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Photography as Play

### Abstract

In this paper, current photography and photo sharing are studied as play. Playfulness has always been one of snapshot photography's affordances. People engage in playful actions, for instance, with their cameras, photo manipulation techniques, facial expressions and poses. However, it appears that the breakthrough of mobile phone technologies and contemporary photo sharing applications, especially Snapchat, have truly provided a fertile playground for digital 'photoplays' to flourish. This paper will consider on what grounds current photography may be understood as play. To be more precise, it will trace the common characteristics of play that come into view in photo sharing between young friends.

Today, young people take and share huge numbers of ephemeral photos, often on the go. Photographing as such has become a substantial part of their everyday life. To better understand this constant photographing and sharing, a twofold data was gathered. The data consists of in-depth interviews of close friends (two friend pairs and one triad, at the ages of 12,13; 16,16; 21,21,21) who actively use Snapchat, and of saved snaps (Snapchat messages, i.e., photos and videos) sent between these friends within one day (98 snaps in total). From the data, the concept of play emerged as a new perspective for examining photography and the data itself.

Snapping, as it shows itself in the data, aptly fits in with the notion of play. The aim of snapping is in itself. Because of their disappearing quality, snaps are not suitable for communicating 'real issues', for serious conversations or for sharing information that one should be able to return to. Snapping is about making comments, being in connection and having fun. Thus, the fun-element that characterises the essence of play is essential in snapping.

As play in general, snapping is limited in regard to time and space. Although the young are snapping throughout the day, one day, in fact, consists of several smaller bursts of communication. The play begins and it ends. Snapchat provides a playground which is marked off

both materially by the applications, devices and bodies using them, and ideally as a space with its own logic and rules. All these elements of play - the fun, the rules, and the limitations regarding time and space - contribute to the fact that play is different from ordinary life. However, play has an impact also outside the play as, in this case, it reinforces friendships through a rich array of indices of intimacy and trust that the photographs entail.

In many profound writings, play is considered as an innate urge, integral part of life and culture, something characteristic to all humans of different ages, even a necessity for the individual and for society. Recognising this importance opens a possibility of seeing meaning in the seemingly meaningless playful photo sharing. In addition, when the notion of play is used, the context specificity of shared photographs becomes evident. Finally, although there was no 'bad play' in the data, play as a framework may also be useful when considering undesirable forms of photo sharing.

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