
The 'Renaissance' of Photography Technologies, Practices and Aesthetics: an Explorative Theoretical Account of the Current Interdisciplinary Understanding of Media Revivals

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Abstract

Photography's past occupies an increasingly prominent position in today's media landscape: the popularity of photo filter software, the continuing appeal of retro camera designs and the successful comeback of instant photography constitute only a few possible examples of the so-called 'revivals' that are exemplary of the contemporary 'hybrid' ways of engaging with (photographic) technology. They are indeed no longer dismissed as deviant behavior of passionate small subcultures and attract a growing audience.

The aim of this research paper is therefore to gain insight into the variety and multidimensionality of such resurgences in photography. It hereby answers to the need to further explore the dialectics between past and present and the underlying mechanisms that allow a technology to revive. It adds to the understanding of the phenomenon by making a necessary distinction between references of the past on the level of the photograph and the photographic device, between the technology (i.e. the software/hardware features), practices (i.e. the modes of production, distribution and display) and aesthetics (i.e. the visual style, design) as to grasp the many kinds of 'revivals' and the interesting interplay between these three levels. The literature study will integrate perspectives from a variety of disciplines (ranging from media studies and science and technology studies to (consumer) psychology and fashion studies) needed to address, for example, the momentum of revivals, the authenticity discourses that surround them and the hybridity resulting from their current embedment in a new, digital infrastructure.

I will also pay special attention to the critical exploration of the interrelation and applicability of the recurring concepts nostalgia, retro and vintage in this context, as well as to other confusing terms and dichotomies (such as analog versus digital, old versus new) that have recently been problematized.

Keywords: Photography, revival, nostalgia, retro, vintage

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