

FUTURE OF THE FACE: PHOTOGRAPH AND THE ALGORITHM

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Abstract

Photography was pronounced dead in the 1980s following the widespread introduction of digital cameras. At the time it was considered among photographic historians that the innovation of the digital pixel, that element that allowed for endless cloning and manipulation of the image, was the defining factor of the new photographic technology. My paper argues that the introduction of digital photography can be considered as but one point on the timeline of the history of computer-aided imagery. I argue that our understanding of what photography is and what it is yet to become, needs to recognize the direction of informational technologies to which photography is ever more connected.

This paper considers contemporary advances in a range of computer-aided imaging. There are attendant shifts in our daily uses and practices of photography that operate on increasingly personalised and diaristic planes. But while 'selfie', tagging and facial recognition are the everyday realities of social media usage and the online traffic in images proliferates and accelerates, developments in computational photography such as digital biometrics, recognition, stitching and 3D reconstruction remain lesser known and expert fields at the forefront of informational technology destined for use in security systems, market research and intelligence.

Mark Zuckerberg's prediction that 'the future will be social' is also a confirmation that the future will also be networked, that the digital interaction of users and experiences, call it 'big data', relies on a connected online world of users. In this post-photographic moment, the photograph still exists but in series, in associations, connections and archives. Also the photograph is social. The single photograph, captured in a decisive moment, is of the past. In this paper I consider recent advances in the field of image technology to analyse the directions in which the traffic in photography is flowing.

Keywords: photography, photographic history, algorithm, information technology, digital, face recognition, biometrics, interconnectivity, 3D construction, computer-aided imagery.