

## **Enduring Memories: Photographed GIFs and the Smartphone Album**

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Among the most popular smartphone applications are photo-apps. These applications not only enable the seamless display of both still and moving images in smartphone photography albums but even create new looped images, such as GIFs. This shift potentially changes the temporal experience of everyday digital media from linear temporality to looped, cyclical time, promoting a present tense made visible not through instantaneous capture (photography) or sequential unfolding (film), but continual recurrence.

This theoretical paper uses the advent of the GIF as a key product of smartphone photo albums to re-conceptualize the temporal and mnemonic structures of everyday digital photography. The relation between visible movement and the perception of time guides this paper's focus on the smartphone photo album. While pre-digital photo albums functioned only as vehicles of image-organization and presentation, contemporary smartphone albums also enable – and even initiate – the creation of seemingly new kinds of domestic photography such as 'moving photographs'. The character of these visual products and the processes of their creation vary across photo apps. The Google Photos application, for instance, notifies users with offers to animate their sequences of photographs almost immediately after they are taken, turning them into GIFs.

These GIFs radically disrupt the conventional assumptions of photography theory regarding photography's relations with time. Pre-digital photography theory postulated a key distinction between a photograph and a film: the photograph is static; the film is characterized by duration. While the photograph was associated with an *absolute* past (Barthes, 1981), moving images were associated with temporal progression (Bazin, 1960; Deleuze, 1986). More

recent work, however, has altered this dichotomy, conceptualizing smartphone photography as 'present' and 'live' for two reasons: first, the digital (still) photograph is actually a high-speed continuous projection of multiple static images (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2013); second, photographs are shared across social networks, which are experienced as 'live' (Frosh, 2019).

GIFs in smartphone albums transform photographic representation even further, shifting it from past immobility to endless recurrence. The GIF eliminates the linear chronology of past-present-future because of its perpetual looped temporality, constituting a hybrid between photographic still and film. The looped movement provides a visible incarnation of the central characteristic of computational memory – the 'enduring ephemeral' (Chun, 2008): the GIF's looped temporality continually repeats the past as an automatic movement of disappearance and reappearance in the present. At the same time, smartphone album GIFs promotes a technologized 'desire for endlessness' (Hoelzl & Marie, 2015) in our visualizations of everyday moments.

The emergence of the GIF in the smartphone album thus invites us to reflect on the nature of memory and temporal experience at the cultural level. Smartphone albums - which organize and display images but also initiate *temporally novel photographic formats* - are at the heart of these complex intersections between continuities in mnemonic practices and techno-cultural transformations.