

Lehman College

Is technology Destroying the Art of Photography?

Capstone Project

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12-13-2016

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December 13th, 2016

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Photography is a dying art, or at least that is what a lot of photographers are thinking. There is an influx of phones with cameras. Instagram, the liking system, and the accessibility to cameras have led to the increase of “photographers”. Professional photographers have started to believe that people are taking advantage of this art form. Is technology destroying photography or is it pushing it passed toward innovation? I believe technology is being pushed forward to create more interaction. People have become more curious about photography. They have begun using photos as a form of communications. The Hundred Project and Future of Story Telling Festival are just two examples of this. I’m excited to see where photography will take us next.

We live in an era of excess; excessive media, excessive advertisements, and excessive images. So much is going on around us that we have grown numb to what would have been normally “attention-grabbing”. This numbness has affected media companies but, more importantly, it has affected the arts. Think about it, how often do you scroll passed images without a second thought. Whether you use Tumblr, Instagram, or Facebook there are an excess

of images at your disposal. Before the 1900's, images were so important, because there were so few of them. An image helped to clarify stories, add context, and had the ability to persuade. Photographers captured life styles, life crisis's, amazing moments, minuscule moments, and things we never noticed. Today, photographs do not have the same impact. Could it be that social media is destroying the art of photography?

How many pictures do you have in your photo album? Do you even have a photo album? There is a whole generation of children that will grow up with smart phones instead of disposable cameras; what does that mean for the photographs of family events and special moments? Will they be deleted at some point or possibly lost in a sea of selfies? *Social Media Today* believes photographs are no longer cherished for a multitude of reasons. One of which is the fear that these images have the power to destroy a person's reputation. Another reason is the rise of the age of lazy photography and communications. Conversations are outdated; If you want to know how and what your friends are doing you simply scroll through their Instagram. Photography has become the actual medium of social communications. This way of communicating has everyone believing photography is simple, "Just take a photo, set it in sepia, blur a few bits here and there and whack on an edgy border. 58 likes? Why, you're a modern-day Ansel Adams". The outcome is the fear of the undeletable image, lazy photography, and less cherished photographs. People end up thinking five times before posting something or avoid social media all together.

I was born at an interesting time. My age group grew up in the transition phase from analog to digital. We have seen the pros and cons of both eras. By studying media communications, I can see how this difference has shaken up the media to push social media and

digital more; Media companies want to adapt to new technology while staying relevant to a new generation. Studying photography, I can see how photographs just are not the same anymore. While at the start of photography, photographs took hours to develop. The process involved various chemicals and test strips for exposures. Today the process is not the same. It is as simple as the click of a button. Because of this we live in a sea of images and most of them are not well made. Photographers are afraid their art form will no longer be valid.

Modern day technology has everyone believing that anyone can be a photographer, and that is almost true. Cameras are accessible to almost anyone, especially since they come attached to almost every phone. Cameras have also become simple to use. On a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex), all you have to do is turn the switches from manual to auto and the camera does the work for you. On your phone, all you do is tap the image and lighting you want to focus. Technically, it is true that anyone can be a photographer, but that is true about anything. Anyone with a computer can be a programmer. Anyone can write a “hello world” script. But it takes a certain discipline, a certain passion to take your camera off auto and decide you want to learn the science behind a camera. The passion and discipline are what separate a citizen photographer from a photographer.

The fear of losing an art form is common in an age of growing technology. This problem has occurred numerous times throughout history in multiple fields. The invention of self-check-outs led to the fear that cashier will no longer be appreciated. The invention of photography once raised fears that painting will no longer be needed. The same thing has happened to journalism.

The rise of the internet led to the invention of blogging. This brought fear that journalism will no longer be needed in the same way.

Journalist became known as the fifth estate. Journalist main job was to check the political system to ensure every estate was doing their job while informing the people. They were the bull dogs of the American system. Journalism was its own distinct field that required experience or schooling. When the internet brought forth bloggers, journalism was not the same. People no longer had to buy a newspaper to know what was happening. They had an excess of news available online. Eventually, people who took part in sharing news, or blogging about social and political problems, were given the title citizen journalist. Today, we can find all sorts of citizen journalism media in forms of zines, vlogs, blogs, and videos. Journalist feared that their field would soon diminish. Bloggers are to journalism what instagrammers are to photography. The same fear is what photographers feel about their field. There is no exact solution to ridding photographers of this fear. Like the great painters once adapted, journalist, photographers (and anyone in fields that suffer this same fate in the future) must also adapt.

It is no shock that things change over time. Technology innovates, society progresses, and fields adapt. Instead of fearing this change, photographers should embrace it. A comment on *Social Media Today's* article suggested that photographers of all kind can use social media to get citizens involved in photography. This seems like the best solution. It is a solution that embraces change. Photography should be praised and taught about. More impactful photography should be noticed (photography with a message). And this does not just mean photojournalism. Commercial photography can address important issues to an observant audience.

Commercial photography is made to sell a lifestyle or product, but it can also change the perspectives of the audience. Annie Leibowitz made controversial portrait and fashion photography. Since her earliest photographs in Vogue's 1971 issues, Annie Leibowitz has taken photographs of women in powerful positions including Michelle Obama, Queen Elizabeth II, Miley Cyrus (at the height of her career), and many more. Her photographs address important issues like homosexuality, women's role in society, and other social-political problems. While Annie Leibowitz empowers women in her Guy Bourdon hyper-sexualizes women. Instead of having models with strong poses, Guy usually has women flopped over or creating an object. Commercial photography has affected us in many ways.

Studies show that most if not all commercial photography has subliminal messages that sway our beliefs. The idea is that the consumer is so relaxed in their daily environment that advertisements appeal to the "deeper (more gullible) part of their mind" ("Subliminal Messages"). The same affect can happen with normal everyday images. Think back to the photographs you liked today; are you encouraging over sexualizing women, are you raising awareness to a cause, or are you acknowledging your friends first bachelor's degree. Likes have become the currency of the twenty-first century.

Why is this important? Why is this the future? Well. A generation of lazy people overwhelms us. People can barely look at a picture for more than ten seconds. People do not really read past the headlines of an article. With an increase of lazy people, we also have more technology that aids their laziness. Some would argue that this has led to the decline of photography.

BGR and TechSmart, two leading online sites for commentary and news on the latest mobile devices, had their reporters test an iPhone 7's camera and an old DSLR (Nikon D300). They used a variety of test and the iPhone 7's camera is very close to having the same technology as an old DSLR camera (VL 2016). They tested burst speeds, shallow depth of field, low light situations, videos, and weather proofing. The iPhone had a higher score than the DSLR low light, weather proofing, performance, and video quality. In an ideal situation, the DSLR was the winner.

The iPhone 7 is a big step forward for phone cameras. What makes the iPhone 7 a major innovation is that it has two lens: a wide-angle lens and a telephoto lens. The wide-angle lens is used for regular picture taking. The telephoto lens is used to zoom into objects as far as 56mm away. Both lens swap back and forth to create a "fake" sense of shallow depth of field. Of course, algorithms also aid this system into clearing up any blurred edges (Epstein 2016). The difference between an iPhone and a DSLR are virtually indistinguishable, until you zoom in. So try not to make a billboard out of your iPhone pictures. In time, the quality of iPhone could be better than DSLR. Reporter Zach Epstein says, "if DSLR companies don't step up their game it won't be long before iPhones are the next DSLR's".

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in 1910, "Laziness promotes invention," and the iPhone 7 is just one example of this (Weeks 2016). *Los Angeles Times* mentions another example: the invention of the steam engine. The steam engine was created by one lazy boy and a couple of steel pipes. Some believed that this leisure time could be used for self-improvement (exercises, meditation, yoga etc.). Others believed it could be used for education. Alternatively, others believed this time was better spent doing nothing. "In 1928, a couple of Michigan cousins in the furniture business capitalized on this strain" they created the "La Z Boy", a reclining chair

typically seen as the American image of luxury (Weeks 2016). This image was hard to erase. By 1973, American productivity had slowed down so much the Department of Commerce decided to launch a \$10 million advertising campaign to encourage Americans to be more productive.

"Americans didn't get rich by goofing off," was one of the ads.

American Suburb X, an online blog focused on contemporary photographers and movements, explain that photography as an art meant to be used by the public. Photography, despite its excessive use, is meant to be used to share moments and feelings. *American Suburb X* argues that social media is just another platform to distribute your images for free. Instead of fearing that anyone can use photography, we should find a way to make photography through a phone unique to our field. My photography professor, Terry Towery, gives out an assignment every semester based on the excessively shooting something. I call the project "The Hundred". There are two simple rules of the project. One, you can only use your cell phone. And two, you must shoot 100 photos of the same thing. The idea is that by shooting one thing we learn that the process of creating an excessive number of consistent images.

In the process, each of my fellow students found a unique way to tackle the project. My project was 100 arrows. I printed them out on regular computer paper and cut them out into squares (like Instagram pictures). Because they were small pictures on low-quality paper my classmates felt drawn to organize them in different ways. From this project, I learned that not all projects have to be high-definition to evoke emotion in people. In fact, photography that involves people seems to be the most impactful photography today.

FoST Fest is another proof of how photographers can involve people in photography. FoST stands for the Future of Story Telling. They are an organization that focuses on the use of storytelling, technology, and media. Every year they hold a festival with a different theme and a ton of artist who use technology to evoke change. This year the theme was becoming a part of the story. Throughout the festival, the audience was considered the actors for a huge movie. FoST put together teams to follow them to cameras and created set-up scenes that the audience was not aware will happen. Their tag-line was: “all world’s a stage, come be a player”.

Every corner of FoST Festival is filled with lessons and interactive artist projects. One lesson included teaching people the uses of drone photography (Satow 2016). Another project included augmented-reality photography books. The book tells the story of a man following arrows. Arrows are all over the book in unforeseen ways. With a specific app, certain pages of the book will allow you to see the man walk through arrows on your phone. Other pages had the man reaching for your hand.

Technology is creating a vast amount of opportunities for photography. Technology can create a three-dimensional view of a photography (like google cardboard). Holograms can create pictures appear from, what feels like, thin air. What scares people the most is how often we look down at our phones. We look down, more than we look up. We have become accustomed to a digital world. Some think that this virtual world will completely take over. With a new wave of technology, holograms and virtual reality will be working as well as our iPhone cameras.

Charles Melcher, the festival's founder, was once technophobe (Satow 2016). After a crisis, he stopped questioning the fate of books and started using new media. He helped to create an app for "Our Choice," the sequel to "An Inconvenient Truth," the book about the environment. The app won Apple's Best Design Award in 2011. "I had the chance to talk to all these different people, and everyone was discussing how to use technology as a publishing vehicle," he said, "but I realized that none of these people were speaking to each other" (Satow 2016).

We have a problem. We have taken advantage of the art of photography. We have used photography to create pushy advertisements and publish our daily lives on Instagram for likes. Technology innovations have created a generation of lazy photographers. While technology becomes more advanced, photographers become more scared that their expertise will not be needed in the future. Although the technical innovation has its upsides, some people think technology innovations have done more harm than good. Others believe new technology can be used to create new forms of art that involve the audience into their photography. Despite which side you are on, technology is being used at an exponential rate. The question is, will you begin to integrate your art into technology or will you stick to the traditional ways?

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