested in is the way in which these images might be likened to “letting go;” their representational and communicational impotence has either cast them outside of the realm of (dissemination) share-worthy images, or it has enabled them to go largely without the affections of tagging. While this, in a sense, construes them as ‘ethical images’ of the utmost degree, it is difficult to support a vision of ethics that encourages a form of engagement with minimal to no affective capacity. These images are easily ignored, or passed over, because they are perceived to be inconsequential. While encouraging the other to come into being within their own terms is ethical, an important question arises

*In July 2010, I curated a photo exhibit at Kingston’s The Artel art gallery. The topic of the show was “failed photography.” One month prior to the opening, I sent out a public call for submissions providing only the very broad terms: send me your failed and bad attempts at photography. (There was a byline barring the submission of photographs that serendipitously, through accident, revealed a moment of “beauty.”) While a couple of individuals sent images that reflected an aesthetic similar to art photography of the 1970s that highlighted ‘mundane moments,’ the overwhelming majority of image submissions (I received and sifted through nearly three hundred images) were depictions that appeared to match the aforementioned characteristics outline by Lister (2007) and Miller (2008).
regarding the balance between being ethical and potentially inconsequential and being unethical and potentially impacting the other (positively)\textsuperscript{a}.

This chapter has introduced, mapped out and discussed a number of canonical and novel experiences of photographic ethics. It began by reiterating and outlining a series of instances in which the dissemination and relative “uncontrollability” of digital images have revealed a need to imagine a photographic ethics that extends beyond the controls of representational ethics to encounter and persuade photographic practices within the realm of first philosophy. The chapter then continued to detail a series of canonical photographic ethics, explaining why these would no longer suffice. Following in this trajectory, it then offered a series of alternate means for approaching the image in a fashion that does not provides points of ‘closure’ and subsumption but instead suggested an approach that relies upon \textit{mindfulness} and “\textit{letting be}.” These methods, while presenting certain short-comings or challenges, offer the possibility of beginning to imagine a more effective ethics of digital photography and photo-sharing.

\begin{center}
A FEW CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
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This thesis has mapped out a number of photographic novelties that have been exposed as a result of digitization. By providing a rich discussion of analogue and digital technologies, it has demonstrated that photography, through accretion and convergence, is

\textsuperscript{a} While I have read discussions of suspending the ethical as a result of risk management and “self preservation” (Derrida 2004) or as a result of moralistic obligations, I have not discovered a text that supports forgoing the ethical in favor of living a meaningful and consequential, I’ll be it “risky,” existence. While this line of reasoning extends beyond the stretches of this thesis, what is important here is the perception that the images that in a sense “represent” an ethos of letting be, through their formal qualities and the (in)action that they aspire, are arguably inconsequential, engendering a number of questions regarding the value of interaction or engagement that does not excite a need for affection by saying or doing something that impacts other(s).
more than an image-making method as it is constituted by an ever-shifting constellation of technological, economic, and sociological elements. As I have argued throughout this thesis, digitization, while not obliterating past photographic practices, significantly altered the converging forces and practices through which it was, and is, articulated. With this in mind, and as a significant amount of recent research suggests, it has been necessary to revisit past conceptualizations of the medium in an effort to establish the present state of photography. One of the glaring differences, which has been the central trajectory of this thesis, is the effect that digitization has had on past (and present) conceptualizations of an ethics of photographic representation. By tracing through the affective capacity of software and performative potential of images, I have demonstrated that an ethics of closure, regardless of how ‘hospitable’ it may be, appears inadequate in the digital age; each nodal end opens the image and its audience to numerous potential and unintended visitations, suspending any possibility of a conclusive (and definite) ethics. As a result, I have suggested that we begin thinking of images in light of an ‘ethos of letting be’. While this may be construed as a personal endeavor, and certainly in some ways it is, my intention here is to suggest avenues for moving beyond the individual in an effort employ this ‘ethos’ as a vehicle for change at a structural or affective level. While there are many ways in which to start doing this, I am convinced that this ethical approach holds promising opportunities within the fields of technological and computational design. As I outlined in the past chapter, there are an increasing number of technologies that are being designed and built with the capacity to automatically tag images; while this form of automation might be ‘organizationally’ useful, given the images propensity towards subjugating its viewers, it has a number of potentially negative, and significantly ethical consequences. While it isn’t within
the parameters of this thesis, I believe that this assertion locates a rich area for further research, namely an “ethical” re-design of technology and photo-sharing software.
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