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# PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY, MOBILE MEDIA, AND POSTMODERNITY: ANALYZING SPACE, TIME, AND THE VISUAL CULTURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Kevin J. Reardon

University of Rhode Island, [kevin.j.reardon@gmail.com](mailto:kevin.j.reardon@gmail.com)

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PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY, MOBILE MEDIA, AND  
POSTMODERNITY: ANALYZING SPACE, TIME, AND  
THE VISUAL CULTURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING  
SITES

BY

KEVIN J. REARDON

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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2012

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS  
OF  
KEVIN J. REARDON

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee:

Major Professor      Dr. Ian Reyes Ph. D.

Dr. Thomas Zorabedian Ph. D.

Dr. Sandra Ketrow Ph.D.

Nasser H. Zawia  
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND  
2012

## **ABSTRACT**

Contemporary society is overwhelmed with images. Personal photography has in recent decades gone through a considerable change in terms of practice and technology. Traditional forms of production, dissemination and presentation are being uprooted and replaced by new ones. One cause for this change is the emergence of new technologies such as Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) and Social Network Sites (SNS). These technologies are collapsing the traditional temporal and spatial aspects of personal photography. These current technologies and practices have a distinct relationship with postmodernity. This research is interested in the epistemological implications of these changes. This research utilized a critical and historical examination of photography theory and photography history. I have used Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation as a lens to elucidate how these practices, while changing, are still perpetuating the same epistemological reality that traditional mass media has since its inception.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a society that is saturated in images. Personal photographs, or snapshots, have always been a part of everyday life for decades now, but the practice of personal photography is different than it used to be. This change in practice has occurred for multiple reasons. One reason for this change is new forms of technology have emerged in the last two decades. Others are cultural, political and social in nature. These changes have enabled new communication practices. The way society listens to music, and the way people entertain themselves are a couple of examples. These communication technologies should be followed closely not merely for documentation sake, but also in order to examine what impact these technologies have on society and vice versa.

The two particular forms of technology that this paper will be examining are Social Network Sites (SNS) and Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS). This paper is going to explore how these two technologies work in conjunction with the personal photograph as a communication medium. Culture and technology have a long and intertwined history. Technology is not developed in a vacuum. It has been known among academics that technology is a socially constructed artifact that influences different cultural practices (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). This research will follow that framework by attempting to establish certain historical moments that have had a major influence on the practice of photography. It will also show how these technologies enable broader cultural changes. Often these changes then spur new forms of

technology, this creates an interesting cycle. These technologies also influence our understanding of knowledge as well as the cultural concept of knowledge itself. This relationship between knowledge, culture and technology is what this research is interested in.

This research is also going to explore how these two technologies fit within our society's current state of postmodernity. Postmodernity in this instance refers to the era that comes after modernity. Modernity as an era was noted for its use of science and technology as tools to find absolute truths. Postmodernity characteristically is an era where discerning specific truths is understood to be a difficult if not impossible task. This paper will focus on the larger epistemological implications of a new type of digital image culture that is both enabled and perpetuated by MMS and SNS. This research will be addressed through the lens of personal photography. The technical and cultural aspects of personal photography's history will be addressed. This analysis will include accounts of early technologies such as cameras, film and more recent technological advancements such as digitization. It will also focus on the cultural aspects that include practices of production, reproduction and display.

The theoretical lens of Jean Baudrillard's simulation will be applied to these technologies and their photography based uses. In particular the way that Baudrillard's theory approaches the phenomenon of representation. The reason that Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation has been chosen for this research is that his theoretical focus on larger societal shifts. Baudrillard applies his theory to broad historical changes and views interactions between culture and technology. This



historical perspective fits nicely with the aim of this paper which is to track how both MMS and SNS fit within the larger historical context of photographic visual culture.

Baudrillard posed that the traditional model of images as representations of a true “real” is no longer valid. This will be addressed in detail in the next chapter, what this “real” designates is a historical understanding that there is a truth that existed in the world. During modernity it was understood that truth could be represented through a visual representation. The belief in this difference between image, or representation and truth has until recently informed our society’s relationship to knowledge. A new model that posits that the image and the “real” are one in the same has supplanted the modernist model of representation. This change did not happen at one particular moment but over a period of time that spans multiple historical eras. This change will be addressed in depth in chapter two. This research will be focusing on how MMS and SNS enable larger amounts of personal images to enter circulation by altering the spatial and temporal nature of the practice of personal photography. Beyond simulation, I will explore other related theoretical aspects of Baudrillard’s work, including concepts about real time and events versus nonevents.

Certain limitations for this research are necessary. This researcher is only concerned with *personal* photography. Personal photography refers to photographs taken by a private citizen, their friends, peers, or family. These photographs can include candid photographs of people and objects as well as landscape photographs. This research excludes photographs shot by professional photographers for commercial purposes. This study will also exclude other types of non-commercial photographs that would not fit within traditional personal photography. This exclusion

includes but is not limited to photographs intended for display as fine art or images taken and photographs used for private, commercial or government documentation, such as documenting a plot of land. To this extent, personal photography is considered to be based on the photographer and not the photographed subject (Chalfen, 1980).

Secondly, this research attempts to understand a complex practice that involves a particular relationship between technology and culture. Certain limitations arise, however, because the study explores only one side of the global digital divide (Norris, 2001). This paper will not be addressing the parts of the world and cultures that do not have physical, cultural or socioeconomic access to the internet and the technologies that provide access to the internet. Unfortunately this research will leave a large percentage of the world from the conversation. This was not done intentionally, but the questions that are being asked here are about societies that have access to technology. If a culture does not have access to a technology, then it would be very difficult to understand how that technology affects that culture from that culture's perspective. Cultural understandings of the practice of photography also vary. This research approaches this phenomenon from a distinctively Western cultural viewpoint. This is important because the conceptions of knowledge that are addressed within this paper are particularly western. If certain portions of the population do not have access to these technologies, they do not have access to the knowledge-creation practices that most of contemporary industrialized societies have access to.

This paper first addresses, in chapter two, the epistemological implications of photography and how personal photography's development has coincided with Baudrillard's simulation. Chapter two focuses on certain events in the history of

photography and how these events enabled changes in the epistemological functions of personal photography. The third chapter examines the temporal aspects of personal photography and how MMS as a technology alters those aspects. This chapter also focuses on the rapid dissemination of information and the Baudrillard's idea of real time. Chapter three also examines what he calls the non-event. The fourth chapter discusses SNSs and their relationship to space seen through a Baudrillardian lens. This paper concludes with a chapter that focuses on both theoretical and practical implications of this research. The conclusion asks the following questions: Are these technologies promoting a more democratic personal image based epistemology? Does this new democratic existence actually alter traditional dominant ideologies? This paper will answer those questions and show that these new technologies and practices maintain the status quo.

## CHAPTER 2

### PHOTOGRAPHY, REPRESENTATION AND SIMULATION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is going to discuss photography and its epistemological role in society. Studying photography is not a new endeavor, however, this research intends to examine personal photography, as it exists during postmodernity. This shift from modernity to postmodernity will be examined by tracing the historical origins of the practice of photography. It will look at the scientific origins of the camera and how they have impacted a cultural understanding of the practice of photography, as well as how photography has changed recently from a practice of representation to one of simulation. The particular aspect of postmodernity that this paper will look at is Jean Baudrillard's understanding of simulation. First, I will examine the relationship between modernity and technological visual representation.

#### **Modernity and Representation**

Photography is a child of modernity. It was invented in a historical era during which people became entranced by the idea that knowledge could be gained through practices of perception (Snyder & Allen, 1975). This epistemological understanding impacted the technologies that were created during the era of modernity, and the social practices that accompanied them. Because of its early relationship with science the camera was viewed by its inventors and the public as a device that could create an accurate image of the world through technical means. This scientific history will be

flushed out later in this chapter but it is important to understand the modernist assumption that a “real” can truly exist and can be perceived by the human senses. Modernity created photography as a tool that could capture that truth, or an unspoiled “real.”

The fact that photography and the camera were linked to representation is important. Representation, knowledge, truth and meaning have been linked for thousands of years. One early example is Plato’s allegory of the cave (Plato & Bloom, 1999). Plato attempted to demarcate the relationship between truth and representation by explaining that there are representations of reality, but they are not reality. Plato pointed out that these two entities are separate and a representation was a tool that attempted to capture the “real.”

An example of this modernist view of representation should be mentioned here. Modernity as an era explained, in a very Platonic way, that the essence or truth of something such as a bird, could only be found in the bird itself. Representations, for example a painting, a photograph or even video of that bird, were merely a visual representation. Representations attempted to capture that essence or truth, but according to the modernist perspective, would always fall short of that goal. This is how we as society until recently understood the world, that there was a truth that existed and that only through human agency and modernist scientific examination could we come closer to capturing that truth in its entirety.

Postmodernity is a broad term that does not neatly fit into a succinct definition and it includes a variety of theoretical perspectives. As this paper is limited to tracing certain aspects of photographic culture, it will not be using all ideas that fall under the

umbrella term of postmodernity. Postmodernity states that there is no truth or essence that exists. Postmodernity understands truth as a social construct often created by people in power and people who control the spread of information. Often those in power were the Catholic Church or traditional nation states. Postmodern theorists (Baudrillard, 1988) challenged this dichotomous relationship between representation and the “real” or truth, positing that representation and “real” were in fact one and the same. Postmodernity challenged the established epistemological assumptions of modernity and Baudrillard’s simulation was a key point in that challenge. Before this paper moves on to explaining simulation it is important to refresh the reader’s understanding of semiotics as this field plays a key role in Baudrillard’s theory.

### **Postmodernity and Simulation**

Semiotics is the study of signs and their cultural interpretations. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure was one of the earliest and most important theorist in the field of semiotics. Saussure developed the idea that a sign has two interdependent parts. The first is the signifier, or the material vehicle of meaning, the second is the signified, or the concept that comes to mind (Saussure, 1993). Saussure was important because of his novel idea that the relationship between the sign and its meaning is one that is completely arbitrary. This view of signs was a radically different idea than a traditional platonic understanding of meaning, which believed that there was a natural link between a representation, or sign, and its referent. This understanding of a sign as arbitrary or not fixed to nature influenced a large amount of postmodern thought. One of Saussure’s followers was Jean Baudrillard.

Baudrillard was a Marxist turned post-Marxist critic. He was interested in

semiotics and the way that signs are used in knowledge creation and dissemination. In particular, his epistemological interests focused on power, both in terms of capital and religion. He believed that traditional forms of knowledge creation and dissemination no longer existed. Instead of focusing on nation states as distributors of information and knowledge, he became fascinated with mass media and its ability to disseminate knowledge, which would then shape a society's worldview. Baudrillard is most influential for his theory of simulation. Simulation is a state of reality where images, or signs, have come to supplant traditional understandings of "real" life. Simulation is different from Plato's understanding of representation because it rejects the binary notion that perception is different than reality. Baudrillard concluded that there was no longer an image and a "real," but image and the "real" are one and the same. Simulation is reliant on the concept of Saussurian semiotics but it is also different from the Saussurian understanding of signs because Saussure, like Plato, believed that a "real" existed outside of its sign. The Saussurian model is similar to the modernist understanding of representation, because a referential "real" still exists. This process of change from modernist representation/reality to simulation will be explicated in the coming pages of this chapter, but here it is important to understand that this postmodern state of simulation is one that rejects a traditional, dichotomous understanding of representation, in which one true "real" is represented through a sign. Simulation can be applied to images created by the practice of photography. Society previously assumed throughout modernity that meaning is formed within the difference between representation, or image, or sign and a natural "real." In this way, modernist photographic culture displayed a Platonic logic. Because this paper is going

to focus on personal photographs, it is important that the reader understand that the photograph is a sign, which during modernity was assumed to, represented a “real.” The images made through the technical and cultural practice of photography are complex signs, previously understood to be representations of the “real world.” If the common modernist assumption was if X is a fake, Y must be “real,” then applying Baudrillard’s simulation to photography would come to the following result. No longer is photography a cultural practice that documents but rather photography is a practice that has been caught in a continual loop of simulation:

So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation.

Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the “real” are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom).

Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. (p. 170)

Baudrillard (1988) stated that instead of a society in which the relationship between “real” and representation or a sign exists, we live in a society where a sign only references other signs which only represent other signs. This process happened to the extent that “real” becomes indefinable. He was interested in how films and television shows presented a reality that was fake but was assumed to be “real.” Baudrillard’s interest in images and is where his work and this research collide. This paper is interested in new forms of photographic technology and social practices, ones that are distinctively postmodern. This change from modernity to postmodernity, from representation to simulation that photography has gone through has been so distinct



that it is possible to track through photography's relatively short history. Both multimedia messaging services (MMS) and social network sites (SNS) are technologies that have been invented during postmodernity. The social and cultural practices that accompany these new technologies have different epistemological implications than previous forms of the practice of photography. Personal photography has become a practice that perpetuates simulation. It no longer documents any type of "real" life.

### **"Real"**

We should now address what is meant by the "real." It is difficult to discern what the "real" is. Walter Benjamin (2002) has pointed out that society's attempt to demarcate what is "real" is in itself a relatively new activity linked exclusively to the arrival of traditional modernity and the new mechanical forms of mass-reproduction. This act began to occur during the middle of the nineteenth century. Before there were multiple representations of images, the question of what is an original was never asked. For clarification, this paper will continually assess the concept of the "real" through a Baudrillardian perspective. As the definition of the "real" changes, this paper will adjust its own definition. For the most part "real" will refer to a historical real; in this case the understanding of reality before the invention of mass-produced representation, and will be used to differentiate a time before our current state of postmodernity.

### **Object Value System**

In order to understand Baudrillard's writings on the transition from a representation-based modernity to a simulation based postmodernity, it is important to

understand his object value system. Baudrillard (1988) in *System of Objects* explains how the evolution of value has transformed over history. When he wrote this, Baudrillard was interested in the concept of value because he believed that value is primarily a man made creation. He was also trying to understand the world not from a Marxist based economy of production, but a new economy of consumption. According to Baudrillard the earliest understanding of value is functional value. Functional value is how an object is actually used. For example, a hammer is used for hitting nails and other objects, a pencil is used for writing. The next type of value is the exchange value of an object. Exchange value is essentially an economic value in the sense that it is determined by society, and indicates the economic worth of an object. A hammer might be worth the value of two screwdrivers in some cultures, or it might be worth \$18.99. This type of value is constructed by humans. The following industrialized era of history introduced the symbolic value of an object. The symbolic value of a hammer is what it represents in the society in which it exists. The symbolic value of a hammer might be how the object represents carpentry or traditional manual labor. This value is created through society. The final value that Baudrillard discussed is the sign value. Sign value occurs when signs relate to other signs and to nothing else. As Baudrillard (1988) stated:

Here technique and knowledge are divorced from their objective practice and recovered by the "cultural" system of differentiation. It is thus the extended field of *consumption*, in the sense we have given it of production, systems and interplay of signs. (p. 58)

What he is saying here is that value becomes derived from signs that only

reference or differentiate themselves from other signs. This clarification is important because it is essentially a major step in understanding his theory of simulation. This loss of referent becomes a central point in the concept of simulation. Images reference only other images not a true historical reality. This value system corresponds to Baudrillard's precession of simulacra, which is central to this paper's historical account of the cultural practices of photography.

### **Precession of Simulacra**

In *Simulation and Simulacra*, Baudrillard (1988) used the term "precession of simulacra" when he explains society's transition from one that uses signs to signify a true reality to one that uses signs to only signify other signs. Baudrillard explains it this way:

Three orders of simulation, parallel to mutations in the law of value, have succeeded one another since the Renaissance: 1. The *counterfeit* is the dominant scheme of the "classical" epoch, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution. 2. *Production* is the dominant scheme of the industrial era. 3. *Simulation* is the dominant scheme of the present phase of history, governed by the code. (p. 50)

Baudrillard first used this term in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* but he expanded on the precession in his later works. His precession travels through three historical periods that highlight the change where images move from forms of objective representation to perpetrators of simulation. The precession is comprised of three orders, which are counterfeit, production and simulation.

## **Counterfeit**

The first order, counterfeit, is one that Baudrillard associated with premodern forms of representation. In this stage, a representation (or sign) is an acknowledged fake copy that references a true reality; this is the functional value of an image separated from the semiotic code. This relationship is a modernist understanding of visual representation and it is applicable to the photograph. The example Baudrillard used when explaining the counterfeit stage was a map. During the classical era, a map was understood as an image, used as a representation of land that has been discovered or imagined by either an explorer or cartographer, commonly someone who was commissioned by a state or landowner. He argued that this form of representation existed during the period that preceded modernity. Here Baudrillard (1988) points out the cause of the stage that he calls counterfeit:

The problem of the counterfeit (and of fashion) was born with the Renaissance, with the deconstruction of the feudal order and the emergence of open competition at the level of distinctive signs. There is no fashion in societies of caste and rank; where social assignation is total, social mobility nil. (p. 135)

Essentially what he asserted here is that this new value of objects was caused by early free market capitalism. In this system there was no longer an official version of any object, including visual representations. Such an economy allowed objects to be judged by their functional value in a way that was not previously known. If two metal workers forged horseshoes, those horseshoes would be judged by their functional

value. The consumer would be concerned with whether the horseshoe was an effective horseshoe or not.

This period of premodernity is notable due to the fact that these objects or representations are one of a kind and not mass produced. If one moves away from horseshoes, and towards visual representations, this idea of functional value is still present. For example, a painting or portrait of a wealthy aristocrat is intended to be a representational document of a “real.” That painting is a unique object due to the fact that only one exists. This single item production aspect is important to consider because it was based during a historical era where objects were not thought of in terms of serial production, but rather as unique objects this meant that they could only be considered in terms of their functional value. In terms of images, the functional value was to represent a truth or “real.” These early images also required an artist who had an ability to create that image. This type of production eventually changed, as the major difference between a painting and a photograph is the technical means of production.

Early photographs were similar to paintings in regard to their functional value and uniqueness. Charles Daguerre’s Daguerreotypes were not reproducible (Batchen, 1999). The images taken with this early camera were fixed on a glass plate that, unlike a modern film negative or digital file, could not be easily reproduced. This reproducibility is important to consider. It is a critical key to understanding Baudrillard’s simulation. During the counterfeit period, both representational images, made with a camera and those not made with a camera were often one of a kind. During the counterfeit era the sign or image is to reference a perceived truth and not

other images:

It produces only neutral values, those that exchange among each other in an objective world... the "free and emancipated" sign is only free to produce equivalent signifieds. It is thus in a kind of simulacrum of a "nature" that the modern sign discovers its value. (p. 137)

The image as a sign that references nature correlates well with photography's early history. This history and its relationship with science and industrialization has been well documented by many sources. Melin and Frizot, as well as many of the inventors themselves, wrote about the invention of photography. In the early nineteenth century a main theme found in the inventors' early descriptions of their own work is the camera conceptualized and utilized as a tool created to benefit the pursuit of science (Batchen, 1999). The best example of this type of description comes from Henry Fox Talbot's (2000) accounts of photography. One of the inventors of photography, Talbot spoke of his invention process as though it were a long drawn out experiment. Often he used the term experiment when recounting his search for a chemical that would fix the images that he was creating. Talbot adopted other terms from natural science, such as specimen, when describing the images he photographed. Once he finalized the process, many photographs he took were for documentation purposes. Talbot was a self-proclaimed botanist, and a lot of the early photographs he produced were of plants and other natural specimens. These images were created to supplement his interest in natural science. These scientific photo shoots are an early indicator of the future use of photography. Scientists and early photographers began replacing actual scientific specimens with photographs of specimens. Instead of a leaf

being looked at in its natural state, an image was taken and used in order to keep a record. This practice is an example of how early images were being used to replace the actual “real” natural specimen.

Other inventors used not only the same experimental processes, but also the same language when describing their experimentation. In 1826, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce was the first early photographer to create a photographically based fixed image (Frizot, 1998). “View from the Window at Le Gras” was a culmination of decades of scientific trials. Like Talbot and others, the difficulty most photography pioneers encountered was fixing the developed image. Niépce managed to find the missing piece of the puzzle, a simple salt bath (Frizot, 1998). After the invention of the fixed image, changes in the technology came rapidly. Louis Daguerre thirteen years later introduced the Daguerreotype in a speech at the French Academy of Sciences (Melin, 1986).

These early experiments with photography and uses of photography fit well with Baudrillard’s first order of the precession of simulacra. During the nineteenth century early photographers were creating images that were thought to be objective and true representations of reality. The early camera was a piece of technology not commonly found outside of scientific labs and the houses of wealthy hobbyists. Furthermore early cameras were built by the photographer himself or herself and these cameras were also built for specific photographic purposes. If a photographer was interested in natural sciences the camera that they would manufacture was designed to address that interest, If they were interested in pictorialism, or the practice of making photographs that

mimicked the aesthetic of romanticist paintings, then they would design a camera to produce those images.

The camera that a photographer used affected the way the photographer viewed the subject as well as the image that was created. The camera forced the photographer to view the subject through a rectangular viewfinder. The apparatus allowed certain planes to remain in focus and others to be blurred. But most importantly the camera enabled society to envision the world as though it was a specimen, something that can be captured and stored. Ephemeral reality became an encapsulated artifact. This view, although perceived as objective, changed the reality that the object existed in. It was no longer an objective natural specimen. The object was turned into an image that was created to document the object. In this process the image also documented the practice of scientific documentation. These early images influence future uses of photography as well as cultural understandings of a photograph as a tool of documentation. The photographic image at this point is still something that is considered the realm of enthusiasts and professionals. That begins to change as the practice spreads in popularity and new technologies allow its proliferation.

## **Reproduction**

Gradually images become easily mass-produced. Baudrillard explained that this ease of mass production eventually enabled society to enter its current state of simulation. There was however a stage between counterfeit and simulation.

Advancements in technology along with industrialization brings upon the period that Baudrillard called reproduction. Mass production that was achieved due to industrialization made a major impact upon the value system because it changed the



sign's referent from something natural to a reference only to other signs.

This is the phenomenon of the series; in other words, there is the very possibility of two or of  $n$  identical objects. The relation between them is not that of the original to its counterfeit, or its analogue, or its reflection; it is a relationship of equivalence, of indifference. In the series, objects are transformed indefinitely into simulacra of one another and, with objects, so are the people who produce them. Only the extinction of original reference permits the generalized law of equivalence, which is to say, the *very possibility of production*. (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 137)

In this historical era, the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the image still has a functional value, but that begins to diminish as an economy of signs develops. The economy of signs is based around signs gaining their value from other signs. Sign value is different from their functional value (its use) or exchange value (its economic value). An example of new form of value would be a photograph used to remember a deceased relative. In a society that is not inundated with images, such a photograph would have a functional value in that it stood in for the absence of a "real" dead body. This use as tool for recall was the object's functional value. Using the example of the aforementioned premodern map, that map was used to show the characteristics of a land not easily viewable. Parallel to the map, an early photograph was used to represent a "real" person, place or thing. However, in the second order of simulacra, reproduction, functional value begins to diminish. The image's value begins to be replaced by the value gains through its relationship to other similar images. An example of this is the early family photographic portrait. The photograph

becomes one of a number of family portraits and becomes interpreted through that genre of photograph. The photograph's value is determined by whether it looks like other family portraits not its function as a tool of recall or presentation. Photographs begin to refer to other photographs. Its functional value as a photograph that is a representation of a definitive reality declines because the referenced reality is compromised. Is the photograph referencing a reality a true "real?" Or is it referencing other photographs of a supposed "real"? This change brings society closer to the final order of simulacra, simulation.

This is a good moment to again focus on the history of photography and examine how the technology as well as the culture the technology was invented in correlates along with this transition. The Daguerreotype had an interesting relationship with this transition. Although it only created single images, that were not reproducible, it filled the role of a widely used standardized camera. This, to an extent, standardized the look of an image as well as the cultural practice of image taking and sharing. This is important in regard to the fulfillment of the second order of simulation, reproduction. It is much more difficult to discern the beginning and end of this stage but the rise in reproduced images that took place during this era is an important stepping stone between the first and third stage. Let's now look a bit closer at the Daguerreotype, and a trend that pushed photography to the forefront of the Victorian age, the *carte de visite*.

The Daguerreotype helped the spread of early professional photography. Daguerre's camera was a piece of technology that made taking a photograph a process that was easily reproducible. Instead of a camera that was a one of a kind device

Daguerre's camera was standardized and mass-produced. Mass production created a standardized process for taking photographs. Mass production also increased access to cameras, which in turn enabled more people to become photographers. Photographs became more prevalent and easily attainable. The consumer of photography also changed at this time. Early on photographers took traditional portraits of upper class family members. These portraits emulated the paintings that were used to symbolize wealth and power. They were also used as objects intended to memorialize the subject after their passing (Berger, 1986). Partly due to the development of the Daguerreotype, photographic portraits eventually became accessible to the middle class. As the practice became more popular and the technology became more readily available, specific studio spaces were built these spaces allowed a more efficient and productive photographic output. These early photographs, although one of a kind were engaging in a form of primitive simulation. Increasingly the middle class began to have their photographs taken. Early portraits of wealthy patrons, aesthetically, influenced these middle class portraits. The aristocratic paintings that Berger spoke of became the visual reference for early photographs. This is an early instance of signs referring signs and not a natural "real."

The carte de visite is an excellent example of this transition in referents. It changed the photographic culture of the United States and western Europe. The U.S. and Europe were so engulfed by the frenzy for these small cards, that the phenomenon was named "cardomania" (Frizot, 1998). The carte de visite was a small card, which measured two and a half by four inches, this size was an international standard, which is very interesting if one thinks about mass production and its relationship with the

ensuing state of simulation. It was made not using a Daguerreotype but with a new albumen printing process that allowed multiple prints to be made off of one original negative. This is a watershed moment as photographic images were becoming easier to reproduce.

Carte de visites were created essentially as calling cards. Guests would leave their own card and take a card from the person or family that they were visiting. This artifact is interesting because it was an early example of a mass produced personal photograph. This early craze illustrates how photographs lost their status as unique objects created by and for people of means and became mass-produced images that informed a larger photographic economy. This represents a period of transition between counterfeit representations of reality and modern day simulation. The carte de visite began to inform the public what a photograph should look like as well as what the public should look like. One reason that cannot be overlooked is that many people saw the same image. Society as a whole became influenced by these images due to how wide spread they were. Another fascinating aspect of the carte de visite is its role in establishing early celebrity culture. Both U.S. President Abraham Lincoln as well as General Ulysses Grant had their photographs taken for carte de visites. These prints were two of the top selling prints in the U.S. (Wichard & Wichard, 1999) This is not only an early example form of mass media and personal media becoming intertwined it is also an early moment of simulation. A form of representation begins to represent another form of representation. The “real” at this stage does not become meaningless but it becomes increasingly blurred.

This is a time to recall what Benjamin said about society's attempt to understand the "real." That it only occurs when mass production becomes a societal force. The painting was not imposed upon with the same scrutiny as the photograph because it never raised questions of fake or "real." It existed in a society where everything was "real" and nothing was seen as a fake. The camera was not seen in the same way because of its ability to create multiple photographs challenged that assumption.

Other novel instances of photography and its role in this transition also take place during this time period. Various nation states begin utilizing cameras for the tasks of documenting crime scenes and surveying criminals. This makes sense, as the photograph is commonly known to be at this time a medium of scientific documentation. Susan Sontag (1977) pointed out that:

Starting with their use by the Paris police in the murderous roundup of Communards in June 1871, photographs became a useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations. In another version of its utility, the camera record justifies. A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. (p. 5)

This use of photography as a form of surveillance had other consequences. The first consequence is the general spread of photography. State surveillance might not have been wide spread but this is another example of photography increasingly weaving itself into society's psyche. The second consequence and one that is important when considering simulation is that the public was for the first time seeing what "real" criminals looked like. Criminals were being reduced to signs. Baudrillard's take on this might even push it further. He might assert something like

this, the criminals are made “real” by their image being captured and stored, the public loads this image, and this understanding of criminality, into their own epistemological matrix. Crimes are not crimes unless they are recorded. Baudrillard hit upon this point when he discussed the Loud family. The Loud family, TV’s original reality stars, became “real” not by their existence but by the act of being televised. The “real” ness of the criminal is one that is based on media representations of the criminal. This is a way that images increasingly came to signify other images only. Eventually images simulate the criminal. If someone robs a bank increasingly it is not the crime that is reported on or observed it is the visual representation of the crime. This type of surveillance increasingly enters more common areas of society. It also demonstrates another moment where image and reality become blurred further allowing society to move towards simulation. Baudrillard (1988) clarified:

The mere fact that any object can be reproduced, as such, in an exemplary double, is already a revolution. ... That two products are *equivalent* by virtue of social necessary (sic) labor is less interesting in the long run than the serial repetition of the same object (which is the same for individuals considered as labor power). Technique as medium quashes not only the "message" of the product (its use value), but also labor power itself, which Marx wanted to make the revolutionary message of production. But Benjamin and McLuhan saw that the real message, *the real ultimatum*, lay in reproduction itself, and that production, as such, has no meaning: its social finality gets lost in seriality. Simulacra surpass history... This is a matter of reversing origins and finalities, since all forms change from the moment they are no longer mechanically

reproduced, but conceived instead in light of their reproducibility, as a diffraction from a generating nucleus called a model. With this, we find ourselves in the midst of third-order simulacra. Both the counterfeit of the original in the first order and the pure series of the second order disappear in favor of models from which all forms proceed according to the modulation of differences. (p. 138)

This is perhaps one Baudrillard's most important points and one of his earliest instances of separation from traditional Marxist critique. What he is essentially saying is that Marx's model does not fit within the current social reality that exists. For the sake of establishing context Baudrillard was writing in France during the late 1960s. Marxism was assumed to be, by the far left, the solution to the nation's and world's economic, social, and geopolitical problems. This idea was repeated by intellectuals ad nauseum. It was not production or the state that was to determine the future of knowledge and wealth and power, but it was the media, a media that dealt exclusively in signs. This phenomenon also took place in the realm of personal photography. In the ensuing years professional photographers' services became cheaper, and thus, lower classes began to have their photograph taken. This enabled photography to become more widespread (Melin, 1986). As this occurred, images began to further lose their connection to reality. This transition was amplified by the introduction of a personal photography camera, Kodak's Brownie. Around the turn of the century the public was introduced to the Brownie, an affordable consumer camera that middle class families used to document special events, vacations and even everyday life. This infusion of mass produced personal images enabled society's transition to simulation.

## Simulation

The third order of simulacra is one where the simulacrum precedes reality itself. Baudrillard's example focuses on a map that precedes the territory. Instead of the use of a map as a representation of reality where the map was created based off of surveyed land, simulation is a result of society having access to maps before we experience the land they are based on. Both maps and photographs historically were documents that represent a "real." Images are the cultural maps that society follows. The land is the reality that photographs are said to represent but the problem is that images at this stage lose their traditional relationship to a referent. The land on these maps is just based off of the representation of the same land from another map. Baudrillard (1988) argued the "real" land itself can never be discovered in a "real" way. Maps are just representations of other maps and as long as there is no new land to actually discover, as long as everything has been mapped, reality in its traditional sense loses its original status.

At this level, the question of signs and their rational destination; their *real* and their *imaginary*; their repression; their reversal; the illusions they sketch; what they hush up, or their parallel significations- all of these are swept from the table. (p. 140)

This is what happens when our society increasingly becomes exposed to new forms of visual media. These images, both still and moving, have begun to act as a map for society. But like stated above, this map of images does not illuminate a "real" that exists somewhere else. It is the "real." Images constrain what reality can be thought of as. This is similar to the linguistic constraints of reality. But in this example



images are the new language. When Baudrillard was writing his works on simulation he was primarily interested in mass media. A sitcom, he would argue, constrains potential “real” life interactions; for example, a group of friends spending time together. This simulation because it lacks a stable referent copies other copies. This is what Baudrillard meant when he spoke of the death of the “real.” What is lost is the assumption that a “real” ever existed. Did representations ever reference a “real?” Even in premodern times was the visual influence of our images informing our reality? Did it take mass production to make evident an epistemological phenomenon that always existed?

This forces a similar train of thought with the contemporary changes in technology and the way it enables a new personal photographic culture. Both personal still images and video are easier to create and disseminate than they ever have been before. Do personal photographs fit into the model of simulation as well? For example, when we take a trip to the beach, that trip is influenced by media provided visual representations of people going to the beach. If the mass media generated photograph was traditionally viewed as a true representation of reality, the personal photograph was viewed in a similar way but to more of an extreme. The personal family photograph is not regarded in the same light as a mass-media created image. Mass media representations are framed as fake images that attempt to represent reality but personal photographs are often culturally considered to be a true representation of reality. If Baudrillard said, in the case of mass media representations that the previously assumed link between representation and reality is rendered meaningless then the recent rise of video and still images taken on cell phones is a phenomenon

that should be examined. These images are disseminated more easily due to the rise of SNSs such as Facebook. These technologies and the way they enable personal images to enter into greater circulation in a shorter duration of time have established a new type of map. One that is seemingly democratic by design due to its easy access. This conception of personal photography is best understood through a historical account. If people examine this history of personal photography, it becomes apparent how the photographic image began to signify only other images.

The transition between reproduction and true simulation when applied to a history of photography, and in particular, personal photography, is not one that has obvious points of demarcation. But there are significant historical events both technological and cultural occurred. Lisa Gye (2007) focused on Kodak's Brownie when she looked at what she calls the increased commercialization of the snapshot. The snapshot she states was created by commercial forces. That phenomenon grew with the introduction of the Brownie as well as the advertising campaign that made the Brownie a popular camera for the "average" consumer. The rhetoric from Eastman Kodak during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped to form the idea that personal photography is a form of remembrance, but with a catch. Kodak was interested in selling its product as a way to capture memories in time. Kodak used slogans such as: "A vacation with out a Kodak is a vacation wasted," "Bring your vacation home in a Kodak," and even, "In every home there's a story to record—not merely a travel story and the story of summer holidays, but the story of Christmas, the winter evening gathering and of the house party" (Walton, 2002). These slogans influenced personal photography at the turn of the century, both its popularity and cultural practice.

Although the Brownie did not create personal photography, it enabled its extensive proliferation. Image making became a middle class form of entertainment (Sontag, 1977). This commercialization of the snapshot and the increased access to cameras also had another effect. The slogans used informed the consumer of how to practice personal photography. If pushed further one could reach the Baudrillardian conclusion that these ads informed society what the “real” actually was. Images were based off of Kodak’s suggestions. Kodak produced countless guides informing consumers how to capture specific moments and when to use a camera. This media representation of how to reality was to be documented ultimately determined what reality was. This pushed society further into simulation.

Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag in their writings addressed photography as a practice. Both managed to foreshadow our modern societal state of simulation. Sontag (1977) wrote about the relationship between photography and memory in *On Photography*. Sontag viewed the camera as a tool that people use to collect images. These images, she went on, are then used to substitute actual memory, often to the point of replacing experiences. Sontag (1977) wrote: “Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood” (p. 3). Sontag wrote this during a time where the camera industry was booming and personal photography became a major component of the practice of leisure. She cited tourists going to art museums and experiencing famous paintings and statues through the viewfinder. Instead of viewing the art through their own eyes the tourists used the camera. This she said was due to the large amount of post cards and prints of these original works of art that are available for sale. This is an example

of the second order of Baudrillard's simulacra but it shows again a form of total simulation. The images that are sold and disseminated have influenced the way that the museumgoer sees the art. The act of seeing art is influenced by both representations of the art itself as well as representations of people seeing art. It is no longer an original reality.

Roland Barthes (1981) described something similar. In *Camera lucida* he struggled to remember his mother, as he believed she actually was. He remembered her through a photograph. Barthes pushed this use of photography further. He said that photography serves to tell us what was, or in his own words "That-has-been" (p. 77). He however knew that the image cannot accurately or adequately represent the "real" of his mother. This is an account of the image becoming more and more powerful and eventually it trumps the "real." Barthes' "That has-been" is essentially that which-is-photographed. The "real" is diminished as memory is only influenced by personal images, this reaches a point where they become indistinguishable from one another. This idea is an example of the development of the second order of simulacra but shows the impending simulation was caused, not only through mass media representations but also our own images. The photograph that Barthes obsesses over is still a tool of remembrance and remembrance is perceived to have a link to an objective reality, but these are early instances of blurring. The photograph is becoming the sculpture and the mother, and as that happens the "real" collapses because of an abundance of mass-produced and personally produced images. This is around the same time period that Baudrillard wrote *Simulation and Simulacra* (1981). This was

his main work on simulation. He had been dealing with these issues since 1968 when he wrote *System of Objects* but it took more than a decade for his ideas to flush out.

Early on Baudrillard (1988) pointed to mass media as the main type of media that disseminated information on a large scale.

The psychological restructuration of the consumer is performed through a single word — Philips, Olida, General Motors - a word capable of summing up both the diversity of objects and a host of diffuse meanings. Words of synthesis summarizing a synthesis of affects: that is the miracle of the "psychological label." In effect this is the only language in which the object speaks to us, the only one it has invented. Yet, this basic lexicon, which covers walls and haunts consciences, is strictly asyntactic: diverse brands follow one another, are juxtaposed and substituted for one another without an articulation or transition. It is an erratic lexicon where one brand devours the other, each living for its own endless repetition. This is undoubtedly the most impoverished of languages: full of signification and empty of meaning. It is a language of signals. And the "loyalty" to a brand name is nothing more than the conditioned reflex of a controlled affect. (p. 17)

The idea that is being stated here is that advertising creates its own language, one primarily based on images that signify only other signs. This is an early conceptualization the third stage of simulacra, simulation. When signs no longer signify reality, they just signify other signs. This new language of images based solely on signification correlated with the maturity of personal photography as both an industry and a practice. One example was the phenomenon of slide shows, a new way

of displaying photographs that eventually influenced the practice of taking photographs (Gye, 2007). Often these photographs bear a resemblance to advertising. Families with their collection of personal images imitate a collection of mass produced signs. Personal photography does not represent a “real” home. It represents media portrayals of home. These media portrayals attempt to represent the reality of home but that is a reality that is impossible to represent. At this point the simulation is complete. Personal photography during the mass media dominated industrial age begins to imitate advertising and the idealized images that advertisements offer. It becomes difficult to clinch down on where the new reality starts or ends. In an attempt to represent the reality of everyday life advertisers represent the representations of reality that they create and disseminate. The “real” in the presimulation sense has been rendered meaningless.

This research is not interested in mass media, but rather is interested in personal photography in conjunction with social media. This shift focuses the lens away from large corporate entities that essentially create the world around us through image dissemination. It makes the central interest new forms of social media, and asks how are they contributing to this same phenomenon of simulation. This change has recently become accelerated and many scholars including Murray (2008), Cohen (2005), and Van Dijk (2009) point to the digitization of the image as the reason for this acceleration. This phenomenon of signs signifying signs has moved in to the realm of personal photography. It is no longer corporations that are injecting society with visual representations. Baudrillard himself points to the digitization of images as an

important factor in this shift. How does that shift correlate with the transition to the final order of Baudrillard's simulacra?

Baudrillard's first two orders of simulacra describe the image and its connection to reality in a way that focuses on the prevalence of images in society. Digital cameras have made it easier to make images more prevalent in society. Digitization has enabled a faster transfer of information, such as images. It has also enabled new ways in which information and images can be consumed. MMS would not be possible without digital technology. What MMS because of digitization does is enable users to quickly send images to other users or SNSs. This phenomenon will be discussed in detail in the next chapters. But for now this should be considered when addressing simulation. As images and information are increased and more widely available it is more likely that simulation engulfs a culture. Mass media images as well as personal photography now have new ways to reach consumers. This means that consumers are seeing more mediated images than ever before. It is not that these technologies cause this influx of images, but they enable this cultural change.

Images play a role in the way that we see and understand the world. As the photograph has gone through history it has influenced our perception of reality. From a seemingly objective representation of the world around us to a mass-produced sign that represents nothing more than other mass-produced signs the photograph has changed rapidly over the last century and a half. This change has serious historical as well as social implications. The society that we inhabit is in a perpetual feedback loop that is difficult to escape. Now that this paper has looked at simulation as a process, it is important to differentiate this research from other research on simulation. This

researcher is interested in how the theory of simulation works with personal images. If new groups of people, the public at large, have more access and availability to the tools of image dissemination do they have the same epistemological impact that the mass media has? This paper is now going to turn its attention to two major technological components that influence our new cultural understanding of personal image culture, multimedia messaging service (MMS) and social network sites (SNS). The next chapters will explain their role as both products and enablers of simulation.



## CHAPTER 3

### MMS AND TIME

#### **Introduction**

Because multimedia messaging services (MMS) and social network sites (SNS) are often linked through use, categorization and demarcation can become a bit difficult. This paper will deal with this issue by associating MMS with time and SNS with space. Although there is an overlap between the two, this categorization has been implemented in order to reduce confusion. What this chapter, and much of this paper, is interested in is examining how transferring images through MMS, which should be seen as a part of a new cultural understanding of the practice of photography, relates to the historical practice of photography. This chapter is also interested in relating MMS to the Baudrillardian concept of simulation and postmodernity in general. Although these technologies were not focused on during Baudrillard's lifetime his theory of simulation fits well with them. These technologies were created during Baudrillard's period of simulation and are technologies created during the postmodern era. Older photographic processes coincided with Baudrillard's first two orders of simulacra, counterfeit and reproduction. Baudrillard (1988) stated that this transition between an era with an identifiable "real" and simulation was caused by the ease of reproduction and dissemination of images. Images became more quickly and readily available mainly due to changes in cultural practices of photography that were mentioned in the previous chapter, in particular due to changes in forms of technical reproduction. The

digitization of images is a succeeding step in regards of reproduction. Not only does digitization affect ease of production, it also enables new forms of reproduction and dissemination of personal photographic images. These new forms impact the traditional temporal expectations of the practice of photography.

This chapter will explain what MMS is as well as what its implications are in regards to the practice of photography. This chapter will apply Baudrillard's concept of "real-time," a conceptual understanding of sped up information dissemination, to the cultural and technological practice of MMS. It will compare this idea of real time to our current perceptual understanding of instantaneity in regards to data transference through digital technologies. This phenomenon has a correlate in our contemporary world; often the technologies that we use to send information from one device to another are viewed culturally as instantaneous. This chapter will also explore the relationship between this type of technology and the third order of simulacra. First off, what is MMS?

### **Defining MMS**

Conceptually, mobile image uploading is the process of sending digital media through Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) (Okabe & Ito, 2003). Different types of digital media can be sent through MMS. These include images, songs, videos, ringtones as well as text pages. Beginning in 2002 MMS became a feature found on most standard mobile phones (Le Bodic, 2003). This service is available on most standard cell phones as well as internet accessible mobile devices commonly referred to as smart phones (Van House, 2004).

The process of sending a MMS from a technical standpoint is as follows. The device first changes the content into a common e-mail format. That message is then sent to the wireless phone or internet provider's store and forward server (Le Bodic, 2003). This store and forward server holds the message briefly and then forwards it to the recipient at a later time. If the intended recipient is on another phone carrier the message is sent through the internet to the other carrier's server. Commonly the recipient of the MMS will first receive a short message service (SMS) message, also known as a text message, alerting the recipient of the incoming MMS. If this is accepted by the user the carrier will then send an SMS providing a URL that the phone will open up in its internet browser. More frequently MMSs are opened and formatted separately from the phone's browser in a format acceptable for the phone (Le Bodic, 2003).

Although MMS was originally created to be sent from one mobile device to another, recently these different types of messages can be sent to a website, often a SNS such as Facebook, Myspace, YouTube or Twitter. Facebook is being looked at in particular for this research due to its recent unprecedented growth and popular acceptance. SNSs will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Understanding this process is important. The public often thinks of this process as one that is instant but it is in fact not instant. Information travels through these channels at a rate that is much faster than previous forms of image dissemination but it is not instant. Instantaneous file transfer is feasibly impossible. But the understanding of this process as instantaneous by the public is what matters here. Before this chapter

addresses time, and photography's historical relationship with time, it is important to give a possible common example of how these forms of technology are used.

When MMS is used in conjunction with SNS it might be carried out this way, a gathering of a group of friends might be enjoying each other's company at a restaurant. When their entrees arrive, and if the meal is deemed good enough, they may take out their mobile devices and photograph the food in front of them. Since their technology is connected to the internet they might then choose one or multiple SNSs that they would like to send their photograph to. Often times this is Twitter or Facebook. The image then is transferred through the process mentioned above and becomes available to a chosen audience. This is a new temporal reality that personal photography exists in. Time has always been an important aspect of photography and this next section will explore that relationship.

### **Examining the Temporal Aspect of the Practice of Photography**

Time is a major component of photography. The duration that a shutter stays open has a direct effect on the photograph that is produced. A "good" photograph is often considered one that has utilized an appropriate shutter speed (Snyder & Allen, 1975). Time is also present in the practice of photography through the common understanding that photography captures a specific moment in time. This is understandable when considering early photography and science's previously mentioned relationship, its early practitioners also envisioned photography as a process that captured an objective moment in time. This understanding of time is interesting when we consider Baudrillard's simulation. The photograph was essentially a sign that captures not only an objective representation of what reality was but also

attached that temporal reality itself to the sign. Walter Benjamin (2005) in *Little History of Photography* examined this phenomenon of temporal fixation. In *Little History of Photography* he focuses on the process of early photography, in particular the long exposure that the Daguerreotype required. These exposures, Benjamin said, were all about permanence like the paintings that came before them. The process of having a portrait taken during this historical era was a slow and deliberate process. Often photographers were forced to move their subjects to locations of low light due to the technological limitations of the cameras that they worked with. Benjamin remarked on early photographs:

Everything about these early pictures was built to last. Not only the incomparable groups in which people came together—and whose disappearance was surely one of the most precise symptoms of what was happening in society in the second half of the century—but the very creases in people's clothes have an air of permanence. (p. 514)

This can be read a few ways; one interpretation is that, like mentioned previously, Daguerreotypes are photographs of a time period that has been forever captured in supposed permanence, a slice of life, a piece of reality captured for years to come. This passage could also be seen as a statement on photography itself. Benjamin might have been stating that this new act of capturing reality was a practice that would last throughout time. Either way it is a meditation on the power of the photograph as sign. Much of that power it seems is bound to the relationship between time and photography. Benjamin's interest in permanence is interesting. Like his focus on the "real," his interest in permanence is linked to his participation in a society that

obsesses with permanence because of the camera. Was permanence, as a quality of an image, a subject of interest before the camera allowed society to take multiple photographs? Although painted portraits allowed a viewer to gaze upon someone who lived in the past it seems as though this form of image creation transfixed viewers and forced them to consider the temporality of both the person of the image and the process of photography in a way that was never seen before. Benjamin's interest in time is something he shared with other theorists.

Roland Barthes is preoccupied with time in *Camera lucida*. Barthes believed that time, and ultimately its passing, is what makes a photograph so powerful. Barthes was interested in the photograph as a sign as well as the practice's cultural significance. This dread or fascination with passing years fascinates Barthes to a point that he claimed it is a photograph's punctum. Barthes' conceptualized a punctum as the aspect of a photograph that was separate from its traditional semiotic signifiers. This idea of a type of information that exists outside of signs is something that Barthes wrestles with throughout his book. Barthes' punctum was a personal realization. It related to time passing and in most instances death. For example on one photograph by Kertesz that Barthes meditated on he noted, "it is *possible* that Ernest, a schoolboy photographed in 1931...is still alive today (but where? how? What a novel) (p.84)." This is an example of how arresting a property of photography time was. It forced observations and questions such as these. It was a medium of documentation but also a medium that introduced a new conceptual understanding of time.

This temporal aspect of early and traditional photography, the way photography consumes time, reinforces the concept of a photographic image as a sign that signifies

a past reality. This temporal aspect also firmly places photography inside of Baudrillard's first and second order of simulacra. It does this in two ways. The first way it does this is it points out the temporal distance that exists between the photographed and the viewer of the photograph, this is what Barthes spoke of. This cultural understanding of the image as a representative "real" is inherent in older conceptions of photography, and it highlights the separation between the photographed reality and the image as a sign. Traditional photography was not a process of images being created and then quickly disseminated. It was a process that was intended to store a particular time, an objective slice of life. This temporal separation allows the traditional photograph to maintain its established epistemological relationship with the "real." This traditional relationship that was mentioned earlier was of an image or sign that referenced a truth or a "real."

The second way the temporal aspect of early photography firmly places the practice inside of Baudrillard's first and second order of simulacra was the actual process of having a photograph taken and developed. This commonly overlooked task was an activity that the public dealt with often. Images taken on film in the past had to be developed, whether it was through a studio or a local drug store, this added to the cultural concept that the passage of time was a necessary component of the practice of photography. This occurrence amplified the temporal distance between the photographed "real" and the actual image as sign. This again confirmed the epistemological assumption that a reality could be permanently captured through a sign. Early photography never allowed any other assumption than that the photograph was a document, or sign, of a time that had passed. This was primarily a cultural

phenomenon. Traditional photographic technology and practice were guided by earlier modernity epistemological understandings. During these historical eras, the concept of an image being produced, reproduced and disseminated in a brief moment was unimaginable. Time's relationship to the practice of photography does eventually change and this change correlates with Baudrillard's precession. Eventually it transitions from a premodern use of photography, which has been discussed earlier, to one where images are easier to produce, reproduce and disseminate. As improvements in methods of reproduction are developed society goes from counterfeit, to reproduction and eventually to simulation. The technological advances that enable these changes include the introduction and access to more physical locations that can develop personal photographs and offer new services such as one hour film processing. The most recent major development in image culture that affected both mass mediated and personal photography was the digitization of the photograph.

### **Digital Photography**

In the last two decades the digitization of photography has greatly impacted the practice of photography. Photographs are now easier than ever to reproduce and disseminate because they do not require a hard copy to be printed, nor do they require the chemicals, the photo labs or the specialized technicians that accompany them. The previous pages of this paper discussed how this digitization enables Baudrillard's simulation it is important to talk about digital photography and its relationship to MMS. Digital photography although produced in 1982 only became commercially accessible to amateurs in 1991. The first commercially available camera phones came to market in 1997 (Terras, 2008). The digitization of photographic technology changed



images from an analog chemical process involving different forms of film into discrete information easily stored on a computer as binary code. As digital technology advanced the images taken with digital cameras were increasingly easily stored and transferred to various devices. Digital cameras do away with a large part of the time aspect in the traditional photographic process that Benjamin spoke of. Amateur photographers no longer have to wait for film to be developed to see the image that has been taken. Digital photography now allows the user of a camera to go through images almost instantly. This new technology allows photographers to decide what images are going to be kept and which would be discarded. This process of editing and treating photographic images with such ambivalence is a new and interesting phenomenon linked to the digitization of photography (Cohen, 2005). This collapse of photographic processes is a result of a change in the cultural understanding of the temporality that goes along with the practice of photography. One of the most interesting technological advancements related to digital photography is MMS. MMS has radically changed photography's relationship to time in that it allows a collapse of the entire social, cultural and technical process that accompanied disseminating traditional film based personal photography. Images are taken using widely available camera phones and other mobile devices and can be sent through MMS to other mobile devices or websites that allow hundreds of viewers to view that photograph within seconds.

This should all be considered in the context of Baudrillard's theoretical aim. What are the epistemological implications of MMS? How do these technologies affect the way information is disseminated to the public? Although no authors have explicitly

applied a Baudrillardian framework to MMS it is valuable to go through the writings of certain researchers that have addressed modern forms of photographic practice. In particular both photoblogs and camera phones have a sizeable amount of literature to go over.

This MMS phenomenon, many scholars argue, is a new type of temporality that exists in photography. This new temporal reality, according to Susan Murray (2008), has changed photography into a cultural act of celebrating life and not death.

Photographs are now taken to tell others that they experienced a moment. She stated:

In this way, photography is no longer just the embalmer of time that André Bazin (1967: 14) once spoke of, but rather a more alive, immediate, and often transitory, practice/form. In making these claims, I want to make clear that I will not be arguing that these new practices are inherently more emancipatory, progressive, or participatory, but rather that they signal a definitive shift in our temporal relationship with the everyday image, and have helped alter the way that we construct narratives about ourselves and the world around us. (p. 151)

This theme can be traced back further to other research that discussed the use of camera phones. Okabe and Ito tracked the use of picture messages transferred through MMS by Japanese youth. Okabe and Ito reported that many moments photographed using camera phones supplied by researchers were considered everyday moments by both the users and the researchers (2004). This was due to the increased access to a camera. Students that had constant access to cameras on their phone took more photographs. (Okabe & Ito, 2004) It should also be argued that this change was not purely technology based. Society and its increase of images shifted the view of the

public as to what is photographable. These technologies are just a logical follow through of this cultural change.

Although these changes are not solely due to technological advancements new forms of photographic technologies have impacted the cultural practice of photography. Murray found when interviewing photobloggers that digital cameras, either as part of a mobile device or a more traditional digital camera, and their freedom from the reliance of analog film enabled bloggers to take more photographs. This led to more photographs of everyday events and occurrences. She contrasted this with analog photography. Analog photography was used for special occasions such as birthdays, vacations and other events culture determined to be worthy of photographing (Murray, 2008). This is becoming increasingly common. Since these articles MMS has increased in availability and the websites that support the technology are growing in number as well (Van Dijk, 2009). These examples of recent studies show how these technologies, and the culture they were created in, further push photography towards Baudrillard's simulation. The photograph loses its function as an artifact of remembrance and becomes a document of a life that is being lived. This change is understandable as the image culture leading up to these inventions went through a serious cultural change. Images were increasingly being seen as a document of current life and time.

Since this research intends to apply Baudrillard's theory to this change it is helpful to first look at his views on a world increasingly overrun by mass media. Baudrillard never spoke about MMS and SNSs, although he was alive during the time period that they were invented, these technologies did not become popular until years

after his death. But he did write about another image culture that increasingly undermined the traditional dichotomy of representation and reality. That was the creation of twenty-four hour news network television stations. The similarity between these two technologies, both truly postmodern phenomena, is that they treat the “everyday” in a new way.

### **Real Time**

A very basic tenant of Baudrillard’s theory of simulation is that the more images that exist within a society the more likely society is going to enter the epistemological state of simulation. This is due to the fact, as mentioned before, that once society becomes ensconced in images those images increasingly reference other images and not the “real” world. It is difficult to argue against the idea that we as a society are now more inundated by images than ever before. This comes up in one of Baudrillard’s most recent essays. In “Event and Non-Event” he pushed his theory of simulation even further. Years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks Baudrillard became fascinated with those attacks. In particular he was attempting to explain how the incident was an example of a “real” event, something he claimed was not common in our mass mediated world. Baudrillard stated that 9/11 was a “real” event because it was at the same time unimaginable and probable (2007). This differed from other events because it was a phenomena that had not been envisioned by the media in any film or other type of image representation.

In the media, we see the event short-circuited by its immediate image feedback most clearly. Information is always already there. In case of catastrophe, journalists and photojournalists are there before help arrives. If it were at all

possible, they would be there before the catastrophe, better still invent or provoke the event to get it in prime time... There is a great difference between events that take place (or took place) in historical times and events that take place in the real time of information. To the pure management of the flows and the markets under the sign of planetary deregulation corresponds the "global" event, or rather the globalized non-event: the World Cup, Y2K, the death of Diana, *The Matrix*, etc. Whether these events were fabricated or not, they were orchestrated by the silent epidemic of information networks. *Fake events*. (Baudrillard, 2007)

Baudrillard argues that the mass media's seemingly perpetual coverage of historic events he argues turns those instances into non-events because they are not original historically "real" experiences; they simulate previous media portrayals of both other events that are similar. One example of this simulation would be a protest. Any protest that takes place during the postmodern era is heavily influenced by images and representations of other protests. For example, like many protests before and protest movements after, the current Occupy Wall Street movement has reached into the historical lexicon of traditional protest movements. Large gatherings, colored bandanas, placards with slogans and even the incessant drum circles all exist as signs that signify protest. These signs are taken from both other recent protests and famous historical protest movements. The protest is not a "real" event because it is purely a simulation.

The reason that Baudrillard's writing on non-events is of interest to this research is his introduction of real time. Baudrillard's concept of real time is extremely

important for this research. Baudrillard's real time refers to society's obsession with information and its dissemination in an almost instant circulation (Baudrillard, 2007). This he stated is enhanced by technological advancements. Baudrillard was mainly interested in mass media and the way it quickly spread information and created an information loop. This loop he argued "short-circuits" the event.

Real Time dematerializes the future as well as the past, dematerializes historic time, pulverizes real events: the Holocaust, Y2K, that never took place, which will not have taken place. It even pulverizes current events in the news, which are only instantaneous image-feedback. The news drapes itself in the illusion of the present, of presence -- it is the illusion of the live in the media, as well as the horizon of the disappearance of real events. (Baudrillard, 2007)

What he is saying here is that the event or the "real" becomes meaningless due to the instantaneous media representations of the experience. Even past events are not safe from this process. Images of the holocaust from films, photographs and newsreels inform us about the Holocaust, but eventually they are only representations of representations. The significance of the event itself has disappeared.

When speaking about the event versus the non-event, Baudrillard spoke mainly of the most recent Iraq war, but his focus on media portrayals of war and the role of the media as a type of constant feedback loop can be linked to his earlier works on the previous Iraq war. In *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995) Baudrillard wrote that although events did actually take place on the ground in Iraq during the U.S.'s first gulf war they were not indicative of a war in the traditional sense. He was fascinated with the gulf war because he thought was a war unlike any other in history. The

public's understanding of the war was based on images of war. Twenty-four hour television news stations with their embedded reporters and camera crews showed the public what was happening on the ground. The U. S. was fixated on radar screens and night vision footage taken of jet fighters taking off and landing from aircraft carriers. Baudrillard explained that the public was not witnessing a war, rather that they were witnessing a televised spectacle. The reason he was interested in this was because he felt it contrasted with the reality that was taking place on the ground. Although Iraqi soldiers were being killed by guided missiles and precision air strikes the U.S. led coalition sustained minimal casualties. This according to Baudrillard proved that the Gulf War was not a war at all but an atrocity. This Gulf War issue is important for this research because it is an example of an example of a carried out simulation. A war was presented through the tools available to the media but it had no link to what was actually happening on the ground but the public and the military consistently perpetuated the idea that a "real" war was taking place. When Baudrillard spoke of real time it is important to point out that this term is not used to speak of instantaneousness but it is used to explain the increased rate of information dissemination that coupled with changes in mass media during the late twentieth and early twenty first century. This concept fits well with contemporary image culture. MMS and SNSs allow an increased dissemination rates and new modes of display and reproduction. Baudrillard's non-event that is caused by the flow of information helps explain the effect of SNS and MMS. The "domain of perpetual change, of a relentless actualization" happens through the constant sending of everyday images. Although Baudrillard was fascinated with the effects of real time information distribution among

mass media, sovereign states and new world orders many of these ideas can be applied to social media as well.

This idea of perpetual information as a reason that events become nonevents fits well with MMS and its relationship to personal photography. This real time information is no longer limited to large forms of mass media. The average citizen, with the appropriate technological access, now has an ability to gather and disseminate images on a larger scale than ever before. The case studies listed above prove that digitization, MMS and the resulting temporal changes in the practice of personal photography have further entrenched society into Baudrillard's third order simulacra. In the Okabe and Ito study the participants said that they often photograph everyday events with their camera phones and send them to their friends. What they are doing is widening the scope of this simulation. Analog personal photography was normally saved for special events.

Two distinctions must be made before proceeding. Baudrillard was writing about large multinational corporations covering, through the mass media companies they own, large, often global, spectacles. The images that are taken with camera phones and that are sent through MMS to SNSs are for the most part not similar in that regard. Although increasingly we see mass media outlets utilize social media for their stories, the majority of images sent through MMS and found on SNS would be classified as everyday events. It is important to understand that these images have the same epistemological implications as those that are sent through mass media channels. These images influence our understanding of the world around us just like televisual images did in the late twentieth century. As societies change the tools that they use to



spread information change as well. This can be seen throughout Baudrillard's precession of simulacra. The meaning makers were once religious figures and heads of state and eventually that epistemological task shifted to mass media. So just like war photos and representations of the world cup or the Olympics these images found on Facebook are informing a large section of the global population about the world around them. This is an interesting phenomenon because seemingly these images lack the link to power that the images that the mass media had. These images are of private citizens, they come from private citizens, and they are being presented to private citizens. That is why this new phenomenon is so fascinating. Yet all of these issues that are raised by the theory of simulation are applicable as well.

One example would be applying the concept of event to these new enablers of simulation. In the same way that global events were simulations that were preceded by their image, special personal events that are photographed multiple times and disseminated to multiple friends through MMS and SNS also eventually become representations of representations. In Okabe and Ito's research the availability of the camera phone allowed Japanese youths to take more images and the availability of MMS enabled them to send them to their friend's phones. They didn't only take photographs of birthdays and holidays but also of interesting cracks in the sidewalk. Do we live in a world where our understanding of a phenomenon as everyday as encountering a crack in the sidewalk is now informed by other images of cracks in sidewalks? This would be a new depth of simulation, one unimaginable to Baudrillard himself. The impact of MMS on simulation is astounding, it pushes it further than

ever. As the camera phone and MMS become more popular than ever, average citizen engages in their own practice of simulation in a new way.

These uses of MMS presented by earlier research correlate well with Baudrillard's conception of real time. Increasingly personal images lose their temporality. They do not belong to an understood past but continuously perpetuate a vivid present. MMS allows images to rapidly replace others. Photographs have become understood culturally as reality broken into quickly digestible moments (Baudrillard, 2007).

Now that this paper has talked about how digital photography and MMS are enabling a change in our understanding of the world it will talk about the other technology that is enabling this change as well, the social network site. SNSs like MMS are technologies born during the postmodern era. These new digital places encapsulate society's shifting cultural understanding of space. This shift accompanies Baudrillard's simulation well. The next chapter will address these new spaces and show how they have begun to supplant the traditional presentation spaces associated with personal photography.

## CHAPTER 4

### SNS AND SPACE

#### **Introduction**

Similar to how examining multimedia messaging service (MMS) as a technology has enabled changes in our society's relationship to time, examining social network sites (SNS) is a good starting point for attempting to understand our society's new postmodern relationship with space. In particular the space that we use to present and curate photographs. Recently the space that photographs are presented in has undergone a change. SNSs are increasingly taking the place of the traditional analog photo album. This chapter is going to look at these new presentation spaces and is going to explore how they fit in with Baudrillard's simulacra. It will also introduce his concept of hyperreality. These new spaces, like MMS, were created during postmodernity. They are caused by a new cultural understanding of space and they also further enable that change to transpire. Before this chapter discusses the epistemological implication of these spaces, it is important now to understand what exactly an SNS is.

#### **Defining Social Network Sites**

One of the most prevalent new forms of digital presentation spaces is the social network site. Boyd and Ellison used three functional purposes as criteria for determining if a site is a social network (2007). Those three functions are if the site allows users to "(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,

(2) articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (2007, p.1).” Ellison, Haino and Gibbs (2006) have shown that SNSs are primarily used as tools of self-presentation. Although SNSs use various types of media for this function one type that is often a focal point in regards to presentation is the photograph. Ellison et al. found that users spend time choosing photographs that make themselves seem more attractive to friends and even potential romantic interests. This practice is one that has carried over from the original use of early SNSs which were dating sites. Friendster one of the earliest dating sites eventually became an SNS where users used the site not for its initial purpose, meeting romantic partners, but for a purpose of connecting with friends and other users in a platonic manner (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Often times these bonds were based around similar interests, for example tastes in music.

This dating site lineage played a large role in determining the layout of SNSs. Current sites have been developed with similar features as those dating sites. The archetypical SNS profile that still exists to this day consists of demographic information such as sex, location, education, age and income. It also included interests, such as lists of favorite music, television programs, and films as well as open-ended text fields that allow users to present favorite quotations or other types of information. The final piece of information that a profile offers is a photograph chosen by and uploaded by the user. These sites are interesting because essentially what is being created is a fake copy of a “real” person. We create mediated versions of our identity that are designed with others in mind. A lot of writing has been done about the

careful selection of a profile image. The user picks a photograph that they feel represents them as an individual in an ideal way (Siibak, 2009; Strano, 2008). This profile and the information it contains are available to any friend that is accepted by the user. What is important to note here is that the user is creating the representation through video, photographs and text. Although this practice is similar to traditional self-presentation in real life it is different because the public that views content on a SNS is often a larger group of people that the user already has an established connection with.

The profile is only one aspect of SNSs. The SNS also allows the user to create and disseminate visual content not related to these distinct profile categories in a similar way. The user can curate and spread visual media his or herself. This practice of disseminating visual media to a larger public was previously the role of larger media corporations that controlled the financial means and infrastructure that allowed that type of distribution. This is a new phenomenon. This paper will now briefly look at different practices of photography presentation with this idea in mind.

### **New Presentation Spaces**

These new presentation spaces are continually evolving as well. Descriptive research has been carried out on a variety of digital image presentation spaces in particular the photoblog or photography specific SNSs such as Flickr. What is interesting is how quickly earlier conceptions die out as new ones gain popularity (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). One early example, which is still used, is the photoblog. When Susan Murray was conducting her research photoblogs had gained the attention of some scholars. A photoblog is a variant of personal web log, or blog, that primarily

features photographs as content (Murray, 2008). Blogs first appeared on the internet in 1999 (Cohen, 2005) yet only became popular in the early 2000s. Cohen pointed out that the majority of photoblogs that he found when doing his research were created in 2004. A user of an early photoblog would upload images to the internet from their local hard drive. These photographs were most likely put on the computer through a cord such as an USB cord. Later in 2004 other photoblogging specific websites such as Flickr, Snapfish, and Photobucket were introduced to the public (Harmon, 2005). These websites have since simplified the photoblogging process, through improvements such as interface improvements and standardization. This made photoblogging more accessible to the average internet user. These websites also began to resemble traditional SNSs. Many of the features that SNSs utilize were being made available such as commenting, forming groups this allowed users to connect with other users. Most recently SNSs themselves have taken a larger role in image management. As this research is interested primarily in SNSs it is important to gather a bit of information based on the most popular SNS, Facebook. Facebook is of particular interest due to its recent unprecedented growth and acceptance as a SNS. The website states facts such as, “More than 500 million active users,” “50% of our active users log on to Facebook in any given day,” “Average user has 130 friends” and “People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook.” Facebook was also an early adopter of MMS based mobile uploading.

There are more than 200 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices...People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users...[The]

Average user creates 90 pieces of content each month...More than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) shared each month. More than 500 million active users 50% of our active users log on to Facebook in any given day... Average user has 130 friends. People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Facebook, 2010).

Facebook, like many SNSs, has a fascinating way in which it presents photographs that are uploaded to the site. Many of these sites present the images that are uploaded in albums. This language is a carry over from the photographic culture that went along with analog photography. These albums can be organized by the user according to event, time period or any other category. Beyond the album feature these sites also have a public area where either the user or other connected users can share various types of media. Facebook formerly called this area a “wall” and have recently changed the name of this feature to the “timeline.” The difference between the wall and the timeline is the acknowledged temporality of the feature. The difference between the wall and the timeline is based around a visual representation that highlights this temporal aspect. Both are similar in function. The timeline, or wall, of a SNS is a place where both the user and the people connected with the user can insert text, images or video this is similar to a public bulletin board. As new items are added, either by the user or by members of the user’s network, older entries are forced down the screen until eventually they become not immediately viewable. The photographs that users upload through the mobile upload process are also kept in a particular album located in the user’s photos tab. This wall displays its content in way that highlights

context but also allows content to be viewed outside of any type of context. A video from YouTube can be found next to photos of a family dinner. These items can be surrounded by text based messages that can range in topics, from well wishes to the coded punch line of an inside joke. These SNS walls have a temporal aspect that accompanies MMS quite well. The SNS because of this wall becomes a constant changing curatorial project, one that could be viewed as an analog to the user's social life and activities. Beyond being limited to either desktop, or laptop computers or any internet ready mobile device this presentation space is no longer limited to a particular location such as a living room or parlor. Viewing a photograph is no longer something that needs to happen in a close proximity to the traditional analog artifact. Digitization and SNSs allow images to be viewed in other states, countries and even continents.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) would have said that this is a remediation of traditional image presentation processes. Although the presentation space changes the task is very similar. This goes along Bolter and Grusin's understanding of new media in the digital age. They argued that new visual media achieve their cultural significance precisely by paying homage to, rivaling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television. They call this process of refashioning "remediation," and they note that earlier media have also refashioned one another: photography remediated painting, film remediated stage production and photography, and television remediated film, vaudeville, and radio. Like these forms of media the SNS is limited by its form. The information that it can give to a viewer is linked to the possibilities that the platform offers.



This new type of presentation space also allows users to upload images through MMS. In this was a SNS not only allows viewers of images to consume images from a distance but also the photographer to present and curate photographs from a distance. SNSs are also subject to their own presentation rules. These rules are interesting because they essentially limit the self-presentation that the sites offer. If a user wants to present them selves as and individual they are limited substantially by the conformity caused by the layouts standardization. Myspace another popular SNS used to allow a large amount of customization but has in recent years significantly limited those options, instead the site's layout now favors the more conservative look of other popular sites. This standardization however contrasts with the changing nature of the site due to a often constant feed of content. Mark Federman (2006) said this about SNSs,

One of the most important effects of Massively multi-way, instantaneous and ubiquitous communications is pervasive proximity. We experience everyone to whom we are connected and conceivably everyone to whom we are potentially connected—as if they are exactly next to us. The effect is that of hundreds, or thousands, or millions of people coming together in zero space, so that there is no perceptible difference between them. (online source, para. 2)

Federman stated that this new technology has an effect on the way people interact because they all exist in a new zero space. This space enables us to interact with those that live in remote areas as though they are right next to us. When a user sends a photo through MMS to a SNS and points out an everyday event to a person miles away it is as though they are standing next to each other they are existing in this idea of zero

space. Zero space is an interesting concept because the space that it refers to does not physically exist but it has a certain type of physical attributes applied to it. The idea that these pages bring us closer together doesn't quite fully explore the conceptual alteration of space that SNSs allow. The zero space aspect is interesting in that it points out that an SNS isn't actually a place at all. Federman also raised the idea that existing in this new space creates a similarity between the people within a person's network. They become surprisingly similar because they all are bound within this restricted space. Although this aspect might not be true it is true that on another level all of these profiles are stored as similar types of binary code on a server somewhere. Also this does raise an interesting question about the effects of these spaces on the concept of mediated individuality.

This research when applied to the idea of simulation is interesting because it highlights a lot of the features that have been created by a society that exists in a postmodern society. The image increasingly becomes the maker of meaning in these spaces. This goes is pushed to the point where the profile supplants the identity of the user. Self-presentation and displaying personal images has existed for a while but these practices were never intended to take the place of the actual living person. Older image presentation spaces and the images that existed within them were known representations and they were understood to exist within the representation and truth dichotomy. This is a good time to briefly look at analog photo albums as well the technological advancement that made them irrelevant, digitization.

## **Analog Versus Digital Presentation Spaces**

The presentation of personal photographs is a subject that has been an interest of scholars for quite some time. Richard Chalfen (1987), in *Snapshot Versions of Life*, explored the social practice of personal photography, which he called Kodak culture. Kodak culture was the cultural phenomenon of people sharing images in private yet social setting. These photographs were often accompanied by stories that were orally shared. Chalfen's research explored several family photo albums, looking for the cultural significance in the way photographs are taken, stored, and exhibited. He found that families create a narrative that accompanies each photo album and that the way the albums were set up normally followed that narrative. Chalfen's work is interesting because he manages to examine multiple families' photo albums, which allowed him to see how frequently albums were used to create and maintain a public image. Even though these albums were for designed for select close family members and friends, they were still a presentation of the ideal family. This was according to the families themselves.

These albums spatially are interesting because they played a major role in the centralization of the practice of photographic presentation. Photographs were found in specific places; albums, frames, or in bins, very "real" places. This practice reinforced modernist understandings of personal images, and images in general by allowing images to exist in distinct places that separated them from a "real" event. If a person is looking at an album of photographs it is makes to assume that those photographs represent another time. The viewer is in a different location from where those photographs have been taken. The photographs are also not in the location where they

were taken. The viewer is in a location that is designed for this practice. This is different than the smart phone. With a smart phone a viewer can view photos of the same beach trip while still at the beach. This is a drastic example of this phenomenon but it points to a major spatial change in the presentation of photographs.

Similar to photography's relationship to time the digitization of personal photography has changed the spatial aspect of what Chalfen called Kodak culture. This traditional use of photo albums has undergone a change as more and more images that are taken are digital photographs. Early on Lev Manovich realized that certain aspects of digitization were having an effect on the traditional understanding of photographic culture. In 1995 he wrote about photography's digitization stating:

The logic of the digital photograph is one of historical continuity and discontinuity. The digital image tears apart the net of semiotic codes, modes of display, and patterns of spectatorship in modern visual culture – and, at the same time, weaves this net even stronger. The digital image annihilates photography while solidifying, glorifying and immortalizing the photographic. In short, this logic is that of photography after photography. (p. 1)

Although Manovich was writing seventeen years ago his predictions are accurate. Photography's digitization has allowed a new type of presentation space, as well as a new understanding of the photograph itself.

These new ways of presentation ostensibly destroy old ways of viewing photographs, for example the photographic print and analog album. But these new ways have also made the photograph more powerful and prevalent than it ever has been. One reason is that our society has more locations and technologies to view a

photograph than ever before. This means there are also more photographs to view than ever before. This increased access to information coincides with Baudrillard's precession of simulacra.

Digital photographs are becoming easier to access. People can access a digital photograph from various devices, and many of those are new mobile electronic devices. Mobile devices that allow a person to make a digital image also increasingly allow them to use the same piece of technology to disseminate and present that digital image. This new type of dissemination is an example of how the digitization of the photograph is changing traditional presentation practices. Traditionally, if a person saw something worth photographing, he or she would take a photograph with his or her camera, and later develop film or upload the image to a computer. The next step was to get a print made, which in turn would be placed and subsequently shown in a frame or an album. Other presentation forms also existed, such as having a photograph sent from one computer to another through e-mail. This whole process involves events that are tied to the hard copy format of the photograph. Mobile devices, with their internet connectivity along with the introduction of SNSs has enabled the implosion of that process both spatially and temporally.

### **Applying Theory to SNS**

As this chapter traces how these SNSs are both a product of and enabler of simulation, it also shows the reader the epistemological implications of this new cultural use of presentation space. One way that these new spaces are different from traditional presentation spaces is the way the user interfaces with these new digital spaces. While some SNSs are customizable, many use a standardized layout. This

standardization is reminiscent of a concept introduced by Marc Auge (2008). In *Domaines et Châteaux* (Homes and Places), Auge (2008) was fascinated with hypermodernity, particularly the architectural spaces that exist within what he called “hypermodernity.” An Anthropologist, Auge looked at locations that seem to have no discerning characteristics, but only similarities. These similarities he said caused the non-place to break its connection with reality. These places seemed so ubiquitous that they transform into non-places. An example of a non-place would be a McDonald's. As a common fast food chain, it loses all characteristics that might distinguish it from any other (Auge, 2008). Although it may be true that different locations offer different styles of food that are linked to a certain culture, they do have similar structural cues that transcend cultural and geographic boundaries. They can be located anywhere, and they are not linked to any particular location, boundaries or traditions. The practice of creating spaces that are similar should be considered when assessing an SNS because this practice shows how a culture has gradually accepted a reorganization of space, one that is not a representation of a “real” but a representation of another representation. This is similar to simulation. Buildings or spaces in this instance change from modernist representations to simulations. This concept of non-places can be applied to SNS. A SNS shares similar characteristics with the non-place. Its practices and structure are intimately familiar, personal and culturally rooted in the everyday lives of people. Yet they are similar. One Facebook screen will look very similar to another Facebook screen even if the users are different. Standardization does not apply to all SNSs but increasingly these sites are restricting the amount. Again, Myspace used to allow a larger amount of customization but has since scaled those

options back. If a photograph can be viewed on any computer screen or mobile device through an SNS, then the phenomenon described by Chalfen (1987) is seemingly outdated. When applying Baudrillard's theoretical lens to Auge's (2008) writing it seems feasible that a non-place is a symptom of simulation. It is in fact very similar to Baudrillard's hyperreality, which he claims is a state that occurs only during the postmodern condition of simulation. Hyperreality is the simulation of something that never really existed. Baudrillard's (1988) primary example when it came to explaining the concept of hyper reality was Disneyland:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real. (p. 172)

Here he says that hyperreality is a fakeness attempting to cover up the fact that the surrounding world is fake as well. This fake world to which he is referring is simulation, where images have lost connection to the "real" reference that they purport to represent. This idea goes farther than Auge's but is similar in that both observe the development of spaces that have little to no connection to the "real" that surrounds it.

The SNS is very up front about it being a hyperreal simulation. Where most spaces attempt to defend their realness SNSs share the same characteristics as Disneyland. The SNS is admittedly a fake construction and one that does not represent

the “real” world it is embedded in. The same way that a Facebook profile is a copy of ourselves that are actually not very similar to ourselves but act as a substitute the Facebook as a site is also a fake space that is a copy of our “real” world.

Conversations happen, organizing, planning and photo sharing all take place in this made up place between fake versions of ourselves. People often will use these sites to disseminate messages that would have never been sent out to a public in past times. Suicide notes, break up announcements, and family deaths are all announced without much hesitation in these new spaces.

This non-place and hyperreality relationship is one that should be examined more with the SNS in mind. The SNS is a non-place, yet it has very “real” interactions that occur within it. It is an example of hyperreality because it blurs the distinction between “real” and fake. As people became comfortable with transferring digital images around they were increasingly put onto this new type of space. The viewer can go to a website and view images that have been uploaded to that website. This is possible because the image has been placed on the website’s server. But the thing that is most important is that the SNS as a photographic viewing location is standardizing the photograph viewing experience. Images are being quickly sent to these sites through MMS. Once they are on the site, they become a part of the code that surrounds viewing images in an era of simulation.

This is actually similar to our physical space interactions in this way although we go to actual locations those locations are in fact simulations. Simulations are dependent on the consumption of information. Again, I would like to use the beach as an example. The beach is a place that we cannot experience as a reality. This again is



due to our lives being saturated with images of people going to the beach. Our behavior is influenced by those representations to such an extent that we cannot tell what is “real” versus what is not. Therefore information about the beach becomes our understood reality of the beach. Both are non-places in this instance due to the fact that they are strictly formed by information.

### **The New Map**

This discussion of spaces is important when attempting to understand the epistemological implications of this new form of personal photographic image culture. These photoblogs and SNSs allow a larger part of society to share the images that are being used to form an understanding of the world. Returning to Baudrillard’s earlier example of the map it is possible to say that what is presented here is a new map. It is perhaps a more democratic map as the SNS has replaced the traditional forms of receiving and disseminating information in the form of images. Large multinational mass media corporations are no longer the sole source of the images that enable Baudrillard’s simulation; social media and SNSs also fill that role.

Although this new style of map is exciting conceptually, it is important to attempt to understand who is actually looking at these images. Can they rival the image presentation capabilities of the mass media? This raises new questions on the subject of public. These questions are about who is looking at posted photographs on SNSs. When a group is gathered around a photo album it is very easy to discern the audience. But with an SNS is the audience one’s (often) very large list of friends? Or is there something new perhaps a new mediated public? The definition of public goes back to Habermas’ original work on the public sphere. Livingstone (2005) when discussing

SNSs pointed out that the public used to be a spatial relationship only accessible to the people in the physical space around a person. Originally this group of people shared “a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest” (p. 13). This is different than an audience. Audience members do not normally identify themselves as such; it is an imposed term for the passive group of people that purposefully consume media. It contains none of the discursive elements necessary to create a group of people both separate from each other but also grouped together. Mass media has changed our understanding of public. Formerly, a public was a group of people that, if someone yelled out, the public would hear that person’s yell. Perhaps others would hear about it later, through word of mouth. But those people were not included in that person’s immediate public. Mass media allowed messages to reach a larger public, often times an unknown public. If a yell is recorded it can be played multiple times to multiple people. The SNS’s public is similar to the mass media public because it allows messages to be sent to a large group of people. It is different because the message sender often knows those people. But it is actually more complicated than that. If someone have three hundred and fifty friends on Facebook and that person posts an image on their Facebook site how many people are going to see that image, all 350 members, only a handful? What if the image is of five friends at the beach? Are only those five members going to view that image? Are others? Someone might have missed that trip so they may pay more attention than others to that image. If it is a friend that one had in middle school are they going to care to look at all? These examples demonstrate how the SNS’s public is truly a unique public. This presentation space is similar to a television show in that a

group of unspecified people can access a SNS but SNSs are also similar to a slide show held in the confines of a living room, where only a few selected guests have been granted access to someone's personal vacation images.

If we were to follow the idea of the new map to its logical conclusion, it would be feasible to say that although an SNS reaches a limited public, the images that reach the public are going to, affect the way that the world understands the world around them, as did mass media before them. Unlike mass media these spaces are born out of postmodernity, the construction of the sites themselves points to a world fully enveloped in simulation. SNSs, which exist in a non-space, are allowing the public to consume their world in a new way they send off images at a faster rate through the internet than ever before and those that choose to view them consume them in a novel way. This new phenomenon should not be looked at through a lens that is interested in how people use these sites to present themselves to others, they should be looked at in a way that questions how do these sites perpetuate a certain world view. The implications of this new map and of this new photographic culture will be examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The act of creating images through technological means is now more firmly rooted into our society's psyche than it ever has been before. The technology that we use to take photographs has changed, and that change is largely linked to culture. This technological change, as well as the culture that causes those changes, has been the focus of this paper. Instead of large time consuming glass plates or even compact rolls of thirty five millimeter film we have now moved on to easier to use streamlined digital cameras that can be found on other types of commonplace pieces of technology such as mobile phones and other devices.

This paper has traced cultural and technological changes such as these throughout photography's history with a focus on how culture and the tools it uses limit or enhance society's understanding of the world. Early on in premodern times traditional Platonic understandings of representation and reality as two separate entities both informed early modes of representation, such as painting and early photography, and were informed by those mimetic practices. This Platonic legacy solidified itself throughout the ensuing decades. As personal photographic images as well as mass media images began to burgeon this previously assumed relationship began to be challenged by a variety of theorists that were interested in communication technologies and the industrial world. Theorists became very upfront about challenging these assumptions. Jean Baudrillard (1988) stated images were not

analogous representations of a true reality or truth, but that they were one in the same. Baudrillard's famous work on simulation stated that this was caused by a mass infusion of signs into the everyday. He went on to say that this torrent of images caused a societal change. The "real" was formerly understood to be something separate from the image. But now it has become the image. He explained that this happens due to changes in economic, technological, and political systems. Signs, or images, currently only reference other signs or other images. It becomes very difficult to make a distinction of what "real" is or was. Baudrillard was very interested in who controlled the spread of knowledge. He believed studying mass media and the channels they use to disseminate images could help determine who was in power and how those in power affected society. Baudrillard existed in a world where large multinational corporations held a large amount of power because they controlled various channels of mass media. If Baudrillard's theory of simulation is correct then these large corporations, that possess an ability to disseminate images on a scale that was unrivaled in history, are the primary meaning makers of our society. They have ostensibly created a society that deals in an economy of images. Things and images no longer signify a function, they signify other objects and images. A Porsche, or photo of a Porsche isn't judged by its function as a car, it is judged by being compared to every car that has ever existed. Interplaying signs determine a car's Porschness not the car's ability.

This research used the theoretical lens of simulation and applied it to new practices of photographic creation, dissemination and presentation, in particular the practices that surround the new technologies multimedia messaging services and

social network sites. These are interesting technologies to apply this theoretical lens to because they were created during the postmodern era. They represent a period in photography's ongoing history where both the temporal and spatial aspects of the practice have gone through considerable change. One major cause of those changes was digitization; this format of image allows photographs to be sent through MMS quickly from one hand held device to another, or to new type of place all together, a SNS. The reason that these new practices should be observed is that these new practices and technologies have enabled personal photography to become rampant to a degree that it never has been before. More photographs are being taken because technology has made that process easier, they are being sent to more people because technology has made that process easier and they are being presented to larger groups than ever before because technology has made that process easier as well. This combination means there are more personal photographs being circulated throughout society than ever before. This new phenomenon forced the question, is this new cultural practice of photography changing the epistemological role of the corporation? Is the balance of knowledge creation power swinging towards the individual?

This paper's primary purpose was to conduct historical and cultural analysis of a new phenomenon. Often times this type of research leaves the reader with more questions than answers. And this chapter likely has done just that raised many questions. Digital cameras, MMS and SNS are three forms of very interesting contemporary pieces of technology. Explaining how they all interact with our society's visual culture allowed this research to examine each one. This paper used photography as a lens to track changes in society's epistemological understanding of

the world. The changes that we have covered are not exclusive to the practice of photography but the impact on the practice of personal photography has been large.

What does all of this theory mean in regards to understanding the way we understand the world around us? If we exist in a society where the public is increasingly becoming a factor in furthering simulation by expanding our daily visual lexicon to include many more personal images is that good for society or worse? It is important not to make value judgments in this case, and it is difficult to truly understand the epistemological implications of this recent phenomenon. But it seems feasible on a surface level that this new democratic map would yield a truer or more “real” portrayal, and in turn, understanding of the world. This idea is sure to excite the proponents of people’s history or history from below, and is one that is increasingly being portrayed through the mass media, which is a bit ironic. News organizations have gotten into the habit of using viewer generated content to cover stories as diverse as storm footage to political and economic uprisings in various parts of the globe. The term “citizen journalist” (Goode, 2010) has become particularly popular recently. News organizations have always utilized found footage; it is a cheaper alternative to the traditional news footage. The difference is this new public generated footage is so abundant and so readily available. This is true because the prevalence of camera phones and other mobile devices, which are equipped with MMS or have access to the internet. It is common to attend an event, no matter how innocuous, and see a handful of people with their mobile phones out either photographing or recording the event to video. This footage is seen as raw or unfiltered, it lacks the veneer of production value. It makes sense that both news editors and viewers would deem these images as

more “real” than traditional news footage. But is this new phenomenon harkening back to older understandings of representation? This practice seems to reposition the photograph as a representational analog to an objective “real.” A technology that was created because of postmodernity is being used by society as a way to revitalize a modernist understanding of the image. But it is of course not that simple. If there is one thing that this paper has pointed out it is that these personal photographs are as much a part of enabling simulation as mass media images.

What appears to be happening is this new form of image culture is just allowing people to further perpetuate the images they had previously consumed from the mass media. These technologies are being used to imitate those complexly coded mass media produced images. This goes back to the well tread example of the beach. Are personal beach images just representations of media created referents? Or are they the way a person really experiences the beach. Discerning where an individual’s own image creating agency begins and ends becomes problematic.

What should be raised are questions about power. If the traditional capitalist media have ceded the epistemological duties to the public but the public is still perpetuating the images that those previously in power pushed forward aren’t the large corporations still dictating society’s worldview? Who is benefiting from this new model? Corporations still, or the public? With multinational mass media corporations it is very easy to distinguish who benefits from the images that are being shown, advertisers, television companies, media conglomerates are all fairly tangible institutions. The internet is different. Facebook gives their service away for free with hopes that advertisers will place ads on user’s pages and that users will then click



those ads and then consume the advertised good. This process seems very similar to the model that newspapers and television networks have used for decades. Hard copy newspapers have always charged for their product and television early on did not but the models for making money were still similar. As content is made free service has become the main stream of revenue in this new model. This system still exists in a primarily free market capitalist system.

So who owns the internet? Commonly the internet has lofty ideals attached to it by society. A common assertion about the internet is that it is a free open place where society can express itself in a way that it never could (Tuohy, 2011). This is not true. There are definitely owners of the internet. The “owner” often changes depending on the country a person is in. In some places the owner is a private corporation; in others the state is the “owner” (Lewis, 1998). But someone somewhere has control over the access that one has and the content that one posts or produces. The internet is a type of man made technology that is ultimately a collection of servers that send digital signals through thousands of miles of infrastructure, sometimes on land, sometimes through the airwaves and increasingly often through space. Although this paper has been discussing lofty epistemologically based theory that seems to have little real world application, it is important to remember ultimately Baudrillard’s concerns were power. Even as the former Marxist traveled further from his early ideas, he was concerned with what made industrial society different than societies before it (Baudrillard, 1988). It is a bit ironic that this paper calls for more research into the production of a commodity, as that is what Baudrillard eventually moved away from in his own theory. But this seems to be an interesting avenue to travel further down. If the

primary motive of controlling history is to control capital as Marx and Engels (1976) stated, then capitalism would not allow this to be given away as a gift. In fact information technology companies allow us to present our history from below due to the practice's reliance on the goods that they provide.

In a society that appears to be both decentralizing and democratizing through new forms of media and acceptances of new technologies and cultural understandings this decentralization and democratization are in fact false and we live in a society strikingly similar to the one that we thought we were escaping. It is important here to realize that this trend in making the public the mapmaker should actually be framed as making the consumer a mapmaker. Capitalism has never been particularly interested in the transfer of ideas and information. Capitalism is interested in creating and maintaining markets.

The same goes with history. Corporations allow the public to make their own maps because they ultimately need to use the products that the corporations produce to do so. These resources include both traditional means of production, the raw resources that are necessary to construct and maintain computers, mobile devices and large servers, as well as bandwidth. Corporations still own and produce the resources that give new media the power that they conceivably possess.

It is important to point out that the reason this research is new and exciting is that it applies Baudrillard's simulation. While Baudrillard did not focus on the internet extensively during his academic career it is important to note that the internet as well as MMS and SNS are technologies that fit so well with his theory. The cruel irony is that Baudrillard's theory was concerned with large corporations and their

epistemological roles in society. That monopolized role has been changed due to the proliferation of the internet, MMS and SNSs but the users of these technologies are using these tools to perpetuate the images and worldview that mass media put forth years ago.

This research and the theoretical perspective that it used encountered certain limitations. One limitation of this research is the lack of minority viewpoints that exist in Baudrillard's theory. Baudrillard assumed that his theory of simulation was a blanket theory that impacted in the same manner all people that interacted with mass media. This is not necessarily true. People that identify with minority groups may have different cultural experiences than people that do not. Baudrillard failed to take into account the influence of race, gender, sexual preference or ethnicity. Future research should account for this lack of demarcation. Although these limitations should not be grounds for dismissing Baudrillard's theory of simulation future research should focus on MMS and SNSs' use from other cultural perspectives.

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