

# INSTAGRAMMING NOSTALGIA

*Faux-vintage photography and nostalgia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*



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“I literally remember looking to my side, to my cofounder, and being like, ‘I think this is going to be big.’”

*- Kevin Systrom, cofounder of Instagram, not long after the launch of Instagram*



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## INTRODUCTION

In the year 1975 Steve Sasson, an engineer working for Kodak, developed what is to be understood the first digital camera. It was the first camera that did not make use of film to create an image. Among other things, Sasson's camera consisted of a lens borrowed from the Super 8 movie camera and a portable digital cassette instrumentation recorder, which made it able to record 0.01 megapixel black and white photographs. It took twenty-three seconds to create a photograph, which was recorded to a cassette tape. To play back the images created, data was read from this tape and displayed on a television set.<sup>1</sup> Sasson described his camera as a "rather odd-looking collection of digital circuits that we desperately tried to convince ourselves was a portable camera." Years later Sasson revealed how the company executives of Kodak could not understand why anyone would ever want to look at images on a television screen when he first proposed the idea of the 'filmless camera' to them.<sup>2</sup> Time has proven Sasson's revolutionary idea to be the right way to go.

By the end of the 1980s the digitally capturing of images became accessible for the masses, when companies like Canon, Nikon and Sony began to develop new image devices for capturing images. These devices were compact, of high quality and recorded images directly on a miniature floppy, the alternative of the silver-based photography film.<sup>3</sup> In the years that followed, the digital camera developed rapidly. New models were faster and produced images of increasingly higher quality. Also, adding extra memory became a possibility. More and more options were added, for example monitors that enabled direct view and possibilities to evaluate the colour, shading and contrast of the images.<sup>4</sup> By the beginning of the 2000s, cameras were also added to mobile phones.<sup>5</sup> An annual research on the mobile industry numbers and statistics reported that in 2013 there were more than five billion mobile phones in the world for a population of almost four and a half billion people. Eighty-three per cent of these mobile phones have a built-

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Zhang, 'The World's First Digital Camera by Kodak and Steve Sasson', *Petapixel*, published 05-08-2010, accessed 24-05-2014. <http://petapixel.com/2010/08/05/the-worlds-first-digital-camera-by-kodak-and-steve-sasson/>

<sup>2</sup> Audley Jarvis, 'How Kodak Invented the Digital Camera in 1975', *Techradar*, published 09-03-2009, accessed 24-05-2014. <http://www.techradar.com/news/cameras/photography-video-capture/how-kodak-invented-the-digital-camera-in-1975-364822>

<sup>3</sup> William Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 16-18.

<sup>4</sup> Shoji Kawamura, 'Capturing Images With Digital Still Camera', *IEEE Publishing* (1998), vol. 18 (6): 14-16.

<sup>5</sup> Hoi Wan, 'Evolution of the Camera Phone', *Hoista*, published 28-02-2012, accessed 31-05-2014. <http://www.hoista.net/post/18437919296/evolution-of-the-cameraphone-from-sharp-j-sh04-to>

in camera.<sup>6</sup> This omnipresence of mobile cameras caused an explosion in the growth of digital produced images, for mobile devices are almost always within reach.<sup>7</sup> More than ever, it became possible to create digital photographs anywhere, anytime. As philosopher Matthew Biro stated in 2012 in his article 'From Analogue to Digital Photography': "the analogue age is over." Biro believes that although analogue processes may survive as specialised technologies, most of the new images made will be captured, transmitted and consumed digitally.<sup>8</sup> One could almost say that digital photography has become the norm.

The shift from analogue to digital photography has not been without its implications. In their research from 2014 on how this shift has affected the meanings of personal photographs and the practices of remembering associated with them, researchers in the field of media, culture and communication Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering write that analogue photographs are given a particular value. They are described as 'special' and 'precious' relating to their singular existence and their venerable age. In contrast, "digital photographs are perceived as more immediate and disposable. (...) They are seen as less unique than their analogue counterparts."<sup>9</sup> In the same year Gil Bartholeyns, assistant professor in visual culture at the University of Lille, writes that over the course of a decade the technologies behind digital cameras had evolved in such a way that the process of creating images became highly automated and so effective that the images the cameras produced began to be described as cold and disembodied in comparison to traditional (analogue) pictures. Although analogue photography was expensive and its results were not always certain, it had the advantage of being 'alive.'<sup>10</sup> Also, the words 'truth' and 'objectivity' are often still associated with analogue photographic practices as opposed to digital photography that is often associated with 'untruth' and 'subjectivism.' As Biro writes:

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Harrington, '90% of People Have Only Taken Photos on a Camera Phone vs. a Camera', *Photofocus*, published 10-11-2013, accessed 05-05-2014. <http://photofocus.com/2013/11/10/90-of-people-have-only-taken-a-photo-with-a-camera-phone-in-their-lifetime/>

<sup>7</sup> Hunter Schwarz, 'How Many Photos Have Been Taken Ever?' *Buzzfeed*, published 24-09-2012, accessed 13-05-2014. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/hunterschwarz/how-many-photos-have-been-taken-ever-6zgv#.gbnRxdRDG>

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Biro, 'From Analogue to Digital Photography: Bernd and Hilla Becher and Andreas Gursky', *History of Photography* (2012), vol. 36 (2): 366.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, 'Technologies of Memory: Practices of Remembering in analogue and digital photography' *New Media and Society* (2014), vol. 16 (4): 582-583.

<sup>10</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, 'The Instant Past: Nostalgia and Digital Retro Photography' *Media and Nostalgia Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Katharina Niemeyer (ed.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 51.

“The rapid adoption of digital technologies in photography since the 1990s has led to a greater erosion of the public trust in the truth of the photographic image than ever before, as well as a more broadly based awareness of the photograph’s ability to lie.”<sup>11</sup>

These digital technologies that Biro talks about are wildly spread today. Numerous photography editing software programs can be used to edit or alter a digitally produced photograph.<sup>12</sup> These programmes are designed to create digital perfection, as all imperfections can be corrected.<sup>13</sup> But these possibilities of creating the ‘perfect photograph’ have given rise to a new development in the field of photography: the simulation of imperfection. The recent years have seen a rise in digital image making technologies that produce images that look like as if they were taken with an analogue camera.<sup>14</sup> The goal of these technologies is to simulate imperfection, and digitally simulate analogue authenticity.<sup>15</sup> They break through what media and cultural theorist Dominik Schrey defines “the logic of perfection that pervades the digital.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most well known technology that offers its users this digital simulation of analogue imperfection is the website and mobile application *Instagram*.

### *Researching Instagram*

Put shortly, *Instagram* (founded in 2010) is an online platform that focuses on sharing photographs that are taken by its users. This sharing can be done via the *Instagram* website as well as the *Instagram* application for the mobile phone.<sup>17</sup> The website of *Instagram* describes the platform as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Biro, p. 353.

<sup>12</sup> To name a few: Adobe’s Photoshop, Google’s Picasa, GIMP, Photo! Editor, PhotoStudio and PaintShop.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Biro, p. 366.

<sup>14</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> As said, analogue photographs are often viewed as more authentic. However, this is questionable, since analogue photographs were sometimes, much like digital photographs now, manipulated as well. So ‘analogue authenticity’ might not be a correct term, since it probably does not even exist. Due to time issues I will not be paying further attention to the discussion that tackles this question. When I speak of analogue authenticity I will merely refer to the values of analogue photography that are mentioned here above.

<sup>16</sup> Dominik Schrey, ‘Analogue Nostalgia and the Aesthetics of Digital Remediation’ *Media and Nostalgia. Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Katharina Niemeyer (ed.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> The website and app of *Instagram* work according to the same principle, so when I refer to *Instagram* I refer to the website as well as the app, because of the lack of differences between the two. When I do refer to the website or the app specifically, I will mention this explicitly.



"*Instagram* is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building *Instagram* to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos."<sup>18</sup>

*Instagram* can transform the look of digitally produced images into pictures that look like they have been taken with the help of an analogue camera. This is achieved by letting the user upload a digital photograph, after which a filter can be added. This filter replicates the aesthetics of analogue photography and will instantly change the look of the photograph. This simulation of analogue photography refers back to the uniqueness and being more alive; characteristics that seem to be inherent to analogue photography, as mentioned earlier.

According to the website of *Instagram*, today, almost five years after its introduction, the platform is immensely popular all around the world. Over 200 million users are active on *Instagram* every month. Over twenty billion photographs have been shared on the platform. Each day more than one and a half billion 'likes' are given and per day sixty million photographs are uploaded to the platform.<sup>19</sup> Not only is the app popular among its users, it is an often recurring subject in the popular press. In the last few years *Instagram* has often been discussed in relation to its makers, the new records the platform has broken, the popularity of profile pages of famous people on *Instagram* and popular trends rising through *Instagram*.<sup>20</sup> One of the frequent recurring subjects is the relation between *Instagram* and nostalgia.<sup>21</sup> Nostalgia can be described as a sentimental longing or a wistful affection for a period in the past.<sup>22</sup> That *Instagram* often is discussed in relation to nostalgia is not that surprising, for photographs that are posted via *Instagram* are, according to an article in the American newspaper *The New*

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<sup>18</sup> Instagram, 'FAQ' *Instagram*, accessed 28-04-2014. <http://instagram.com/about/faq/>

<sup>19</sup> Instagram, 'Press Page' *Instagram*, accessed 28-04-2014. <http://instagram.com/press/>

<sup>20</sup> Los Angeles Times, 'In the News. Instagram' *LATimes*, collection of articles about Instagram published in the Los Angeles Times, accessed 02-01-2015. <http://articles.latimes.com/keyword/instagram> and New York Times, 'Instagram', *NYTimes*, news about Instagram, including commentary and archival articles published in The New York Times, accessed 02-01-2015. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/i/instagram/index.html>

<sup>21</sup> For example 'Instagrams Instant Nostalgia' [http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/04/instagrams-instant-nostalgia.html#slide\\_ss\\_0=1](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/04/instagrams-instant-nostalgia.html#slide_ss_0=1), 'Instagram, The Nostalgia Of Now And Reckoning The Future' <http://www.buzzfeed.com/petrusich/instagram-the-nostalgia-of-now-and-reckoning-the> and 'Instagram Creates "False Sense of Nostalgia," Shows Disconnect From '70s' [http://www.redandblack.com/news/instagram-creates-false-sense-of-nostalgia-shows-disconnect-from-s/article\\_54e13f30-bcd8-11e1-8949-0019bb30f31a.html](http://www.redandblack.com/news/instagram-creates-false-sense-of-nostalgia-shows-disconnect-from-s/article_54e13f30-bcd8-11e1-8949-0019bb30f31a.html)

<sup>22</sup> Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p 1266.

*Yorker*, often perceived as instantly nostalgic.<sup>23</sup> This thesis will answer the question why these photographs are perceived as nostalgic.

Until now, not much scientific research has been done on *Instagram*. The little research that has been done so far is written from a marketing perspective and examines effective marketing strategies for companies with the help of *Instagram*. In my thesis I would like to bridge the discrepancy between the popular press and scientific field by researching *Instagram* and nostalgia from a scientific perspective. I have formulated the following research question:

*Why do we perceive photographs posted online via Instagram as nostalgic and what kind of nostalgic photographs are posted on Instagram by its users?*

In order to answer this question I have divided my thesis in two chapters. In the first chapter, 'Faux-Vintage Photography: *Instagram*', I will zoom in on *Instagram*. I will describe how the platform came to life, how it works and in what ways it simulates some aesthetics of analogue photography. Here, some examples will be discussed. Next, it will be discussed how *Instagram* can be placed in the photographic tradition by taking a closer look at the kind of photographs that are created by the users of *Instagram*. The platform can be described as a digital album of 'vernacular photography.'<sup>24</sup> This type of photography is, as art historian Geoffrey Batchen puts it:

"ordinary photography, photography made and bought by everyday folk from 1839 until now, the photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum or the academy. Vernacular photography is the popular face of photography, so popular that it has been largely ignored by the critical gaze of respectable history."<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the chapter I will take a small step towards the concept of nostalgia by discussing *Instagram* in relation to memory, for the concepts of memory and nostalgia are very closely related. A short theoretical framework of memory will be presented, by making use of theories on memory by sociologists Maurice Halbwachs, Jeffrey Olick and Eviatar Zerubavel, after which the concept will be discussed in relation to some examples posted online via *Instagram*.

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<sup>23</sup> The New Yorker, 'Instagrams Instant Nostalgia' *New Yorker*, published 10-04-2012, accessed 08-01-2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/instagrams-instant-nostalgia>

<sup>24</sup> DTASCHEREAU, 'Photopanic: Instagram and Nostalgia' *Messywords*, published 30-10-2012, accessed 29-04-2014. <http://messymethods.wordpress.com/2012/10/30/photopanic-instagram-and-nostalgia/>

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Batchen. 'Vernacular photographs' *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*, Geoffrey Batchen (ed.) (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 57.

The second chapter, 'Instant Nostalgia on *Instagram*', will focus on what nostalgia is and how it relates to *Instagram*. The platform will be discussed as being a place for memories and nostalgia. The beginning of the chapter will present a theoretical framework of nostalgia, explaining the history of nostalgia, how it works and how it is activated by making use of the works of physician Johannes Hofer, psychologist Constantine Sedekides et al., writer, theorist and media artist Svetlana Boym and sociologist Fred Davis. I will then focus on photographs that are posted via *Instagram* and are considered to be nostalgic according to the users of the platform. Since it is not possible to look at every photograph that is posted on Instagram due to the huge amount of images the platform accommodates, I have decided to focus my research on only those photographs that have been given the hashtag<sup>26</sup> nostalgia by its users.<sup>27</sup> These photographs should give an indication of what kind of photographs the users find nostalgic. I have made a selection of 500 photographs that I will be analysing with the help of the methodology of content analysis as described by geographer Gillian Rose in her *Visual Methodologies*. Through this content analysis I should be able to see what nostalgic subjects are recurring in the photographs posted on *Instagram*.

I will conclude my thesis by answering the research question and pose some questions that may be subject in further research.

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<sup>26</sup> A hashtag is a label that can be added to the photograph by users of Instagram. This makes it possible to search for specific tags and see what kind photographs have been labelled with the same hashtag.

<sup>27</sup> Since *Instagram* does not offer the possibility to search by a word and then being able to see all the photographs that are associated with that word by users of *Instagram*, I have made use of the website *Iconosquare* that does offer this possibility. (Iconosquare, '#nostalgia', *Iconosquare*, accessed 09-11-2014. <http://iconosquare.com/tag/nostalgia>)

## CHAPTER 1 – FAUX-VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY: INSTAGRAM

### 1.1 EXPLORING INSTAGRAM

In October 2010 Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, both students of Stanford University near San Francisco, launched their website *Instagram*. The idea for the website originated seven months before. At that time Systrom started thinking of his own start-up project wherein he would combine the options of the social media app *Foursquare* and the social network game *Mafia Wars* into a new mobile application. Not long after, Systrom got assistance from a fellow student from Stanford: Mike Krieger, who was interested in building an app together. This new app would be named *Burbn* and would also be able to function as a social network. *Burbn* would have several different options, among which the option to check into locations and post pictures. But Systrom and Krieger soon realised that building this app with all its functions would take up an enormous amount of time. Moreover, the people who tested the prototype were overwhelmed by all the different functions the app offered. This resulted in Systrom and Krieger cutting all options in the *Burbn* app, except for the photography, comment and like capabilities. What remained of the app they renamed *Instagram*, a combination of 'instant' and 'telegram.' With this name Systrom and Krieger wanted to emphasize the fact that the photographs were uploaded almost immediately and that these photographs could be used as a way to communicate between one person and another. Systrom said the following about the first few moments after *Instagram* was launched: "I literally remember looking to my side, to my cofounder, and being like, 'I think this is going to be big.'"<sup>28</sup> And he was right. Just two months after its introduction, the community that made use of the website had grown to one million users. Half a year later *Instagram* saw its 150<sup>th</sup> million photograph being uploaded. Today, *Instagram* has 200 million users who are active monthly. Over twenty billion photographs are shared via *Instagram* and every day this number is extended with sixty million photographs.<sup>29</sup>

With *Instagram* Systrom and Krieger wanted to help the user to make their photographs look better, since photographs that were taken with a mobile phone at the beginning of 2010 were of a poor quality. To achieve this the duo came up with different editing possibilities and filters the user can add to the photograph to instantly change the look of it, without having to use difficult photo-editing software.<sup>30</sup> So how does this work? When using the *Instagram* app, the user can choose to upload an existing

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<sup>28</sup> Rosa Waters, *Instagram. How Kevin Systrom & Mike Krieger Changed the Way We Take and Share Photos* (Broomall: Mason Crest, 2014), p. 21, 23-25, 28, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Instagram, 'Press Page'.

<sup>30</sup> Rosa Waters, p. 25.

photograph or take a new one with the camera on the mobile device. The next step is the possibility of editing the chosen photograph, which *Instagram* automatically crops into a square format.<sup>31</sup> The user can edit the photograph in multiple ways. For instance, the user can rotate the photograph, add a frame, change the brightness of the photograph or create a blurring effect. It is also possible to skip the editing of the photograph. When the user is satisfied with the result so far, a filter can be added.<sup>32</sup> Each of these filters instantly changes the look of the photograph as they are designed to recreate the visual style of specific analogue cameras of the past.<sup>33,34</sup>

Over the years, Systrom and Krieger added new features to the *Instagram* app to keep up with the popularity of the platform and the wishes of its users. An example of these new features is the introduction of hashtags.<sup>35</sup> Directly after adding the filter, but before uploading the photograph, the users have the possibility to add a short description or a hashtag to the photograph. A hashtag is a word that is preceded by the #-symbol. If more users add this hashtag to their photographs, the user can click on the hashtag and all the photographs that have been tagged with the same hashtag will appear. So by placing a word behind a hashtag (#), for example #newyearseve, users can see all the photographs, in this case likely to be photographs of fireworks and new years eve parties, that have been tagged with that hashtag. The #nostalgia will play an important role in the second chapter, 'Instant Nostalgia on *Instagram*', of this thesis.

*Instagram* is not the only application for the mobile phone that offers the possibility to make a digital produced photograph look more analogue; the recent years have seen a rise of retro and vintage photography.

## 1.2 FAUX-VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY

Gil Bartholeyns describes that by the time digital technology had reached its optical perfection, it now could simulate photographic imperfection. The years 2009 en 2010 saw a rise of mobile phone applications that could “simulate the square-format photos of the old Brownie, the warm colours of the Polaroid and all the delightful imperfections of family photography in the 1960s-1980s, such as vignetting and over-exposure.” In other words, these applications referred back to older modes of, mostly, analogue

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<sup>31</sup> Here the app is referring to its predecessors in the field of photography, namely the Brownie (1900), Rolleiflex (1929), Rolleicord (1933) and Polaroid (1947), that both produced a square format photograph.

<sup>32</sup> To this date (spring 2015) there are twenty-five filters the user can choose from: normal, slumber, crema, ludwig, aden, perpetua, amaro, mayfair, rise, hudson, valencia, x-pro II, sierra, willow, lo-fi, earlybird, brannan, inkwell, hefe, Nashville, sutro, toaster, walden, 1977 and kelvin.

<sup>33</sup> DTASCHEREAU.

<sup>34</sup> For a complete guide on how to use Instagram see <http://www.wikihow.com/Use-Instagram>

<sup>35</sup> Rosa Waters, p. 35.

photography. In 2013 several dozen apps allowed their users to manipulate their digitally produced images in such a way that they look as if they were produced years ago with the help of an analogue camera.<sup>36</sup> This type of photography is what social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson defines as ‘faux-vintage photography’, for it is a type of photography that replicates the aesthetics of photography that was prevalent in the past.<sup>37</sup>

Bartholeyns mentions different developments that made the rise of the above-mentioned apps possible, for which he goes back to the early 2000s. Up until that moment traditional digital cameras already offered the option to create black-and-white and sepia photographs. Creative retouching software allowed the editing of photographs, for example adding filters. However, neither of these two options enabled vintage style to become widespread among amateur photographers. In the year 2000 multiple events occurred that laid the foundation for the spread of vintage style among amateur photographers. The first event was the addition of cameras to mobile phones people carried everywhere. This convergence changed the very status of photography. Now, more than ever, photographs could be taken anytime and anywhere. The taking of photographs became more routine and photographs of everyday activities, according to Bartholeyns commemorative in nature and potentially nostalgic, became frequent recurring subject matter. Second, photography software was developed for mobile phones. This software was very easy in use and allowed photographs to be edited automatically or with just a few clicks at a later stage. Third, the quality of built-in cameras of mobile phones improved. In the year 2010 the number of megapixels increased from five to eight million. And finally, apps were linked to social networks (for example *Instagram* that was embedded in *Facebook*), which was an unprecedented development that introduced photography into everyday communication. Bartholeyns sees these developments as the precondition for an ‘illusionist technology’ that would simulate analogue photographs. Photographs produced with the help of this illusionist technology would be able to provoke similar emotional associations as actual analogue photographs. According to Bartholeyns, this development of a metamorphosis of the present into the past has led to a new kind of nostalgia.<sup>38</sup> This nostalgia will be further discussed in chapter two ‘Instant Nostalgia on *Instagram*’.

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<sup>36</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 51-52.

<sup>37</sup> Nathan Jurgenson, ‘The Faux-Vintage Photo: Full Essay (Parts I, II and III)’ *The Society Pages*, published 14-05-2011, accessed 09-11-2014, <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/05/14/the-faux-vintage-photo-full-essay-parts-i-ii-and-iii/>

<sup>38</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 54-55.

Faux-vintage photo apps can simulate the aesthetics of analogue photography, but what they cannot do, is recreate the materiality of the photograph. In their introduction to *Photographic Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* historical and visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards and cultural critic Janice Hart write that the photograph is a three-dimensional thing and not just a two-dimensional image:

“Photographs exist materially in the world, as chemicals deposits on paper, as images mounted on a multitude of different sized, shaped, colored, and decorated cards, as subjects to additions to their surface or as drawing their meanings from presentational forms such as frames and albums. Photographs are both images and physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience.”<sup>39</sup>

Photographs created via apps that simulate the aesthetics of analogue photography are digital objects. They do not exist in the ‘real space;’ they are merely pixels on a digital screen of a camera, mobile phone or computer. Even though a photograph produced by for example *Instagram* may look like an analogue photograph aesthetically, it is in fact not, for it lacks materiality as described above. The digital image only becomes material when it is printed. But here another problem arises. As media theorist Peter Lunenfeld states in his *Snap to Grid*, after printing any physical difference between analogue and digital photographs can be hard to find, what can be seen as a result of what Lunenfeld defines as the increasingly merging of analogue and digital photographs.<sup>40</sup> *Instagram* is a perfect example of this merging of analogue and digital photography, for the app produces digital images with analogue aesthetics. The lack of materiality is compensated by the option to make the photograph look as if it was printed on photographic paper, simulating the decay caused by time, for example desaturation and scratching.<sup>41</sup>

So what does a faux-vintage photograph, or a digital photograph that has been ‘grammed’, look like? In figure 1, images are placed next to each other in order to answer this question. Image 1.1 is a photograph taken with a digital camera, image 1.2 is the same photograph, but has been edited with help of the *Instagram* app and images 1.3-1.7 are all the same photograph as image 1.1, but now a different filter has been added to each and every one of them. Image 1.1 has not been edited with the help of any software programme.<sup>42</sup> Image 1.2 has been edited in multiple ways with the help of *Instagram*. First, the rectangular shape of the original photograph is cropped to the characteristic square format of *Instagram*. This instantly changes the look of the

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<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (ed.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid, A User’s Guide to Digital Arts, Media and Cultures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Apart from the software that is built in the camera and was used during the creating of the photograph.

photograph, since the ice cream is no longer right in the centre of the photograph. So to change the rectangular-format of the photograph into a square one changes the balance of the photograph. The alteration of the photographs horizon and the adjustment of the brightness and contrast of the photograph further distort this balance. Also, the clarity of the edges of the photograph has been reduced (a process called vignetting) and a soft focus is applied. Most of these alternations refer back to aesthetics of analogue photography: the square-format of the photograph refers to the square-format photographs that were produced by the Brownie camera, the Rolleiflex, the Rolleicord and later the Polaroid camera and the process of vignetting refers back to the tradition of small photographic portraits with blurred edges which were popular in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> These alterations make the photograph already look more like an analogue photograph, but the adding of a filter finishes this appearance. Images 1.3 to 1.7 have all been altered with another filter: respectively mayfair, willow, walden, hefe and kelvin. These filters replicate the look that in the past was reached with the help of analogue cameras. For instance the filters walden and hefe that are based on the photographs that were produced by the Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera.<sup>44</sup>

Although the filters *Instagram* offers may change the look of a digital photograph to a photograph that looks like as if it was taken with an analogue camera, in reality they are not based on the aesthetics of one of their analogue predecessors in specific. Each of the filters changes the look of the photograph in a particular way, but *Instagram* does not ascribe these aesthetics to certain analogue cameras.<sup>45</sup> However, the American website *1000memories*, that no longer exists today, but until 2013 let people organize, share and discover old photos and memories, researched with which cameras and film combinations the look of the *Instagram* filters can be replicated. For example, the website discovered that the look of the filter walden can be reached with a Polaroid Land Camera in combination with the Impossible Project PX 70 film. This type of film produced photographs with a cooler, washed out, blueish tones, much like the walden filter. *1000memories* recreated the filter X-Pro II with the help of a Lomo LC-a camera, which produces radiantly coloured and vignetted images with a high contrast. This, in

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<sup>43</sup> Douglas Harper, 'Vignette', *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 18-05-2015.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/vignette>

<sup>44</sup> Les Shu, 'Respect Your Elders: 5 Vintage Cameras That Inspired Your Instagram Filter Addiction', *Digitaltrends*, published 02-08-2013, accessed 18-05-2015.

<http://www.digitaltrends.com/photography/respect-your-elders-5-vintage-cameras-that-inspired-your-instagram-filter-addiction/>

<sup>45</sup> For what filter has what effect, see Megan Garber, 'A Guide to the Instagram Filters You'll Soon be Using on Facebook', *The Atlantic*, published 10-04-2012, accessed 04-06-2015.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/a-guide-to-the-instagram-filters-youll-soon-be-seeing-on-facebook/255650/>



combination with the Velvia 50 cross-processed film, reproduces the look of the X-Pro II filter. When the Velvia 50 film is processed normally, it produces warm, saturated images. But when it is cross-processed the colours shift to aquas and greens, as is clearly visible when using the X-Pro II filter. Another filter the research recreated was the sutro filter. This filter was recreated with a Holgaroid, a camera that combined the Holga camera with a Polaroid camera. The film that was used was the Polaroid 80 Chocolate, a film that produced images with a sepia-effect with purple and brown undertones.<sup>46</sup> What the research by *1000memories* shows is that a particular combination of an analogue camera and a certain type of film can replicate the look of the filters that *Instagram* provides. Each of the filters has a different basis, but all them refer back to one or more of the analogue predecessors of digital photography.

After the adding of the different filters, each of the above-mentioned manipulated photographs can now evoke different feelings by the viewer. For example, image 1.7 could be perceived as a reference to photography in its early years, due to the use of sepia tones, and image 1.3 could be perceived as 'more natural' as it highlights the colours in the photograph. However, these associations can differ from person to person. One person may have entirely different associations than another. Also, these associations can differ from the intentions of the photographer. When an image is created, a series of choices is made around aesthetics and meaning. In the case of the photograph discussed above, the photograph was taken without much thought about framing and colouring. But through the editing of the photograph (image 1.2) and the adding of the filters (image 1.3 to 1.7), deliberate decisions are made. These decisions, for example the adding of vignetting, can affect, whether consciously or unconsciously, the aesthetics of the photograph and its meaning.<sup>47</sup>

Now that is discussed how the aesthetics of photographs that are posted via *Instagram* refer to analogue photography, the subjects of the photographs that are posted via the platform can be further examined.

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<sup>46</sup> For the complete research results, summarised in an infographic, see Michael Zhang 'How to Recreate the Look of Instagram Filters with Vintage Cameras and Films', *Petapixel*, published 29-09-2011, accessed 04-06-2015. <http://petapixel.com/2011/09/29/how-to-recreate-the-look-of-instagram-filters-with-vintage-cameras-and-films/>

<sup>47</sup> Lisa Chandler and Debra Livingstone, 'Reframing the Authentic: Photography, Mobile Technologies and the Visual Language of Digital Imperfection', Oxford: 6th Global Conference, *Visual Literacies Exploring Critical Issues* (03-07-2012): 11, accessed via <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/chandlerlvpaper.pdf>

### 1.3 VERNACULAR PHOTOGRAPHY

When placing the photographs posted via *Instagram* into the larger context of photography, it can be said that they fit into the tradition of vernacular photography. In the introduction of this thesis Geoffrey Batchen was already shortly mentioned when describing this type of photography. He defined vernacular photography as ordinary photography, made by non-professionals. Vernacular photographs are the type of photographs that can be found in the private environment rather than the museum or the academy. According to Batchen, this type of photography was largely ignored by the critical gaze of respectable history, due to its popular status.<sup>48</sup> That is, until the year 1964. In this year John Szarkowski, then director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) in New York, put on an exhibition at this museum that combined both art and vernacular works. The exhibition was titled 'The Photographer's Eye.' Two years later, Szarkowski published a book that carried the same title. The aim of this book was to shed some light on formal questions common to all branches of the medium.<sup>49</sup> With *The Photographer's Eye* Szarkowski wanted to increase the attention for photographs that are created by non-professionals. Szarkowski writes that in the early days of photography, it was mainly practised by professionals. These professionals produced a flood of images. Szarkowski: "Some of these pictures were the product of knowledge and skill and sensibility and invention; many were the product of accident, improvisation, misunderstanding, and empirical experiment." Towards the end of the nineteenth century new developments in the production of photographic images caused a further growth of images.<sup>50</sup> These developments made the hand held camera as well as the snapshot possible, which resulted in an easier way to take photographs.<sup>51</sup> This simplification made photography accessible for the masses. The vernacular works that these masses produced eventually entered the domain of respectable history, thereby fulfilling Szarkowski's wish.

This new situation wherein photographs were more easily created, led to the photographing of practically everything that was in sight. Objects of all sorts, shapes and sizes were depicted, without the creator taking a moment and asking himself whether or

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<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Batchen. p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> Robin Lenman, *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) accessed via <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-1697?rskey=xAZk4A&result=1625>

<sup>50</sup> By this time the dry plate had replaced the wet plate, of which the first could be purchased ready-to-use instead of the plate having to be prepared just before exposure and should be processed before its emulsion had dried, as was the case with the wet plate.

<sup>51</sup> John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007) accessed via <http://www.jnevins.com/szarkowskireading.htm>

not the photograph would be artistic. These photographs were nothing like the pictures that were created in the years before by professionals, for the visual imagery varied immensely between different photographs, or as Szarkowski states: “Each subtle variation in viewpoint or light, each passing moment, each change in the tonality of the print, created a new picture.”<sup>52</sup>

With the arrival of the camera on the mobile phone, photography became even more accessible for the masses. Now, more and more people have the possibility to create photographs, everywhere they go. This situation has influenced the subjects of photographs. Instead of, for instance, carefully framing the photograph, digitally produced photographs by mobile camera phones are now taken as fast as a blink of an eye – anyplace, anytime. Everything that is within sight can be, and is, photographed. This point-and-shoot way of practicing photography results in very diverse subjects depicted in the photographs. A part of these photographs is posted online via *Instagram*, where the diversity of the subjects becomes visible. The British-American news website, technology and social media blog *Mashable* has made a top twelve of the subjects of photographs that have been posted frequently on *Instagram* in 2013, that makes the variety of subject matter visible. The subjects of these photographs vary from feet on the beach, clouds, food, nail art, inspirational quotes and tall buildings shot from the ground, to latte art, SMS conversations, airplane wings, bathroom mirror selfies, circles of feet and sunsets.<sup>53</sup> Examples of these subjects are collected in figure 2. These photographs are created by non-professionals and therefore almost always have a personal subject matter. For this reason it can be said that they fit into the tradition of vernacular photography.

The connection of photography to personal subject matter that is prominent in vernacular photography is not surprising according to visual culture researcher Don Slater. He states that photography is, since its inception, intimately bound up with domesticity and the private world. Here he mentions snapshot photography: images that are taken by ourselves of ourselves and in other words form a self-presentation of everyday life.<sup>54</sup> These images of intimate situations were collected in family photo albums, which are part of the home mode of visual communication, says anthropologist Richard Chalfen.<sup>55</sup> Home mode photographs are said to help people order their

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<sup>52</sup> John Szarkowski.

<sup>53</sup> Stephanie Buck, ‘12 Most Cliché Photos on Instagram’ *Mashable*, published 31-08-2012, accessed 03-05-2014. <http://mashable.com/2012/08/31/cliche-instagram-photos/#>

<sup>54</sup> Don Slater, ‘Domestic Photography and Digital Culture’ *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, Martin Lister (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 129, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Home mode of visual communication as opposed to mass mode of communication, as newspapers and books.

memories of people, events, and places, and aid in the preservation of details.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, photo albums become useful tools when recalling, sharing or reviewing memories of lived experiences.<sup>57</sup> It can be said that *Instagram* can be used as a place for the storing of photographs and their accompanying memories. The concept of memory, however, first may be in need of further explanation.

#### 1.4 EXPLAINING MEMORY

Put simply, memory is the basic form of our relationship to the past, of our existence in time. It is looking back at past times and recalling feelings, events and thoughts that were experienced during those times. Remembering is a fundamentally individual phenomenon. Some memories are strictly personal, for only he or she experienced them. Take for instance a girl remembering playing in a playground all by herself. Only she was present in that moment and therefore only she has access to this memory. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who is often considered to be the founding father of contemporary memory studies, calls this type of remembering 'autobiographical memory.' These are the memories of one's own life that one can remember because they were experienced directly. However, according to, among others who have commented on Halbwachs work, sociologist Jeffrey Olick: "all individual remembering takes place with social materials, within social contexts and in response to social cues." Memories are thus acquired in society and it is also in society that memories are recalled, recognized and localized.<sup>58</sup> As Halbwachs writes in his landmark *The Social Frameworks of Memory* published in 1952: "The greatest numbers of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other people recall them to us."<sup>59</sup>

Halbwachs' theory on memory was inspired by, among others, the philosopher (also Halbwachs' teacher at secondary school) Henri Bergson, who not long before Halbwachs characterized memory as active engagement. According to Bergson the act of remembering was fluid and changing. This led Halbwachs to conclude that individual memory was highly variable, sometimes recording short periods in intense detail and long periods in only the vaguest outline.<sup>60</sup> In other words, not everything that happens is preserved in the same amount of detail; some parts of our lives are even cast into

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green: State University Popular Press, 1987), p. 9, 137.

<sup>57</sup> David West et al., 'MEMENTO: A Digital-Physical Scrapbook For Memory Sharing' *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing* (2007), vol. 11 (4): 313.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey Olick et al., 'Introduction' *The Collective Memory Reader*, Jeffrey Olick et al. (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 5-6, 16, 18-19.

<sup>59</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, 'The Social Frameworks of Memory' *Maurice Halbwachs. On Collective Memory*, Lewis Coser (ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Olick et al., p. 17.

oblivion. Moreover, we do not all remember in the same way, making recollections of the past by no means objective.<sup>61</sup>

### *Collective memory*

Memory studies have, next to researching individual memory, also focussed on exploring collective memory. Collective memory is the way we register and organize a collective past in our minds. For there are specific memories that are commonly shared by entire groups. Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel states that much of what we remember we do as members of particular communities: “It is thus mainly as a Jew that I remember the deconstruction of the First Temple more than twenty-five centuries before I was born, and as a track fan that I likewise recall Paavo Nurmi’s heroics at the 1924 Olympics.”<sup>62</sup> This type of remembering is what Halbwachs called fifty years before Zerubavel’s work ‘historical memory’, a type that he opposes to the above-mentioned autobiographical memory. Historical memory “refers to residues of events by virtue of which groups claim a continuous identity through time.” Here, the example of the United States Civil War is mentioned. This Civil War is part of what it means to be an American and is part of the collective narrative of the United States. But nobody who is alive today has access to the autobiographical memory of this event.<sup>63</sup>

Collective memories are, unlike personal recollections, not confined to our own bodies. For example, the invention of language made it possible for people to share their memories. The human memory was freed and memories would no longer have to be stored exclusively in individuals’ brains. Now, experiences would be preserved as essentially disembodied impersonal recollections even after the people who experienced them were long gone. Since the invention of writing it became possible to share memories with any future audience, without having to use any oral contact. Yet, social preservation of memories does not even require any verbal transmission. Objects like portraits, statues and photographs are examples of the capturing of images and sounds of the past. These objects thereby offer future audiences visual as well as auditory access to historical figures and events. Zerubavel: “Libraries, bibliographies, folk legends, photo albums and television archives thus constitute the sites of social memory.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps. Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, p. 2-3.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey Olick et al., p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, p. 5-6.

### *Memory and photography*

From the beginning of photography, the medium has been discussed in relation to memory. Photographs can help people to order their memories of people, events and places, and they can aid in the preservation of details. In her 'On the Relationship Between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory' Catherine Keenan, who obtained a PhD in Literature Studies from Oxford University, says that we turn to our collections of photographs in order to relive the memory of the event. However, this remembering through a photograph does not happen naturally. Each time we look at a photograph to relive the memory that is depicted, the photographic image itself, or rather that what is depicted in the photograph, becomes part of the memory. As a result that memory is relived each time the photograph is looked upon and other memories are repressed. Thus photographs can in fact help remember something, or supplement the memory, but they can also configure the memory. To explain how this works Keenan turns to her personal pin-board. On this board, Keenan has pinned many photographs of her relatives. Each time she looks at one of the photographs, the memory of the person at that moment in time that is depicted in the photograph is relived, or better yet, becomes implanted in her memory. This memory then becomes dissociated from other memories of the same person. Thus, Keenan's specific memory that is relived through the photograph on the pin-board becomes more prominent than other memories of the same person.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, as professor of Media, Culture and Communication Marita Sturken says, unlike photographs, "memory does not remain static through time – memories are reshaped and reconfigured, they fade and are rescripted. While an image may fix an event, the meaning of that image is constantly subject to contextual shifts."<sup>66</sup> So memories change as time passes and, as cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer states, the reasons why they are remembered change as well:

"Memories are retained because of their significance for that person. Thus they are organized according to a principle that is essentially different from the organizing principle of photography. Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance."<sup>67</sup>

Thus a photograph remembers everything that is displayed within the frame, but the mind only remembers what is considered to be important. It is also relevant to note that

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<sup>65</sup> Catherine Keenan, 'On the Relationship Between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory' *History of Photography* (1998), vol. 22 (1): 60-62.

<sup>66</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories. The Vietnam War, The aids Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography' *Critical Inquiry* (1993), vol. 19 (3): 425-426.

photographs can represent the appearance of events, but they cannot represent their significance. Moreover, particular places and symbols can be invested as sites of memory for a community, in much the same way individuals can invest personal photographs as sites of their own memory.<sup>68</sup>

### 1.5 INSTAGRAM AS PLACE FOR STORING MEMORIES

*Instagram* can be used as such a site for storing personal memories. As has been said, the subjects of the photographs that are posted on *Instagram* are of a personal nature. During the time when there was no digital photography, analogue photographs of intimate situations were collected in (family) photo albums. *Instagram* can to some extent be considered as a digital version of a photo album. When a user uploads a photograph via *Instagram*, it will appear on the user's personal profile page. As time progresses more and more photographs will be added to this profile page, eventually forming a database that combines all uploads. So whereas the analogue photo album relies on actual photographic objects, *Instagram* collects digital objects. Much like the physical object of the photo album, photographs are selected and then stored in a specific place: the personal profile page of the user. An overview of photographs on this page can together be seen as a photo album, only then a digital one. This album can be accessed at any time and therefore be used as a tool for recalling memories of people, events and places. Figure 3 shows the design of a personal *Instagram* profile page, in this case the profile page of Daniel Nahabedian (*canvasoflight*).<sup>69</sup> Every profile page has the same design, there is no option to personalise it in any way other than the uploading of personal photographs. What a profile page on *Instagram* does is collect all the photographs that are posted online by the owner of the profile page. Such a page can function as a place for memories for it collects all the memories that are depicted in the uploaded photographs. When looking at the photographs at a later stadium these stored memories can be relived.

Although the *Instagram* profile page, much like the physical photo album, stores photographs in one place, there are also differences between the two platforms. Unlike the photo album, users on *Instagram* cannot play with the order of the photographs. They are automatically ordered by the time and date they were uploaded. So where the users of a photo album can create stories between photographs, by placing particular photographs next to each other, this is not possible on *Instagram*. Moreover,

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<sup>68</sup> Catherine Keenan, p. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Instagram, 'Canvasoflight', accessed 04-06-2015. <https://instagram.com/canvasoflight/>

photographs in the physical photo album are often accompanied by short texts that give context to the photographs. Users on *Instagram* also have the possibility to add hashtag or a short description to the photograph, but this text only becomes visible when the photograph is clicked upon and it fills the entire screen. While the selected photograph is being viewed, the other photographs are not visible, making it hard to see the relation (if present) between the photographs on the profile page.

Next to *Instagram* being a place for storing individual memories by uploading photographs on a personal profile page, the platform can be used as a place for storing collective memories. As discussed, objects like photographs are examples of the capturing of images of the past. These objects can offer future audiences visual access to historical events. Zerubavel stated that libraries, bibliographies, folk legends, photo albums and television archives constitute the sites of social memory. I would like to add *Instagram* to this list. The function of the photo album that *Instagram* can be said to offer, allows the storing of images much in the same way as is done in libraries or archives. As well as new photographs, historical photographs can be uploaded, so that together they can form a collective place of memories of historical events. Take for instance the page *historyphotographed*. This is an *Instagram* profile that shares, according to the page itself: “the most powerful and entertaining historical photographs ever taken.”<sup>70</sup> This can be a photograph of Alfred Hitchcock serving tea to Leo the Lion, MGM’s mascot in 1958, a photograph of a picnic in the middle of a highway during the oil crisis in 1973 or the last known photograph of the ship the Titanic as it leaves Queenstown near Ireland on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April in 1912, all collected in figure 4. Especially the last photograph is a good example why *Instagram* can also be a place of storage for collective memory. Just like the example of the United States Civil War Jeffery Olick et al. mentioned, the tragedy of Titanic will form a part of the collective memory of Great Britain and the United States, since most of the passengers on board were British or American. The British and Americans who are alive today will claim a continuous identity through time by virtue of the residue of the sinking of the Titanic, as is the case with collective memory. This is a historical memory, since no one alive today has an autobiographical memory of the event, for the – what is believed to be – last known survivor of the Titanic, the British Millvina Dean, past away in 2009.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Instagram, ‘Historyphotographed’, accessed 13-01-2015. <http://instagram.com/HISTORYPHOTOGRAPHED>

<sup>71</sup> Samira Simone, ‘Last Known Titanic Survivor Dies’ *CNN*, published 01-06-2009, accessed 16-01-2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/05/31/titanic.last.survivor.obit/>



This chapter has, by discussing the concept of memory, made a small step to the main subject of this thesis: nostalgia in relation to *Instagram*. Since memory and nostalgia both rely on the recalling of times and places that are no more, or are out of reach they are viewed two closely linked concepts.<sup>72</sup> So far, it has already been discussed that photographs posted via *Instagram* can bring back memories. But when these memories turn into a sentimental longing for the time the photograph was created, nostalgia makes its appearance. The next chapter will further discuss this concept of nostalgia and will examine it in relation to photographs uploaded via *Instagram*.

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<sup>72</sup> Katharina Niemeyer, 'Introduction: Media and Nostalgia' *Media and Nostalgia Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Katharina Niemeyer (ed.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 5.

## **CHAPTER 2 – INSTANT NOSTALGIA ON INSTAGRAM**

The previous chapter already has shown the possibilities for *Instagram* to simulate the aesthetics of analogue photography. This chapter will go a step further than just the aesthetics and will zoom in on the content of the photographs that are considered to be nostalgic or evoke a feeling of nostalgia with the users of *Instagram*. I would like to start with an example of how a photograph can evoke a feeling of nostalgia, which is experienced by the user who uploaded it on the platform. Figure 5 posted on the website by *georgia\_voo* on the ninth of December in 2014 and shows a girl standing on a beach. There are no visual markers from which one could deduce the precise location of the beach, but with the help of the hashtag #aigio\_greece that *georgia\_voo* added to the photograph, it becomes clear that the photograph was taken in Aigio in Greece. Another hashtag the user has added is #tbt. This abbreviation stands for throwback Thursday. As the American website *Webtrends* states, throwback Thursday is “the name of a weekly social media posting theme that users participate in as part of a very general ‘throwback’ activity for posting content. [...] The ‘throwback’ theme can pertain to basically anything that happened in the past.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, each Thursday users can post a photograph that was taken earlier and tag it with #throwbackthursday or #tbt to remember a past event. With this information in mind, the photograph reminds *georgia\_voo* of past times, specifically the time she spent on the beach years earlier. Thus, the photograph brings back memories for *georgia\_voo*. When these memories bring back warm feelings relating to the time depicted or when a sentimental longing for the time the photograph was created arises, she would be experiencing nostalgia. The hashtag #nostalgia *georgia\_voo* has added to the photograph tells me that she was in fact experiencing nostalgia when she was looking at the photograph. Nostalgia and the experiencing of it by *Instagram*’s users will be the main subject of this chapter. The chapter will focus on the relationship between photography and nostalgia, which then will be discussed in relation photographs posted via *Instagram*. But first, nostalgia as a theoretical framework will be presented.

### **2.1 A HISTORY OF NOSTALGIA**

Nostalgia is a word derived from the Greek language. It is composed of the words *notos*, which means return home, and *algia*, a painful condition.<sup>74</sup> Nostalgia, then, is the

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<sup>73</sup> Elise Moreau, ‘Throwback Thursday Definition’, *Webtrends*, accessed 09-12-2014. <http://webtrends.about.com/od/Instagram/g/Throwback-Thursday-Definition.htm>

<sup>74</sup> Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday* (New York/London: The Free Press, 1979), p. 1.

psychological suffering caused by a persistent yearning to return home.<sup>75</sup> References to the emotion nostalgia denotes, can be found in accounts as early as Hippocrates, Caesar and the Bible.<sup>76</sup> Despite these early accounts of nostalgia from ancient history, nostalgia did not originate in ancient Greece. It was the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer who coined the term 'nostalgia' for the first time in his 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia or Homesickness' in 1688. Treating it as a disease that originated from the inner brain, Hofer wrote that nostalgia had not yet been properly observed or explained in the medical field. Therefore he felt the need to "approach it with proper spirit", coming up with the word 'nostalgias' to describe "the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land." According to Hofer the illness occurs when principally young people or adolescents find themselves in foreign regions. These people are accustomed to their national habits and other pleasant customs of living in such a way that they cling to them in a tenacious manner when they find themselves in an unfamiliar habitat with strange manners and foods. They do not know how to become accustomed to these foreign ways and they recall the charm of the fatherland before their eyes and thus the continual desire of returning to it. They are snatched up easily by nostalgia unless they return to their homeland within short time. Hofer described that certain symptoms may indicate the presence of nostalgia, such as the above-mentioned disdain for foreign manners and the frequently remembrance of the delights of the fatherland. But the key insight of Hofer's thinking was that the mind could affect the body. People suffering from nostalgia could experience actual physical discomforts. Some of the symptoms Hofer named are continued sadness, fever, sleeping problems, decrease in strength, demise of the senses and cares or even palpitations of the heart. As to the curability of the disease Hofer said the following:

"The ill is curable if an appropriate remedy can be administered; it is incurable and fatal or at least most especially dangerous, where the means are lacking by which it is permitted to satisfy the desire of the patient."

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<sup>75</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia. Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions', Jeff Greenberg (ed.) (New York: Guilford Publications, 2004), p. 200-201.

<sup>76</sup> According to Sedikides et al. (2008), the term nostalgia was inadvertently inspired by the famous traveller Odysseus. After a successful win in the Trojan War, Odysseus set sail to reunite with his wife Penelope who lived in his native land of Ithica. He had been fighting for three years and had delayed his return for another seven years by spending his time lying in the arms of the beautiful sea nymph Calypso. Trying to keep him with her, Calypso offered Odysseus immortality if he stayed with her on the island Ogygia. Odysseus replied with the following words, describing his feeling of nostalgia or homesickness:

*"Mighty goddess, do not be angry with me for this. I know very well myself that wise Penelope is less impressive to look upon than you in looks and stature, for she is a mortal, while you are immortal and ageless. But even so I wish and long day in and day out to reach my home, and see the day of my return."*

This appropriate remedy was in most cases a return to the homeland within short time.<sup>77</sup>

Up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century nostalgia was still only seen as a medical disease. But at this turning of the century some scholars began to view it as a psychiatric disorder. Symptoms associated with this disorder were anxiety, sadness and insomnia. Half a century later, psychodynamic approaches considered nostalgia as a subconscious desire to return to an earlier stage of one's life, and therefore considering it as a repressive compulsive disorder. Not long after, nostalgia was downgraded to a variant of depression, with loss and grief at its basis, though it was still equated with homesickness.<sup>78</sup>

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, nostalgia started to develop an independent status from homesickness by researchers as well as non-professionals. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines nostalgia as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal association"<sup>79</sup> and homesickness as "experiencing a longing for one's home during a period of absence from it."<sup>80</sup> In *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* psychologists Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut and Denise Baden describe the distinction between the two terms when they are used in the field of research. They state that whenever homesickness is discussed, the focus lies mostly on the psychological difficulties accompanying a transition, for example the transition to boarding school or a university, at home or abroad.<sup>81</sup> In other words, homesickness refers to one's place of origin.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, nostalgia is a "yearning for aspects of one's past, a yearning that may include but is not limited to one's homeland. This yearning may pertain, for example, to events, persons, or sights." Sedikides et al. view nostalgia as a universal experience that is present and prevails across the lifespan.<sup>83</sup>

That by the end of the 1970s this division was already fully incorporated into the academic field, is made visible by sociologist Fred Davis. He conducted a research among students by letting them fill in a checklist of possible associations with nostalgia or homesickness. The result was that the students associated the words "warm, old times, childhood, and yearning" with nostalgia more frequently than they did with the

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<sup>77</sup> Johannes Hofer, 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia', Carolyn K. Anspach (trans.) *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1934), vol. 2: 380-381, 383, 386-388.

<sup>78</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia. Past, Present, and Future', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (2008), vol. 17 (5): 304.

<sup>79</sup> Judy Pearsall, p. 1266.

<sup>80</sup> Idem, p. 877.

<sup>81</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions', p. 202.

<sup>82</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia. Past, Present, and Future', p. 304-305.

<sup>83</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions', p. 202.

term homesickness. Moreover, Davis describes that most students were amused when they found out that nostalgia was once regarded as a disease. Davis explains this by stating that nostalgia, after being fully 'demilitarized' and 'demedicalized', has been undergoing a process of 'depsychologization'. Nostalgia was no longer only used by researchers alone. Rather, it had become subject to commercial and popular usage, which, as will be illustrated later, resulted in a dilution of the definition of nostalgia.<sup>84</sup>

## 2.2 EXPERIENCING NOSTALGIA

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, which was published in 2001, writer, theorist and media artist Svetlana Boym typifies nostalgia as "a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals." The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition.<sup>85</sup> Today we see the same tendencies as a result of new technologies that seem to develop faster and faster. Now, just like Boym said more than a decade ago, people seem to tend to the nostalgic. They long for better times, with a simpler lifestyle, for example their childhood. Thus, nostalgia is prevalent when discontent occurs with life in the present; the present time is viewed as threatening or unsatisfactory and the distorted past offers a way out.<sup>86</sup>

Nostalgia can be triggered passively by external stimuli that remind someone of his or hers recent or distant past. These stimuli can be social, for example friends, family members or birthday parties, or non-social, like music and scents. In both cases, a direct (explicit) or indirect (implicit) comparison is made between past and present experience, which is, according to Sedikides et al., a defining feature of the nostalgic experience. The referent of this experience can range from the specific to the general. The specific being a reference to an individual experience, which is defined as personal nostalgia. An organization with which one is affiliated can also be a referent for the experience of nostalgia. This is what Sedikides et al. call 'organizational nostalgia', and is quite common. Other referents can be a group of people from the same generation or a historical period within a specific culture.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Fred Davis, p. 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. XIV, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Olivier Rieter, 'Nostalgie in perspectief. Met een roze bril omgaan met het verleden' *Nostalgie. Met een roze bril omgaan met het verleden*, Olivier Rieter (ed.) (Bunnik: Drukkerij Libertas, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia. Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions', p. 203-206.

### *Restorative and reflective nostalgia*

To help make sense of nostalgia, several scientists have tried to categorise nostalgia. Among them is Boym, who states that there are two kinds of nostalgia that characterise one's relationship to the past, those being restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Boym explains the difference between the two as follows:

“Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *notos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance. (...) Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. (...) They can use the same triggers of memory and symbols (...), but tell different stories about it.”<sup>88</sup>

Boym further explains the difference between the two by using the example of the discussion about monuments from the past. Followers of restorative nostalgia would choose a total reconstruction of the monument, while followers of reflective nostalgia would rather linger on the monument's existing ruins and fantasize about another place and another time. Restorative nostalgia is thus seeking a way to reconstruct the past, taking itself deadly serious, while reflective nostalgia rather lingers on existing memories when thinking about the past, which can be ironic and humorous. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. These two types of nostalgia are not absolute; rather they are ways of giving shape and meaning to longing.<sup>89</sup>

At first glance, the photographs that are being uploaded via *Instagram* might, on the level of aesthetics, be seen as a form of restorative nostalgia. By adding a filter that simulates the look of analogue photography, this type of photography would be restored. This could be further accomplished by the replicating of the imprint of psychical paper on which analogue photographs were printed. However, the words simulate and replicate already give a clue that this process can never reach a complete restoration of analogue photography, simply because *Instagram* relies on digital photography. The photographs that are uploaded via the platform are digital ones (or at least digital reproductions of analogue photographs), the photographs that are edited via *Instagram* are digital and the end result are digital photographs that are published on a digital platform. To fully restore analogue photography, the produced photographs would have to be analogue objects. As PhD candidate in Film Studies at the University of Southampton Elena Caoduro says, “Retro filters dust speck and halation effects do not aim to recreate the past exactly as it was; their adaptation is an intentional act to

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<sup>88</sup> Svetlana Boym, p. 41, 49.

<sup>89</sup> Idem, p. XVIII, 41, 49.

challenge temporality and ironically play with it.”<sup>90</sup> In other words *Instagram* simulates the look and feel of analogue nostalgia, without fully restoring it.

### *Ascending orders of nostalgia*

Next to this categorization of what kind of nostalgia one is dealing with, a categorisation is made by Fred Davis to try to define to what extent one is experiencing nostalgia. Davis calls this ‘the ascending orders of nostalgia.’ He mentions three successive orders, namely the ‘first order or simple nostalgia,’ the ‘second order or reflexive nostalgia’ and the ‘third order or interpreted nostalgia.’ The first order, or simple nostalgia, is described as “that subjective state which harbours the largely unexamined belief that things were better (more beautiful/healthier/happier/more civilized/more exciting) *then* than *now*.”<sup>91</sup> In this order, problems and experienced hardships are ignored. The past is looked upon as a seemingly problem free time. In several randomly chosen examples of people talking about their experience with nostalgia, Davis recognises a warm glow the speaker conveys for a past era. One of these examples is the following, taken from a interview with a young woman:

“When I think of the time my grandmother was a girl I think of riding big-wheeled bicycles, wearing a long dress with a buckle in the back. I think of it as a romantic time. Then cars weren’t around so much, but transportation was pretty good. You could get places. (...) You could still move around, but you didn’t have these huge urbanized areas like you have now with now open space and with people living atop each other.”<sup>92</sup>

The example shows that the young woman is experiencing nostalgia for the time her grandmother was a child, because she thinks these were happier, easier times, even though she never experienced it herself. In the first order seemingly lost values are celebrated and how far advanced the future may be, it is believed that it is meaner and baser in some deeper sense. Nostalgia in the first order is an emotional attitude towards a yearning for return, even though one realizes this is not possible.<sup>93</sup>

Nostalgia in the second order or reflexive nostalgia goes, as expected, a step further than the first order or simple nostalgia. Here, one recalls the past and the feelings accompanied by that memory and asks empirically oriented questions concerning the truth, accuracy, completeness, or representativeness of the nostalgic claim. “Was it really that way?” Sometimes these questions are directed at the present as well: “Are things really as bad as they seem?” In reflexive nostalgia another voice is

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<sup>90</sup> Elena Caoduro, ‘Photo Filter Apps: Understanding Analogue Nostalgia in the New Media Ecology’, *Networking Knowledge*, 2014, vol. 7 (2): 74.

<sup>91</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>92</sup> Fred Davis, p. 17-18.

<sup>93</sup> Idem, p. 20-21.

added to the main interior nostalgic dialogue of virtuous past/unpleasant present of simple nostalgia; namely the voice of what Davis calls the 'truth squad'. The role of this voice is to question, deflate, correct, and remind regarding the excessive romantic claims of the nostalgic impulse. In other words, the person experiencing nostalgia takes a step back to reflect on this experience.<sup>94</sup>

An example of this order, given by Davis, is taken from an interview with a young woman who contemplates the apparent contradictions of remembered experience and historical judgement:

"You know, a lot of people nowadays are talking about 'those good old nineteen thirties' even though that's when we had a depression. Still that's also when my mother grew up and she has great memories from the thirties. So even though we know it was a pretty rotten era – nobody had money, a lot of people were out of work – if you talk about individuals who lived then many will tell you it was a beautiful time for them. So what you remember as good for you personally may not have been so good for the world."<sup>95</sup>

This quote shows that memory is selective, as is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Some things are remembered and some things are forgotten. In the case of nostalgia in unhappy times, a longing for the happier, warmer times of the past arises; times that might not be as happy as one remembers. When one realizes that the times looked back upon with a feeling of nostalgia were not as happy or warm as he or she initially remembered, the experience of nostalgia can be placed in the second order of nostalgia.

As to the third order, or interpreted nostalgia, Davis says the following: "This moves beyond issues of the historical accuracy or felicity of the nostalgic claim on the past and, even as the reaction unfolds, questions and, potentially at least, renders problematic the very reaction itself." In this order the actor thus seeks to objectify the nostalgia he feels. He, or she, asks analytically oriented questions regarding for example its sources or significance. Questions are similar to "Why am I feeling nostalgic?" or "What may this mean for my past, for my now?" Here Davis quotes a column of Herb Caen, a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in which Caen searches for the reality of the lost magic of the city of San Francisco:

"You keep looking for the magic and now and then when the wind and the light are right, and the air smells ocean-clean, and a white ship is emerging from the Golden Gate mist into the Bay, and the towers are reflecting the sun's last rays – *at moments like that you turn to the ghosts and ask, 'Was this the way it was?' And there is never an answer.*"<sup>96,97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Fred Davis, p. 21, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Idem, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> Here Davis has italicized the segment that signifies the cognitive shift to an interpretative perspective.

<sup>97</sup> Fred Davis, p. 24-25.



In this example Caen clearly wonders whether the magic of the city of San Francisco ever existed, and if so, how this magic was shaped and experienced. The third order or interpreted nostalgia merges the analysis of the experience with the primary experience itself, causing it to become something more than a mere proclamation of past beauties or lost virtues. It goes a step further and wonders why nostalgia is experienced. It is important to note that these three categories of nostalgia might not be experienced as such by the subjects themselves. They should be viewed as analytical categories.<sup>98</sup>

When placing *Instagram* in these categories by Davis, it would be placed in the first order of nostalgia. *Instagram* is visually orientated; it relies on photographs and not the written word. Therefore it would be hard to discover what the owners of these images think or feel when they upload their photographs. In other words, when a user uploads a photograph on *Instagram* we do not know if he or she questions the nostalgia that is experienced when looking at the photograph, unless he or she tells us in a description of the photograph. Thus, looking at the photographs posted via *Instagram* and that have been tagged with #nostalgia by its users, the platform can never be categorised in something other than the first order of nostalgia, simply for the reason we do not know to what extent he or she is experiencing nostalgia. Only through the use of words it can become clear whether the user is thinking why he or she is experiencing nostalgia and questioning whether this nostalgia is truthful.

Luckily, some photographs are accompanied with more than just the hashtag nostalgia. On rare occasions the user has added a small text to the photograph, wherein he or she explains what the photograph shows and what kind of memories or even nostalgia accompany the photograph. These texts can thus help the viewer understand the situation that is depicted or even evoke a feeling of nostalgia with the viewer. As Gil Bartholeyns states:

“Certain photos are composed with the aim of conveying that feeling [of nostalgia] to the photographer or an outside observer. The connection to nostalgia is made by the users themselves when they identify pictures by titles, tags and comments.”<sup>99</sup>

Thus sometimes the description of a photograph may help to understand why the owner of the photograph is experiencing nostalgia for that what is depicted in it. All that is needed is a period look or an instruction on how to interpret the image.<sup>100</sup> In the case of *Instagram* this instruction can be a combination of hashtags or small description that is added to the photograph. An example might be in place. Figure 6 is a photograph that

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<sup>98</sup> Fred Davis, p. 25, 28.

<sup>99</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 56.

<sup>100</sup> Idem, p. 57.

was uploaded on Instagram on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January in 2015 by Sarah Kirkpatrick, under her *Instagram*-user name *travelphotolenses*. The image is mainly filled by a big tree standing in front of a low-rise building. The photograph has been edited by adding the filter *earlybird* to make the look of the photograph more nostalgic, for it simulates the look as if it was taken with the Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera. At first glance the image does not seem to be showing something special, but when the photograph is viewed in combination with the description Sarah has added to the photograph, it becomes clear that the building in the background has a special meaning to her. The description is as follows:

“#tbt to my old #stompingground. Grade kindergarten to 9 baby! Oh man... This is where life started, got fun, life got hard, and more than one kind of lesson was learned. #elementary #school #jrhigh #oldschool #schoolyard #growingup #memories #nostalgia #throwbackthursday #throwback #portables #calgary #yyc #canada”

This short text defines the building as Sarah’s old school, where she spent the first years of her life. The photograph clearly brings back memories for her, memories of the time she has spent at the school. The tone in the description is quite warm of tone, much like in the examples that Davis has collected in his research discussed above. Based on the short text it can be said that Sarah is experiencing nostalgia for the time she was at school in the building depicted in the photograph. This deduction could not have been made based on the photograph alone. In this case the photograph and the description work together to make the experience of nostalgia visible. The nostalgia Sarah experiences through the photograph can be categorised as simple nostalgia; she does not ask questions whether the nostalgia that she is experiencing is truthful or if the times she remembers were really like the way she remembers them, therefore not touching the second or third order formulated by Davis.

### **2.3 PHOTOGRAPHY AND NOSTALGIA TODAY**

Nostalgia also acquired a place in the field of media sciences, for example in the field of the science focusing on television. During the early sixties television broadcasts were still a one-time event. Broadcasts would take places once, only to be never seen again since recording devices, like the videocassette, did not exist yet. With the arrival of these recording devices, nostalgia in relation to media became understood as the replaying of recorded broadcasts.<sup>101</sup> But with the arrival of new – digital – media, this relation changed. Rather than just replaying old fragments, the new media sometimes started to

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Fulford, ‘A Culture Drowning in Nostalgia’ in *The National Post*, published 24-12-2001, accessed 04-06-2015 via <http://www.robertfulford.com/Nostalgia.html>

look back at their predecessors: analogue media themselves. Here a trend arises that Dominik Schrey characterizes as 'the general trend of nostalgia.' This is "the longing for what is assumed to be lost in the continuing process of digitization that accounts for contemporary media culture's widespread romanticizing and fetishizing of analogue media." In other words, new, digital productions tried to recreate the look and feel of analogue media that thought had been lost in the process of digitalization.<sup>102</sup> This 'digital remediation of analogue aesthetics' is what American media theorist and artist Laura Marks defines as 'analog nostalgia.'<sup>103</sup> *Instagram* can be seen as an expression of analogue nostalgia, for it is a digital platform that simulates or 'remediates' the aesthetics of analogue photography.

But *Instagram* is just a small part of a much larger upheaval of analogue photography. As shown in the previous chapter there has been a recent explosion of retro or vintage photography. This type of photography remediates aesthetics that are inextricably linked to analogue photography. Photographs are digitally produced and afterwards modified to make them look more analogue. Gil Bartholeyns states that this creating of analogue photographs through a digital medium is a brand new way of what he calls 'practicing nostalgia.' Until now, according to Bartholeyns, nostalgia was a feeling that one only experienced when reminiscing about the past. This was done by looking through family photo albums or reminiscing old times with their friends. In order to experience nostalgia, waiting was required. It was necessary to forget and then to be reminded of these old times by browsing through old photographs or having a conversation about 'the old days'. As Bartholeyns writes:

"Nostalgia, like nightfall, took us by surprise. This Proustian emotion<sup>104</sup> would suddenly bring us close to tears, its sweetness flooding through us as we thought back to moments so distant that they seemed to have been experienced by someone else."

Thus, in short, nostalgia could not be ordered on demand. But according to Bartholeyns this is no longer the case. He states that now, nostalgia can be evoked in an instant. Moreover, as soon as one experiences it in daily life, he or she has the means to display it through the above mentioned photo apps and be moved by it in an instant. Bartholeyns typifies this as the 'nostalgibility of the world.' He further explains this statement by stating that every object can be 'nostalgised'. Here he discusses photographs that have

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<sup>102</sup> Dominik Schrey, p. 27-28.

<sup>103</sup> Laura Marks, *Touch. Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 152-153.

<sup>104</sup> With Proustian emotion Bartholeyns refers to the term involuntarily memory written about by French novelist, critic and essayist Marcel Proust. Involuntarily memory is a subcomponent of memory that occurs when hints encountered in everyday life evoke recollections of the past without conscious effort. In other words, nostalgia is experienced all of a sudden, without any warning.

an obvious nostalgic component, for example two girls taking a photograph of themselves in a shared moment or an old tractor that is overgrown by weeds, next to photographs with seemingly neutral subjects, such as an empty swing or a dish served in a restaurant, that have become nostalgic due to the aesthetic component.<sup>105</sup>

In chapter 1 I have already shown with the help of images 1.1 to 1.7 that through editing with the help of *Instagram* the look of a photograph can instantly change. Small alterations – like the cropping of the image into a square-format, adjusting the brightness and contrast and vignetting – make the photograph instantly look more nostalgic. Even though the object depicted in the photograph might not evoke a feeling of nostalgia, it is possible nostalgia that is experienced as a result of this simulating of analogue aesthetics. In other words, the photograph is nostalgised with the help of *Instagram*.

So far I have only discussed how a photograph on *Instagram* can be considered nostalgic on the level of aesthetics, but it is also possible that a photograph is nostalgic on the level of content. Based on the literature a nostalgic photograph would display an obvious relation to the past: it would be, or at least look as if it was, taken years ago and would clearly display something that the viewer would feel nostalgic towards, wanting to return to the times depicted. But does such a nostalgic photograph exist on *Instagram* and if it does, what would it look like? During my research I have encountered only a few photographs that might pass as ‘the nostalgic photograph;’ the ultimate photograph that shows an obvious relation to nostalgia on the level of content. While most photographs clearly were taken in the present time, figure 7 shows a photograph that may be the clearest example of such a photograph from my dataset. It was posted on *Instagram* by the user *bushj49* and can best be defined as a photograph of a photograph. In the image a Polaroid photograph of two children sitting on the lap of Santa Claus is held up. The nostalgia that is accompanied with this photograph can be divided into three parts. First, nostalgia is expressed through the use of the filter slumber. As discussed in chapter 1, the filters *Instagram* offers refer back to the aesthetics of analogue photography. Second, nostalgia is visible for the object of the Polaroid photograph that is depicted. Today, photographic objects have become rare for, as stated earlier in this thesis, digital photography has become the norm. Third, nostalgia is visible on the level of the content of the photograph, as the added description by *bushj49* makes clear: “Lol my dad showing me polaroid pictures! #nostalgia” This description tells us that the photograph is a depiction of an old event that the user experienced when he was a child. This threefold experience of nostalgia for the object of the

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<sup>105</sup> Gil Bartholeyns, p. 55, 57.

photograph and for what is depicted in the photograph, makes the photograph a good example of 'the nostalgic photograph,' that thus in fact exists on *Instagram*.

#### **2.4 CONTENT ANALYSIS #NOSTALGIA**

I would now like to take a closer look at the content of the photographs that are considered to be nostalgic by the users of *Instagram*. As I already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis I will make use of the methodology of content analysis. Since the looking at photographs is always about interpretation, a methodology is needed. The methodology of content analysis is not entirely objective, because it still relies on choices that have to be made, but it does help to interpret the images that are being analysed and to say something meaningful about them in an objective way as possible. In her book *Visual Methodologies* geographer Gillian Rose provides four steps that have to be used when one wants to say something meaningful about the images he or she is analysing. The first step of a content analysis is to find the images one wants to take a closer look at.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I have collected 500 photographs that have been posted on *Instagram* with the #nostalgia. These photographs were collected by searching on #nostalgia via the website *Iconosquare* and capturing the first 500 photographs that would come up in the results of the search in screenshots.

The second step of a content analysis is to devise the categories for coding. With this step descriptive labels are attached to the images. Rose mentions three conditions these labels must comply with. They must be exhaustive (every aspect of the images with which the research is concerned must be covered by one category), exclusive (the labels may not overlap) and enlightening (it must clearly describe what is visible in the image).<sup>107</sup> Following these conditions I have come up with eleven labels that cover my selected images. These labels, or categories, are: childhood, game/toy, place, event, media, object, food, text, friends/family, no clear nostalgia and film. I will shortly describe each of the categories and what my conditions were for placing a photograph in one of the categories, since the third and next step of the content analysis is to code the images.<sup>108</sup> But before I do this I must note that sometimes it was hard to see a notion of nostalgia in the photographs, for example a photograph of a girl who is, seemingly without a reason, lying on the ground and a photograph (selfie) of a girl who is behind the steering wheel of a car. I then turned to the descriptions the users have attached to

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<sup>106</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, (London: Sage Publications, 2001), p. 54.

<sup>107</sup> Idem, p. 59.

<sup>108</sup> Idem, p. 62.

the images in the hope they would help me see why the user was experiencing nostalgia. These descriptions were helpful as they in many cases indeed told me where the experienced nostalgia was based upon. So the added descriptions proved to be a helpful tool. It is also relevant to mention that during the categorising of photographs I sometimes had to choose between two categories that both would seem to be a good fit, because the categories may not overlap. I then let the subject matter in combination of the description added by the user guide me to a category.

The category 'childhood' consists of photographs of the users themselves at a younger age.<sup>109</sup> Photographs in this category are portraits or photographs of groups of people. Examples of photographs in this category are class photographs and old family portraits, as is the case for image 8.1. The category 'game/toy' has collected photographs objects being games or toys the users played with in the past. This can be a doll or a board game, but the clearest example in this category is a photograph of a Nintendo game controller, which I encountered in many photographs. This not that surprising for the Nintendo was very popular during the 1980s and a great part of the 1990s and is likely to be remembered by many people.<sup>110</sup> The category 'place' shows photographs of places that users associate with nostalgia, for example a photograph of a place where one has spent the majority of ones life or a location where one has spent a vacation like a beach in Greece. In the category 'event' all the photographs are of events for which the users experience nostalgia. This can be a group shot of a group of friends at their graduation from high school or a photograph of a campfire that has taken place a few months ago. The category 'media' shows photographs of books, (characters from) television shows, CDs and concerts the users associate with nostalgia, for example a photograph of a drawing of Pikachu, a character from the Japanese animation series Pokémon. The category 'object' features photographs of objects that were manufactured in the past, for example a car from the 1930s or a street telephone form the 1980s. All the photographs that display some kind of food, for example candy or a dinner, are placed in the category 'food'. The category 'text' has collected images wherein texts that are associated with nostalgia by users are the focal point. Photographs that display

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<sup>109</sup> What is interesting here is that many of these photographs are digital reproductions of an analogue photograph. Either the analogue photograph has been digitalised or the object of the analogue photograph is rephotographed with the help of a digital camera. Here, the users may be experiencing nostalgia for the object (the analogue photograph) instead of nostalgia for the moment depicted in the photograph, but since none of the users explicitly mentions this, this remains uncertain.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Workman, 'What was it Like Playing Video Games in the 90s?' *Primagames*, accessed 26-05-2015. <http://www.primagames.com/games/super-mario-3d-world/feature/36-awesome-things-about-playing-video-games-90s>

groups of friends or family are placed in the category 'friends/family'. Examples of photographs of all categories are collected in figure 8.

The last two categories, 'no clear nostalgia' and 'film,' combine those photographs that are not relevant in my research. In the category 'no clear nostalgia' photographs are placed that do not display any form of nostalgia. Also, their descriptions do not hint towards a feeling of nostalgia. Because it is hard in these cases to determine why the user is experiencing nostalgia I have decided to not take them into consideration. The last category 'film' is not relevant simply because it combines moving images, which I will not be discussing in my research on static nostalgic images.

## 2.5 ANALYSING THE RESULTS

According to Rose the final step of content analysis is to analyse the results.<sup>111</sup> The results of my content analysis are summarised in table 1: result content analysis. The results are sorted from most frequent recurring subject to least frequent recurring subject.

Category	#photos
Place	84
No clear nostalgia	64
Object	62
Media	59
Friends/Family	50
Event	46
Text	34
Food	31
Childhood	26
Game/Toy	24
Film	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>

*Table 1: result content analysis*

Table 1 shows that from the 416 remaining photographs<sup>112</sup> that have been tagged with nostalgia, the largest category consists of photographs that express a feeling of nostalgia by the users for a certain place they have visited. The smallest category collects photographs of games or toys the users feel nostalgic towards.

Looking at these results in light of the theory of Hofer, it is not strange that the users are mostly feeling nostalgia for a place, because for Hofer nostalgia was a sad emotion that originated from the desire to return to one's native land. According to Hofer's theory the photographs that have been collected in the category 'place' must be

<sup>111</sup> Gillian Rose, p. 63.

<sup>112</sup> The total of researched photographs (500) minus the category 'no obvious nostalgia' (64) and 'film' (20).

photographs of the places the users call home. But when looking at the photographs this is not the case. Not one user refers to the photograph of it being a depiction of one's home. Instead, most photographs are taken while on vacation and the users are expressing a feeling of nostalgia for the place they visited during this vacation. For example image 8.3, which was taken by Rafaella Zanol Bezerra and posted on *Instagram* under her username *rafaellazanol*. Zanol Bezerra has added the following description:

"Local/Place: Pedra Furada – Jericoacoara – Ceará #nostalgia #takemeback #amazing #gopro #gopro4girls #jericoacoara #vemprajeri #vemconhecერი #pedrafurada #paraiso #destinosdobrasil #trilheirasdobrasil #goprohot #goprovip #goprooftheday"

The use of the hashtag #takemeback, in relation with the hashtag #nostalgia tells me she wants to return to this location in Brazil she has visited earlier, and is therefore experiencing nostalgia for this location. So here a discrepancy between the definition of nostalgia formulated by Hofer and the use of the term nostalgia today arises. Where Hofers definition leans on what is now understood of homesickness, the desire of Zanol Bezerra to return to her vacation location is understood as nostalgia, thereby distancing itself from the definition by Hofer. This discrepancy can be explained as a result of changing times. As time progressed, so the usage of the term nostalgia, while the definition remained static.

What also becomes visible from all the photographs that have been tagged with #nostalgia is that in almost all cases the users look back on the past with warm feelings. This does not always become clear from the photograph alone, but does with the help of the added descriptions. For example figure 9. At first sight the photograph does not display a clear expression of nostalgia. But after reading the description the user *je\_suis\_sylvie* has added to the photograph it does become clear she is in fact experiencing nostalgia. The description is as follows:

"The smell of rose-hip flowers always reminds me of when I was a little kid. Sometimes, I used my own perfume when I was playing outside. These were the only petals I was allowed to pick (no picking flowers of other people's garden) #nostalgia #rosehip #nature #flowers #spring #pink #memories #tbw"

The user looks back with warm feelings on the memories of her playing in the backyard and picking rose petals. However, she does not express a longing of returning to those times, which is a characteristic that is often attributed to nostalgia. This not expressing a longing of wanting to return to the times depicted, is a recurring phenomenon when looking at the photographs that have been analysed in this research. Users do express warm feelings towards the memories that are depicted in the photograph, but rarely express the wish of returning to the times depicted, which is another discrepancy that arises when looking at the definition of nostalgia and the use of this definition today.



The only exception here is the photograph that was posted by Zanol Bezerra, discussed above. In her description she expresses the wish to return to the time that is depicted in the photograph by using the words ‘take me back.’

When looking at what triggered the nostalgia in the analysed photographs, it can be said that in most cases the experienced nostalgia is a result of a non-social trigger. In some cases this is the object of the photograph itself, for example when an old photograph of an event is encountered by the user and an instant nostalgia is experienced for that event (for example image 8.4), or the nostalgia is triggered by an object that is encountered in daily life, for example on the street (as is the case in image 8.6). In case of the latter, this object is then immediately photographed and placed online via *Instagram*. It is in this situation that a new kind of nostalgia is practised, as described earlier in this thesis, for a seemingly ordinary object becomes instantly nostalgised through the multiple editing possibilities that *Instagram* offers.

The nostalgia the users are experiencing can be placed in the category of personal nostalgia as described by Sedikides et al., for the photographs will remind the users of an individual experience. For example the nostalgia is which experienced by *sriramvishwanath* in the group shot of image 8.9. Only a few people were present when the photograph was taken and only they will have memories relating to this time. Therefore only they can experience nostalgia for this time, simply because others do not know what took place then. However, sometimes this personal nostalgia is shared with other people or experienced by groups of people. In most cases this would be a group of people from the same generation, for example the nostalgia that is experienced for the Nintendo game controller (image 8.2). Even though other people were not present when the photograph was taken, they will recognise the object that is depicted– the Nintendo game controller – and will look back on their own memories they have for the same object. In this case personal nostalgia is shared, because the object is recognisable, for it is an object that is part of the collective memory.

Earlier in this thesis the photographs that are posted via *Instagram* were categorised as restorative nostalgia when looking at the level of the aesthetics of the photographs, for the photographs to some extent restore the aesthetics of analogue photography. However, on the level of content, the nostalgia that is experienced can be categorised as reflective nostalgia. As Boym stated this kind of nostalgia is based on loss and longing, on the imperfect process of remembrance and on individual and cultural memory. Through the photographs the users do not wish to restore the past times that are depicted, rather they wish to linger and look back on the memories relating to those times. Also the photographs were categorised as simple nostalgia on the level of

aesthetics, according to the descending orders of nostalgia formulated by Davis. After taking a closer look at the content of these photographs, they still can only be placed in the category of simple nostalgia. From looking at photographs themselves and sometimes their descriptions, it became clear that none of the users was questioning the nostalgia he was experiencing. Nobody wondered whether the nostalgia her or she was experiencing was based on true memories or were based on rosier versions of this memory that had changed over time.

## CONCLUSION

The writing of this thesis has been full of surprises. Not only have I learned a lot more about *Instagram* and the theories describing memory and nostalgia, I have also seen how these theories come to life on a platform that is used every day by millions of users around the world. Starting point for my thesis was the question I formulated in the introduction: why do we perceive photographs that are posted online via *Instagram* as nostalgic and what kind of nostalgic photographs are posted on the platform by its users? In two chapters I have tried to answer this question whereby the first chapter, 'Faux-Vintage Photography: Instagram', focused on why photographs that are posted via *Instagram* are perceived as nostalgic and the second chapter, 'Instant Nostalgia on Instagram', focused on the question what kind of nostalgic photographs the users of the platform posted online.

The answers as to why photographs edited with *Instagram* are perceived as nostalgic can be divided into two parts: on the level of aesthetics and on the level of content. First the photographs are nostalgic on the level of aesthetics. Through the filters *Instagram* offers, the photographs simulate aesthetics of analogue photography. For example, the square-format photographs that *Instagram* produces refer to the square-format photographs of its analogue predecessors – the Brownie camera, Rolleiflex, Rolleicord and the Polaroid camera – or the process of vignetting, which was prominent in the small photographic portraits that were popular in the mid-nineteenth century. But the photographs are also nostalgic on the level of content. The photographs that have been tagged with #nostalgia often show depictions of events, objects or places that have a special meaning for the users. They remind the user of past times and bring back memories relating to those times.

What is interesting about *Instagram* is that this experience of nostalgia can be shared. Photographs that display a personal nostalgia can be uploaded via the platform and thereby become part of the public domain. Other users of *Instagram* can access these photographs and when what is depicted in them is recognised, share the feeling of nostalgia. For example a photograph of a Nintendo game controller, of which it can be said that it is part of the collective memory. Looking at a photograph of this object might trigger nostalgia for the times related to the object among other users who see the photograph, because it reminds them of the times they played with the same object, which results in a shared experience of nostalgia.

As to the question of what kind of nostalgic photographs are placed on *Instagram* I have discovered that there are returning subject matters when analysing the photographs that have been tagged with #nostalgia. These returning subject matters

eventually formed the eleven categories that I have used in my content analysis. These categories were, sorted on most frequent to least frequent returning subject: place, no clear nostalgia, object, media, friends/family, event, text, food, childhood, game/toy and film. As said, nostalgia is inextricably linked to the past. Looking at the analysed photographs from Instagram that have been tagged #nostalgia, the past is indeed subject of these photographs. All the categories showed, sometimes with the help of the added descriptions, a collection of photographs that refer to past times, for example someone's graduation years ago or the times one played with a certain game or toy.

Even though the analysed photographs all have some relation to the past, the eleven categories used in this research vary wildly on subject matter. I have seen photographs of old objects like cars and an old telephone, games users used to play with and a painting of a bird sitting on a hedgehog, but also many group shots, photographs of people on vacation and drawings of the anime character Pikachu. These very divergent subjects of the photographs are a result of today's the nostalgibility of the world. Seemingly ordinary objects instantly become more nostalgic when they are photographed and then edited with the help of *Instagram*.

This research has shown that *Instagram* is almost inextricably linked to nostalgia. But when looking at as to what extent the users are experiencing nostalgia, it becomes clear that this experience does not go further than the first order or simple nostalgia, as formulated in the descending orders of nostalgia by Fred Davis. Users of *Instagram* do express that they are experiencing nostalgia, but do not ask questions as to why they are feeling nostalgic. Moreover, they do not wonder whether the nostalgia they are experiencing is truthful or whether the times that they feel nostalgic towards really were as warm, easy or simple as they remember. The users just want to linger on existing memories that are brought back through the photograph, rather than return to the times that are depicted. They do not wish to restore the past, the users simply want to reflect on the past times, making the nostalgia that is experienced reflective nostalgia as formulated by Boym, as opposed to restorative nostalgia.

As closing argument I would like to state that the users that have posted a photograph on *Instagram* and tagged it with #nostalgia are in fact not fully experiencing nostalgia as is described in the literature relating to the phenomenon. In this thesis I have given several definitions of nostalgia, but what these definitions all had in common is that they mention a longing for past times. In other words when nostalgia is experienced when someone wishes to return to the past times. Nostalgia relating to photography then would be the wish to return to the times that are depicted in the photograph. However, during my analysis of the nostalgic photographs I encountered

only one user who expresses a clear desire to return to the time that was depicted in her photograph (image 8.3). I already ascribed this discrepancy between the literature and the use of the term today to the changing times, resulting in a dilution of the definition of nostalgia. As time progress, so should the literature discussing nostalgia. New sources on the subject may include today's use of digital media in relation to nostalgia and the popular usage of the term. Also, this research has been conducted on literature that mainly focussed on textual nostalgia: nostalgia that is expressed through words. Research should be conducted that focuses on the visual imagery alone. This thesis has already taken a step in this direction, but was sometimes still dependent on the descriptions that were added to the photographs by the users.

Another focus of further research might be the hashtag #tbt or #throwbackthursday I shortly mentioned at the beginning of the second chapter. Although I chose did not discuss this hashtag any further in my research since my focus was on the hashtag #nostalgia, it might be interesting to take a closer look at the hashtag #tbt. This hashtag was, and still is, part of the phenomenon whereby *Instagram* users upload an old photograph on a Thursday. Do these photographs bring back memories for the times depicted and do users feel nostalgic towards these times? Further research may provide an answer to these questions.

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## FIGURES

FIGURE 1 – Original photograph and edited photographs with the help of *Instagram*

### 1.1 ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH



### 1.2 EDITED PHOTOGRAPH



### 1.3 FILTER: MAYFAIR



### 1.4 FILTER: WILLOW



### 1.5 FILTER: WALDEN



### 1.6 FILTER: HEFE



### 1.7 FILTER: KELVIN



FIGURE 2 – Top twelve subjects of photographs posted on *Instagram* in 2013

2.1 FEET ON THE BEACH



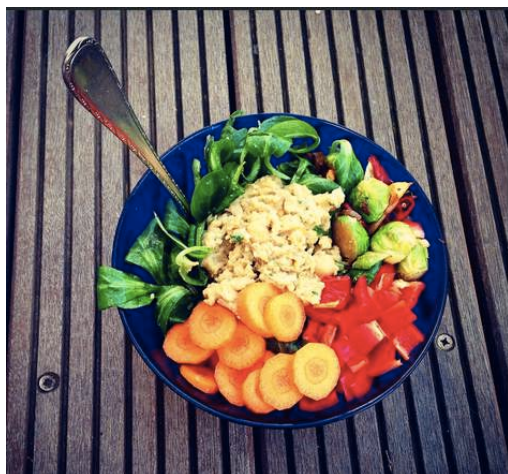
*pillarinthehouseofthelord, 08-12-2014*

2.2 CLOUDS



*mars\_rafa, 08-12-2014*

2.3 FOOD



*ca\_vy, 08-12-2014*

2.4 NAIL ART



*maite\_huylebroeck, 08-12-2014*

2.5 INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES



*m0tivati0nnati0n, 08-12-2014*

2.6 TALL BUILDINGS SHOT FROM THE GROUND



*liebehkg, 08-12-2014*



### 2.7 LATTE ART



*wei0211, 08-12-2014*

### 2.8 SMS CONVERSATIONS



*romeo\_0315, 08-12-2014*

### 2.9 AIRPLANE WINGS



*shooooota78, 08-12-2014*

### 2.10 BATHROOM MIRROR SELFIES



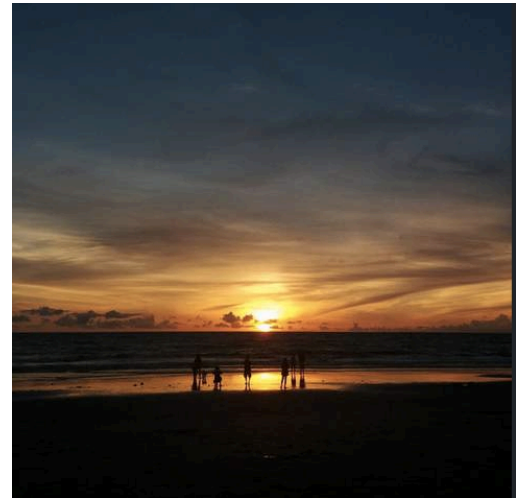
*arne\_kuebler, 08-12-2014*

### 2.11 A CIRCLE OF FEET



*\_tri\_love\_, 06-12-2014*

### 2.12 SUNSETS



*deansaechang, 08-12-2014*





## FIGURE 4 – Examples collective memory on *Instagram*

### 4.1 HITCHCOCK AND LEO THE LION



**historyphotographed** 4 maanden geleden  
Alfred Hitchcock serving tea to Leo the Lion, MGM's mascot, 1958

♥ jessi\_h\_christ iin.sibirian \_\_\_fefe\_\_\_ and 31.6k others like this.

macbay @joeperrymc  
ynotfotography @stellejewellery  
mahsooliii @mosioooooo in page ooo nigaaa  
bananaapocalypse @amanda\_sigurdsson ♡[]  
ali\_azadnia @amir\_free  
allison28 @sean\_j\_daly  
coachpk @lagranthegasse  
delgadoarthur @betodelg

### 4.2 PICNIC DURING THE OIL CRISIS

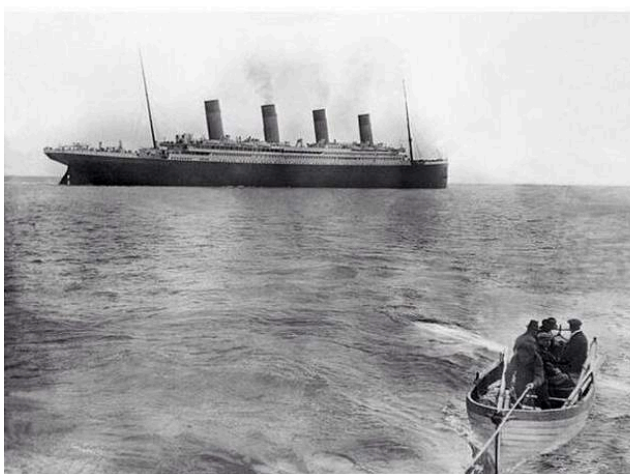


**historyphotographed** 4 maanden geleden  
A picnic in the middle of a highway during the 1973 oil crisis

♥ jessi\_h\_christ tongvatotanka msericarork and 22.8k others like this.

annarebecca23 @axel\_ayag @harbordcami haha seria chivisimo hacerlo!  
harbordcami Elqqq? @annarebecca23  
annarebecca23 La foto @harbordcami  
axel\_ayag No gracias :) prefiero hacerlo en el pasto @annarebecca23 @harbordcami para que no atropelle la combi  
annarebecca23 Hahaha, no nos pudieran atropellar, no si llevamos mas gente haha @axel\_ayag @harbordcami  
axel\_ayag Hahaha peor vos, si lo que vos queres es hacer una mision suicida @annarebecca23 @harbordcami

### 4.3. THE LAST PHOTO OF THE TITANIC



**historyphotographed** 8 maanden geleden  
The last known photo of the Titanic, as the ship leaving Queenstown, Ireland on April 12th, 1912

♥ kaaviaan shahad\_mansoor hader.ahmed.7 and 14.9k others like this.

veronica\_\_adele @brechtvanthof I feel like you'd be into all these pics  
brechtvanthof RAD! @veronica\_\_adele  
fatycus @adasenyurt  
sam\_gibney Now known as Cobh not queenstown  
jerzydelphia\_87 @theresa\_julie "come back" "come back" ...  
vset @salonskye ☹️ I wish I was on it  
avila7714 @lmn410  
iniguezashley @lindseyiniguez

FIGURE 5 – Introducing nostalgia



*georgia\_voo, 18-09-2014*  
*Filter: brannan*



FIGURE 6 – Categorizing nostalgia



*travelphotolenses, 29-01-2015*  
*Filter: earlybird*



FIGURE 7 - 'The nostalgic photograph'



*bushj49, 20-05-2015*

*Filter: slumber*

FIGURE 8- Categories content analysis

8.1 CHILDHOOD



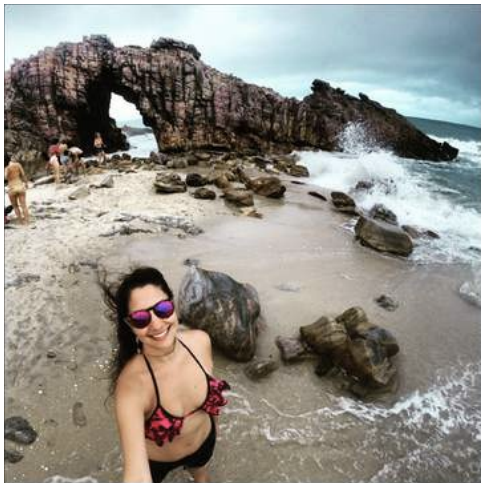
*rosimussi, 20-05-2015*

8.2 GAME/TOY



*ken\_conklin59, 20-05-2015*

8.3 PLACE



*rafaellazanol, 20-05-2015*

8.4 EVENT



*\_caddie\_, 20-05-2015*

8.5 MEDIA



*therarmy, 20-05-2015*

8.6 OBJECT



*lost\_landscape, 20-05-2015*

8.7 FOOD



*mbokjajan, 20-05-2015*

8.9 FRIENDS/FAMILY



*sriramvishwanath, 20-05-2015*

8.8 TEXT



*elisaterrosi, 20-05-2015*

8.10 NO CLEAR NOSTALGIA



*\_just\_smile\_to\_life\_, 20-05-2015*



FIGURE 9 – Analysing #nostalgia



*je\_suis\_sylvie, 20-05-2015*

*Filter: Aden*