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The Public Mirror: Legitimizing 'Social' Photography as a contemporary discipline

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The Public Mirror: Legitimizing ‘Social Photography’ as a contemporary discipline

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Abstract:

With all the public information about any famous person, topic or event ‘googleable’ on the Internet, there seems to be nothing new for ‘digital natives’ to discover other than the elusive Self. The Self is the ‘new frontier’ and the smartphone camera is at the forefront of this quest, unearthing and exhibiting different kinds of content everyday. With over 95 million photographs and videos shared on *Instagram* daily; Photography has merged with social networking sites and applications (SNS/A) to become a recognisable phenomenon called – ‘Social’ Photography. Despite its rich association with legitimate visual art-forms and numerous scholarly articles examining its various forms – the term ‘Social’ Photography is unfamiliar to most. This inquiry discusses ‘Social’ Photography in relation to existing literature to argue for its establishment as a legitimate discipline within the Creative Arts. By acknowledging its subjectivity and utilization of digital technologies, this study employed an interpretive group of methods and identified six characteristics of ‘Social’ Photography – namely, (i) Activity, (ii) Participation, (iii) Identity, (iv) Glamour, (v) Protest, and (vi) Spectacle – that exemplify its capacity to curate a meaningful democratic public image. These six aspects can be used to categorize and formalize individual behaviour that can be analysed and interpreted to foster a better understanding of ‘Social’ Photography as a discipline.

Keywords:

Social Photography, Instagram, social media, democratic, selfies, subjectivity.

Introduction

“The web has become a hall of mirrors, filled only with reflections of our data”. (Schraefel, 2015: para 1)

There are two kinds of mirrors that most people are familiar with; 1.) the plane mirror that allows an individual to view an unobstructed reflection of the Self that appears to be backward, since it is reversed left to right, and 2.) the two-way mirror that affords a ‘spectator/s’ the opportunity to look through the mirror and scrutinize an individual’s actions, and collect data unobserved. When we look into a plane mirror, one of the most persistent questions we ask ourselves is, “who am I?” As we move further from the ‘mirror’ and interact with the world, we notice ‘others’ observing our actions and behaviour. Consequently, we ask ourselves, “what is my purpose or role in society?” These queries attempt to define the Self in contradictory yet complimentary ways. The latter is what we do in society; purpose is a public-communal act, evidenced through noticeable consistent action, validated by others. On the other hand, “identity is not stable, it is tenuously constituted in time and instituted through a stylized repetition of acts ... which the actors themselves and the mundane social audience, perform in the mode of belief”. (Butler, 1988: 520) Identity is therefore a ‘performative illusion’ affirmed by our immediate communities and initiated by an intimate desire to understand our Self.

“In the hall of mirrors of the Internet, the phenomena of photo-sharing provides a similar yet more complex environment for projection and perception of Self, in which the authors are no longer, for the most part, artists but rather the ordinary person”. (Donnachie, 2015: 7) “Social media allows for people who fall outside the norms of mass culture to become popular ... [and it] provides users with fairly open-ended tools and techniques that an individual can select to represent themselves”. (Marwick, 2015: 138) Amateurs can now enact a more democratic public representation of themselves that reflects a dynamic set of personal interests and aspirations – rather than demographics, marketing strategies, and mainstream media’s archetypes. This contemporary practice of curating and sharing personal photographs to SNS/A is the ‘two-way mirror’ known as ‘Social’ Photography.

Research Problem

‘Social’ Photography is theoretically a two-way ‘public mirror’ that reposit numerous micro-expressions, or ‘reflections’, of amateur photographer’s personal interests, emotions, and ‘ideals’ – primarily in three specific categories; people, places, and things. “In fact, in the occasions which give rise to photography, such as the objects, places and people photographed, it appears that there is nothing more regulated and conventional than photographic practice and amateur photographs: everything seems to obey implicit canons which are very generally imposed”. (Bourdieu, 1990: 7) Despite these self-imposed conventions, there is very little literature that attempts to define ‘Social’ Photography as a discipline or argue for it’s recognition as a legitimate art-form. New media scholars and researchers seem to be pre-occupied with examining the Selfie phenomena, the *Instagram* application, and online marketing strategies, in conjunction with the negative narcissistic effects of regular social media use.

‘Social’ Photography has provided a new arena for conversations and commentaries about race, gender, politics, and social inequality to take place in the public sphere. Recent social movements like #Egypt (the Arab Spring, Tunisian, Libya, Egypt), #BringBackOurGirls (Nigeria), #Kony2012 (Uganda), #BlackLivesMatter (USA), #BlackTwitter (USA), #RhodesMustFall (RSA), #FeesMustFall (RSA), and #ThisFlag (Zimbabwe) - have all used pictorial campaigns that feature ‘social’ imagery. Studies such as Hänska-Ahy and Shapour (2013), and Bonilla and Rosa (2015) respectively examined how; the BBC’s Persian and Arabic language services newsrooms drew heavily on content created by ordinary citizens to cover events surrounding the 2009 protests in Iran and the 2011 Arab uprisings; and discussed how digital protest such as #Ferguson have become powerful tools for documenting, contesting misrepresentation, and re-imagining the materiality of racialized bodies.

‘Social’ Photography has evidenced the capacity for ‘ordinary’ photographers to directly communicate germane versions of their ‘ideals’ and ‘lived experiences’ to the digital super public sphere and mainstream media; yet it’s relevance as an art-form is relegated to that of a social past time. This dissertation examines the existing literature associated with ‘social’ imagery to legitimize and define ‘Social’ Photography as a distinct contemporary art-form and a field of interest for scholars, critics, and ‘ordinary’ citizens. The study cites the ‘social’ photographer’s ability to recycle societal realities and curate a meaningful democratic public image in (6) key areas – (i) Activity, (ii) Participation, (iii) Identity, (iv) Glamour, (v) Protest, and (vi) Spectacle – as evidence that exemplifies its usefulness in understanding the Self and the Self’s role in the public arena. Using this criterion, it argues for the legitimization of ‘Social’ Photography as a contemporary discipline within the Creative Arts, because, “nothing is more acceptable today than the photographic recycling of reality, acceptable as an everyday activity and as a branch of high art”. (Sontag, 1977: 115)

Research Questions

This research explores the central question of: 1) What is ‘Social’ Photography? Around this inquiry, several sub questions were developed to foster a better understanding of the art-form, specifically: 1.a) How did ‘Social’ Photography develop into a discipline? 1.b) What is the role of ‘Social’ Photography in the public sphere? And, 1.c) What communicative structures (visual tropes, motifs and practices) exist, that make ‘social’ images meaningful and easier to understand? The aim of this study is to determine how personal images are contextualized in ways that make their assemblage a more useful form of social communication.

Defining ‘Social’ Photography

Patro et al (2011), Weilenmann et al (2013) and Zappavigna (2016) all use the term ‘Social’ Photography to describe the practice of taking pictures of everyday people, places and activities to post on SNS/A, in their text. Patro et al (2011) defined ‘Social’ Photography as an active, rather than a passive endeavour that encourages collaborative photography and leverages social trends such as online media sharing and participatory data acquisition – they proposed that “3D social snapshotting” could become a common participatory practice in the near future.

Weilenmann et al (2013) characterize 'Social' Photography as "everyday photojournalism" in which people document small but significant events in their everyday lives, with a smartphone camera that has Internet access to social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Flickr*, and *Instagram* – they identified "instagramming" as a contemporary social practice. Zappavigna (2016) uses the term 'Social' Photography to refer to subjective social media photographs of everyday experiences intimately captured via camera phone, and shared via social networking services such as *Instagram*, to ambient viewers not known by the photographer; often with a short caption or hashtag (#) – she defines the practice as a "domestic routine". In their book, *From Snapshots to Social Media: The Changing Picture of Domestic Photography*, Sarvas and Frohlich (2011) chronicle the history of what they termed 'Domestic' photography – as mediated by technological changes. Anthropologist Richard Chalfen also used a similar term to describe 'Social' Photography in his 1987 book, *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Chalfen (1987) examined the "Polaroid People" and "Kodak Culture" to define what he termed, "Home Mode" photography – he uncovered culturally structured behaviour underlying seemingly spontaneous social photographic activities.

Considering some of the previous hypotheses and terminology used to define 'Social' Photography - certain phrases such as "collaborative photography", "domestic routine", "participatory practice", "everyday photojournalism", "instagramming", "Polaroid People", "Kodak Culture", "Internet access", "smartphones", "cameras", and "social networks" - warrant further exposition before providing a studied definition of 'Social' Photography; after all "the ordinary photographer takes the world as he or she sees it; according to the logic of a vision of the world which borrows its categories and its canons from the arts of the past". (Bourdieu, 1990: 75)

A brief account of the development of 'social' imagery

Using a smartphone to record, edit, publish and comment on personal images of oneself or others, on a SNS/A, by employing trendy hashtags, reactions (likes), and emojis, initially might seem like a novel approach to developing the public Self; however this now commonplace practice of depicting 'scenes' from favourable 'lived experiences' - was developed from other, once novel, now established canons, in the Creative Arts - notably, Fine Art (self-portraits), Photojournalism, and Freelance Photography - and their dependence on specific technological advancements.

The Self-Portrait: During the Renaissance period of European culture, skilled painters used the most luxurious medium at the time – Oil paint – to document, preserve, and depict 'sights' that are aesthetically pleasing, intellectually stimulating, and worthy of possession. According to Berger (1972: 83), "Oil paintings often depicted things which in reality are buyable; therefore, if you buy a painting, you also buy the look of the thing it represents". However, the engineering of the first high quality mirrors (mirrors with coating glass and a tin-mercury amalgam) in Germany, during the early phase of Renaissance, inadvertently led to painters turning their gaze off their patron's interests and onto themselves – popularizing the Self-Portrait. (Carbon, 2017)

The portrait served the function of a medium through which the artist could construct and convey an identity or that fictitious entity we call our 'Self'. (Donnachie, 2015) The final product's purpose was not to transport their spectator-owner into a new experience, but to embellish the 'experience' they already possessed. "The traditional function of portrait painting, to embellish or idealize the subject, remains the aim of everyday and of commercial photography". (Sontag, 1977: 105) However, in contrast to Self-Portrait painting, which was indoctrinated, costly, and followed a sophisticated production process, the contemporary self-portrait – the Selfie – is a spontaneous and intuitive 'flash'; produced within seconds, usually with no special preparation required, and no compositional factors seem to be considered. (Carbon, 2017) Nonetheless, both types of 'selfies' attempt to convey the 'real' world status and actions of the spectator-owner.

Photojournalism: According to Newton (2009) the Photojournalism of the 20th century grew out of the novelty of being able to hold time still and really look at moments of life in parts of the world most people would never see. By the mid-1970s it had achieved critical currency status and become ensconced as a distinct discipline of study and museum collecting. (Lyford and Payne, 2005) It was a time of believing what you saw in a photograph in the newspaper or a magazine as 'real'; and photojournalists were increasingly required to present iconic objective-authentic visual stories, or 'show the truth', for the purpose of shaping public perception, archive development, and collective memorizing. "Even the most compassionate Photojournalism is under pressure to satisfy simultaneously two sorts of expectations, those arising from our largely surrealist way of looking at all photographs, and those created by our belief that some photographs give real and important information about the world". (Sontag, 1977: 105)

Such a modus operandi problematically creates a barrier between a) the photographer and the subject and b) the audience and the publisher; fostering a clinically civil way of reading public images. Philosopher Roland Barthes (1981) cites journalistic photographs as good examples of "Studium". "Studium", as Barthes (1981) explains, are images that exhibit a kind of "educational knowledge and civility that bares no mark or sign"; "they are finely shot scenes whose homogeneity remains cultural and historical". Studium creates "a general polite interest without special acuity" and "belongs to the order of liking, not of loving"; as well as "irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, and the clothes one finds".

Freelance Photography: The 'order of liking' people and the entertainments has greatly influenced 'Social Photography'. "In the early 2000s snapshots of celebrities doing the ordinary - pumping gas, buying books, carrying groceries - were fetching \$10,000 to \$20,000 a pop ... attracting droves of photographers and thrill-seekers to New York and the epicentre of tabloid fare - Los Angeles". (Rosenbaum, 2015: para 2) These 'celebrity sightings' are often captured by freelance photographers, some of whom are known as the Paparazzi. Initially Paparazzi Photography was, "held in less esteem than Photojournalism but regarded as a 'visual form of gossip', so it quickly attracted mainstream demand (from glossy tabloids, broadsheets, broadcast sources, reality based and new media platforms such as blogs), shifting Paparazzi photography from being a street based job to a technology-driven industry". (McNamara, 2011: 517)

‘Social’ imagery developed into a discipline by adopting visual tropes and categories from these three pre-existing arts of the past; Self-portraits, Photojournalism, and Freelance Photography. But unlike Photojournalism whose aim was to capture and uncover objective iconic moments, ‘social’ photographers are more subjective, mobile and vernacular like the Paparazzi - so they depict ordinary ‘sightings’ packaged in glossy rhetoric and highly stylized popular motifs. And just like the Paparazzi which is dependent on new media, ‘Social’ Photography has embraced digital technologies that have turned millennials from subject to artist, spectator to journalist, and paparazzo to celebrity - at the push of a button.

Digital technology and ‘Social’ Photography

The introduction of new technologies does not guarantee widespread adoption or utilization; people tend to resist new technology mainly because it’s usually expensive, seemingly more complex, and they fear becoming redundant. However, over the years some disruptive technologies have been embraced and inadvertently led to the democratization of the Creative Arts; and in some instances, equalized the relationship between owner / artist and subject/ audience.

Instant cameras: Around the 1900s, photography freed the hand - henceforth the most artistic function devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens - since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech and everyday life. (Benjamin, 1969) The inventions of the first inexpensive ‘one button’ snapshot cameras in the 1880s by George Eastman and *Kodak* – coupled with *Polaroid*’s first instant camera in the 1940s¹; effectively contributed to the emergence of the instant ‘social image,’ spawning a culture of producing and viewing images of ourselves, friends, family, landmarks, products, and meals. In late 20th century homes sharing polaroids and ‘*Kodak* moments’ was a social event, and some personal photographs of famous people have even been exhibited in films, books and galleries – increasing the consumption of ‘social’ imagery in the public sphere.

The smartphone camera: The development of the classic photo cameras in the 1830s made it possible to make self-photographs, “but the process was far more complicated than today; because the exposure time was extremely long (often more than 10 minutes), and the photographer could not see his own depiction while taking the photo”. (Carbon, 2017: 4) However, almost two centuries later, the smartphone camera phone – both front facing and rear camera – made self-photographs commonplace. The now infamous ‘selfie-cam’ or ‘forward-facing camera’ was designed in 2007 to promote a relatively costly video-telephone system; a practice which did not prove as popular as expected, so the popularity of the front facing camera was neither instant nor anticipated. (Donnachie, 2015) The shift from instant / *Polaroid* cameras to digital smartphone cameras was not a result of widely accepted new technology but a consequence of the duality, mobility, accessibility, and communicative qualities of the smartphone itself. Rather than forming a barrier between photographer and subject, “smartphones can be experienced as multiple consolidated technologies in one device: a mirror, a camera, and a door to communicate with a social media platform”. (Warfield, 2017: 78)

Web 2.0 – Social networking sites and applications (SNS/A): As the “Polaroid people” exemplified, sharing the personal images is the secondary function of ‘Social’ Photography, so the prospect of using a mirror as an ‘pseudo - supernatural’ doorway to communicate to other worlds, made smartphones an attractive tool for ‘social’ photographers to utilize. This is because, “a photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen” (Sontag, 1977: 106) and, “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself”. (Benjamin, 1969: 220) The smartphone grants a social photographer access to individuals, communities, contexts, and situations outside of their reach through Web 2.0 technology. Web 2.0 is distinguishable from the original Web 1.0 (World Wide Web / WWW) model -which is static and only allows users to view and download content - by its greater user interactivity, participation, collaborative practices, more pervasive network connectivity, and enhanced communication channels. (Rouse and Haughn, 2015) ‘Social’ photographers, often choose where to post an image depending on a SNS/A interactive capability. Thus, several online communities such as; *500px, Cluster, Facebook, Flickr, Google Photos, Instagram, Moments, Muzy, Path, Shutterfly, Snapchat, Twitter, and Zenfolio* – have emerged to cater for the different kinds of ‘social’ photographers and to act as repositories for ‘social’ imagery. According to the *Business Insider*, *Snapchat* and *Facebook* users upload 350 million new photos each day, and *Instagram* users upload 95 million photos and videos daily. (Smith, 2013: para 3-4) *Flickr*, one of most the reliable photo hosting for over a decade, has over 10 billion images shared on the platform since it’s inception, and *Tumblr* has over 129 billion posts. (Smith, 2016: para 7; 2017: para 8)

The development and proliferation of ‘social’ images in mainstream media and everyday life is a direct result of digital cameras, smartphones and Web 2.0 technology. *Instagram* users alone capture, archive, and exhibit more ‘real world’ imagery in a day, than any existing gallery could in a year. Yet, with billions of social images available online (some already categorised by hashtags [#]), ‘Social’ photography’s legitimacy as a contemporary art-form is still relegated to that of a social pastime for amateurs, despite its rich association with legitimate Creative Arts such as Self-Portraiture, Photojournalism, and Freelance Photography.

Literature review of ‘Social’ Photography’s legitimacy

As early as the ‘Kodak-snapshot period’, Chalfen (1987) noted that “some authors carelessly attached the amateur label” to personal photography to imply such qualities as "primitive," "naive," "non-professional," and "inexperienced”, amongst other categories. But as Barthes (1981) noted earlier, Photography is evasive, the various distributions we impose upon it are in fact either empirical (Professionals / Amateurs), or rhetorical (Landscapes / Objects / Portraits / Nudes), or aesthetic (Realism / Pictorialism); these classifications might very well be applied to other, older forms of representation. “Ambitious modernists, like Weston and Cartier-Bresson, who understand Photography as a genuinely new way of seeing (precise, intelligent, even scientific), have been challenged by photographers of a later generation, like Robert Frank, who want a camera eye that is not piercing but democratic; they don’t claim to be setting new standards for seeing”. (Sontag, 1977: 99)

Therefore, in order to determine personal photographs relevance some researchers have opted to move away from the amateur versus professional debate and investigate 'Social' Photography primarily in three areas; reputation, audience, and identity. Studies such as Ploderer, Howard and Thomas (2010) observed how SNS/As facilitate collaboration between professionals and amateurs; their findings showed that amateurs reputations benefit from collaboration, through the extension of their support network, gaining recognition, and through association or endorsement by professionals / celebrities, some users attain 'micro-celebrity' status. The concept of 'micro-celebrity' or the 'branded Self' was introduced by Senft (2013) who argued that the developers of SNS/As actively encourage users to behave as if they were a genuine artist and the Internet was a public stage. Marwick's (2015) study also explored micro-celebrities and concluded that user generated content is a 'by-product' of the narcissistic 'attention economy' in which personal 'self-worth' is linked to fame; and users with social aspirations employ a 'visual self-presentation strategy', with the goal of being noticed and fostering more 'para-social interactions'. This notion of the 'attention seeking economy was explored by Gabriel (2014). Gabriel's (2014) article is noteworthy in that it combined Judith Butler's (1988) notions of 'performativity' with Narcissism, to argue that SNS/As require users to consciously perform their identity. Butler (1988) determined that "performativity" has to do with the ritual performance of often repetitive identity norms and acts; and these acts of identity have been going on before the social actor arrived on the scene. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) work outlined how these re-enactments are a form of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three forms of capital: a) Economic capital (money, property rights); b) Cultural capital (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines); and c) Social capital (connections, mutual acquaintances, recognition, membership in a group, credentials). Bourdieu (1990) stressed that various systems of expression from theatre to television, are objectively organised according to a hierarchy independent of individual opinions which define cultural legitimacy - consumers of expressions whose meaning is situated outside the sphere of legitimate culture, feel they have the right to judge freely the performance of the act; but on the other hand, expressions within the field of consecrated culture are measured according to objective norms, and forced to adopt dedicated, ceremonial, and ritualized attitudes. Bourdieu (1986) goes on to say that Social capital may also be socially instituted by a whole set of instituting acts, or symbolic exchanges designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them.

Marketing researchers Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi (2012) and Bergström and Bäckman (2013), observed the relationship between expression, performance, reputation, democracy, and "social capital", respectively delineating how SNS/As constitute a hybrid role of digital freedom that fosters consumer and companies interaction, at the same time, allowing consumers to easily tarnish a brand's public image; and image-driven social media networks like *Instagram* are a great resource for companies to share content that would perhaps be unfit for publication on mainstream media. Because of these and similar studies findings SNS/As (especially *Instagram*) have emerged as useful resources for researchers because of their capacity to merge publicity, celebrities, performance, marketing, and Capitalism in a relatively unobtrusive manner.

Marwick's (2015) study investigated how *Instagram* created a new breed of "instafamous micro-celebrities" who emulate the tropes and symbols of traditional celebrity culture, and concluded that in the broadcast era celebrity was something a person *was*; in the Internet era, micro-celebrity is something people *do*. However, in such a free-for-all environment such as a SNS/A like *Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or YouTube*, there is very little that an ordinary person can *do* to distinguish the amateur's performance from a genuine 'professional act', other than the 'accumulative logic' of social capital – that is, the number of followers. Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz (2016) observed this 'accumulative logic' in their study, highlighting the link between the quantity of contacts displayed on a SNS/A and "highly-tailored-self-presentations" strategically posted to promote a user's avatar, market their brand, and attain 'micro-celebrity' status. In the digital public sphere, this is just one way for an amateur to garner a large following; the other way is by self-redacting through the use of descriptive language, tagging, and assigning popular hashtags.

Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis's (2015) study explored the use of captions, tagging, and hashtags on *Instagram*, observing how the hashtags provided by users, expressed more accurately the intention of the content compared to the captions assigned to a photo during the explicit image annotation process. Highfield and Leaver's (2015) paper also focused on hashtags and developed a methodology for studying *Instagram* activity using hashtags and other digital identifiers, on the premise that such data allows for quantitative and qualitative analyses - whether counting the amount of content over time, users, tags, and location data, or looking at the content of the media and their captions. However, as useful as tagging and hashtags are to 'Social' Photography, the bulk of the literature on the subject is related to the online presence of the human face (the Selfie phenomena) not users' interaction with SNS/As API.

For example, Bakhshi et al (2014) asked how the presence of a face in selfies (it's age / gender) might impact social engagement on *Instagram*. Studies by Lim (2016), Senft and Baym (2015), and Kalayeh et al (2015) respectively investigated, the Selfie's role in the social media marketplace and attempted to decipher "what the Selfie says about different cultures, demographics and prevalent issues". They presented a proposal on how to publish a popular selfie by including certain objects, concepts, and visual tropes from popular culture. Given the pivotal role of selfies in the scope of 'Social' Photography, new media scholars have merged all three areas of interest - reputation (Professional versus Amateur), audience (Cultural versus Social capital), and identity (Self versus Society) - and examined group behaviour on SNS/As, in conjunction with the negative effects of regular image creation on the youth. Leung's (2013) study demonstrated how exhibitionists express narcissistic tendencies and negative feelings on SNS/As to gain the attention of others; the same study also observed that distributing personal content on SNS/As also satisfied (5) psychological needs of the users - namely, showing affection, venting negative feelings, gaining recognition, entertainment, and cognitive needs. Researchers Hu et al (2014) paper went further and identified (8) popular types of photos (selfies, friends, activities, captioned photos [pictures with embedded text], food, gadgets, fashion, and pets) that can be categorized into (5) kinds of users – selfie-lovers, friends / family / pet lovers, texters / taggers / captioners / citers, foodies, and fashion / gadget lovers.

Zappavigna (2016) proposed that an additional system of subjectivity is needed to account for the different kinds of photos and users online; the relationships between the viewer and the photographer that are instantiated in the photographs; and the ways in which subjectivity is signified in these images. Miller (2014) acknowledges this subjectivity, stating that smartphone devices subjectively influence the process of individualization, foster more dependency on digital self-creation and self-maintenance, and are both indicators and motors of mediatization that embody cognition and intensify the interweaving of mind and machines. This study agrees with Zappavigna (2016), and Miller's (2014) observations that the smartphone directly affects the user's everyday point of view and experience of their place in society, suggesting therefore a user's interaction with the device is an essential characteristic that makes 'Social' Photography not only subjective, but distinguishable from other art-forms. Therefore in order to establish the legitimacy of 'Social' Photography as a contemporary artform, its subjective use of digital technologies must form the basis of the argument. According to Sontag (1977) the very question of whether Photography is or is not an art is essentially a misleading one; Photography requires subjectivity because it generates works that are aesthetically pleasing and can be called Art - however, Photography is not an art like painting but it is a medium in which works of art are made.

Methodology

This study employed an interpretive group of methods focused on understanding the 'Social' Photography phenomena in a comprehensive and holistic manner. According to Bevir and Kedar (2008) and Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2009), interpretive methodologies (sometimes called qualitative research) refers to systematic "experience-near research" that prioritizes the documentation of the "lived experience of the participants". Researchers can "collaborate with flexibility" with the participants in the field's "views, local knowledge, situated meaning, and sense-making of their own circumstances". These "views and local knowledge" constituted the raw data that the researcher used to generate observable outcomes and disclose the meaning-making practices of visual social interactions. The interpretive group of methods lent itself better to this inquiry because they allowed for participation in the meaning making process to facilitate a more transparent extraction and identification of the cross-disciplinary information related to 'Social' Photography.

Initially this study conducted 'non-contact' research of pre-existing literatures related to 'Social' Photography to explore the preliminary questions; What is 'Social' Photography? and How did 'Social' Photography develop into a discipline? "Non-contact method or a literature research methodology is to access, read through, analyse, and sort information from a variety of literatures in order to identify the essential attributes and crystallize the knowledge". (Lin, 2009: 179) Following the literature research, a qualitative evidence synthesis was undertaken to identify and extract some of the key texts and technologies associated with 'Social' photography before going out into the field. To answer questions - 1.b) What is the role of 'Social' Photography in the public sphere? And, 1.c) What communicative structures (visual tropes or practices) currently exist that make social images meaningful and easier to understand? - this study employed a unique mixed methods approach (the systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative data) focused more on subjective knowledge from data generated through field research.

This study developed a photographic field research project to facilitate data collection through i) observation, ii) participation, iii) informal interviews, iv) the figurative identification of research-relevant visual tropes online, and v) collaboration with the subjects. Twenty black-African social media users (ages 18 to 35) from (4) cities - collaborated with the researcher / photographer to produce a series of images that conjoin traditional Portrait Photography's meditative and measured approach with Selfie's / Social Photography's subjectivity. Each participants existing SNS/A account was a) observed for a 60 day period and b) some visual tropes and motifs were identified before they were c) informally interviewed via the *WhatsApp* application. The participants were then d) encouraged to conceptualize a more 'permanent' SNS/A 'scene' that reflects their existing content on SNS/A, for a physical photo-book. A date was set to capture the 'scene'. On the date, the researcher / photographer e) took several portraits of the participants in their chosen 'scenes' according to his designs (with the input of the participants), and each participant also f) took several selfies in the same scene, according to their own desires (without the input of the photographer). The researcher/ photographer and participants then g) chose (40) portraits (20 traditional portraits and 20 selfies) which were h) assigned captions by the participants. The data was collected and a discourse analysis of the captions assigned was conducted.

Findings

1. The literature based research identified the terms - "amateur or non-professional" (Benjamin, 1969) / (Barthes, 1981) / (Bourdieu, 1990) / (Suler, 2015), "everyday or personal or snapshot" (Benjamin, 1969) / (Sontag, 1977) / (Chalfen, 1987) / (Rosenbaum, 2015), "home or domestic" (Chalfen, 1987) / (Bourdieu, 1990), "ordinary" (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011) / (Hänska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013) / (Donnachie, 2015), "sightings" (Rosenbaum, 2015), "biographemes" or autobiographical" (Barthes, 1981) / (Iqani and Schroeder, 2016), "digital" (Suler, 2015), and "social" (Bourdieu, 1990) / (Patro et al, 2011) / (Weilenmann et al, 2013) / (Zappavigna, 2016) - as related to the definition of 'Social' Photography.

2. The subsequent qualitative evidence synthesis observed how - 'Social' Photography developed into a distinctive discipline as a direct result of the timely emergence these specific digital technologies - *Kodak* and *Polaroid* snapshot cameras (Chalfen, 1987), MMS and *Samsung's* first camera phone (Hill, 2013), the introduction of the 'selfie-cam' in 2007 (Donnachie, 2015), and Web 2.0's user-generated content (Rouse and Haughn, 2015). The evidence also revealed that social images predominantly appear in the digital public sphere, with over 129 billion posts in the digital archive on *Facebook*, *Flickr*, *Tumblr* and *Instagram*. (Smith, 2017)

3. The photographic field project collected data in the following areas:

PHOTOGRAPHIC FIELD PROJECT 40 Traditional portraits + 40 Selfies = 20 presentations	Subject/s	15 self / single / solo portraits		5 group / friends / family portraits				
	Gender	17 females		10 males				
	Social class	14 working class		10 middle class		3 upper class		
	Occupation	10 self-employed	7 students	5 unemployed	4 employed	1 child		
	Nationality	13 Zimbabweans		11 RSA	1 Mozambican	1 Swazi	1 Zambian	
	Locations	5 natural/nature		5 urban exterior	5 urban interior	5 venues/ landmarks		
	Costume	9 smart/ fancy		8 casual / plain	4 provocative / skin/ tight	4 brands / labels	2 print / African attire	
	Action captured in the 'scenes'	9 ordinary social activities		6 staged exhibitivie activities	3 archival or coverage activities	2 stunts or performance or acts		
	Captions	28 hashtags	5 statement or opinions	5 colloquial / personal anecdotes	5 descriptive / explanatory accounts	3 quotes	1 vernacular	1 no caption

4. The discourse analysis of the (20) captions in the photographic field project, identified and extracted verbatim, the following, keywords and phrases which were thematically grouped into five categories:

- i. Self related words used - “Personal”, “who I am”, “love yourself”, “personality”, “me”.
- ii. Participatory related words used - “Love”, “who you are around”, “cutiepie”, “friends”, “besties”, “cousin”, “parents”, “strangers”, “watchers”.
- iii. Location / Object related words used - “Beautiful”, “ordinary”, “spaces”, “colourful”, “scenery”, “nature”, “classic”.
- iv. Identity related words used – “We”, “black”, “African”, “Panstula”, “culture”, “unite”, “liberate”, “melanin”, “skin”, “believe”, “freedom”, “fighter”, “crown”, “dress for success”.
- v. Motivation / Agenda related words used - “Capture”, “document”, “what you are doing”, “create”, “repeat”, “start again”, “therapy”.

Discussing the six forms of democratic social representation

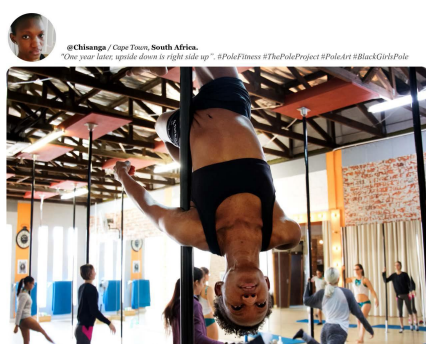
This study defines ‘Social’ Photography as a subcategory of Photography, characterized by amateur photographer’s depiction of social events for non-professional purposes, and ‘social’ photographers’ interaction with digital tools; specifically, digital cameras, smartphones, SNS/As, and the Internet. A ‘social’ photographer typically employs digital technology to generate and curate autobiographical ‘idyllic scenes’ that communicate ‘who they are’ and ‘how they have lived’ to an immediate community of ‘followers’ or the digital super public, to garner positive responses.

Furthermore, photographers can assign public meta-data by utilizing mentions, captions, tags, hashtags, and geotags - making their personal content easier to catalogue, access, review, and contextualize. Followers and “ambient viewers” can then utilize the meta-data generated through tagging to search for an image to engage with by assigning emojis, likes, and comments; thus making a singular ‘social’ photograph a densely compact public ‘scene’ that contains a micro-expression of the photographers ideas or emotions. According to Barthes (1981: 28) the functions of the photographer are to, “inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, and to provoke desire”. Carbon (2017) states that inclusive of these functions, the ‘social’ photographer’s aims centre around three main factors: (A) self-expression, (B) documentation, and (C) the performance of the activity; all of which focus on the idea or wish to freeze, maintain or to document a fluctuating but significant slice of life. Donnachie (2015) characterizes these intentions as “anxious self-scrutiny” created as “a detachment from routine,” for the purpose of transforming “role-playing into a symbolic elevation of life”, thus the ‘social’ photographer is “stuck in a feedback loop of behaviour and personality, creating a state of mind in which the world appears as a mirror of the Self”.

With Barthes’ (1981) five functions of the photographer, Carbon’s (2017) three main aims of a ‘social’ photographer, Donnachie’s (2015) feedback mirror of Self notions, and Hu et al (2014) five kinds of users in mind, this study acknowledges the the subjectivity of all man-made images, and identifies (6) characteristics of ‘social’ imagery – namely, (i) Activity, (ii) Relationships, (iii) Identity, (iv) Glamour, (v) Protest, and (vi) Spectacle - that exemplify the ‘social’ photographer’s capacity to curate a more meaningful democratic public image. These (6) characteristics will be discussed in relation to a) the existing literature, b) the figurative identification of visual tropes observed during the 60 day period, and c) the discourse analysis of the captions. Each characteristic will be d) exemplified by portraits extracted from the photographic field project. ‘Social’ Photography’s “democratizing of formal standards is the logical counterpart to photography’s democratizing of the notion of beauty”. (Sontag, 1977: 103)

1. **Activity:** There is an “assumption that photographs are objective proof (proof of the way people looked, the places they visited and the events that took place), this assumption plays an important role in the documentation of ordinary life”. (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011: 7) Because of this assumption ‘social’ images tend to depict activities that take place in authentic ‘lived’ spaces such as the photographer’s homes, vehicles, favourite establishments, gym, restaurants, clubs, and public spaces such as landmarks / parks. 75% of the ‘scenes’ captured in the photographic field project took place in ‘lived spaces’. Such locations project a sense of verisimilitude and intimacy because the spectator feels as if they have been granted access to the photographer’s ‘private’ life. However, ‘social’ images are not ‘truthful’ depictions of ‘real’ spaces and ‘real’ people, their primary concern is to illustrate the activities and agency of the photographer much like a tourist collecting and exhibiting evidence from their holiday experiences. As Chalfen (1987) noted, tourists often try to photograph people, places, activities and events that are not normally part of their at-home experience, and such instances do not share the same sets of understandings, expectations, and social conventions regarding pictorial representation. In these instances, “the camera is a way of taking possession of the places they (tourists) visited”. (Sontag, 1977: 65) ‘Social’ photographers, actively curate what to document, and upload the best ‘scenes’ that say - ‘Look at me, ‘I was here’, ‘This is what I do’; as visual evidence of their most animated and enterprising experiences.

The ideal ‘active-social’ images are ‘highlights’ from the ‘frozen moments’ of a photographer’s actions that represent a trifactor of evidence in one image – the ordinary person, in the extra-ordinary location, engaging in the enviable activity or interacting with that special ‘thing’. To aid in this endeavour and add another layer of verisimilitude, adept ‘social’ photographers use the smartphones Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to geocache / authentic their ‘scene’; using geotags articulates the user’s location and archive within the ‘real world’. Below are two solo ‘scenes’ from the photographic field project that captured stunts or performative acts in interesting locales (one at a gym and one has the recognisable Midrand Tower in the background). They were captioned, “one year later #ThePoleProject” and “Everyday is a playday #PanstulaForLife” - as evidence of memory creation, self-examination, progress, and escape from the daily routine.



By sporadically observing ‘scenes’ on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period, this study identified examples of Activity in photographs of vacations, food, dancing, sport, concerts, clubs, birthdays, weddings, nature, and so forth. Such ‘scenes’ can be categorized by the publisher using hashtags and geotags, which can be employed by a researcher, critic or viewer to collect data, appraise the activity, or assign a social value to the image depending on the performance of the social actor, and location of the action.

2. **Participation:** ‘Social’ Photography’s interaction with SNS/As characterizes it as a participatory medium. Oftentimes a photographer will choose which platform (*Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Tumblr*, *Snapchat* and so forth) to post an image, depending on the participants (followers) and characteristics (API, demographics, filters, tagging capabilities) of the SNS/A. According to Jensen (2013), social tagging through tags, mentions, geo-tags, and hashtags has become an essential convention for encouraging participation, social curation, communicating with others, and categorising the cultural heritage in a special context. “Being ‘here’ allows for observation and being ‘there’ calls for participation”. (Nichols, 2005: 116) “Group selfies are particularly striking examples of this, where the photographer is usually at the forefront of a mass of faces and bodies, visibly participating in the process of composing the image as it is taken”. (Frosh, 2015: 1612) The act of posing together as a group implies a sense of affinity, engagement, relationship or mutuality between the subjects in the picture; however, the dominant figure in the frame usually directs the arrangement and poses of the other participants.

Therefore, images of two or more people performing an activity is not entirely engagement, rather collaborative participation, with most of the prestige and social capital being assigned to the photographer who had access to the camera and the group of photogenic friends. The ideal ‘participative-social’ image discloses the nature of the relationship the user has with his / her friends, family, and pets; fosters more ‘parasocial’ engagement whilst retaining the current audience, and creates new relationships. Some users go a step further and tag participants, brands and locations in the image; thereby making the performance more credible, and simultaneously encroaching on other participants market by association. According to Bourdieu (1990: 19) “two thirds of amateur photographers are seasonal conformists who take photographs either at family festivities or social gatherings or during summer holidays ... the presence of a camera points out family life, reinforcing integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has unity”. Below are two group portraits from the photographic field project that captured family archival activities. They were respectively captioned, “captures the love of her dear parents” and “me and my cousin” - to solemnize relationships, signify reciprocity, and exhibit social capital.



By sporadically observing ‘scenes’ on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period this study identified examples of Participation in photographs of family, friends, relationships, celebrities, workmates, pets, weddings, parties, teams, and so forth. Such ‘scenes’ can be tagged by the photographer who is assigned some form of prominence by other users, depending on the kind of / mutuality / intimacy / relationships exhibited in the image.

3. **Identity:** The most common performance of Identity is usually a solo one because the smartphone allows the user to easily turn the camera on themselves, especially for a portrait of their face or selfies. According to “the *Georgia Institute of Technology* and *Yahoo Labs* researchers, pictures with human faces (or selfies) are 38% more likely to drive engagement and 32% more likely to attract comments on image-sharing communities, than photos with no faces”. (Face it, 2014: para 1) Nichols (2015) observed this engagement, outlining that in such public forums as *Instagram* and *Tumblr* the face is supposed to reflect personality while maintaining a human presence online, therefore it is often the subject of public scrutiny, especially when placed in tags like #selfie. Rutledge’s (2013) study also observed how selfies support our need to figure out who we are and what we are; they can be viewed as a trigger for identity exploration, self-study and self-observation.

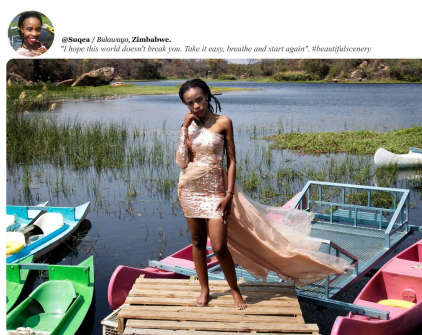
In an earlier study, Crozier and Greenhalgh (1988) claimed that identity exhibited through presentations of the Self are a necessary element in social life; the individual's self-image and his interpretation of his own experience cannot be divorced from the concept of society, culture and historical contexts. As Stuart Hall writes (1992: 276) “identity is formed in the ‘interaction’ between self and society, between the personal and public ... we project ourselves into cultural identities aligning our subjective feelings with objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world”. Selfies afford users an opportunity to record their behaviour, express their personality and scrutinize themselves. “We learn to see ourselves photographically: to regard oneself as attractive is, precisely, to judge that one would look good in a photograph”. (Sontag, 1977: 85) Below are two solo ‘scenes’ from the photographic field project that captured ordinary social activities and were respectively captioned, “colourful spaces reflect who I am” and “I deserve a crown” - to reflect personality, self-examine, align the subjective feelings with the spaces we occupy, engage with the public’s gaze, and signify Self worth.



By sporadically observing ‘scenes’ on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period this study identified the following examples of Identity in photographs of faces, costumes, text, hairstyles, make up, pets, clothes, festivals, rituals, captions, hashtags, quotes and so forth. Such solo expressions are validated by ‘others’ reactions such as likes, emojis, and comments; and, or, reinforced through imitation or replication.

4. **Glamour:** Besides projecting Self-worth and archiving personal actions and interests, ‘social’ images often attempt to convey a glamorous identity and status through new hairstyles, partners, bffs (best friends forever), holiday locations, meals, jewellery, gadgets, books, and music. (Donnachie, 2015) Glamour, according to Berger (1972: 148) “is the after-effect of the industrial society, which moved towards democracy by acknowledging the pursuit of individual happiness as a universal right ... it is dependent on widespread social envy”. Much like advertising or magazine fashion photography which “is based on the fact that something can be more beautiful in a photograph than in real life”. (Sontag, 1977: 104), ‘Social’ imagery relies on consumables, pop-culture motifs, brands and celebrities to elevate life, provoke desire, elicit widespread social envy, illustrate a beautiful ‘happy’ life, and project success. “This disturbance is ultimately one of ownership ... Photography transforms subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object”. (Barthes, 1981:13)

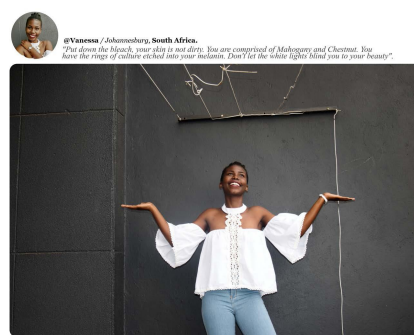
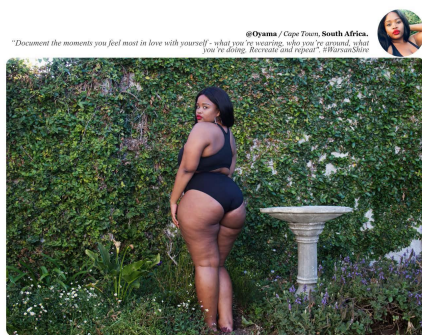
By putting oneself in the public eye, especially in the permanent yet fluid space of the Internet, the Self is commodified and given a life of its own apart from its artist; becoming a product, that projects power and glamour through the consumption of people (followers) and access to places and things (brands). (Nichols, 2015) Some celebrities and micro-celebrities are often employed by actual brands and companies to market their product directly to their immediate community of followers on SNS/As. This is because SNS/As dismantle the demographic categories and roles by grouping people based on algorithmic interests; integrating not just the platform’s APIs, but also companies, products and users into one global consumer culture. Below are two micro-celebrities solo ‘scenes’ extracted from the photographic field project. The extracts captured staged or exhibitive activities in recognisable locations (that require entry fees), with poses reminiscent of Fashion Photography. The ‘scenes’ were respectively captioned, “#beautifulscenery” and “dressed for success” - to elicit envy, elevate life, exhibit consumption, and project aspirational desires.



By sporadically observing ‘scenes’ on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period, the following examples of Glamour were identified in photographs of the body, designer clothing, logos, hairstyles, cars, make up, products, food, beverages, landmarks, vacations, concerts, money, hashtags, faces and so forth. Such ‘scenes’ reinforce the user’s position, financial well-being, and status in society. They are often validated by gaining more followers, emulation the original user actions, higher social status through association, or going viral.

5. **Protest:** Despite being an avenue for brands to maintain the status quo, ‘social’ images have also become a means to protest consumerism and mainstream’s iconography / narratives. Studies, such as DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) observed how *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube* have created new contexts for hashtag activism that does not exist in old media – citing #OccupyWallStreet as an incident that fostered an ethic of individual and collective participation, thus creating a norm of perpetual participation. The use of hashtags has become synonymous with photographic protests on SNS /As because they provide an inter-textual chain of images on a given subject or theme in spite of demographics, culture, and personal perspectives. However, hashtags are not the only form of activism on SNS/As. Penney (2015) investigated symbolic action on popular social media platforms in the form of stylized profile picture campaigns for tragic events and social advocacy such as the *Facebook Red Equal Sign* profile picture campaign.

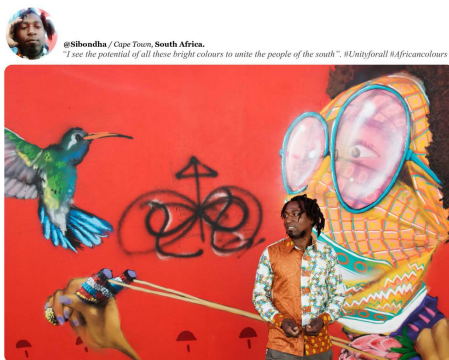
Unlike the hashtag campaigns that foster offline community engagement, profile picture campaigns focus on the individual's need to strengthen their civic identity and their ability to initiate peer-to-peer discourse. For example on *Instagram* another form of picture campaign is taking place. Women are addressing body politicsⁱⁱ by posting numerous examples of 'authentic' body types as a form of endorsement, documentation, protestation of the status quo and mainstreams exclusion / objectification of gender roles - and a range of body modifications such as bleaching, enhancements and transsexual surgeries. In his paper, Nichols (2015) noted how the popularity of such 'social' images could herald a change in the way women are viewed by others; and perhaps more importantly, themselves. "As a mass art form, photography is not practised by most people as an art; it is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power". (Sontag, 1977: 7) Below are two solo 'scenes' from the photographic field project that captured staged or exhibitivite protests, which were respectively captioned, "document the moments you feel most in love with yourself" and "put down the bleach, your skin is not dirty" - to contest mainstream media exclusion, document authentic bodies, signify beauty, express oneself, challenge popular opinion, and create an alternative archive.



By sporadically observing 'scenes' on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period this study identified the following examples of Protest in photographs of: text, protesters, banners, body, gestures, campaigns, fads, art, concept imagery, photo shoots, groups, faces, murals, rituals, no make-up fads, and so forth. Such 'scenes' challenge mainstream narratives in film, print and television (specifically news) and emphasize offline activity, documentation (archiving) and community engagement. They are often posted in conjunction with hashtags that become a way to access and review the archive. Some images can 'go viral' and be rebroadcast on mainstream media with their accompanying hashtags.

6. **Spectacle:** Not all 'social' imagery depicts 'reality'; some 'social' photographers embrace the subjectivity of the discipline and construct inauthentic, irrational and visibly edited images that seek to be understood purely as aesthetic works of art. This aesthetic appeal is what Barthes (1981) termed, "Punctum". Barthes (1981) explains that "Punctum" exists alongside "studium" but it "refers to the notion of punctuation and poignancy"; it is that "accidental detail which pricks the viewer, holds their attention", and evokes sentiment. According to Zhao et al (2013) emotional or self-expressive content is a great motivator for the creation of social media posts.

This is because ‘Social’ Photography is a vernacular art-form that produces gestural ‘finger pointing’ content that directs our attention to different perspectives of everyday life. Doane (2007) claims that the photograph is never anything but an antiphon of ‘Look’, ‘See’, ‘Here it is’; an index finger, directing attention onto a present object: look at “this”, “that”, “here”, “now”, and personal pronouns “I,” and “you”. Nonetheless, ‘finger-pointing’ images are not the only eye-catching spectacles created to elicit a reaction online. “During the past decades, the culture industries have multiplied media spectacles, and the spectacle of conflict is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, politics, society, and everyday life”. (Kellner, 2004: para 1) Social, political and domestic conflicts are increasingly published on SNS/As. Exhibitions of sensational violence, nudity, sex scandals, car crashes, pornography, protest action, criminal acts, drug abuse and even tragic events, are all being posted to entertain followers’ desire for the ‘dramatic’ and ‘unusual’. Below are two solo extracts from the photographic field project that captured staged or exhibitivite activities in surreal settings. The ‘scenes’ were respectively captioned, “I see the potential of these bright colours” and “an oldie but a goodie” - to direct the eye of the viewer, appeal to the senses, express oneself, exhibit good taste, and elicit an emotional response.



By sporadically observing ‘scenes’ on *Instagram* and *Facebook* for a 60 day period, the following examples of Spectacle were identified in photographs of: nudes, fashion, landscape, art, text, pornography, blood, glitch, portraits, drawings, fights, collages, filters, gifs, memes, interpretations, and so forth. Such ‘scenes’ attempt to establish the social photographer as an artist or entertainer, who can arrest the viewer’s attention. Photographers publish such images to create or find an audience for their work. Spectators often re-post / circulate the spectacular images until they reach viral status or people lose interest.

Conclusion

“The web holds a mirror up to us, reflecting back our precise interests ...[however] these are two-way mirrors: we are observed through the mirror but see only our reflection, with no way to see the machines observing us”. (Schraefel, 2015: para 16-17)

Traditional forms of Photography such as Photojournalism, Documentary, Landscape, Nature, Fashion, Fine Art, Portrait, and even Weddingⁱⁱⁱ Photography, have been assigned the mandate of shaping and documenting public images; yet ‘Social’ Photography which is the most widely practised, and has the biggest archive, is deprived of this cachet and recognition, despite its rich association with these legitimate art-forms. Whether it is scholars investigating the Selfie phenomena on *Instagram*, or mainstream media outlets broadcasting *Twitter* hashtags on TV, or friends tagging participants in spectacular group photos on *Facebook* - “the ordinary uses of Photography have shifted into new forms of expression and activities such as sharing, editing, publishing, copying, posting, praising, printing, [filters] and displaying are now part of our vocabulary”. (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011: 1) Every image exhibited on a SNS/As is a vignette that references a ‘real’ world experience, person, activity and environment that can be contextualized with hashtags, and verified through geo-tagging. “Photography seems to have found its grandiose role, as the bridge between art and science”. (Sontag, 1977: 91)

What differentiates the ‘social’ photographer from the professional, scientist, artist or journalist is that their images are not works of Art or “truths” – they are accessible, vernacular, dialogic ‘reflections’ of the private interests of millions of collective viewers, that overwhelmingly assert that every moment has a meaning to that somebody that has experienced it with ‘open’ eyes. “The arrival of the domestic practice of Photography, coincides with a more precise differentiation between what belongs to the public and what to the private sphere”. (Bourdieu, 1990: 29) The billions of ‘Kodak’ moments published on SNS/As since the turn of the century, should immediately signify to anybody – scholar, professional or ‘ordinary’ citizen – that sharing images is not merely a private social pastime, rather a public activity used to understand our place in the society.

The popularity of the unofficial image of ‘real’ people, in ‘real’ locations, doing ‘real world’ activities in the ‘now now timeline’ has bypassed the filter of mainstream culture demystifying celebrity culture and public perception, and simultaneously creating an autonomous ‘space’ for ordinary voices and marginalized communities to flourish. For Castells (2015), the role of the Internet and social media is to provide a “space of autonomy” which is the backbone of social movements such as the ‘Revolution of Liberty and Dignity’ (Tunisia), ‘25th January Revolution’ (#Egypt), and #OccupyWallStreet’. ‘Social’ Photography might seem less credible to some because it is too personal, too subjective, too ordinary, too ‘protesty’ to be objective, or maybe even not professional because the photographer’s technical prowess is problematic – those are all subjective notions which the discipline publicly acknowledges.

In retrospect, the most significant aspects of 'social' imagery in the digital era are its most humanist; its capacity to maintain a human face on the web, its ability to foster offline relationships, and its democratization of marginalized communities - these qualities alone should guarantee its recognition as a legitimate contemporary discipline within the Creative Arts. In Modern Art, each image must speak for itself; it must immediately convince the spectator, standing in silent contemplation, of its own value. (Groy, 2008). 'Social' photographers adopt this premise and attempt to convince 'others' not of the monetary or historical value of the image as a possession, but rather the 'social' value of the micro-expressive presence of the Self's 'aura' - in the images of people, places and things they have chosen to re-present. As Barthes (1981: 12) writes, "What I want is that my mobile image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my profound 'Self'; but it is the contrary that must be said: my self should never coincide with my image; the image is heavy, motionless, stubborn, and sustained by society, my self is light, divided, dispersed; 'myself' doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar".

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Notes

ⁱ Chalfen R (1987) *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

ⁱⁱ Body politics refers to the institutional practices and policies through which powers of society subjugate the agency, ethical, moral, temperamental, and social characteristics of groups of people, based on attire, body types, gender, sexuality and skin colour.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The wedding photograph was accepted so quickly and generally only because it met the social conditions of its existence: just as waste is a part of festive behaviour ... it is felt to be obligatory, as a homage to the married couple". (Bourdieu, 1990: 20)

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