

Zombie Photography: Or, the long afterlife of the analogue image

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Introduction

In this paper I will discuss;

1. How the Internet, as the default medium of dominant communication, challenges the historical cultural authority of the analogue photographic archive in new and fundamental ways;
2. How photography is now constituted by the screen image and why curation has become a strategy for rescuing the photograph as photography from its immanent dissolution by the embedded screen image;
3. Why there is a need to find ways of making the interface of the screen's image visible if we wish to go beyond the simulation of analogue photography, which repositions photography as heritage, rather than memory.

Running across these three positional statements, there is an argument that the challenge to the authority of the photographic archive is part of a larger crisis of representational systems and that the attempt to deal with this crisis through curating the photographic image both online and offline reduces the image's relationship to the present and remove's its past. The challenge is to find ways of engaging with or constructing the interface to the image, (which could be a screen or a gallery), which puts the image under the spotlight and which reveal the assumptions of its' own making. In doing this, the aim would be to create new public spaces of enquiry and contention. Hopefully, through illustration and example I will be able to demonstrate the value and practical utility of the larger argument in framing the practical tasks for those of us who are also custodians, curators, editors and makers of photographic images.

In order to expand upon the opening three positions I need to locate the photographic image, as others have done, notably, Tagg, Sekula and Frosh, as an integral part of the long established system of reproduction. We need to see photography this way because, as Lister and others have argued, photography does not have a singular identity, nor a common purpose. Whilst we are living through a moment where there is a renewed emphasis upon the singularity of photography, either through its insertion into the discourse of art, or the discourse of technology, we should remind ourselves that there are many 'photographies', some of which have been in existence since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century. The apparatuses of photography have been put to work across a diverse range of purposes and interests and with different outcomes and understandings about the resulting 'photographic image'. As I say in Lister 2013,

The place of photography within the general system of representation

and its technical organization in digital transmission and reception continues to present a problem for media theory, since photography is both distinct in fixing the automatic light reflecting latent image, as well as being entailed in the relay of photo-mechanical and photo-electronic processes of reproduction

For this reason photography in culture has historically been analysed in two distinct registers, first as an adjunct to anthropology and literature in producing 'texts' and 'signs', capable of being read semiologically and psycho-analytically; and secondly as an adjunct to sociology, as a technology producing a medium of popular ritual and record.

Whilst this is somewhat of a reduction, since photography also crosses the interests of science, art history, cultural studies and philosophy, the problem of the photograph as a sign/text and as medium/technology and how to grasp these objects and relations and assess their significance within human communication remains. The recent technological entailment of the automatic latent image in computing and the proliferation of the digital image once more brings photography to attention as a contrary object of both singular distinction and general diffusion. With computing the digital image makes photography ubiquitous and more clearly automated and it is this that presents new questions of photography's authorship and cultural authority for those for whom its singularity remains a central principle. (p. 95-96. Lister. 2013)

The problem then for photography, is not wholly of its own making, nor simply a product of changing technological apparatuses. The problem for photography, as it is for many other systemic forms of cultural coding and registration, is inescapably part of a much larger and more complex change in systems of thought and systems of representation. We are living through a reorganization and rerouting of fundamental system of human organization established over the course of the European Enlightenment. In this process the reproduction of knowledge, technological forms of communication and social democratic politics face new challenges from a disaggregated public, made up of the hyper-individual consumer. I don't want to deflect the specific interest in questions of visibility into the murky territories of cultural and political theory for longer than I have to, but it seems to me that unless we locate what interests us about photography in a wider context of the production of culture, we will not understand the scale of the 'crash' which is both an apt title for this conference, but also a good description of the current condition of photography. Photography here can be seen as a crash of the analogue and digital; a pile-up of multiple image technologies and photographic identities; and a head on collision between heritage and the contemporary. In these various versions of a photographic crash which can be spun from the title of the conference, photography is not quite dead, it refuses to die and we are left with the troubling thought that we are dealing with 'Zombie Photography' or the long afterlife of photographic image. How did it come to this?

Prologue: Crisis of Representation

Firstly let me say that talking in terms of a crisis of modern culture is not new, in fact it has been a critical intellectual narrative of one kind or another almost continually since the 1940s, as evidenced first in the work of the Frankfurt School intellectuals, Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer, who were generally pessimistic about the trivializing and debasing effects of the capitalist mode of mass production, mass media and mass society. Television and advertising were singled out in the 1950s and 1960s as the cultural expression of the dominant mode of capitalist commodity relations, but it was also the response to mass media in the development of Cultural Studies, which gave an optimistic account of media in everyday life. Whilst the first part of the twentieth century was dominated by the press and cinema, it was the opening up and success of commercial television which could be seen as both reflecting as well as celebrating on a mass scale the values of commodities, life styles and identities. Photography was of course entailed across the entire spectrum of what is now acknowledged as the flawed term of 'mass media'. Indeed the modern photographic industry and its specialist divisions of production along with its differential markets was precisely a product and part of mass media. Across the second half of the 20th C. the demand for analogue photographic print imagery expanded in newspapers, magazines advertising and publicity in general, alongside the continued expansion of domestic snapshot and amateur photographs. And within all of this activity photography was practiced paradoxically as a medium of record and document, memento and ritual, fact and fiction with little reflection upon the apparent contradictions in what photography represented and how it was used. As well as being entailed in mass reproduction, it was possible, given the relatively independent means of production, for photography to develop critical independence over this period. It was this independence of photography, which made it possible for a critical photographic practice to exist in the form of various documentary movements. The historic canon of photography, that which is being admitted into the museum and gallery is largely constituted from such practices.

However, it was the intellectual moment of post-structuralism and more stridently post-modernism that alighted upon and started to reveal the larger crisis of which photography was part. There are many intellectual contributions to the understanding of the condition of post modernity and it would take us too long here to work through the arguments. The postmodernism was fond of pointing to the growing list of 'modernist' failures undertaken under the banner of 'progress', 'history' and 'destiny', such as the rise of Fascism, the Holocaust, Stalinism, the Vietnam War, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, the pandemic of AIDs and more recently Global warming. Time's progressive forward march under the banner of rationality, science and technology was fundamentally questioned, if not rejected entirely. For our purposes Jean Baudrillard exemplifies the 'crash' of the system of representation in very stark terms. Writing as early as 1987, in an essay entitled 'The Ecstasy of Communication', Baudrillard wrote;

Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the "proteinic" era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean era of connection, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication."

Baudrillard goes on:

If one thinks about it, people no longer project themselves into their objects, with their effects and their representations, their fantasies of possession, loss mourning, jealousy: the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished. (Foster. 1983. p126)

According to Baudrillard and others, the world of the object and subject has collapsed and the distinction has been rendered now as illusion. Instead we are living the era of simulacra. Throughout the 20th Century photography depended upon this distinction between subject and object, outer and inner world and in return photography guaranteed the continued stability of the order of reality given by the distinction. Without an invested world of meaning, structured through continuous time and identity the photograph has no meaning, and instead is projected straight into the world as image, without mediation. The photographic image becomes both 'other worldly' and mundane.

More generally the 'crash' of the conference title, or the implosion and crisis of representation so widely reported in the post-structuralist and postmodern period from the 1980s, argued that much more than photographic meaning was coming apart. The argument in summary was that the very systems of thought and their reproduction, organization and authority, vested in the cultural and political institutions was coming apart. Over the last twenty five years I would argue the postmodern vision is uncannily prescient about how the world has changed.

The Argument, Part One: How the Internet challenges the cultural authority of the photographic archive and their institutions.

Bringing the argument back to photography there is also a long line of established intellectual thinking, rooted in medium specificity, which argues that ways of seeing and the organization of visuality changes with technical development. Without being able to discuss this in detail we can do no more than list the role call of Benjamin, McLuhan, Berger, Williams, Manovich, Mitchell, Mirzoeff and Lovejoy who have all shown how the established paradigm of representation based upon a model of a reflected reality, has been radically challenged by economic and technological change, In my writing of 2013 I summarized the position for photography in network cultures in the following way:

The photograph in computing has become mutable, fugitive, fleeting and restless. In its boundless quantities it is repetitive and replaceable. But what is still taken to be the photographic image on the computer screen has also become an emanation of light, an intensity. It is more of an 'image-potential' than a fixed image through variable scalability of all its visual parameters. The photographic image on high-resolution LED screens are filled with brilliance and brimming with detail. (Lister 2013. p101)

In arguing that the photographic image in digital culture is essentially a flow, a

torrent of image replacements on screens I went on to ask:

*How, in network culture, in the emerging economy of the image, in the new spaces of image circulation, is the historically defined idea of the photograph to be regarded? The visual images and animated graphics encountered on screens are no longer met in isolation, in print, books frames and albums. Indeed the torrent of digital images produced by computers will only exist as files, retrieved on screen through the intermediary of software. The screen image that appears on palmtop, laptop and desktop computers come through a graphic interface as an embedded file; the image will typically be surrounded by text and graphics, which set out the procedures by which the file can be manipulated, filed, tagged and transferred. Images can be viewed, resized, edited and deleted instantly at any stage in their screen life. The swipe, tap and pinch of the mobile and tablet touch screens allow images to be scrolled, enlarged and reduced. They can be arranged in countless albums, become searchable through the addition of tags, copied, displayed and published. In short, images are accessed, viewed, shared, altered and stored online within a seamless and interactive flow. Hand (2012:1) usefully points out that digital imaging has shifted from a professional or specialized process to a routine and unavoidable aspect of everyday life. At the same time, he points out that what was once amateur or snapshot photography has become potentially global in scope. 'Where many once imagined a future of digital simulation and virtual reality we now, arguably have the opposite: the visual publicization of ordinary life in a ubiquitous photoscape'.
Lister 2013.p.101)*

I was making the argument that one way of seeing the computer generated image in cultural and social terms was to explore the idea that photography is allied not with film as it was with analogue technology, but with the first electronic medium – television.

The replacement of the cathode-ray tube by the high-definition flat screen radically changed the resolution and aesthetic of the television image and quickened the convergence of television and computing, in which computing is now remediating television, parallel to the remediation of photography. This is what gives ground for positing the technical convergence of the photographic and television image as electrical transmissions made manifest on light emitting diode displays (LED screens), since they now share the same technology of digital capture and screen transmission.

In a remarkably short period of time public and private life in advanced industrial societies has come to involve screen interactions as unremarkable acts in everyday life and it is this proliferation of screens together with advances in the resolution of the image and network connectivity which gives ground for considering the cultural remediation of the photographic image by the cultural form of television.

How does viewing digital images on screens change ideas about and relationships to the photograph? Here there is abundant evidence that in everyday life, rapidly advancing screen technologies have already altered the ways in which the visual image is made present and how new forms of interaction are entailed. Secondly, and less obviously, how does the presence of screens in museums and galleries change, or challenge the collection and exhibition of images?

The very ubiquity and hybridity of the digital screen image would seem to present obstacles to established forms of cultural authority based upon collection and the discourse of aesthetic modernism. These two lines of enquiry; the presence of more screens in everyday life upon which more images circulate, and; the presence of screens in spaces of the public realm, previously reserved for viewing highly selective analogue images, are inescapably connected through the network to previous modes and behaviours of viewing photographs and watching television. One way to understand this connection is to say that the particular historical forms of authority and knowledge embedded in cultural institutions, which have previously selected, curated, collected, conserved and interpreted objects of visual culture under the system of aesthetic modernism¹ is now overwhelmed by what has been termed ‘image capitalism’, in which, ‘Images have become a constitutive dimension of the capitalist forces reshaping our affective world. They are, therefore, no longer merely an automatic, replicative reflection of the real world’, (Mbembe 2011).

Something more dramatic and less easily identifiable than technical remediation is therefore happening in the ways in which cultural authority on the one hand, and social utility and ritual, on the other, is circulating in what is still taken to be the photographic and televisual image. “That which was previously registered as private life in the photograph has dissolved into the temporal flow of images that ‘act’ in the giant spaces of network circulation, and, what was previously made public in broadcast television has merged with what was private space but is now the spaces of personalized consumption”. (Baudrillard 1985:127). Up until this moment the ontology of photography, largely taken to be discrete and technical, has been a guarantor of the coherence of the individual subject, whilst the ontology of television has been a guarantor of the existence of public space. It is the distinction between public and private, interior and exterior held in place by the general representational system, which is now in a crisis produced by networked behaviours, globalized modes of production and transcultural subjects. What Williams (1974:p26) defined as the new subject position of ‘mobile privatization’, which corresponded to the needs of post-war industrial capitalism and expressed through domestic television, might now also be considered to be reforming. Whilst the social location of the reception of media remains for the large part the domestic home, private space has itself been mobilized metaphorically and materially by the ‘spaceless’ and ‘timeless’ exchanges of the Internet (Castells 2010:p430).

To sum up this part of the argument we can say that firstly, the analogue photograph, and the world to which it belonged along with the world it showed us, its apparatuses and institutions which reproduced photography relation to and separation from other media have disappeared. And with that disappearance of the material and social organization of photographic production, its cultural authority, vested in the accumulated knowledge of its practices is now threatened with redundancy or obsolescence. Secondly it has been argued that the new photography, or non photography, (we need a new terms for it) the computation image, is the cultural default of visuality which establishes new relations to subjectivity on the one hand and what is constituted as external on the other.

A more concrete way of seeing the lines of photographic flight is to look at our attempts by the cultural institutions of photography to bring this new situation under control, both in terms of continuities of practices as well as emergent ones.

The Argument, Part Two: Curating the photograph as heritage and identity

If such a state of affairs as I've described were to be granted then it brings about the need to reconsider the already uncertain place of 'the photographic image in digital culture', or, within the narrower confines of intellectual interest here, to appraise what the digital image is doing to certain kinds of consecrated photographic cultures. The passage of time along which the more singular idea of digital culture has travelled has itself been overwhelmed by the very practices it originally called forth, such that now there is a multiplicity and reduplication of image-knowledge hybrids, which confound attempts to maintain linear historical accounts and singular objects.

The tension between the dispersal of the practices of photography into general computing and the increasing aggregation of analogue photography in archives, collection, exhibition and their organisational systems, represents a new moment of an older problem of the identity of photography. The advent of large and small scale high definition flat screens in fixed and mobile combinations, together with increased digital file sizes, greater storage capacity, transmission speeds and networked databases, now brings the screen and image, in what have been their dominant forms – television and photography - into a new embrace. Taken together the proliferation of images, screens and the network, represents a new moment of accelerated convergence which is not only evident in commercial products and new forms of media distribution, but is becoming visible in the educational and public arts sector, through independent digital media organisations and projects exploring the curation of images in the network.

There is an acknowledged anxiety about how public museums and galleries relate to networked culture. In general the World Wide Web, by its networked and distributed nature, has challenged the analogue socio-technical systems of representation that developed over the twentieth century. Public museums, public service television, photo-journalism and archival record continue to perform representational roles in selecting and framing those aspects of the natural world and human affairs considered worthy of record and expression. The light formed image remains centrally entailed in representational performances and hence what is happening to the photographic image in network culture, serves as a prime

example of accelerated technological convergence and its reconfiguring relationships of cultural knowledge and authority. Networked behaviours, of both data and human users, circumvent and challenge representational hierarchies established by analogue media and this is as much the case for museum collection and display as it is for journalism, record or entertainment. The problem is that two discourses, that of the art museum and digital technology and that of media and digital technology have, by and large, remained separate. If museums, galleries and more generally public cultural institutions wish to maintain their claim to be public and representational, through collection, exhibition, education and curation, then, as the argument goes, they will have find ways of engaging with network culture because as a remediation of analogue cultural forms it prefigures who the new public are, what they are doing and how they are behaving. What is coming into view, and promises to shed light upon the photographic image in this accelerated moment of convergence is that the cultural form and responses to television can no longer be separated from viewing the screen image.

The Google Cultural Institute, is a good example of the crisis of cultural authority of the photograph. It is a useful example because it involves established collections, curation, technological tools and the screen. Hopefully we will be able to see that far from confronting the new situation of the screen's image, it actually conceals more than it reveals. The Art Newspaper of December 2013, reported the opening as follows;

The Google Cultural Institute, which was launched in Paris on 10 December, aims to bring art and technology under one roof. The institute, which is housed at the internet giant's Paris headquarters, is open to students, artists, curators and other art professionals and will host exhibitions, debates and conferences. A workshop space featuring a 3D camera, printer and giant interactive screen is available for artists to create digital works. The institute is due to establish a residency for young artists, though Google would not confirm when this will happen.

The Google Cultural Institute's view of art and technology can be seen in an interview with the founder and director Amit Sood for LabKultur: Sood said:

The Cultural Institute is a not-for-profit part of Google. There is no commercialisation and no monetisation. Culture represents the longest lasting and most persistent kind of information across the world. Efforts to expand cultural reach align incredibly well with Google's mission to organise and provide access to the world's information. Our aim is simply to make cultural information more accessible online and to preserve it for the future.

Sood went on to say;

There will never be a substitute for seeing a work of art or a cultural treasure in person. However, viewing something online allows you to

experience it in a way that may not be possible in the physical world. Simply the act of zooming to brushstroke level in a painting allows you to discover new details, find hidden scenes and appreciate styles.

In order to understand culture you first need to be able to experience it. Some people are lucky enough to visit a museum and see a work of art in person but not everyone can travel the world and see different cultures and culture. Quite simply, the internet can help to export local culture to a global audience, allowing anyone that has an internet connection to explore a heritage site or virtually jump inside a gallery as if they were there.

For Sood, the value of culture and its objects is given by the status accorded to object of collection and collecting institutions. He has no interest in questioning established culture, why would he as a computer programmer, who sees the power of the internet as primarily a channel of export and a set of tools. Let me rehearse, very briefly some of the problems for photography exhibited by Google.

Firstly there is the transparency of the interface, in which digitization treats a photograph like any other visual digitization. Because visual digitization uses the same optical lens system as photography, it renders the photograph as photography either as a screen insert, or as a digitization of an object. In the former case of the screen insert, the photograph becomes a digital image with the exact equivalence of all other screen images, i.e. the photograph loses its specificity, and in the second instance of being photographed as object, the photograph loses its power to frame space objects and events. Both technical strategies involve a loss of definition and specificity of the conventions within which photography operated.

The result of these technical strategies is that the later transforms the photograph into a historic object and in collection terms renders the photograph as heritage rather than continuous with contemporary visualities, whilst the first strategy asks us to see the photograph as visual informatics. I say technical strategies because that is what they are in term of the visual optics and algorithms of digitization and screen interfaces. But they are also cultural strategies in their screen display, or exhibition and of course curation.

The problems just noted of the transformation of analogue materiality now rendered in computational materiality is compounded by the optics of the visual configuration of virtual space itself. With the Google camera the screen's representation image is constructed using the same optical registration as photography. What are we looking at when see the rendering of the 3D space of the gallery and control our angle and position of view in front of a virtual photographic object? At what point were we not looking at photographically generated image and what distinction do we draw, other than a cultural conventional one derived from theatre, television or more accurately computer animation? Whilst we are all able to navigate the space and suspend judgment on its artifice, can we negotiate the translation of the photographic into animatics? I think not and if we did then we would have to say we are not looking at a photography, nor gallery space.

The Google Art Project has been applauded for the development of the zoom tool, in which images are scanned at very high resolution in order that the image can be magnified without obvious pixellation. In the case of the painting the viewer can 'get closer' to the surface or the painting and thus see more, or see how brush strokes are applied. But what does the zoom tool do for the photograph. Again we can get closer in order to see more detail, but it reveals nothing of the photographs construction other than pixels simulation the grain of the analogue image. The zoom tool is novel to use and extends our vision as a proxy of the relationship between the object and eye, but it also fixes and limits that relationship on the basis of a strict algorithm.

The zoom tool, the virtual space and the curation formats essentially mimic the special and scopic logic of the museum and the conventions of exhibition, which is culturally conventional, but essentially a limited computational image strategy. What the Google Cultural Institute does is reproduce the limits of representation and can only invite us to 'pretend' that we are still in the continuous world of representation. In doing so it turns photography into heritage and ignores the new reality or materiality of the image on screen.

The Argument, Part Three: The representation of representation, the problem of the Interface

So finally and briefly there is a need to make the values inherent in the tools, their scopic vision visible to the user if we are to begin to see and understand what we are invited to 'see' to 'know' on the computer screen.

The Google Cultural Institute shows us the obvious flaws in taking culture as a given and the interface as a transparent channel. Perhaps it was too easy a target, but it is salient in pointing up the problem of one of the predominant ways in which the relationship between art and technology, or photography and technology for that matter has been seen. To regard the technology as simple the channel or the tools, is to miss the point that network interfaces are deeply valued coded as well as mathematically coded.

In 'The order of Things' Foucault begins the book with a short essay on Velazquez's famous painting in the Prado museum, Las Meninas. The essay stands as an emblem for the book as a whole because it allows Foucault to describe in a single image, the much more abstract problem of knowledge and representation the book addresses. In the conclusion to the essay he says of the painting;

Perhaps there exists in this painting by Velazquez, the representation as it were of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us. And indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly

from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – which is the same – has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form. (Foucault)

The Order of Things was first published in the mid 1960s, when the Internet was in its scientific infancy. In the light of all that has followed we might be too jaded or relativist to talk of a pure form of anything, but I believe Foucault's understanding of the limits of representation remain highly relevant and that his essay on Las Meninas points to a way in which we might think the problem of computational representation. For just as Velasquez's painting is an attempt to reveal the logic of painting, so to do we need interfaces which make their own logic visible and networks of circulation which reveal the agency of networks.

The digital image circulating as information in networked databases and present in screen transmission is now the central default of reproduction and it is this function, which guarantees the exclusion of the networked image from the art museum. Reproduction cannot be embraced by art because it is precisely that which undoes the prevailing logic of art and museums which are in large part committed to the preservation of art and their collections, both public and private. To admit the network would entail the high risk of setting in play, not simply a reversal of the polarities of the knowledge production of and about art, which would be risk enough, but the obliteration of the paradigm itself and a tearing up of the rule book. The network challenges the notion that the creation of art is carried out necessarily by a singular vision intended for a singular viewer who is the sole locus of intended meaning. (Woods 1998)

Writing on the socio-technical organization of photography from the 1870s Tagg saw the contradictory division of photography into a domain of artistic property and that of the scientific and technical where, 'what we begin to see is the emergence of a modern photographic economy in which the so-called medium of photography has no meaning outside its historical specifications'. (1999:246). Such contradictory divisions within the 'medium' of photography are the source of the anxieties around the dispersal of historical practices into general computing which is played out within a number of institutional communities of interest. Museums, contemporary art galleries, academia and public funding for the arts in Europe, North America and Australia are in the process of acknowledging the cultural significance of media to a greater extent. But there are questions to be asked about this contradictory moment in which a selective canon of photography and its historical archives are fully and finally included in the artistic legacy of twentieth century aesthetic modernism and acknowledged as a medium of contemporary art, whilst photography as analogue media's mode of reproduction is finally dissolved into computing. At the risk of oversimplification the situation appears to follow Benjamin's insight that the change in the technical mode of reproduction changes the function of art, and it can now be added that the objects of the mechanical mode of reproduction are being repurposed in the mode of acceptance of the aesthetics of photography. If something like this is taking place then it presents the existing organization of the production of art, centred on its

exhibition and exchange value with a major challenge. One of the most pronounced signs of confusion and resistance to these changes in major cultural organizations has been their reluctance to practically conceptualise the aesthetic of the Internet, based upon digital code and its visual manifestation on screens.

The established and normative notion of spectatorship entailed in aesthetic modernism, based upon the idea of a singular and exceptional transaction between two foundational subjects in the encounter with the work of art, is unsustainable in the face of new subjectivities engendered by the screen interface. Whilst the relationship between a media object and a viewing subject has been previously understood to be constructed on both sides, with the possibilities for counter readings of object and subject, as in feminist and query cinema theory, or post-colonial critiques of spectatorship, (Rogoff 2000:10) such analysis always returned to the question of meaning in the object or the identity of the subject.

What has been called here the embrace of photography and television is based in a nexus of socio-technical developments of the screen, mobile communication and network behaviours, which has created an image economy and a screen based culture. That economy involves conditions of production and modes of consumption in which the uploading and circulation of countless billions of images derived from multiple sources of differing orders and provenance have currency. Broadcast television has been centralised public transmission organised along national lines with private and domestic forms of reception, whilst photography has historically had both public and private forms of circulation and reception. The remediation of both television and photography in computing and their convergence in the networked screen image calls forth new conditions of reception, new subject positions, which need to be understood. The transaction between viewer (user) and image (computing) is continuous with older representational codes, which the new conditions of production and circulation, challenge, whilst the new transactions remain to be understood. The foundational subject and her/his gaze is at the heart of what the screen and network is busily undoing, creating a highly populated, yet unnamed space of viewing and being viewed.

The paradox produced by the circulation of what stubbornly refuses to be anything other than the photographic image in digital culture is that whilst the screen transmission produces something other than a photograph, its precise effect in everyday life is to make the photographic image more present and saturating. The history and contemporary practices of photography currently being elevated by and admitted to national and international museums and galleries, is not photography as reproduction, nor the networked image, but an abstraction of the analogue and its historical archive. It is photography as heritage, in which the contemporary moment is eclipsed.

What needs understanding in this curious state of affairs is that not only has the old order of analogue technologies been radically replaced but that those who cleave to its image, can only do so as heritage because the paradigm of representation which sustained the analogue photograph's embodiment of the real, has been made redundant. What is now at stake is the struggle for a new paradigm,

a new epistemology which would account for the strange new world of computer systems in terms which are meaningful to the world of social relations, enmeshed with and admitting the computational means of reproduction. In this endeavour those attempting to 'curate the networked image' are leading the way, whilst those admitting the analogue media archive to the canon of modernist art are engaged in nostalgia.

Footnote

¹ Aesthetic Modernism is used throughout as a shorthand for the system of thought generated from the enlightenment, which placed the human at the centre of all meaning, created the distinction between rational science and nature, and led to the foundational subject of the modern artist. The implied critique of aesthetic modernism stems from Latour's account in 'We Were Never Modern'.

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