**Who told you that you were Analogue? History becoming process control.**

Adam Brown, 2017

*Saint Teresa could be photographed having been*

*dressed like a lady and then they taking out her head*

*changed it to a nun and a nun a saint and a saint so.*

Gertrude Stein, from the libretto for *Four Saints in Three Acts,* 1927-8.

Before breakfast, my social media newsfeed drew my attention to two features on the wet collodion process: one article about lumen prints; two articles about World Cyanotype Day; and a video about Daguerrotypes. Somewhere, an algorithm is channelling digital representations of early photographic techniques towards me.

Welcome to the future.

In the past, analogue technologies were consigned to the past – now they appear to have a glorious future. In a culture in which the dominant literary form is the *pitch*, history itself is recruited to the grand narrative of ever-developing process control in the service of economic gain. From within this culture, it seems ever increasingly necessary to claim that something was either *there* (1) or *not-there* (0), or an event either *did* or *didn’t happen*, in the same way as one uses statistics to convince a potential ally or investor of the inevitability (1) of a desired outcome. Monsters are inevitably created.

Considering the current resurgence of interest in analogue technologies, it could be claimed that obsolescence was once a real *thing* and definitely happened at some point. In order for the analogue revival to have any cultural traction at all, *this must have been the case, once*. But obsolescence isn’t what it used to be. In the networked revival of the analogue, what surges through myriad cultural forms is now a kind of *zombie obsolescence* - kept eternally alive by the virus of mythology in order for fetishized technologies to retain that precious patina which keeps the moment of discovery fresh, edgy and attractive for each new consumer. Though it is still possible to deceive oneself that one’s choices run counter to the mainstream, in a networked market enhanced by the power to target individual consumers through algorithmic advertising, such resistance is anticipated and encouraged.

Now that function follows form, any choice of tool is assuredly rhetorical. If I choose to shoot with a DSLR, I am making a different kind of cultural statement than if I drag my old Olympus out of the back of the cupboard and slam in a roll of 35mm film. However, it would be a misunderstanding of the realities of networked societies to lament the perversion of function by spectacle, like a box-bedroom Debord: spectacle is now more functional than function, and what was considered to be ‘ornament’ is now weaponised, drafted into the service of collective advancement, so the story goes. By choosing to make images a certain way *because of how it makes me appear* I am engaging in economically productive activity (applause!) and thereby directly performing a key social good which leads to the production of realities: something happens (1) which would not happen (0) if I had not so engaged. Operations of style, history, rhetoric, which I thought were improperly grafted on to my poor ‘function,’ are now functional, ultimately reducing utility to frivolity, a dalliance with creativity. Utility is subsumed by its representation, thereby accelerating the functionality of the network which serves the cultural priorities of the society that created it. Everything folds into everything else.

Anyway, analogue technology is not *opposed* to the digital and it never was: the two are only separable because of language and culture. If I argue that the voltage that represents a ‘yes’ in digital systems - 5V or thereabouts – is so *because people agree that it is,* and are busy constructing an entire social structure around a particular binary (which in this case is properly binary) then for some I would be putting the cart before the horse. However, one of the more interesting perspectives given to the world by Bruno Latour is that conceivably, the social and the natural co-create each other, given the existence of a structure and set of practices, beliefs and linguistic forms which divide one from the other. In between the ‘analogue’ and the ‘digital’ exist all sorts of odd hybrids of ‘old’ and ‘new,’ form and function. Analogue puritanism was never the point of analogue systems when they were the only tech in town, though technological fetishism was definitely cool, even then: in the 80s, people used to run round abandoned factories with Super 8 cameras in order to give two fingers to those who argued over whether Betamax would kill VHS. Maybe what some consumers are really nostalgic for is the rhetoric and the taking of positions – otherwise known as politics, which itself is also now on its way to being automated. Maybe it was never about the kit after all. Latour is, after all, a producer of *texts –* chunks of which turn up in my social media newsfeed, algorithmically, before breakfast.

At a previous moment of upheaval in the technologies of collective consciousness, Gertrude Stein felt the need to reassert priorities. Commissioned by Steiglitz to contribute to a special 1912 edition of the journal *Camera Work,* she produced two prose portraits, one each of Picasso and Matisse. The commission and inclusion of prose in a forum devoted to images served to make it absolutely clear to the reader that despite appearances to the contrary, the image and the photograph are not the same thing. Try as one might to identify the *image* with a physical state of a given carrier medium – page, print, projection, canvas, hologram- the image is not an object but an effect, event or performance - something one *does*. If anything, the physicality of image media is like that of musical notation, or a script – it is what you do with it that counts. Christopher Small coined the term ‘musicking’ in reaction to tendencies to treat music as if it were a category of object: ‘there is no such thing as music. Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing ‘music’ is an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.’ (Small, 1998) The same principle applies to photography. Improvise.

**References:**

Latour, Bruno. (1991) *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Small, Christopher. (1998) *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middletown CT, Wesleyan University Press.