

**Social media photography:
Construing subjectivity in Instagram images**

Abstract

This paper explores interpersonal meaning in social media photographs, using the representation of motherhood in Instagram images as a case study. It investigates the visual choices that are made in these images to construe relationships between the represented participants, the photographer, and the ambient social media viewer. I draw upon existing work on the visual systems of point of view and focalization to explore interpersonal meaning in these images, and propose that an additional system, subjectification, is needed to account for the kinds of relationship between the viewer and the photographer that are instantiated in social photographs, as well as the ways in which subjectivity is signaled in these images. The corpus analysed is the entire Instagram feed of a single user who posts images of her experience of motherhood.

Keywords

Social media, Instagram, Point of view, Subjectivity, Multimodal discourse analysis, Motherhood

1. Social photography

Sharing images online via social networking services such as Instagram is a pervasive practice. At the time of writing at least 20 billion images had been shared via Instagram, a mobile application developed in 2010 for the iPhone. Instagram allows users to take photographs, apply digital photographic filters, and upload the image, together with a short caption, to its social networking website. The affordances of mobile devices paired with social media applications such as Instagram has meant that “the everyday lives of individuals are being remediated into new contexts of social visibility and connection” (Vivienne and Burgess, 2013). Since smartphones are typically used by an individual, images captured with these devices “relate directly with that one user's everyday point of view and experience” (Chesher, 2012: 106). As such they are interesting studies in how subjectivity is construed through visual choices. Throughout this paper I will use the term ‘social photograph’ to refer to images of this kind posted to social networking services.

While camera phone photography has accumulated a body of research (Hjorth, 2009), and there has been widespread interest in the phenomenon of ‘selfies’ (self-portraits taken with the front facing camera of a smartphone) (Bruno et al., 2014; Schwarz, 2010; Walker, 2005), there has been little research on social photography that explores the meanings made through the visual choices construed in social media images. Research targeted at photographic apps such as Instagram is in its infancy and has focused on human behavior dynamics and network structure (Ferrara et al., 2014), temporal patterning and timescales (Hochman and Manovich, 2013), and

more theoretical dimensions of use in relation to contemporary notions of personal photography (Champion, 2012). Most of this research focuses on the context of Instagram usage or its technical dimensions, rather than the specific visual meanings made in the images.

One way in which social media has influenced camera phone photography is through affording the expression of a form of visual co-presence arising out of the temporal nature of social streaming technologies, inflected by the portability of mobile media. These affordances mean that a style of 'you could be here with me' photography has emerged in which the photographer includes part of themselves in the image and invites the viewer to imagine themselves into the frame. Given the relative ease of taking out a mobile device, both within the rhythm of a domestic routine, or while navigating public space, visual sharing can approach synchronous time. In other words, images, delivered either to massive online audiences or to smaller networks of associates, can be posted and viewed in what is referred to as 'real-time'. Older forms of camera phone photography have afforded a similar 'intimate visual co-presence' through the sharing of "an ongoing stream of viewpoint specific photos" with close associates (Ito and Okabe, 2005). In social photography we see a broadening of the reach of this intimate sharing to ambient viewers not known by the photographer.

2. Instagram

Instagram is a social photography 'app' designed to run on a smart phone through which the social media user can make visual and textual meanings, and the ambient viewer can interact with those meanings. Apps are "bundles of meaning and functionality each marked by its own distinctive name and icon" (Chesher, 2012: 98) that may be purchased via online stores through a smart phone. Instagram affords a number of semiotic modes to the user, such as visual and written modalities, as well as imposing a number of semiotic constraints on the dimensions of the image and the length of the caption. The service may be thought of as "neo-retro" (Chesher, 2012) in the way that it nostalgically positions itself in relation to past photographic practices such as Polaroid photography:

When we were kids we loved playing around with cameras. We loved how different types of old cameras marketed themselves as "instant" - something we take for granted today. We also felt that the snapshots people were taking were kind of like telegrams in that they got sent over the wire to others - so we figured why not combine the two? (Instagram, 2014)

This description of the design principle underlying Instagram suggests the important role that temporality holds to the value of these images. Despite the potential for 'instant' image publication, it is not the case that most Instagram images are simply rough 'point and shoot' style photos with little regard to design. Instagram images usually make use of a set of post-processing techniques such as filtering, cropping, blurring etc. - image manipulation functionality that is made available inside the Instagram application. They can be seen to involve a complex interplay of what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as

‘artistic’ genres, that work in the service of aesthetic function, and ‘extra-artistic’ genres, that are grounded in particular, often domestic and banal, contexts.

Instagram may be classed a social networking service since it allows users to create a personal profile and ‘following’ relationships with other users. These relationships are asymmetrical as users are not required to reciprocate. Most social networking services have in common a number of basic functions: profile creation, the ability to generate a list of affiliated users, privacy customization, and a mechanism for viewing the activities of affiliated users (boyd, 2010). These affiliated users are often referred to as ‘friends’ (e.g. Facebook friends) or ‘followers’ (e.g. Twitter followers). boyd (2010) suggests that social networking services have a number of characteristic attributes: persistence (capture and archiving of content), replicability (duplication of content), scalability (broad visibility of content) and searchability (access to content via search).

A user’s stream of images is an unfolding construal of identity in which the particular phenomena photographed are a presentation of personal style. The images appear as an unfolding ‘feed’ of content in reverse chronological order on their homepage within the site.

Figure 1 is an example of a user’s photographic feed, presented in a chronologically unfolding grid of thumbnail images. When the viewer clicks on an image a larger version of the photograph together with its caption is displayed. Above the caption is the user’s chosen icon and username, and a timestamp showing when the image was posted to the service. Below the caption are the names of other users that have ‘favoured’ the post, indicating positive assessment of the image. There are also two comments that have been posted about the image, one by another user, and a reply by the photographer.

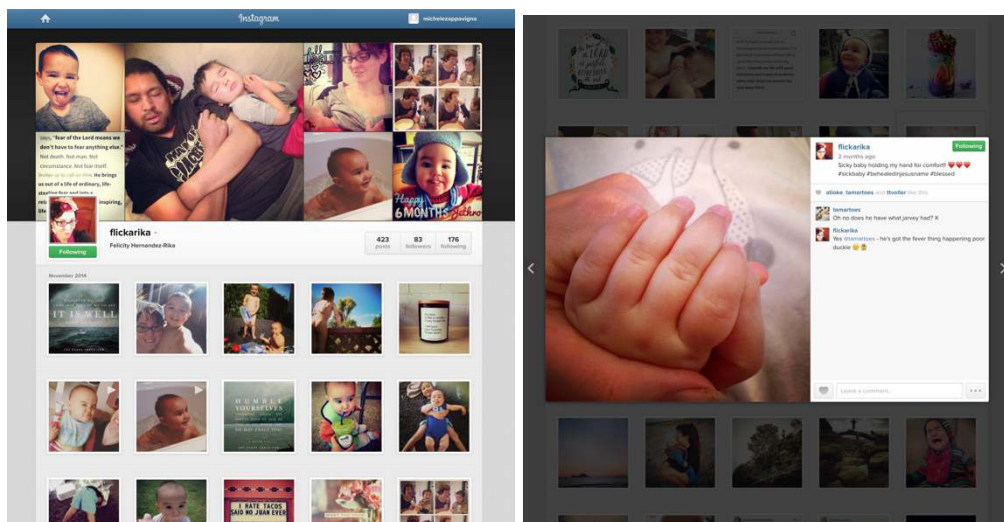


Figure 1 Flickrrika’s Instagram feed (left) and an example of an individual post (right).

In a manner agnate to the textual restrictions placed on Twitter posts (140 characters per post), Instagram imposes a set of visual limitations on posts, making this service an interesting study in meaning-making within a constrained environment. For example the image dimensions are limited to a square cropped frame, and the verbiage restricted to 2200 characters including up to 30 hashtags. In addition, the set of photographic filters that may be applied to an image is constrained to the 10 filters shown in Figure 11. Of course, users may find means to circumvent these limitations, such as importing images created with other systems, but the general design principle appears to be image production under these defined constraints.

In terms of ideational content, images containing faces appear to generate the most 'likes' and comments (Bakhshi et al., 2014), and the most common type of image is what is popularly known as the 'selfie', a form of self portrait taken with a the front camera of a smart phone (Figure 2) (Hu et al., 2014). This form of image has become "an extensive everyday art form for ordinary people" (Lüders et al., 2010: 960). As we will see later, selfies are an emerging visual genre that are very interesting in terms of the ways in which subjectivity and the photographer – viewer relationship are construed.



Figure 2 An example of a 'selfie'.

3. Interpersonal resources in images

The interpersonal meaning made in an image centers on how it represents particular kinds of "social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 42). Two systems of interpersonal meaning play an important role in the way Instagram users represent themselves and others in social photographs: *point of view* (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) or *focalisation* (Painter et al., 2013), and what I refer to as *subjectification* (Zhao and ANONYMISED, in preparation). The former is about how the visual choices made in the image create a relationship between the represented participants and the viewer, while the latter is about the relationship set up between the photographer and the viewer.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that the camera angle of an image is involved in construing point of view, with horizontal angles encoding involvement (e.g. a frontal angle construing direct involvement with the represented participants), and vertical angles encoding power relations (e.g. a

high angle construing power over the represented participants). Building on these ideas, and concepts from narratology of 'who sees' (Genette, 1980), Painter et al. (2013) developed the system of 'focalisation' for exploring how picture books help children learn how to 'read' the viewer-image relationship construed in narrative texts by visual choices that guide the child into adopting different kinds of 'viewing personae'. Narrative studies of point of view typically distinguish between the voice 'who tells' us the story and the persona through whose eyes we 'see' the unfolding narrative, a perspective that may shift as the narrative unfolds. In terms of visual images embedded in narrative texts focalisation is about the viewing position that is represented within this unfolding narrative: "are readers in eye contact with characters, or observing them, and if observing are they observing directly or vicariously (through the eyes of one of the characters as it were)" (Martin, 2008: 13). Focalisation has been used to analyse images in various contexts from children's picture book narratives (Martin, 2008; Painter et al., 2013), comics (Mikkonen, 2012), animated movies (Unsworth, 2014) to fictional films (Schlickers, 2009).

According to Painter et al's (2013) framework an image may either engage the viewer in *contact*, through the gaze of the character out to the viewer, or invite the viewer to *observe* in images with no gaze. For example the selfie image above (Figure 2) depicts a direct gaze out to the viewer, inviting them to participate in direct contact. At the same time, in narrative texts, the image can be mediated through either an *inscribed 'as character'* choice (e.g. part of the character such as hands, feet, or shadow depicted as emerging from the lower frame) or *'along with character'* (e.g. the backview of a character depicted in the foreground signaling a shared view). Mediation may also be *inferred* through a sequence of images through the choice of angle and the kind of affect displayed in the represented participants.

4. Subjectivity in social photographs

While point of view and focalization are helpful for exploring the relationship construed between the viewer and the represented participants in an image, a new description is needed to explain the relationship construed in social photographs between the *photographer* and the viewer. The affordances of the smart phone, the device most commonly used to take social photographs, are conducive to shooting images where the subjectivity of the photographer is signaled either by compositional choices or through inclusion of parts of the photographer's body within the frame. A discourse of self is 'activated' via the Instagram user's profile, featuring a profile picture and username (Figure 1). In other words, we know that the bodyparts in the images are the photographer's because of this profile, and that it would not be in keeping with the dominant social practice to upload another user's photographs (though this is technically possible). The essential principle behind a user's Instagram stream is an on-going display of self to the ambient audience.

The system of meaning at risk, *subjectification*, is about the subjectivity the viewer is invited to vicariously assume or imagine in relation to the image. It

differs from the focalization and point of view systems in the sense that the relationship is not one of interaction with the represented participants by way of gaze, but instead a relationship of 'imagining oneself as being' or 'being in fusion with' the image producer. For example, consider the image in Figure 3. While the gaze of the baby away from the viewer suggests an *observe* relationship in terms of focalisation, we cannot see the gaze of the participant whose legs are represented. Because of the classifying function of the Instagram profile, we know that the legs depicted must belong to the photographer. The ambient viewer can infer this relation from the body part as well as the compositional structure (legs emerging from the bottom of the frame) suggestive of a seated or reclining photographer. The ambient viewer shares the perspective of the photographer, being able to see what they can see from this seated position. Due to the affordances of 'real-time' image-posting, as well as the visual structure, the viewer shares vicariously the represented experience.



Figure 3 An example of an Instagram image.

The main choice in subjectification is between construing an *as photographer* or *with photographer* viewing position (Figure 4). The former involves three different kinds of resources for suggesting the subjectivity of the photographer. In the first choice the photographer is *represented* explicitly in the image, for example via what is popularly known as a selfie. If we do not know anything of the context, this form of image might be mistaken for a traditional portrait taken by another party. However, there are typically visual clues suggesting that the represented participant is the photographer, such as the position of their shoulder or arm, or distortion due to the close focal range. The second choice in the subjectification system is where the photographer is *inferred* by inclusion of part of their body in the image. For example, the photographer's legs in the second image in Figure 4 infer their presence as the participant holding the baby. Finally, the photographer might be *implied* through compositional choices, for instance as the person pushing the pram in the third image in Figure 4, or for example, as a co-participant in a conversation across a table in a café, signaled by the positioning of a coffee cup in the foreground of the image. By way of contrast, there are no clues in the visual structure relating to the subjective presence of the photographer in the *with photographer* choice. The viewer will no doubt recognise that the

image was taken by a human photographer by virtue of a knowledge of the context of photographic production and sometimes through coordinating intermodal resources such as labels or captions.

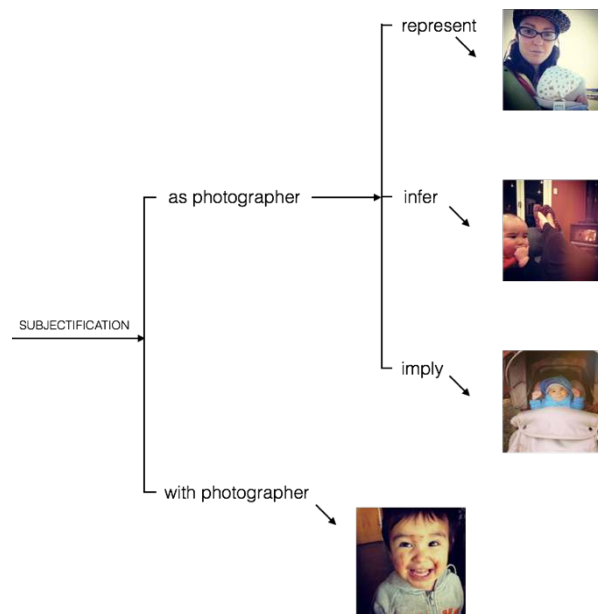


Figure 4 Subjectification (adapted from Zhao & ANONYMISED (forthcoming))

The meaning potential of subjectification is augmented via the technological affordances of the social streaming platform itself, that makes possible near ‘real-time’ broadcasting of the image to the social network. The close-to-real-time pace at which images can be posted by the photographer and viewed by the ambient audience invokes the possibility that the ambient viewer ‘could be there’, that they are sharing in the experience at the time that it is happening. In some images this appears to be agnate to the pre-digital ‘wish you were here’ postcard sent by holidayers. For instance in Figure 3, discussed above, the visual structure invites the viewer into the frame to share in the experience represented (sitting with a baby near a fireplace). This type of image might also involve implied subjectification, for example, images of cups of coffee in the foreground that are shot from a camera angle suggestive of the photographer’s seated eye level and which included a landscape in the background, often accompanied by verbiage expressing pleasure about the view.

5. Corpus: The representation of motherhood in social photography

Writing and posting images online about the everyday experience of motherhood is a practice that has evolved alongside social media technologies. This domain of communication involves a range of multimodal genres that have yet to be comprehensively mapped, but have been controversially labeled ‘mommyblogging’ (Chen, 2013). As an “intimate public” mommyblogging is characterized by networked relationships involved in sharing of personal accounts of motherhood (Morrison, 2011: 36). These accounts offer insight into “the way that mothers act up and are acted

upon...cast[ing] a light into some of the often-ignored corners of contemporary women's history" (Friedman, 2010: 199). Some scholars have viewed mommyblogging as a challenge to traditional cultural representations of motherhood, while at the same time noting the persistence of mythologies of the 'good mother' in framing this discursive community (Powell, 2010) (Chen, 2013; Friedman and Calixte, 2009; Lopez, 2009; Powell, 2010).

Central to strong axiological alignments forged in the kind of interactive commenting seen in mommyblogging is the sharing of images, most often of children and activities associated with their care. While these images might be shared in a longform blogs, the increasing popularity of microblogging means that they are often embedded in short character-constrained posts to social media services such as Twitter or Instagram. Despite interest in this domain of communication, there has been little research into the images of motherhood that are shared.

The corpus explored in this study consisted of the entire Instagram feed of a single user, 'Flickarika' who posts images about her experience of motherhood. At the time of writing this user's feed consisted of 416 images. Figure 5, a photograph of the user's 5-month-old son, is an example of an image from this feed. The subject matter is predominately Flickarika's children and dimensions of her domestic experiences. The most common visual structure enacted was the portrait, representing 80% of the images in her feed. Almost all of these were portraits depicting one or more of the photographer's two children. The remaining 20% of images were fairly evenly distributed across the traditional 'genres' of self portraiture, still life, and landscape, alongside reposts of other user's content, and inspirational quotations. These traditional genres, as we will see in later, are accompanied by emerging visual genres that appear to have been influenced by the affordances of the mobile smart phone medium with which they were captured.



Figure 5 An example of an Instagram image from Flickrika's feed.

6. 'with photographer' subjectification

Before exploring 'as photographer' subjectification, in which the photographer draws upon visual resources to signal their subjective presence in the image, I will consider 'with photographer' subjectification, the less marked option. Images drawing on this resource do not directly inscribe or imply the photographer's presence in the visual structure. For example, Figure 6 is an image of this kind, functioning as a portrait. However, if we consider the intermodal coordination between this image and its caption, as well as its positioning within the social media feed (activating a discourse of self), we can see that these other resources are performing the work of signaling the photographer's subjectivity. The caption applied to this post was the following:

OMG - he's asleep --- it's a miracle --- quick better get my sleep deprived self off to bed! What a long week this has been!!

This caption explicitly inscribes Flickrika's attitudinal reaction to the image, performing the semiotic work of sharing this user's personal experience that in other images in her feed is achieved through subjectification.



Figure 6 An example of 'with photographer' subjectification.

Two types of image were very common in Flickrika's Instagram feed that draw on the 'with photographer' system: the annotated portrait and the collage portrait, both created with third party apps running on the user's smartphone. While the visual structure does not inscribe, infer or imply the presence of the photographer directly, if we consider dimensions such as the image-text relationship realized in the annotated captions and the image-layout relationship realized in the collage layout, the authorial 'voice' of the photographer does appear to be at risk. This voice is of an annotator and a curator of experience respectively. The annotation in the images shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** at once catalogues experience (e.g. image 3 & 4) as well as attitudinally orienting the viewer toward that experience (e.g. image 1 & 3). Similarly the layout employed in the images shown in Figure 8 relates to the overall discourse of personal curation activated by the chronologically unfolding social media feed. Here the photographer operates as a curator selecting which dimensions of experience to include are collected in the image.



Figure 7 Examples of annotated images.



Figure 8 Examples of collage portraits.

7. Mediated portraiture: 'as photographer' subjectification

While all portraiture is in a sense mediated by the subjectivity of the photographer, social photographs display particular tendencies that foreground this subjectivity in ways that have not been routinely seen before in popular personal photography. As noted above, Flickrrika's feed consists predominately of portraits, and, while many of these are similar to traditional portraits, there are images that incorporate visual choices that appear specific to the genres of social photography. These choices arise out of two attributes of smart phone cameras: portability and pervasiveness. Both of these variables mean that the camera is likely to be with the photographer during their daily activities, influencing the choice of subject matter, and also mean that camera angles emphasising the perspective of the photographer are more likely to be used. The slim construction of the device affords flexibility in terms of its positioning in relation to the subject. The device can also be held in one hand while the photographer is doing something else (e.g. holding a child). In addition, as already mentioned, the temporality of the social network to which these images are posted as a chronologically unfolding stream of content, privilege a 'you could be here with me' style of photography since the ambient viewer may view the image in 'real-time' as soon as it is posted. Both the medium used to take the photograph, and the channel on which it is published, are thus oriented toward construing different forms of visual co-presence. In other words social photography lends itself to a portraiture where the subjectivity of the photographer is either directly inscribed, implied, or inferred.

Selfies are the most obvious instances where the photographer's subjectivity is inscribed in the image. While self-portraiture is the most frequent genre

seen on Instagram (Hu et al., 2014), there is only one instance of a self-portrait of Flickarika in the corpus (Figure 2). All other selfies in the feed are images of the user with her children (Figure 9), suggesting how integral motherhood is to this user's identity. This type of selfie offers a view of motherhood as relationship. In terms of subjectification, these images involve an 'as photographer: inscribe' choice since they involve explicit representation of the photographer as a participant in the image. The ambient viewer is looking at the image as if they were the photographer in the sense that they are seeing a similar (though reversed) image to the image shown to the photographer on the smartphone screen.



Figure 9 Examples of 'selfies'.

One common pattern is the choice to include part of the photographer's body in the image, for example feet or hands usually extending from the bottom of the frame (Figure 10). This visual choice infers the presence of the photographer beyond the edges of the frame, inviting the viewer to experience the image as if they were the photographer, in a kind of fused subjectivity. This is different to point of view or focalization because the relationship is not constructed through the gaze of a represented participant, but via the inferred presence of the photographer manifest in the visual structure.

The first image in Figure 10 was accompanied by the following caption:

Just chillin on a Sunday evening by the fire with this little hand chomper!

The caption functions to ground the image in the user's private experience, working alongside the visual representation of the women's legs to both mark the experience as her own, and to create an alignment with the ambient viewer as an imagined co-participant. In other words, somewhat paradoxically, the choice to include elements of the photographer's body in the image construes an 'as photographer' viewing position at the same time as emphasizing that what is seen is a unique personal moment in time. In terms of subjectification the choice is 'as photographer: infer' since we can intuit that the bodypart belongs to the photographer based on the visual structure and the discourse of self activated by Flickarika's Instagram profile.



Figure 10 Examples of images incorporating parts of the photographer's body.

The portraits in Figure 10 also differ from traditional portraits by the way that the parts of the photographer's body in the image indicate that an activity is underway that the photographer is involved in e.g. relaxing (image 1), feeding (image 2 & 4)), and holding (figure 3). This is a representation of motherhood as process, in which what once might be have been viewed as mundane practices not worthy of being captured on expensive analogue film, is presented as central to the construal of identity performed by the mother.

8. Filtering experience: Retro aesthetics and provenance

Another dimension of interpersonal meaning regularly seen in social photographs is a kind of collective faux-nostalgia or 'instant nostalgia' (Chesher, 2012) construed through the choice of digital filter applied to the image. Prior to the advent of digital photography, photographic filters were physical devices, usually glass or plastic disks, positioned in front of the lens to achieve a range of photographic effects, from altering colour balance to distorting the image. Digital filters invoke the effects of traditional filters, as well as providing new options for image manipulation. Instagram offers users a set of twenty prefabricated filters that can be applied to images within the application (Figure 11). An interesting question is the extent to which this 'off-the-shelf' post-processing of images affects notions of authorship and authenticity in contexts such as journalism (Alper, 2013). We might also consider how the inflect the possibilities of subjectification.

NORMAL 	AMARO 	MAYFAIR 	RISE 	HUDSON 
VALENCIA 	X-PRO II 	SIERRA 	WILLOW 	LO-FI 
EARLYBIRD	SUTRO	TOASTER	BRANNAN	INKWELL



Figure 11 Instagram filters applied to an image.

As Figure 11 suggests, many of these filters, both in terms of their visual effect and naming, evoke 'bygone' eras. For instance, they allow the user to manipulate visual dimensions of the image that invoke older media and conventions (e.g. polaroid photography). 'Retro'-style filters of this kind evoke the physical imperfections of analogue film processing through effects mimicking phenomena such as light leaks and vignetting. The *1977* filter, for example, increases the brightness of an image, but fades the hues, to give the feel of an old photograph (Figure 12). Similarly, the *Earlybird* filter applies a shadowy vignette, decreases saturation, and emphasises warm, brown hues. Some of the names of these photographic filters invite us to associate them with particular historical periods (e.g. *1977*) or particular places (e.g. *Nashville*), though others are more esoteric references unlikely to be known by users (e.g. *Walden*, apparently the name of a dog owned by one of the developers). Interestingly, the simulation of these past photographic technologies is not aimed at fidelity but instead represents the "look of aged photographs as they appear to us in the present" (Bartholeyns, 2014: 60), and this is in keeping with the emphasis that the social stream places on the present and 'real-time' image capture and sharing.



Figure 12 Comparing an unfiltered image with an image applying the '1977' filter

While any photographic effect invoking the past might be employed nostalgically, the social function here appears to be more about rendering more poignant the present moment, in particular the banal, everyday present moment. This kind of intensifying of interpersonal meaning is achieved "through the added emotional value provided by a temporal distance that is made visible by a dated aesthetic" (Lüders et al., 2010: 960). For example,

consider Figure 13 where the filter faux-ages the image, as if the viewer might be looking at an old photo from this now-adult's childhood. This increases the interpersonal value of the image by drawing on what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) term the system of 'provenance': meaning that is dependent on knowing the cultural origin of the signifier. This kind of associative meaning has been explored in relation to colour, where provenance is related to "the question of 'where the colour comes from, where it has been culturally and historically', 'where we have seen it before'" Djonov and Van Leeuwen (2011: 546), and also in relation to texture (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002: 355), and typography (Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2011). While the associations invoked in these different semiotic modes might appear "limitless in theory, in practice they are not" and are tied with the context in which they are produced within the genre enacted (Van Leeuwen, 2005).



Figure 13 "Feeding the Pukekos!"

9. Emerging visual genres

A genre is "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity, in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (Martin, 1984: 25). While many textual genres have been mapped (e.g. recount, narrative, procedure etc.), social semiotic work on multimodal genres is still in its infancy. In terms of images, 'genre' is a term with a confusing historical usage, on the one hand referring to 'genre painting' of everyday life and also to the hierarchy of genres defined from the 16th century, including forms such as portrait painting, landscape painting, and still life. These historical terms are not technical genre labels in a functional semiotic sense, however, they have proven historically useful for differentiating between different visual patterns in painting and photography. One problem with the terminology here is that there is no semiotic difference between a portrait and a self-portrait without some intermodal relation signaling that the represented participant is the image producer (e.g. an image caption in an exhibition) (Zhao, 2014, personal communication).

Taking the portrait, landscape, and still life as an admittedly problematic starting point, there appear to be a number of visual genres emerging in social

media discourse that are frequently used, though may have yet to stabilize. Two visual genres that draw upon subjectification as a semiotic resource that were present in Flickarika's Instagram feed are the 'mediated portrait' and the 'mediated still life' (e.g. Figure 14). 'Mediated landscapes' are also possible but were not seen in this user's feed. Both of these genres have the social function of forging a form of visual co-presence (where part of the photographer is presented in the image) as a way of foregrounding the photographer's subjectivity and the uniqueness of the personal experience portrayed. At the same time these images function to create an alignment with the ambient social media viewer positioned as 'sharing' in the experience.

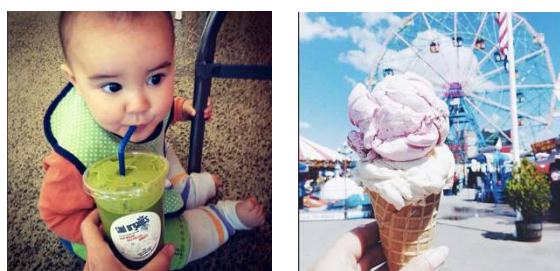


Figure 14 An example of a mediated portrait (left) and a mediated still life (right).

The mediated portrait also foregrounds the activity being performed by the photographer at the time they take the image. In the context of mommy blogging this is typically an activity associated with care of the child, as in the example in Figure 14, showing Flickarika's hand as she feeds her son a green smoothie. The image was accompanied by the following caption further describing the activity taking place:

This morning we're lapping up a delicious green smoothie from [@soulorganicslimited](#) in #whakatane -- nom nom nom #greensmoothie #cleaneating #bubbaloveshisgreens

The mediated still life, on the other hand, foregrounds the photographer's relationship to represented objects, often depicting food or beverages before or after they are eaten. Depending on the domain these are often 'fetishized' objects such as shoes or coffee (Zhao, 2014, personal communication). For example the second image in Figure 14 shows the photographer's hand holding the icecream that she is about to eat. On the one hand this visual choice supports deixis, as she is presenting the object to the ambient viewer. On the other, it functions to foreground her subjectivity as the person about to eat the icecream at that particular point in time in that particular location.

10. Conclusion

Social media images represent a definitive shift in personal photographic practices where we see a foregrounding of the photographer – viewer relationship in the visual structure. This paper has explored the role that subjectification plays in the construal of this relationship, investigating how visual choices such as including part of the photographer in the image operate semiotically. It has also suggested that two genres, the mediated portrait, and the mediated still life have emerged on social media platforms. These images

invite the ambient viewer to approach the image as if they were sharing in the photographer's subjective experience and are activated by the discourse of self inherent in social media (e.g. activated by the social media profile defining the particular user's feed). The proliferation of these types of social photographs is partly because of the impact that the technological affordances of mobile devices and social media apps have had on the extent to which social photography has become embedded in everyday life. It also arises out of the desire for ambient forms of social connection, an impetus driving users to share their subjective experiences with others.

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