

metric-based social media project is seeing one's own life standardized, uniform with others, and ranked.

The social photo is an especially prominent technological mediation of our lives, a powerful contemporary example of how reality is augmented—how connected digital cameras can articulate the self and sociality rather than inherently dimin-

self through a afford, is potentially enture into chnological and human al nature of

Walter Ong and literacy phenomena.¹¹² that merge body's lived of transmit- nis fusion of k, speak, and ; at an event ;g an experi- ; always been made social is machine. The we are made of and by us.

Coda. The Social Video

This book began with a description of the faux-vintage filtered photos that were popular on social media for a short time around 2011. These images first prompted my interest in the entwinement of social media and photography; I was attracted then less to the medium of photography than to the circulation of a new kind of nostalgia. I wrote an essay on those images, which is adapted in this book, about social media as an expanded camera eye, one that views the present as a potential future past. As an early form of social photography, those faux-vintage images represented a kind of halfway point between dominant conceptions of photography as it was known and the *social* photography it would become.

This became clear for me in late 2012 with the arrival of the Snapchat app and Facebook's short-lived copy. The literal expiration of images was an explicit manifestation of where photography had already been going, but without the anachronistic and nostalgic holdovers. Thinking about ephemeral photography and social media more generally lead quickly to the basic conceptual work in this book, describing a style of image-making and circulation as a *social photography* that is more like speaking than recording. From there, I joined Snapchat in 2013 to develop this line of thinking as well as to apply it in design. This book is the culmination of my thinking about the rise of social photography, written from within and outside academia, within and outside industry.

I want this volume to document this transitional moment in the evolution of photography. I hope we can apply the conceptual tools developed here, through the example of

social photography, to other ways we come to speak and learn visually, using whatever connected sensors and software is developed in the future. Already, for example, speaking with images is increasingly done through video. The quick note to a friend and the funny sighting are more routinely done with video. Mitchell Stephens presciently argued in 1998 that the computer would be taken over by video, by moving images. He predicted that when computation and video come together, it will "make it possible for most of us to 'speak' in moving images."¹ This has very much become our present reality. It may be the social video, not the photo, that becomes the standard unit of image speak.

Moving pictures are a kind of magic, a trick created by the mind. In fact, George Méliès, who made the 1902 film *A Trip to the Moon*, was a magician turned filmmaker. Social streams orchestrate a similar trick, which as a whole play a bit like a movie, each image playing off of what has come directly before to create the illusion of a particular definite reality. A finger swipe or scroll sets stillness in motion and turns isolated frames into a continuum. Even when sitting still on a screen, social images shared as communication as much as for documentary or aesthetic reasons are alive in their implicit flow. They are animated by how they relate alongside one another and in how they circulate socially, from screen to screen.

Much of what I've said about photography in this volume also applies to video, but the shift from the still to the moving image requires some analytical adjustments. Videos differ from photographs in how they are made and read. It is outside the scope of this project to fully differentiate the camera eye's video vision, to see movement as shareable, to speak and listen with and through it. This is only a brief and speculative addendum, pointing toward a further analysis that looks beyond photographic theory specifically in describing what people are doing with cameras.

I'm not suggesting any end to social photography. Stillness is especially useful in its relative efficiency as a means of communication. The optimal ratio of information conveyed versus the time viewers must commit to take it in varies, and each device and platform (let alone particular personal experience) posts its own calculus. The social video contains so much detail that isn't included in a still image. The photograph, which could be understood as a cropped video, has its own efficiency, allowing you to be shocked, amused, moved, aroused, and pricked in an instant. This sort of information efficiency—immediacy over superfluous detail—is part of why photographs are so popular on social media.

Unlike watching a video, or listening to someone speak, seeing an image happens almost all at once; it is a story told in a flash, even if you choose to ponder it further after it reveals itself to you. You don't have to wait, as you do with moving images that, like these words on a page, follow progressively one after another. As a kind of seeing over time, video can be information-*inefficient*. A stream of photos scrolled through quickly still imparts meaning, conveying, if nothing else, which shot deserves more careful attention. Videos scrolled through as quickly have less of an opportunity to tell their isolated stories.

If the equation for visual efficiency would be information/time, photos have the smallest possible denominator. Even short videos often take exponentially longer to watch, outpacing any increase they might supply in the numerator. A six-second video may seem short but is a relative eternity compared with the instantaneity of a still image. Six seconds of scrolling through many still images can provide a broad range of disparate informational experiences, not just the single one a video would offer. Videos may be able to convey more, but they require time.

If stillness is a choice, it is one that appeals to this different temporality of watching. Choosing stillness can be a gesture

toward efficiency but it can also invite a particular experience of autonomy for those watching. A still image provides an opportunity to ponder at your own pace, to take in detail and to take as much or as little time as you want. Video demands more than just time from us; it also directs our attention, guiding us through the experience it depicts. The photograph allows more freedom of perception, a sense of control over the small slice of visual reality it provides. While well-composed images have formal qualities that suggest a path for the eye to take to tell a particular story, they remain open to be read and reread differently, indefinitely. Your eye can move along those paths backward and forward or ignore them altogether. Video, instead, imposes a linearity on the viewer, who has little ability to focus their eye for longer on an element that has just been pushed off-screen. They insist on a specific marriage of image and sound over time. Unlike photos, videos have a definite ending. They can finish even before you decide to scroll away.²

While such efficiency facilitates social imagery, it certainly is not the only goal. If, as I argued previously, a social photo is one made less as a formally artistic object or documentary record and more primarily as a means of communicating experience, then in many cases, a video might work even better. If social photography speaks with images, then social video speaks with more of them, conveying more of an experience, more of a moment one wants to share. Of course, no video is the whole truth. Like any framed image, it can only present a portion of reality by cropping the rest away. But posting a video is an invitation to experience as it was experienced. While never complete, it more accurately suggests an experience as it was, in something closer to its initial flow, with movement and sound in sync with the original event.

This overcomes, to some degree, the stillness that can make still photos seem more staged. As Roland Barthes wrote, “the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series

of images.”³ Stillness in an image emphasizes its performed quality; it suggests a decisive moment—that is, one that is calculated, controlled, refined, and shaped to send a particular message. No longer the standard but a choice, stillness foregrounds that this document is a document. By capturing more of a moment, more detail, more sensory information, social videos can seem less resolute and can be read as being simply the experience shared for its own sake. Videos simulate the appearance of directness.

If what we are trying to do with sharing social images is to convey a sense of spontaneous experience, still images may come to seem like stunted videos, oddly halted and frozen. Just as color made black-and-white images appear like a self-consciously arty or nostalgic choice, social video makes still imagery seem more deliberate. “Still” will become a chosen effect rather than the mere default in image sharing, like a filter or style that calls attention to itself and its specific way of mediating experience. To take a photograph rather than a video reads as an explicit choice that screams “*stopped*.” After all, life is flow and movement and sound; a photograph is always a choice to make it still.

Stillness is more informative, more explicitly documentary, and it invites more attention to detail. Both stillness and movement complement each other as part of an expanding array of visual communicative possibilities. For viewers, the photograph affords a sense of total control over the small slice of the visual reality it depicts. Video, by contrast, has limitations that stem from more closely mimicking how experience unfolds. In this way, the photo suggests knowing; the video, observing.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has collaborated on and contributed to the *Cyborgology* blog, the Theorizing the Web conference, and *Real Life* magazine for inspiration. Thank you to everyone at *The New Inquiry*. Some of this book is drawn from essays I wrote there. Thank you to Charles Cappell, Jennifer Lackey, and George Ritzer for mentorship. Thank you to David Banks, Kate Crawford, Jenny Davis, Rob Horning, PJ Rey, Evan Spiegel, and Zeynep Tufekci for conversation. And thank you to my mother Annette and sisters Cicely and Kim for love.