

INSTANT ARCHIVES?

Haidy Geismar

Since its launch in San Francisco in October 2010, Instagram—a social media photography application for smartphones—has garnered over 100,000 million monthly active users. By March 2014 over 20 billion photographs had been shared on the platform, with roughly 60 million images being uploaded each day, and 1.6 billion expressions of “like.”¹ No wonder the platform was purchased by Facebook for approximately \$300 million in 2012. The overwhelming scale of Instagram seems to prevent, even resist, many kinds of analysis. How can we talk about style, genre, aesthetics, or even meaning, in the context of millions of users and billions of photographs? How can such a global phenomenon be inflected with an aesthetics or politics of the local? With the conundrum of scale interfering with our usual analytic categories, what frameworks can we use to make sense of Instagram, and what are the implications for the methodologies of digital ethnography? While Big Data has become a seductive frame within which to develop new theories of scale, and more specifically to develop new techniques of visualization to analyze social media images (e.g. Manovich et al. 2012), in this chapter I argue that thinking of Instagram using the language and frame of the archive enables us to develop an analytic perspective that might make sense of either a single image or the multitude, understanding this proliferation of images through a new institutional lens.

The archive is a particularly evocative image to think about social media, which seems to have obsolescence built into its technical form, and fickleness built into its user base. While social media might seem to resist many archival processes and practices (such as preservation, the imagination of a specific future, and often state-centralized control), the archive is also increasingly recognized as an interpretive form, and metaphor, par excellence for the digital age (Featherstone 2006). In developing a perspective on social media photography that draws upon the rich literature that has emerged about the sociality, politics, materiality, and governance of archives I argue that we may better draw out the epistemologies and values that underpin social media photography, in turn constituting new visible, and visual, publics, but ultimately arguing that we need to take seriously how social media has become a new institutional framework for social life and visual expression. By asking what kind of an archive Instagram is, and by comparing Instagram to other contemporary archiving projects, I open up social media platforms to a new analytic, which I hope can assist us in understanding the implications of these structures and frameworks of organizing images for the future, whether that be intentional or not. Here I deliberately position my analysis as counter, and

complementary, to ethnographic perspectives that would focus more on the substance and content of individual images. Rather, I work to explore how we might make sense of aggregates of images in social, cultural, economic, and political terms, unpacking the blackbox of corporate infrastructures that, alongside user-generated content, constitute social media.

Understanding Archives

At first glance, Instagram seems to be a user-generated anti-archive, one that frustrates efforts at systematic searching and analysis, resisting historicization and any archival research beyond the momentary event of looking.² For the viewer, images emerge momentarily, in feeds, and are almost instantly lost again, to be replaced with yet more images. The experience of time is compressed by volume, provoking a perpetual sense of contemporaneity—no two searches in this archive will ever be the same and recovering an image is not always possible as users delete and manage the privacy settings of their accounts. If, as is often argued, there is a mutual constitution of the archive and the public, Instagram exposes a public culture that is contingent, in flux, and enduringly momentary. The act of looking, or searching, through Instagram is therefore as much one of trying to find what you already know is there, as it is an active process of engagement with an image world, encapsulated in the platform as “liking.”

While the sheer scale and daily proliferation of images has a marked effect on how we may even see Instagram as an archive, understanding Instagram in archival terms not only has the potential to inform us about contemporary visual strategies of self-presentation, visual economies, and the classificatory systems that frame and narrate popular photographic practices. It also allows us to rethink the nature of the archive itself. Rao argues for an understanding of the Indian city as archive suggesting that:

archives can be treated as anchors in the reconstitution of social relations rather than as reflections of an already existing set of underlying conditions. Further, if we can treat density as a reflection of a network of information and relationships rather than as a demographic indicator of the quality and nature of the experience of place, then I suggest that these newly mobile forms of density can themselves be positioned as a form of archive.

(2009, 380)

Rao's vision of the city as archive dovetails with my proposal to read Instagram in archival terms. As she observes, “We need to rethink the notion of archive to encompass a dynamic sense of ordering and interpretation, unmoored from the politics of preservation and evidence creation for historical understanding” (*ibid.*, 381).

Thinking about Instagram as a massive archive, simultaneously user-generated and structured by a largely unseen corporation, allows us to move away from analytics such as style and genre, and away from an analytic gleaned from external cultural worlds, to understand more broadly how the platform is used to create value and constitute new publics. Simultaneously bringing into being, and archiving, what seems to be understood as a new visual commons, Instagram is also a corporate archive, gradually sedimenting a massive database of user information, now owned by Facebook, gleaned from both the images uploaded and the people who interact with them. Photographs on Instagram are, in classically archival terms, more than just representations of their makers and users; they recursively reflect the epistemologies, classifications, and political economy of this archival infrastructure which itself plays a constituent role in Instagram's dominant aesthetic conventions.

Many analyses of social media simultaneously present such platforms as a priori to their use and users, and as “always already new” (see Gitelman (2006) for an incisive expansion to the historicity of “new” media). It might seem anathema to think of Instagram users as self-consciously producing an archive. Certainly, images are generated and collated in a non-centralized way (although the platform itself plays host and manages content in particular ways, including censoring images it considers inappropriate). Equally, most users have not developed any common or explicit discourse about the future of their images, or about preservation, and the resulting temporality of user accounts is remarkably shallow (although many are in fact engaged with the question of intellectual property rights, which became clear when Instagram changed their terms and conditions in 2012). Instagram, like Rao's city, is an unruly and instant archive; it is centralized by corporate interest; and its classificatory system is emergent and fluid, based upon a relatively new communicative artifact, the hashtag.

Archival Models

Many discussions tend to understand digital archives as either Foucauldian instruments of governmental control and surveillance, or tools of decentralized “choreography” within the network society (Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2012). Media archaeology (e.g. Ernst 2012) exemplifies a growing tendency to reify form over content and by developing analytic modes that privilege the aggregate over the individual in terms of understanding the meaning and utility of archival information. Such accounts suggest: “The content of archives, in fact all content, has become largely irrelevant. What matters is not what is gathered, arranged, and transmitted, but how such gathering, arranging, and transmitting works” (Smith 2013, 385). However, such analytic sacrifice of content for structure undermines a more ethnographic perspective of the ways in which archives are in fact constituted, utilized, and experienced.

A burgeoning literature emphasizes the recursivity and reflexivity of many contemporary archival projects, in which the collection and collation of information is structured within a self-aware commentary on the nature of archival forms and methods (e.g. Edwards 2001; Zeitlyn 2012; Povinelli 2011). The practice of reading “against the archival grain” (Stoler 2009) in order to draw our attention to epistemic anxieties of users within the archive is in fact increasingly a characteristic of the practice and process of archiving itself. For instance, archival projects have emerged in Argentina, Chile, and Spain to confront the legacies of fascist dictatorship and materialize those who were “disappeared” (Taylor 2003) or to visually reconstitute a sense of territory for homeless and marginalized peoples (e.g. Susan Meiselas' AKA Kurdistan project).³ These projects highlight the complicity of the archive in state operations of disappearance, genocide, oppression, and in turn formulate the archive as a site of resistance. The practice and technology of archiving has also become a strategy for linked political activism and artistic production, for instance in the Atlas Group's (artist Walid Raad) fictional archive of contemporary Lebanon.⁴ Such projects subvert the ways in which archives are used as tools of power, social control, and centralization, and develop the archive as an aesthetic platform for the emotional exploration of place, politics, and personal experience.

“Indigenous” archiving platforms such as Mukurtu (Christen 2011) or Ara Irititja in Australia (Thomer 2010) have emerged to manage colonial collections of Aboriginal images, texts, music, song, dance, and knowledge in the context of Indigenous protocols and knowledge-management systems (see also Povinelli 2011).⁵ Ara Irititja, for instance, allows Aboriginal users to manage images of the dead, blacking out individuals from group photographs, limiting access to images with ritual content, and requiring passwords to access family- or territory-specific archives. These archives insist on developing a relationship

between these collections and “the public” in which the users must identify themselves in order to achieve appropriate degrees and levels of access. These Indigenous projects, often state funded, sit in tension with state ideals of public access, constituting a newly differentiated public sphere which, while similarly resisting the privatization or archival material, runs parallel to the open access movement, in fact challenging key tenets of openness and accessibility (Christen 2011; Geismar 2013).

Instagram as Archive

It is not usually the case that relatively small-scale Indigenous archiving projects are linked analytically to mass-produced social media. Yet, in the light of the growing trend to include a critique and commentary about the archive within the constitution of the archive itself, I wish to locate the organizational logic of Instagram within these kinds of analog and digital precedents that in fact might help us to better understand the unsettling scale and screen-effects of this proliferation of digital images. These projects highlight the reflexivity that digital technologies bring to the process of archiving in which the archive increasingly preserves a commentary or documents the process of archiving alongside the “original” material it contains. Such self-consciousness, or metadata, alters our understanding of what the archive is—not just a machine or system for documenting and preserving, but an epistemology forever in motion. All archives are responsive systems in which user experience or subjectivity is built into the usability of the archive.

The ways in which some Indigenous digital archives utilize generic database systems to challenge the political sensibilities of the archive mirrors a broader tension within the anthropology of digital infrastructures that explores the relationship between local cultural imperatives and the global forms that increasingly co-opt them into recognizable generic forms, and raises questions about whether these digital frameworks either incorporate meaningful cultural differences or eradicate them (see Geismar and Mohns 2011). Larkin describes infrastructures as:

built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life.

(2013, 328)

While Larkin is referring to built environments such as electricity grids and roads, it is productive to think of social networking platforms as aggregates of hardware and software that create “architectural” infrastructures for the archival appreciation and exploitation of data.

So what kind of an archive is Instagram? If the “visual image is an archive in its own right” (Mirzoeff 2011, xv), how do we analyze structure, epistemology, and meaning in the terms of a single Instagram image? What methods do we use? Big Data has become a dominant epistemology for understanding mass digital media, creating new ethical frames, new claims to objectivity, and new confluences of scale with significance (boyd and Crawford 2012). For instance, a recent project focused on Instagram by Hochman and Manovich (2013) converts the image-archive into “Big Data” within which they can undertake what they describe as “data ethnography” (2013, 14) or analysis of aggregated clusters of visual information (see Figure 30.1).

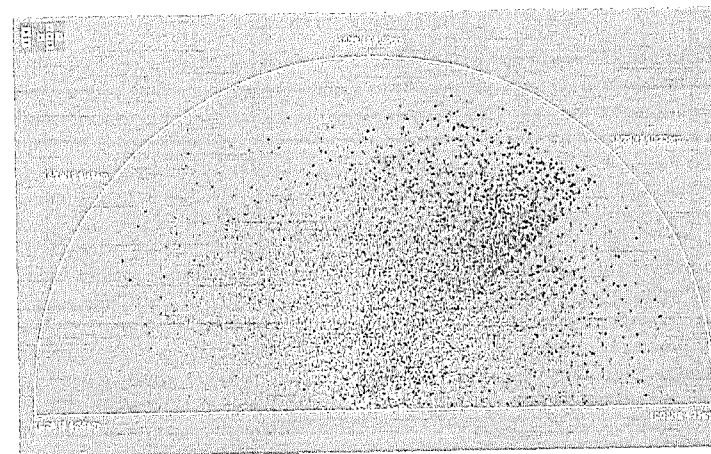


Figure 30.1 A detail from radial plot visualization of 24 hours from the Brooklyn area during Hurricane Sandy by Manovich and Hochman. Source: http://phototrails.net/radial_sandy_hue_created/. Permission to reproduce courtesy of Nadav Hochman

Hochman and Manovich draw on massive numbers of Instagram images to create visualizations that they argue “can lead to cultural, social, and political insights about particular local places during particular time periods” (ibid.). They correlate computer-generated visualizations of these aggregated images onto already existing knowledge about history, culture, society, and politics. For instance, in Figure 30.1 you can see the moment when night falls and the power cuts out during Hurricane Sandy, New York, 2012. However, this visualization tells us little we did not already know either about Instagram or of the role that social media might, or might not, play within these events. Nor does it really provide us with a useful methodology for understanding images as meaningful data in and of themselves (rather than visualizations which then need to be interpreted). Hochman and Manovich’s visualization gives us no understanding of how we might understand aggregated Instagram images to have meaning—as geolocated marks, as potentially legal evidence of political activity, or as indices of social opinion and commentary. The computational power behind their visualization might make distinctions that allow us to speak of the cognitive processes of image-making at a level that might be imperceptible to the human eye or unimportant to the human mind. In our current moment, in which “Big Data” itself is an increasingly fetishized artifact of study, what are the implications of sheer volume in developing tool-kits to understand visual practices such as Instagram? Manovich et al.’s (2012) visualization of style or form across a million images brings a new definition of style into being but cannot help us in understanding how style and genre are socially constructed.

A very different account of popular photographic practices and their engagement with Instagram is emerging from fieldwork based within specific communities, or with specific users, and these are currently being undertaken in numerous locations (Costa et al. 2016). Here I deliberately side-step a more traditional anthropological form of enquiry yet build on basic anthropological principles of locating these images in context to consider how a focus on the archive might help us to grapple with the issues of scale, categorization, and value that underpin Instagram.

The Unruly Archive

We might think of Instagram as a “very messy kind of archive” (Jimenez and Estalella 2014). Reading Instagram as an archive allows us to analyze the ways in which people work with the fixed format of the screen, the limitations of the software and photo-processing filters (which reference past photographic technologies as well as corporate virtual environments) and generate remarkably generic yet personal image collections, organized by epistemologies that emerge from specific users and yet also, through key words, feeds, and comments, are shared across global communities.

Instagram is a platform and network that is forged from three primary practices: the production and presentation of images, their aesthetic evaluation (the appreciation, enjoyment, and judgment of images), and their classification (the constitution of textual frames for image using tags and captions that creates an infrastructure of aestheticized categorization). Instagram accounts present a stream of images, in chronological order simultaneously embedded in a new archival chronology delineated by tags and by user-defined searches. The capacity of smartphones to geolocate also places images within a searchable global map.

For the first year of its existence, Instagram users simply uploaded photographs directly from their smartphone cameras into the signature square format (nostalgically referencing Kodak instamatic and polaroid images), undertook some basic photo editing (including the application of a number of different filter options which similarly referenced older styles and processes of photography), and shared their images with other users. Users could follow other users and have the options to “like” and briefly comment on images. In January 2011 Instagram introduced hashtags to increase lateral connections across user accounts. Hashtags are essentially user-defined captions prefaced by the symbol # creating a searchable cross-referencing system, connecting all images that share the same tag. In the summer of 2013, having acquired Instagram, Facebook added the hashtag facility to its own platform promising even greater integration between the two applications.⁶

Classification

Since its introduction, the hashtag has become an archival tool that underpins the organizational logic of Instagram from the perspective of its users. Aside from following images through an individual account, numerous web-based search engines have been developed to access and browse this massive photographic collection. The hashtag is the device that collects and collates images bringing a second dimension to user accounts, and facilitating the social networking and image-networking component.

The tag is the lynch pin of Instagram’s archival stability and instability and links it definitively to the other archival projects mentioned above. Collections of images develop unsystematically, randomly, in a decentralized way. Yet, visual codes within Instagram are hung together by a user-generated classificatory system we might want to think of as a folksonomy, in which user-generated classifications are connected via the hashtag as textual artifact of access. Hashtags can be used to generate images for specific purposes, such as in daily competitions and themes that invite users to cluster images around tags or to promote events or commodities. Users cluster around hashtags to share their communal experience both with their friends and others. The clustering of images around hashtags also generates a shared visual sensibility around events, as the mobile nature of the platform ensures that people are able to take photos and look at other people’s photographs from the same place simultaneously creating global events, such as #tourdefrance.

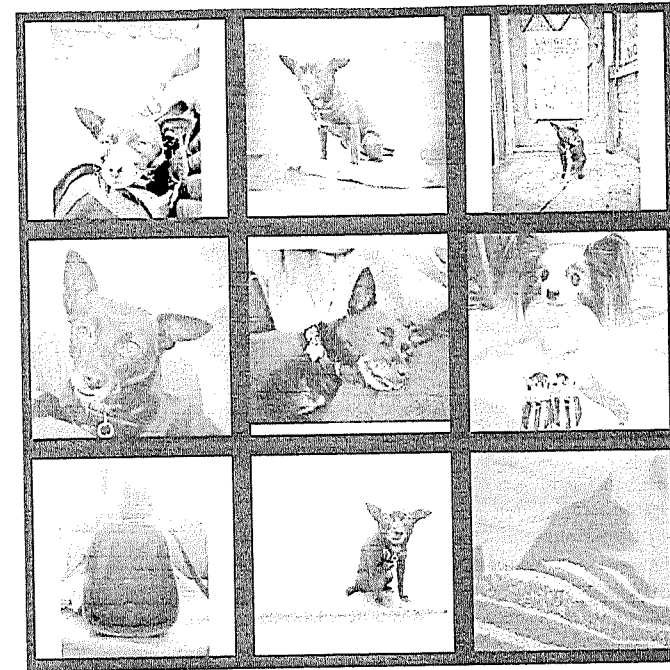


Figure 30.2 #xxxxthedog (via findagram.com) screengrab from September 2, 2013

Hashtags are also selected to generate more personal communities of practice or of friendship, for instance in the generation of a tag #xxxxthedog, clustering intimate images of a household pet and those close to her (Figure 30.2).

Unlike folksonomy projects in museums in which crowd-sourced categories float on top of museum catalogs yet rarely, if ever, enter a dialog with the formal key words of museum collection management systems, the Instagram tagging system both constitutes the archival qualities of the platform and demonstrates the ways in which classificatory systems are in fact not a priori, but created out of a networked infrastructure of images. Alongside the smartphone application itself, various search engines that allow one to search Instagram images depend heavily on their tags which can vary between the selective, small, and the wildly generic: from the ten images clustered around the tag #brunolatour, to the 184,519,839 images linked to #love on September 2, 2013, or the 82,825,375 images tagged #likeforlike on July 7, 2014.

There is a tension between the truly liberated and unruly power of the hashtag, which powerfully organizes communication across platforms, and the shallow temporality of belonging within the community of Instagram images, in which searches render images that are temporarily linked and generate clusters that continually change. Hashtags are recursive in that they reflect user-generated categories at the same time as bringing those categories

into being for users to connect to. Instagram exists as a series of images presented by users or clustered under the categorical imperatives of the tag. Most importantly, hashtags are the interface through which images are connected through the experience of “liking”: a discursive form of tastemaking that underpins the Instagram community. Users are able to search through tags for images that align with their own classificatory manifestation of interests, and express this by liking and commenting on images. In this way, the combination of hashtag search and user account(ability) comes together to forge networks of appreciation for specific images. In the following short sections I focus on three ways in which these qualities of the platform structure and mould particular archival logics which, in turn, account for some of the most interesting phenomena on Instagram—the mass production of genres, the user-led classification of images, and the development of networks of appreciation that are increasingly loaded with commodity value.

Regulation

Regulation is a key quality of the archive, yet social media is famously governed by both a dispersed normativity, and by a motley assortment of trolls (Coleman 2011). The promise of broad circulation seems to underpin the social media image. The conflict between Joy Garnett, a New York-based artist, and Magnum photojournalist Susan Meiselas over Garnett’s painting of, via an internet search, a cropped, yet copyrighted, photograph taken by Meiselas of a Nicaraguan Sandanista throwing a Molotov cocktail, exemplifies the irrepressibility of the digital image and the ethics of its circulation. Garnett eventually removed the image from her website after receiving a cease and desist letter from Meiselas’ lawyers, but the image of her work was rapidly recirculated and remixed by a broad community of artists and supporters (Garnett and Meiselas 2007). Yet despite controversies sparked within “JoyWar,” Instagram images circulate primarily within a network of intense normativity.

Most accounts of ubiquitous photographic practices within social media (e.g. Hand 2012; van Dijk 2007) argue that digital photography facilitates a continuation of the basic nature of popular photography to produce and publicly circulate identities and constitute memory practices. Miller’s account of Facebook profile photographs (2015) focuses on the ways in which these image practices extend and embody social networks, being the visual vehicles by which users enter into the process of self-making and the process of relationship building (and unbuilding, see Gershon 2010) through the image as a communicative practice. Miller and Sinanan (2013) argue in their discussion of webcam that image-making through social media represents a retrospective “attainment” of latent capacities to understand the self and develop new forms of self-consciousness.

Yet it is the very sociality of Instagram and the ways in which it forges networks of images that is also the most profound regulator of the production of normative images. The archival logic of Instagram revolves around an infrastructure of value forged by the formation of classificatory systems based on user appreciations, underpinned by the epistemological logic of the hashtag. Not only does this have a practical application, in the exploitation of these circuits of appreciation in the form of commercial interest, it also in part might explain the emergence of particular genres within the platform.

The use of hashtags demonstrates the emergence of visual genres, in which images (understood as composites of symbols, framed tableaux, and visual conventions) emerge in relation to key categories and simultaneously constitute those categories, creating communities of taste and distinction (following Bourdieu 1984). The power of the hashtag is demonstrated by its conflation with whole categories of image, and the way in which it has been incorporated

into everyday speech (“I can’t find a wireless connection . . . hashtag First world problem”). At first glance the genre of #selfie that moulds self-portraiture in Instagram demonstrates how much the genre is circumscribed here by the form of the smartphone and the affordances of Instagram: selfies present selves in squares, seen from the distance of an arm’s length (although this is changing with the advent of the selfie stick), and through the frequent presence of mirrors often include the camera itself. At second glance we can see how the interplay between classificatory tags and the visual conventions molded by the platform’s software (used on smartphones) interact together to constitute genres within Instagram. In a mocking web article,⁷ one pundit lampoons the emergent popular genres: “photographs of legs from above, photographs of legs standing, photographs of lips, photographs of fingernails, photographs of meals, photographs of pets and children, self-portraits taken in mirrors or by holding the phone away from the body” and so forth. These genres—singular categories characterized by a shared style, which seemingly reproduce themselves (Neale 1987)—are global, and they are each constituted by millions of images. It is the consensual recognition of these genres of photographic practice that reinforces the values that are marked by the processes of liking and the forging of classificatory connections between images. Hashtags such as #selfie, or #maori, expose not just a convention of portraiture, but the emergence of broader kinds of subject position specifically formed within the archive.

Corporate

The archival recursivity of image circulation on Instagram can be seen most clearly in the ways in which value and self-expression are mutually constituted in the platform itself. Alongside the ways in which people use tagging to both perpetuate and develop existing visual codes and paradigms, the act of liking images is fundamental to the social networking of the platform. While liking and commenting form the basis of large numbers of community, even larger numbers of Instagram images are in fact not instantiations of self-making or identity in relation to culture, practice, politics, or sociality. Rather, they are vehicles expressly designed for the interconnection between aesthetic contemplation and taste making, uploaded specifically to engender social networks of appreciation. Images that focus primarily on achieving likes and followers are therefore hyper-recursive images, in that they refer to Instagram and the process of engagement with Instagram (which in turn may provide commercial benefits and other forms of value). The use of the tags #likeforlikes, #tagforlikes, #followme, #instalike, and #instafollow, for instance, are oriented toward attracting maximum numbers of followers and appreciative comments and user references which create a sense of success in terms of the capacities of Instagram, and create a form of capital that is increasingly attractive to publicists and marketing organizations seeking to generate visible proof networks of appreciative consumers (Figure 30.3).

This practice indicates the ways in which Instagram is perceived by many of its users as a kind of visual “trap” (Miller 2000) in which the process of appreciation is a form of visual and cognitive stickiness that creates strategic networks used in order to maximize various forms of capital. Here, the archive is an infrastructure of appreciation, often exploited for profit. The unsettlement of this kind of practice, particularly through the presence of fake Instagram accounts that exist solely to create links, likes, and tags, and present a visible appreciative community around specific events or objects, demonstrates the malleability of this archive and unmoors it from existing models of the archive, which at heart presume a moral perspective on collection, organization, and preservation ultimately aimed at generating knowledge, history, and memory.



Figure 30.3 Images to gain likes and friends are images of that relationship between friends and likes

Social Media Archives as a Form of “Civil Imagination”

I have briefly discussed the affordances of Instagram as a particular kind of archive in order to argue how it is useful to consider these platforms to be archives despite the seemingly anti-archival, even explicitly corporate, nature of these popular photographic practices. There is a tension between understanding social media as generic, reproducing normative genres that are informed largely by market-driven concerns; and understanding social media as the ultimate form of self-expression. I have emphasized that we might see convergences between user-led aesthetic practices and the intentions coded into the platforms and collated in more corporately inflected archival tendencies. Both types of use focus on the production of value for images and forge communities of taste. Azoulay (2008) has posited that the practice of making and viewing photographs instantiates a civil or social contract—a relationship between viewer and viewed that demands an ethical engagement and facilitates a framework of what she terms “civil imagination” (as opposed to state domination of our visual capacities to empathize and connect through images). If this civil contract is found in the very material form of photography then this could and should extend into some of our perceptions of popular photography outlets such as Instagram as a new institutional form of image consumption. Bassett (2013) suggests that one might be able to intervene in the cacophony of social media by producing a “silent commons”: a re-appropriation of the space of social media and a use of communicative media that does not necessarily only produce data that conforms to the use-value of corporate social media platforms and which subverts our usual expectations.

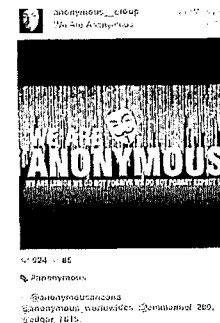


Figure 30.4 Discussion about being part of Anonymous. Screenshot on January 31, 2014 through Webstagram.com

A silent commons could be understood as an archive that can be created inadvertently and without intention yet still be mobilized as a form of public culture with resonance far beyond the marketplace. Can we understand Instagram as a space in which the crowd-sourced classificatory system is truly utilized at cross-purposes to an institutional archival logic that constitutes hegemonic epistemologies and values for companies such as Facebook? If we understand social media sites in the same way we do state archives, we might see them as massive centralizations of information and data that colonize our taste, and even our sociality, to benefit a small number (of shareholders). However, if we follow other accounts that posit social media to be the remedy for archival centralization can we still use the frame of the archive in order to unravel the centralizing tendencies of social media? I have suggested here that the radical or recursive archives of artists or indigenous groups work against centralization and surveillance in exactly this way. The user experience of Instagram is one of a shallow temporality in which images are continuously replacing each other in terms of immediate access. This is more a problem of scale than of the archive itself which successfully maintains images and organizes them chronologically. Yet we cannot allow ourselves to be defeated by scale—rather we have to analyze scale itself as an aesthetic convention and visual effect and locate it as a particular phenomenon for the archive.

Historically there have been numerous failed attempts at total archiving projects from Warburg’s iconographic Mnemosyne project to the Mundaneum. These projects, like that of Google’s book project or even its search engine, might be understood as a kind of imperial hubris, like the mapping project described by Borges in his short story “On the Exactitude of Science.” However, platforms such as Instagram can be seen as new forms of archives of the everyday, constructing a predetermined and emergent infrastructure through which persons circulate in the digital world as assemblages of taste and, by extension, work collectively to construct new forms of value.

It is the archival logic that produces the qualities of Instagram that are of such interest to analysts—the classificatory system of the hashtag, the normativity of genre production, and the self-identification of users within this new normative and visible public sphere. Instagram opens up the possibility of registering or archiving a slice of reality that was absent in the traditional archive, and in so doing makes it possible to incorporate that into circuits of value and

the production of meaning. Thinking of Instagram as an archive allows us to make sense of the ongoing tensions about the visual economy, the monetization of user data, the corporate structure of the interface, alongside the analysis and understanding of user-generated content. We need this kind of archival perspective to make sense of the growing place and proliferation of social media as a new kind of institution within our everyday lives.

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Notes

- 1 Source: <http://instagram.com/press>.
- 2 Snapchat, which is replacing Instagram in popularity with many young people, takes this immediacy of experience to the logical conclusion of deleting the image after a set, and short, period of time. Perhaps for this reason, witnessing, rather than looking is a better verb to use in discussing how we experience social media images.
- 3 www.susanmeiselas.com/akakurdistan.
- 4 www.masumiyetmuzesi.org/?Language=ENG; www.theatlasgroup.org.
- 5 See www.mukurtu.org, <http://irititja.com>.
- 6 Instagram, like Facebook, censors tags that are perceived to be pornographic or otherwise overtly problematic. They also block the use of tags such as #iphone and #photography claiming that they are too generic to be functional.
- 7 <http://photodoto.com/15-reasons-why-your-instagram-followers-hate-you>.

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