Pics or it Didn't Happen

Instagram in Prosumer Capitalism and Reflexive Modernity

Aaron Frey

8/10/2012

Master of Applied Cultural Analysis	Supervisors
Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences	Magnus Wikdahl
TKAM01 – Spring 2012	Karin Salomonsson

Abstract

Drawing on practice centered approaches to consumption, this study situates a cultural analysis of Instagram, a smartphone-based image sharing application used by over 80 million people worldwide, within wider discourses on reflexive modernity, critical media studies, prosumption, and late-modern consumer culture. A seven-day diary study with 25 international participants, supplemented by participant observation, helps tie these theoretical engagements to specific lived experiences illustrating what it means to live with a networked camera almost permanently on-hand to record and share images of daily life. I focus on the reflexive framing and composition of moments of consumption within practice, arguing that the material culture and affordances of networked mobile imaging, as represented by Instagram, reflect a divergence in photographic practice that expands the realm of the photographable. As the 'mobile web' extends networked communication into new spatial contexts, the already overstated dichotomy between the real and the virtual breaks down. This expansion of imaging and communication into new spaces and routines occurs in conjunction with the twin shifts toward an "experience" and "informational" economy, within a social media ecology that enables, and demands, ever more sharing of experiences. While imaging is experienced by many simply as an enjoyable way to fill time or be creative, I explore the multiple agencies that structure enjoyment and explicate the workings of imaginative pleasure using an adapted reading of Colin Campbell's account of modern hedonism, coupled with Jodi Dean's account of drive, or the pleasure that emerges from the failure to achieve satisfaction, and its role in prosumer capitalism. I conclude by arguing that social media platforms like Instagram, and its new parent, Facebook, challenge reflexive modernity theorists' views of empowered, individuated modern subjectivity. Social media slide readily into the institutional gap, as hidden quasi-institutions, constituting powerful limits to reflexivity through new disciplining mechanisms, even as they afford the potential for radically transformative reflexivity.

Keywords: Instagram; Facebook; social media; social network sites; mobile computing; prosumption; prosumer capitalism; web 2.0; photography; material culture; reflexive modernity; communities of practice; practice theory

Acknowledgements

New York, August 30, 2012

Aaron Frey

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1. Introduction

Figure 1. A selection of Instagram images created by the author while producing this thesis.

"I don't post reality. I post stories, nostalgia, and emotions," (Jerry, diary entry, February 2012).

Instantly, that shot you took of your morning bowl of cereal looks dramatic, tinged with a faux-vintage glow, worthy of a Food & Wine *spread. And you, you look like you live a life of unequivocal glamour,"* (Goulet, 2012)*.*

"The assumption [...] is that taking photos of your food is normal, that it is a phenomenon and that it is a worthwhile pursuit. Actually, taking photos of your food marks you out as a desperately vapid sort, whose ability to enjoy everyday life is vitiated by an obsession with using technology to communicate to other inverted half-people the depths of your pretension and desire for approval," (gauteng29, 2012)*.*

Instagram, the popular photo-sharing application for iPhone and Android smart phones, has rapidly amassed over 80 million users who have shared over 4 billion images in a brief two-year span (Wasserman, 2012). In the most stereotypical cases, Instagram users are often seen snapping shots throughout the day of their lunches, current activities, or new purchases, and sharing these with short captions in near real-time on social network sites. A popular, humorous online saying that pre-dates Instagram by several years demands: "Pics, or it didn't happen," reflecting the desire for proof or authenticity, as well as the ability to vicariously share in the many textually

reported experiences that come up on forum posts, blogs, and social network sites. This frenzy of self-documentation, or more accurately, self-narration, meant that in 2011, when Instagram "only" had 15 million users, over 5 million images were uploaded each day – a number that has surely risen greatly today (Instagram, 2011). All this activity has brought about cultural innovation and new traditions in the practice of photography while crystalizing the rise of 'micro-blogging,' typified by the short-form, stream of consciousness style postings on Tumblr blogs, Facebook's news feed, and Twitter's 140 character messages. In the process, it has also generated much public debate (at least on blogs and their comment sections, with the critique encapsulated most succinctly by gauteng29's comment above) over the boundaries of artistic expression and the meaning of authenticity, highlighting the inherently performative and aesthetic qualities of modern consumption, while raising questions about what it means to live with a camera almost permanently on hand to record and share daily life. These common sentiments reflect the not-insignificant dissent of social-media's hold-outs and skeptics, as well as traditional photographers grappling with a disruptive new medium. These groups tend to see Instagram's mode of documentation and the overwhelming demand to 'share more' as something that transgresses good moral behavior, or that reveals a gap in the development of self-identity and hints that one is "self-absorbed," "showing off," or ultimately "faking it." What these superficial popular debates hint at, but ultimately fail to engage with, is that the dominant form of practice on Instagram emerges from, and speaks to, wider developments in consumer culture, the economy, and late-modernity more generally. This study attempts to provide a cultural analysis of Instagram's phenomenal rise––and controversial refiguring of daily practices, photographic and beyond––that goes deeper than popular accounts have thus far attempted.

I was first drawn to Instagram as a topic of study when I started seeing images from the application posted on Twitter in greater numbers. I have an iPhone, and at the time the application was only available to iPhone users, so I was able to download and install the program. As an amateur photographer with a collection of cameras and lenses that often get put to use on weekend photo trips, I was intrigued by the quality of images that were being produced and shared with Instagram. I proceeded to explore and learn its features and conventions, to photograph and learn how to share parts of my own daily life, and to see what was really happening beyond my own social network.

There are a number of popular genres that appear on Instagram, from cute cat pictures to barely clothed self-portraits, but one quickly notices that the most commonly recurring themes are related to moments of consumption, especially with food, fashion, places, and experiences in general. A few vignettes illustrate common photographic content on Instagram: a hand holding a digital SLR camera, with a caption noting that it had just been purchased; a coffee cup sits on a table inside a trendy, newly opened café; a dramatic sunset over a snowy mountain top during a ski trip; the view outside an airplane window; a hand made scarf; and a salad prepared for dinner. In all these examples, the dominant pattern follows the wider trend of micro-blogging, which tends to be – "I'm here," "I'm doing this," or "This is what I'm thinking," frequently framed by brief captions that denote mood, affect, or aspiration within moments of consumption. These and other types of images are published in a sequential flow that, taken as a whole, creates a visual narrative of the photographer's life and emotional states.

This expressive style emerges at the same time that business is increasingly shifting towards an emphasis on crafting 'authenticity' and 'experiences' in explicitly symbolic cultural processes as sources of added value and competitive advantage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 2010). These trends have expanded the notion of what is consumable and marketable, seeing a much more active role for a consumer that is encouraged, and sold props, to customize and memorialize their experiences with brands, goods, and services. In many ways Instagram use reflects the pervasiveness of this business model in the way individuals showcase their creative engagement with diverse moments of consumption. The act of framing, composing, and sharing photographs in the midst of diverse practices introduces a reflexive, co-creative element to consumptive moments, resembling 'prosumption,' or the blurring of production and consumption. In this way, the act of networked mobile imaging extends the logic of experiential consumption, and digital prosumption, to new temporal and spatial contexts. The fact that Instagram is experienced by many users as something simply creative and fun, or a good way to kill time while bored, should not be discounted, but it disguises what is in fact a process operating under multiple logics and agencies. In other words, the camera provides a space to create through performance and imaging competence a pleasing and desirous image of life, in the moment, as it *could* be, where every experience meets its imagined potential: food is perfectly plated and unspoiled, life consists of vacations and sunsets, and our vision of what life should be is matched in practice. These visions and

performances are not universal, but rather emerge from particular intersections of individual biography, personality, and habits; communities of practice; wider cultural fields such as class, gender or national identity; and material and spatial surroundings.

In this thesis I refer to the generalized photographic practices described above using the term *networked mobile imaging* in order to capture the divergence from traditional photographic practice, techniques, and technologies. This new term emphasizes several key points. 'Networked' highlights the role of integrated communications technologies, especially social network sites, in reshaping the avenues for performance, and thus the conventions by which photographs are taken and put to use in social interaction. 'Mobile' suggests the enhanced capabilities inherent in new mobile devices and the expanding 'mobile web.' Instagram is 'mobile' in this sense as it takes advantage of the computational power of smart phones and tablets to enable one-touch image processing, as well as the embedding of meta-data such as GPS coordinates, hash-tags, "likes," and comments. Mobility also suggests a blurring of the spatio-temporal boundaries of communication, a decentering and interpenetration of social relations, creating a new 'situational geography' (Meyrowitz, 1985) that reshapes conventional time and place-bound experiences and performances. All of this often results in something more than just the creation of a photograph, instead producing particular kinds of mediated performances driven by the globalized, mediated contexts in which they may be consumed. Finally, 'imaging' is used instead of 'photography' to suggest a different sort of relationship to visual representation and to move away from simplistic critiques that judge Instagram on the basis of traditional photographic conventions and professional practices. Photography, in this sense, is a particular method of imaging, whereas networked mobile imaging may refer to multiple methods of representation drawing on multiple techniques and technologies. This is useful conceptually given that, as technologies advance and cultural practices evolve or innovate, the kinds of representational images created and shared via mobile devices may shift. At its simplest this means that the term may also account for shared screenshots and re-posted images created by others, though these genres are not the focus of this thesis. It also means that this terminology leaves open other creative representational potentialities like video and newly emerging hybrid forms, e.g. 'cinemagrams.'

Networked mobile imaging represents a widespread shift in daily consumer practice and the diffusion of socio-technical affordances that have the potential to reshape what it means to be a subject, or individual, in late-capitalist modernity. As Poster (1990) writes, subjectivity is in part constructed and enacted through mediums of communication:

> In the first, oral stage, the self is constituted as a position of enunciation through its embeddedness in a totality of face-to-face relations. In the second, print stage, the self is constructed as an agent centered in rational/imaginary autonomy. In the third, electronic stage, the self is decentered, dispersed, and multiplied in continuous instability. (p. 66)

What is important to note here is that media are not neutral; they shape, structure, and afford particular ways of having, relating, being, seeing, and doing. Moreover, despite popular rhetoric of 'information revolution,' 'empowerment,' 'democratization,' and 'participatory media,' these new communications technologies are still bound up in the familiar power dynamics of capitalism (Dean, 2010; Fuchs, 2009a; Hamelink, 1986; Kumar, 2004; Webster, 2002), and may, as I will argue, even extend and enhance its logic, at the very same time that it provides the tools to radically reshape society. Instagram, as one of the most popular applications of the nascent 'mobile web,' made up of ever more portable, capable, and ubiquitous networked devices, presents a potentially fruitful avenue by which to study these reconfigurations of subjectivity, consumer culture, and their expression in daily life.

1.1 Research Aims and Thesis Structure

By highlighting Instagram, I foreground the role of image making and mobile, networked sociality in modern consumer culture. In doing so, I seek to critically examine the cultural dynamics of documentation and sharing and their role in 'prosumer' capitalism, while at the same time complicating our understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that pattern this blurring of production and consumption. Further, I aim to link wider theoretical debates about the nature of reflexive subjectivity in late-modernity to this empirically grounded analysis, illustrating the multiple socio-technical agencies that exert a quasi-institutional influence on behavior and identity. My approach, based in theories of practice, aims to

add to the academic understanding of the relationship between social media, identity, and consumer culture in late-modernity. At the same time, this discussion provides a model for understanding how communities of practice, imagination, pleasure, and identity are intertwined in the use of social media platforms. This approach attempts to provide a way of conceptualizing the role of practices and practice communities in the use and appropriation of social media that will also be applicable for practitioners in the social media field and those seeking to design software or otherwise engage with users in a way that corresponds to how people actually relate to each other, their practices, and the networked communications technologies that enable new behaviors and traditions to take shape. Finally, a critical analysis of social media is applied in order to shine light on the quasi-institutional disciplining effects of an increasingly pervasive and invisible new media ecology, opening much needed space for awareness and dialog that can lead to potential alternative models.

I begin the analysis in chapter 4 by exploring the material qualities of the software application, the smart phone, and the wider social media ecosystem. I argue that the material affordances structure practice in such a way that consumption and identity work become partly organized around what can be visually represented. In conjunction with this, networked mobile imaging greatly expands the situations, and types of performances, through which identity can be constructed and by which experiences, objects, scenery, goods, and more may be consumed. In chapter 5, I explore in more detail the nature of consumptive practice, and focus especially on developing an approach to the role of mediated social networks, the image, and the imaginary in consumption. This section also introduces and adapts Colin Campbell's (1987) work on modern hedonism to account for a more communal, mediated notion of the role of image, imagination, and pleasure in motivating consumption. Finally, chapter 6 situates the material and practical analysis of networked mobile image sharing within a wider discussion on the nature of reflexive modernity and its implications for the 'project' of self-identity. Drawing largely on Giddens (1991), I qualify his view of reflexive identity by exploring the limits of reflexivity suggested by Lash (1993, 2003), arguing that social media platforms represent new disciplinary quasi-institutions. This, in conjunction with critical media theorists' critiques of informational, or prosumer capitalism, leads to a questioning of the impact and experience of digital 'prosumption' in terms of Instagram's recent $1 billion acquisition by social-media giant, Facebook. I will

elaborate these ideas and their connections further in the literature review and methods sections that follow.

2. Theoretical Foundation
2.1 Reflexive Modernity and the Self as Project

The conjunction of networked mobile imaging and consumer culture must be understood in terms of wider shifts toward the stylization, culturalization, and mediatization of production and consumption (Lury, 2011, p. 192). This emerges in the contemporary shift to a cultural economy centered around 'reflexive accumulation.' Amidst a proliferation of styles and tastes, self-directed choice becomes an imperative and overriding responsibility in light of "the decline of tradition which opens up a process of individualization in which structures, such as the family, corporate groups and even social class location, no longer determine consumption decisions for individuals," (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 61). In economic terms, "this means that profit making demands greater sensitivity to the hermeneutics of everyday life," while, "on the other hand, it means that the expressivity of social actors is increasingly intertwined with economic activity, embedded in consumption," (Jansson, 2002, p. 6). Social theorists, led by Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, and Zygmunt Bauman, provide varying accounts of the workings of this increasingly 'reflexive modernity.' Here I engage primarily with Giddens and Lash, who address some of the insights and critiques from postmodernism without fully accepting the argument that we have entered a stage beyond modernity. Rather, they argue, this period represents a 'second modernity,' painting a picture of late-modern subjectivity that manages this era's pervasive doubt, uncertainty, and risk through reflexive 'self-monitoring' activities (Lee, 2006). Self-identity has become a project, unbound from tradition and open to choice, but subject as well to various risks given that knowledge is now tentative, always changing. With this in mind, the work of reflexive self-monitoring can be understood in terms of "the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge," (Giddens, 1991, p. 20). What becomes important, or perhaps even necessary for 'ontological security,' then, is the ability to create a coherent narrative self, an auto-biography that, in many cases, is propped up through recourse to the packaged narratives and identities of a globalized consumer culture. These notions of self and subjectivity seem to share much in common with the self-conscious, consumptive modes of performance so prevalent on Instagram, with some important caveats that I will return to later.

This historical trajectory has given rise to what is often described as a "cultural" or "experience" economy, driven by "informational" or "post-industrial" capitalism (Castells, 2003; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 2010; Touraine, 1974). As Prahalad and Ramaswamy describe it, "products and services are facing commoditization as never before," driven by the fact that "globalization, deregulation, outsourcing, and the convergence of industries and technologies are making it much harder for managers to differentiate their offerings" (2004, p. 7). The business solution to this problem is often presented as a shift toward design intensive production and the creation of explicitly performative consumer experiences. Businesses now engage more than ever with extensive market research and design, manipulating aesthetics and symbolic meaning as sources of competitive advantage, while consumers increasingly make decisions based on constantly changing notions of lifestyle, taste, and identity (Lash & Urry, 1994). As theorists of postmodernism have in part argued, sign-value and cultural narrative has taken greater precedence vis-à-vis functional use-value . Pine and Gilmore popularized a similar view in business literature, arguing that "experiences" have become more valuable than the simple utility or effectiveness of a good or service, and that the perceived "authenticity of experience" has supplanted quality, cost, and availability as a key source of competitive advantage (Jameson, 1990; Jansson, 2002). However, the meanings of "authenticity" are constantly in flux, subject to situated material-cultural construction, performance, negotiation, and interpretation (Frey, 2011). With this in mind, the developing context of the cultural or experience economy can be understood in terms of attempts to build value through the co-creation of meaning, ideas, and knowledge within interactions between and among consumers and producers. This view of market relationships blurs the line between producer and consumer in the sense that sign value and "experiences" are ongoing projects of dialog and negotiation, rather than finished products whose dynamism and contingent nature ends at the design process, factory door, or the store cash register (Pine & Gilmore, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy, 2011). Instagram, and social media more generally, are important spaces enabling these ongoing interactions through communicative activity and social production of cultural goods, while at the same time facilitating feedback and targeting through heightened surveillance and data-mining capabilities.

This active, multi-layered view of consumption meshes with the concept of "prosumption," in which consumers are seen as producing part of the product that they consume (Kotler, 1986). This term suggests that the conceptual distinction between production and consumption has always been overstated, as "consumers" have always engaged to varying degrees in the work of their own consumption, producing value through their associated practices, e.g. farmers consuming their produce, diners bussing their own tables, or home-owners doing their own repairs or renovations (Ritzer, 2010; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). As the economy has taken on a post-industrial, symbolic, and service-oriented character, cultural and social practices have become more often subject to capture by economic forces through mediatization and the consumption of digital media. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Internet, where large corporations (e.g. Google, Facebook, Yahoo, Amazon, and their numerous advertisers or affiliates) actively harness the motivation to 'prosume' in the form of online communities, blogs, product reviews, personal profiles, home videos, photographs, and more. Digital computing, high-speed information networks, and participatory "Web 2.0" software platforms thus represent the foundation of a new "means of prosumption," exemplified by user-generated content becoming the central source of value and dynamism for many online businesses (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Such prosumer activities generate profit or competitive advantage for companies through voluntary, typically unpaid labor that blurs the distinction between work and leisure time.

This brings up a recurring issue in media studies. Some see the "network society" and its socio-technical affordances as patterning a revolutionary new mode of economic relations and social organization that has potential to be more egalitarian compared to past industrial models (Benkler, 2007; Shirky, 2009). On the other hand are those who argue that it represents the continuity, and indeed expansion, of capitalist exploitation and alienation (Dean, 2010a; Fuchs, 2009a). In this latter camp are some critical theorists who argue that, through the kind of 'prosumption' enabled by new digital media, all of human creativity has been captured by the logic of capital (Fuchs, 2009b). This echoes earlier arguments that, in post-industrial society, "all domains of social life – education, consumption, information, etc. – are being more and more integrated into what used to be called production factors," (Touraine, 1974, p. 5). These earlier critics of information society or post-industrial society saw the problem within a monopolized mass media environment, and therefore as one of struggle over control of media and

culture. The solution was seen as greater control over creativity, partly through advancing self-determination over identity and culture as a way to counter-act the alienation of the modern cultural economy (Debord, 1994; Touraine, 1974). Arguably today's shifts towards a more fragmented, open, participatory media environment seem, on the surface, to have gone a long way toward answering these critiques. However, their message about the underlying dynamic of alienation and capitalist control in the fusion of media, culture, and economy still remains relevant and demands a new analysis of its role, especially in a new media environment where technology is by and large uncritically accepted as 'revolutionary,' 'democratizing,' and 'progressive.' Non-stop flows of reflexive, participatory communication may end up having similar effects as the old centralized "regime of control." While new media are indeed disruptive and provide promising potential for democratization and empowerment, such outcomes are not simply technologically determined. As Dean argues, "we can make and be our own spectacles–and this is much more entertaining. [...] Networked, participatory spectacles let us stage and perform our own entrapment," (2010, p. 111). The critical portions of the analysis that follows seek to illuminate the workings of prosumer-centered social media such that democratizing, liberatory outcomes are not taken for granted as embedded in 'social' platforms, or reduced to the simplistic ability to 'share' more efficiently, but rather understood as aims to be guarded, refined, and continually sought after.

2.2 A PRACTICE ORIENTED APPROACH

Traditional research on consumption is often critiqued for focusing too much on self-conscious action, personal identity construction, individual psychology, and the consumer as either a rational "product chooser" with highly developed individual preferences or, conversely, an easily manipulated "dupe" mechanically emulating the elite and buying into advertising messages (Bianchi, 2007; Campbell, 1987; Gronow & Warde, 2001). Without discounting the importance of internal and individual processes, or the role of class and aspiration, the more recent turn towards practice-based consumer studies provides a more fruitful perspective for analysis as it expands and reframes the definition of consumption in a way that is more accommodating to the study of co-creative, "prosumptive" processes. That is, a practice centered approach

accounts for the dynamics of individuals, communities, fields, and objects in relationship to each other, as organized around activities and their trajectories, without over-emphasizing any particular part of the entity that comprises a practice. This approach is helpful in that it comprehends multiple agencies and complex relationships of the sort described by the blurring of production and consumption and the empowerment of consumers who are increasingly networked, informed, and communally engaged with the active process of value co-creation through negotiation of lifestyle, meaning, convention, and technique. This is also useful to avoid painting a one-sided picture of individuality in reflexive modernity, given that acts of prosumption are typically embedded in practices that give them meaning. A practice oriented approach views 'the social' as "a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings," (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001, p. 3). A practice, in this sense, is defined as the "routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood," (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250). In this view, consumption is not itself a practice, but is instead seen as:

> ...a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion. In this view, consumption is not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice. (Warde, 2005, p. 137)

This definition of consumption as a moment within a practice highlights the role of collective understandings, habits, routines, and objects in use, as organizing forces that shape worldviews, dispositions, and ambitions through the expectations and shared orientations they develop (Lury, 2011; Schatzki et al., 2001; Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2008).

These developments in theories of practice also offer a useful update to Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field and capital, which tend to be overly focused on extrinsic motives and competition over stakes and positions within communities or wider fields (Warde, 2004, 2008). Fields, for Bourdieu, are arrays of structuring forces that shape courses of action, while simultaneously acting as arenas for conflict and change. These structuring forces include "institutions, rules, rituals, conventions,

categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy," while the opening for change can be seen in the fact that fields are "also constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field," (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, pp. 21–22). These are useful concepts for examining the role of factors beyond the individual that shape and guide action, as well as the subtle role of strategic position-taking within fields. However, as Warde (2004) points out, Bourdieu's articulation of the connection between practice and field is obscured by his reliance on the notion of habitus, or the "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78) from which practices emerge, as an explanatory complement to the more conscious strategic activity taking place within fields. I take up Warde's critique further and adopt a revised understanding of the relation between field and practice in chapter 5. What I wish to stress here is that taking a more clearly developed understanding of practice as an organizing framework is appealing because it "offers a distinctive perspective, attending less to individual choices and more to the collective development of modes of appropriate conduct in everyday life," and as such it flexibly comprehends a role for "non-instrumentalist notions of conduct, both observing the role of routine on the one hand, and emotion, embodiment and desire on the other," (Warde, 2005, pp. 136, 146).

Thus, practice theories seek to counter-balance overly instrumentalist, cognitivist and expressivist notions of culture by shifting the frame of reference to the organizing role of practices, re-introducing the structuring effects objects in use, the mundane and routine, and the complex relationships within and between communities organized by shared activities. This view does not preclude a communicative, meaning-laden semiotic relationship with objects and consumption, but rather suggests that this is often overblown: "an action can be intelligible without it having an agreed meaning; possessing meaning is not the same as constituting a message; and receiving a message does not entail that there was an intention to send that message," and, moreover, "most action is not directed towards communicating with others but towards the fulfillment of self-regarding purposive projects," (Warde, 2005, p. 147). With these theoretical parameters in place, this thesis seeks to describe networked mobile imaging practice through an exploration of Instagram. Further, it builds on practice theory by attempting to understand the interrelationship between practices, in terms of the practice of

networked imaging and its effect on the practices that are imaged, and vice versa. A practice approach also helps to analyze and situate the production and consumption of images within the wider debate surrounding what it means to prosume in practice, and what it is to be a prosumer.

3. Methodology
3.1 Researching Mediated Practices

Informed by the theoretical engagements described above, I sought to design a research project that would capture the relationship between the practice of networked imaging and other everyday practices, focusing specifically on moments of consumption and identity work. In using the term 'practice' I do not simply mean the action of taking a photo and sharing it, but rather the totality of "performances, shaped by and constitutive of the complex relations––of materials, knowledge, norms, meanings, and so on––which comprise the practice-as-entity," (Shove et al., 2008, p. 13). Practice theorists take issue with what they see as a preoccupation with cognitive processes, semiotics, and self-conscious identity construction, which obscures the important ordering role of things in use, routines, and practices. As such, I have sought to find a balance between these perspectives that accounts for multiple agents and their impacts on networked mobile imaging. This interplay is particularly important to account for in studies of technology, where the underlying hardware and software affordances are easily overlooked, or, conversely, overdetermined. I therefore sought to tease out the relationship between what people are actually doing with Instagram, how they are incorporating it into the structure of existing practices or creating new practices, while simultaneously accounting for the way the technical systems and material objects involved guide and shape the kinds of actions that can take place.

The capabilities enabled by mobile computing devices have rapidly increased over the past decade, leading to the integration of information flows and network sociality into new spheres of practice. This has lead to a growing adoption of information and communications tools in daily life, moving beyond the image of the computer user situated at a desktop at work or in the home. In light of this, the already overwrought distinction between the 'real' and the 'virtual' is increasingly broken down. This demands a richer, more accurate multi-dimensional approach to understanding the relationship between communications technologies and situated practice, but it also poses challenges for research. As the temporal and spatial reach of the network multiplies and fragments into more and more spaces, places, and objects, it becomes more difficult to take into account all of the layered contexts that are implicated in mediated activities. Observation of the physical interface with network technologies is important to understanding how local contexts pattern usage, but at the

same time focusing too narrowly on specific physical contexts risks over-emphasizing "Internet as technology at the expense of Internet as cultural context" (Hine, 2000, p. 60). That is, techniques like shadowing and even participant observation can miss important elements of the intricate communicative cultural activity that takes place online, woven together and made meaningful across diverse tools and platforms by the user's unique practical experiences, ambitions, and competencies.

A practice-centered approach suggests a need to account for the multiple factors that configure practice: communities and conventions, objects and routines, as well as the role of embodied emotion, pleasure and desire. In terms of observational methods, it is difficult to find a vantage point that affords a useful perspective on mobile, mediated practices. This challenges conventional ethnographic practice and its reliance on constructing a bounded field of study. As Hine suggests, "by focusing on sites, locales, and places, we may be missing out on other ways of understanding culture, based on connection, difference, heterogeneity and incoherence," (2000, p. 61). Instagram use, for example, implicates interactivity within physical spatial and temporal contexts, but this is also connected to communication across multiple social network sites, and sometimes blogs and other mediums, with varying degrees of openness to outside observation. Each of these environments have different audiences, modes of interaction, and time scales; they impart different conventions and constraints on communication; and they also permit significant variation and innovation in individual usage. Networked image practice can only be understood if these are taken together and viewed as a tapestry that works together to structure practice both online and offline in multiple 'sites' over time.

3.2 Research Methods

Tracking connections between these multiple engagements with any amount of depth presents a significant challenge as the number of study participants increases. In light of this, a mixture of methods seemed most useful for rapidly building a nuanced picture of what it means to use Instagram in everyday life. Given the limited amount of time allocated to this project, I chose to implement a diary study, complemented by my own participant observation and serendipitous informal interviews and observations. Participants were recruited online through my own social network with messages

posted on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and my own website calling for active users (defined as using Instagram at least once a week to post or view images) to participate in a study. Despite using my own social network, the majority of the 38 individuals who volunteered were unknown to me, signing up as they came across publicly posted messages or word of mouth. Of these 38, ultimately 25 followed through and participated in the diary questionnaires. The participants represent an international group of users from ten countries, ranging from the US and Canada, Sweden and Denmark, to South Korea and Indonesia. The participants were mostly between the ages of 25-29 (12 individuals), and 30-34 (7 individuals), with the remainder consisting of one between 18-24 and three between 35-39. Two chose to submit entries anonymously or did not report an age. The sample was evenly divided between male and female participants. All names have been altered in citations to provide a degree of anonymity.

The diary study format is especially well suited for studies of mediated interaction as it partially solves the problem of "simultaneity and invisibility" inherent in mobile, electronic communications (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 59). The diary format can be structured with a mixture of open and closed questions that build relatively reliable factual knowledge about the conditions in which an image was taken (e.g. others that were present, time, location, context, how it was created, and where it was shared), while also providing room for narrative and interpretations of experiences (e.g. meaning, emotion, motives, mental maps). The latter form of question serves to facilitate "the practitioners' self-reflection" in an attempt to elicit reflexive accounts of how practices, and representations of practice, are constructed (Czarniawska, 2001, p. 264). In order to reduce the amount of work required by participants, I created a template on Google Documents that allowed me to specify questions, instructions, and entry forms for diaries. The same form could be used by any participant accessing a memorable shortened link, while their submissions were automatically privately stored in a Google database spreadsheet only visible to me. Users were asked to report on and interpret their actions and thoughts relating to one specific image that they shared, one shared by another that they "liked," and one that they disliked each day, for six days. Email reminders were sent once each day. On the seventh day, a longer and more generic questionnaire form was sent. In this way, I sought to build a reflexive awareness of practices based on accounts of specific images and events over the first six days,

before engaging in more wide-ranging, 'big-picture' questions about the interplay between imaging, consumption, identity, and practice. This combines established research formats that use photo-diaries and photo-elicitation to aid memory recall in discussing events that occurred in the recent past, and proved very effective for studying Instagram. While some participants were more reflective and engaged than others, the week long duration allowed a fuller picture of practice to emerge even in the more superficial accounts. By and large, responses were thoughtful and self-aware. In the end, the diary study generated over eighty pages of reflections and reports, constituting a significant body of data to interpret and analyze.

In addition to the diary study, I became a regular user of Instagram, and observed the photo streams of those participating in the study to gain another vantage point on their practice. Given the international sample, it proved impossible to combine in-person shadowing or other observational methods on this particular project, though this remains an area that I would like to pursue further in future research. My own experiences, juxtaposed to other's diary accounts and evaluated through discussion with other Instagram users (and non-users, for greater perspective), proved invaluable in making connections between wider social theory and relevant aspects of practice, while bringing up new questions along the way. As O'Dell and Willim (2011) remind us, the ethnographic project is one of composition guided by choices made by the researcher:

> ...out of a multitude of bits and pieces – which are more or less consciously coproduced in collaboration with informants, and through confrontation with various phenomena and experiences – that are not 'naturally' connected, but which have to be linked together by the ethnographer. (p. 31)

Wilk (2011) goes further in this direction, emphasizing the disorderly, always-on nature of ethnographic practice that defies simple boundaries like "office," "the field," "home," or rigid linear processes of "question-research-answer:"

> Ethnography cannot be found in the practice of fieldwork, but in the attitude and values one brings to many different kinds of work. The visible techniques of asking, answering, recording are much less important than the hidden technologies of distancing, re-learning, seeing the commonplace as unusual,

> finding telling details and gaps, an awareness of qualities and categories in
> addition to numbers and things. (p. 23)

It was this process of making connections, and evaluating my own experience, emotion, and interpretations, in light of those reported by other participants, that lead me to the theoretical perspectives above, and simultaneously to choices about what to include and exclude in the following analysis. For instance, a core feature on Instagram has been the 'popular page,' where the highest ranked images are collected and displayed. However, I have chosen not to explore this area in the present study given that, for many users, myself included, the popular page plays little role in daily practice. My own experience was confirmed by others' accounts: as one participant put it, "the 'popular' section is always a mystery to me," (Leo, diary entry, February 2012), and another writes "there are users I've encountered who get hundreds of 'likes' for photos I don't understand," (Samantha, diary entry, February 2012).

Throughout this back and forth between auto-ethnographic experience, theoretical engagement, and the experiences of other participants, I have tried to encourage the reflexive co-creation of knowledge. As Davies writes, the research process is "better understood as a process in which interviewer and interviewee are both involved in developing understanding, that is in constructing their knowledge of the social world," (1999, pp. 97–98). I have sought to encourage this in the diary design through the relative freedom given to choose one's own images to discuss in the diaries. This provides space for participants' self-determination in the co-creation of knowledge, rather than an imposition or attempt at justifying arbitrary *a priori* categories and judgments. My own perception was that images of consumption were going to be key to my study, but I left this unsaid and instead made it open to participants to choose whatever images and topics they thought most relevant to discuss. To further this aim, space was also given in the diary template for feedback, criticism, and other contributions that did not seem relevant to any of the specific questions I had asked. Thus, my own experience, coupled with, challenged by, and corroborated within the in-depth diary entries and observations, all serve to inform the following exploration of what it means to use Instagram, and how this new mode of image sharing effects practice, consumption, and identity.

4. Networked Mobile Imaging: Material Culture and Practice

It's tempting to dive directly into the flows of images that make Instagram so compelling, captivating, and at times controversial, but we cannot analyze the content and meaning of images without first taking into account the practices through which the images are produced, circulated, and consumed. Furthermore, we cannot analyze photographic practices without also accounting for the tools that both enable and script their use (Buse, 2010; Pink, 2006). In order to build a more holistic analysis of Instagram, this chapter begins by drawing on the insights of practice theorists in order to analyze what people are actually doing, and how tools, techniques, and routines are implicated. These approaches stress the analysis of things in use and the way in which subjects are constituted through relations with objects (Lury, 2011; Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2008). With this agenda in mind, this chapter introduces and analyzes the material conditions implicated in the production and consumption of Instagram images. To do this, I will look at the smart-phone itself, Instagram and its software features, the produced image as an object in use, and its role in circulation through wider social network sites like Twitter and Facebook. This chapter's technology and object-centered approach is meant to familiarize the reader with Instagram and the social media ecosystem within which it operates, focusing on the role material artefacts play in scripting the experience and practice of image sharing. This groundwork will provide the familiarity needed to move in to the later chapters' analysis of the communal dynamics and wider economic and cultural processes that shape imaging, consumption, and identity work in conjunction with objects in use.

4.1 Photographic Practice in Historical Perspective

Bourdieu's 1965 study of photographic practices among the French peasantry and bourgeoisie can be taken as a historical starting point from which we may see how far Instagram use diverges from traditional amateur photographic practice. In Bourdieu's study, the aesthetic values and practice of photography emerge as primarily centered around the reproduction and social integration of the family, and of the family's position within wider social categories, of which Bourdieu focuses primarily on class. As such, mainstream photographic practice has often followed socially approved scripts and conventions attuned to one's position in society, dictating what must be

photographed (Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1996). This domestic practice has generally taken the form of marking festive, extraordinary or ceremonial events, meaning that mainstream photographic practice was necessarily "limited to a few occasions and a few objects" and thus could "only be intermittent and relatively rare," (Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1996, pp. 31–32).

Elizabeth Shove, reviewing literature on photographic practice, reiterates this historical view, pointing out that "despite the infinite variety of possible photographic subjects, family albums depict memorable events, holidays, and moments of happiness; representations of sadness, routine activities or ordinary and familiar locations are rare," (Shove et al., 2008, p. 73). Indeed, with traditional photographic practice, especially prior to digital photography, the act of taking the picture was often far more important than the material photograph it produced. The role of photography was effectively to constitute the event it was recording, by marking it as significant and invoking performances of group integration. Instagram incorporates some of this traditional practice, but also introduces very different and novel practices. It is typified by images of the mundane, the routine, and by a high frequency of use often during in-between moments when users are otherwise alone or "doing nothing." The situated, constitutive act of taking a photograph is still significant, but the product is now, as I will argue below, even more important as a tool for circulation within online social networks. As such, Instagram, and networked imaging more generally, represents a significant innovation in photographic practice.

In advancing this argument, I break with Bourdieu's highly structured view of photographic practice as it fails to account fully for how objects can act upon practice by enabling and limiting certain behaviors, which in turn help shape values, needs and ambitions (Latour, 2007; Shove et al., 2008). In Bourdieu's study, the 'scripts' by which photographic practices unfold are inscribed by the structuring forces of class, and barely, if at all, in the actual use of the material objects involved in photography. While new technology alone does not deterministically lead to social practice, it surely has a greater effect than Bourdieu admits, when, for instance, he writes "the aesthetic quality, not to mention the technique, of the picture produced and the modality of practice, cannot be deduced from the qualities of the camera, its possibilities or limitations," (Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1996, p. 32). While Bourdieu's point emphasizing the role of

social convention and structuring forces in both motivating and self-limiting photographic practice is well taken, it would nonetheless be an oversight to talk about the images produced through Instagram without accounting for the way in which they are produced, and how they are made meaningful through practices that are patterned by very specific networks of enabling technologies (Pink, 2006). These technologies interact with practices, photographic and beyond, to organize new routines and new ways of being in the world.

4.2 Smart Phones and Documentation of the Everyday

The first camera phone was introduced in 2001 by Sharp, followed closely by Nokia, in a trend that would eventually make cameras a key selling point in the industry's quest to drive new sales of handsets in a saturated market. This represented an entirely new class of photographic device – one for which communication was the primary purpose, and photography was secondary (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). Early cameras were by and large sold cheaply by companies that used the cost of film and processing as sources of profit. In the price of film and processing, there was a real cost and scarcity associated with making a picture, reinforcing the mode of practice wherein photography was largely an occasional activity centered around exceptional events (Buse, 2010). Camera phones, on the other hand, emerge from the electronic telecommunications industry, where profits come from the monetization of metered digital bandwidth. The images produced on mobile phones are digitized, and thus incur little or no cost or scarcity in production or reproduction on a mass scale. This material and economic environment encourages and facilitates the development of tools for communicating in new situations, and on a much greater scale. Since the early camera phone, new advances in so-called "smartphones" have added many new capabilities to mobile phones, with important consequences for photographic practice.

A smartphone, in colloquial usage, generally refers to a handheld phone with a computer processor capable of running e-mail software, and the ability to connect to the internet wirelessly. More recently, the term has become synonymous with multi-function touch-screen phones, like Apple's iPhone, that have the ability to run a wide range of advanced third-party software at little cost. These phones also feature advanced hardware that includes high-resolution cameras facing both the front and rear of the phone, global positioning system (GPS) satellite receivers, as well as support for

WiFi and high-speed broadband cellular networks. These 'convergent' devices are essentially highly capable mobile computers with advanced multimedia tools, and have ushered in a rapidly growing, and highly innovative market for mobile, networked software products and services typically referred to as the 'mobile' web. All of this is rapidly evolving the material and cultural meaning of personal computing, moving the collective experience of networked information and communications access away from the traditional home-based desktop computer into new socio-spatial contexts with greater mobility, and deeper integration into the personal and ephemeral spaces of daily life (Berg, 2011).

Mobility, multi-functionality, and always-on internet connectivity are the defining features of the smartphone and the emergent 'mobile web.' As opposed to desktop and laptop computers, whose names denote their place-centeredness, smartphones tend to reside on one's person, being hand-held and pocketable. This material quality allows the phone to insinuate itself into moments of daily routine that, for a larger device, would be too cumbersome. What's more, the phone is employed for so many commonplace tasks, from text messaging to checking map directions, to playing video games, that its presence is a given in many social situations where a dedicated camera would draw unwanted attention or judgment. It takes very little effort and minimal disruption to capture a moment or surreptitiously angle the camera for a shot when a subject presents itself, even in the midst of other daily activities that take place through the phone. This constant personal tie to one's mobile device and its wider social ubiquity is hard to exaggerate: for at least one third of smartphone users worldwide, the device is with them and being used to access the internet from the moment they wake in bed in the morning, to the time they lay in bed preparing to sleep at night (Ericsson, 2011). This was reflected in my own research, as a significant number of participants noted that they checked Instagram multiple times throughout the day, e.g.:

> IG [Instagram] is the first thing I do in my bed after I wake up and the last one before I go to sleep. I'd hardly sit on the toilet without checking IG. It's scary! :D (Jerry, diary entry, February 2012)

> I check instagram everyday in the morning, this is when most of the images are in my timeline because of the time zone difference. Because most of my followers are overseas. I usually check the second time around noon or afternoon and

again in the evening. (Alisha, diary entry, February 2012)

This routine of constant "checking in," or looking for updates, is characteristic of smartphone use, especially for those using social network sites with micro-blog features, like Twitter and Facebook's newsfeed (Ericsson, 2011). In order to stay abreast of evolving and spontaneous conversations, new images, and "likes," one must refresh and monitor the feed throughout the day. These brief 'check ins' tend to fill the interstitial moments of daily life as a means of "killing time" while waiting in line, commuting, or transitioning from one task to another. As Instagram has become increasingly popular, these moments are more often engaged with and shared visually – as posts on Instagram, and often as links or embedded images shared on Twitter and Facebook. Far from "doing nothing," the way we occupy, ritualize, and dramatize these mundane micro-moments is culturally shaped, and hints at the taken for granted ways that we order and orient everyday life (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010). The following examples illustrate how the phone-camera fills moments of boredom and in-betweenness by composing, arranging, framing, and sharing elements of the experience:

Why did you share this?
True Instamoment! I like to share my coffee passion with others.

Who were you with and what were you doing?
"I was alone and working on my laptop. Wednesday morning. Kids sent to kindergarten, no sounds except birds tweeting, nice sun rays for the first time in a week or so and a great cup of coffee."

Did you move things?
"I moved the range server and the cup to get the sun rays and the mirroring from the table to encapsulate the mood I was in."
(Dan, diary entry, February 2012)

Figure 2. Composition of morning coffee and server, with window reflection.

Why did you share this?
"I shared this photo because I've been diligently training indoors this winter, and I love the color of my bar tape over the weathered hardwood floor of my apartment."

Who were you with and what were you doing?
"I was by myself, riding the bike (on my trainer) this afternoon in my apartment."

Did you move things?
"I moved back and tried to best frame the floor inside the bars without capturing anything that's lying on the floor."

What do you think other people think when they see this image?
"They will realize I live in a cold climate (Canada). It's "Winter Riding" and you can tell I'm just cruising in a room."

Did sharing the photo change the way you would normally do things?
"No -- just an idea I had while riding the bike and listening to music. Riding indoors, without scenery can get boring."

What kind of response did the image get from people - both inside and outside Instagram?
"Nothing yet! I wanted to take this one for myself, if others like it, great!"

(Rudy, diary entry, February 2012)

Figure 3. Taped Bicycle handle bars juxtaposed with wood floor.

Additionally, Instagram allows images to be imported that have been taken with the phone's built-in camera program, allowing one to post photos taken earlier, or to take a number of photos and then select among them for editing and sharing through the app. This editing, selecting, and sharing process also tends to take place during uneventful moments as a way to occupy time. In the following example, Laura has taken a picture while walking alone from the bus stop to her office in the morning. She slowed her walk because a woman in a red coat caught her eye as worthy of a photograph. She later took time over a coffee break to creatively edit and share the image. Her editing process is described below:

"I took it on iPhone 4. First I cropped it with cameraplus to get it to a square. I also applied the HDR effect to it in camera+. Then I imported it into colorsplash and removed all the colour except the girl and her red coat. Then I reimported into camera+ and applied the Magic Hour effect to make the background less grey and more sepia."

"I only took the photo so I could share it. I enjoy creating interesting images and sharing them with the Instagram community. I wouldn't have taken this picture otherwise as it has no other meaning to me except creative expression on that forum," (Laura, diary entry, February 2012).

Figure 4. A red jacket, spotted during commute, later manipulated for effect.

The two examples above exemplify the way in which the always-there, always-on, always-connected materiality of the smartphone allows it to become ingrained in the routines and mundane moments of daily life – filling time with rituals of image-making, image based status updating, commenting, and instantaneous sharing on social network sites. These in between moments are typically framed to share one's current activities or state of mind using a combination of imagery and short text captions. As Rudy put it, his composition of the bicycle and floor was a "fairly typical snap of 'something I'm digging/doing right now," (Diary entry, February 2012). In Dan's example, he has finished one major task for the morning by sending the kids off to school, and is now setting to work at home on his laptop, having just made coffee. Instagram frequently insinuates itself into these kinds of moments, when one is in transition, ritually marking the end or beginning of an activity with an image and a short caption of evaluation or anticipation. These images are conventionally taken before beginning an activity, when the aesthetic qualities are unspoiled. Alternately, as Rudy's example indicates, efforts are made to compose a scene that idealizes the moment by cropping or removing distracting objects, like the things on the floor he made sure not to represent in his image of indoor cycling. As another user describes it, Instagram expands photography to encompass all aspects of daily life:

It tends to improve, or alter, the way I 'see.' This is much like a newspaper columnist who has to file three original ideas per week. All of life becomes 'material,' and pretty soon anything that happens to you can end up being fodder for published work. (Michel, diary entry, February 2012).

This goes against traditional conventions dictating what is photographable, opening up new spaces, objects, rhythms, uses and meanings for image making.

4.3 Instagram Filters and Software Affordances

Although the material features of smartphones play a key role in facilitating the photography of the mundane and routine, it was Instagram, preceded by the similar app Hipstamatic, which lead to the mainstreaming of this practice. Hipstamatic, for a small fee, was the one of the first to introduce photographic filters and square-framed images mimicking vintage film cameras, but Instagram was released for free and has grown far more rapidly. Prior to these imaging apps, phones with cameras had been used in similar ways, but the images were notoriously low resolution, with poor quality exposure, color, and contrast. As a result, an image generally had to meet some other criteria to merit sharing, e.g. humorous content, newsworthy, or special relevance to some individual or group. The image filters in Instagram work to assuage these quality limitations. Some filters automatically reduce brightness and contrast while adding a warm or cool hue, which effectively brings out detail in an overexposed image and masks defects that occur with low quality images. Other filters compensate for the phone camera's small sensors, which tend to create dark, grainy images in poor lighting conditions. Instagram's editing interface also has two blurring tools that mimic the depth-of-field created by wide-aperture, or tilt-shift lenses on traditional cameras. These enable a photographer to selectively focus on a subject within the image, or to blur out portions of the image that detract from its intended interpretation. In conjunction with short text captions, these features afford a great deal of communicative ability involving little time or effort. These image processing features further enable the extension of photographic practice by reducing the threshold of competence required to produce appealing images with what were hitherto expensive, professional, and difficult to master effects.

Beyond its image editing features, Instagram is a fully fledged mobile "social network site" (boyd & Ellison, 2007; but see Beer, 2008 for a constructive critique of this term). Its software includes a profile page that displays a short caption about the user, and all of the user's photographs arranged in a gallery. Creating an account allows one to "follow" other users, whose images are then aggregated and updated live on a "feed." This process is made easier by using a feature that finds friends based on existing contacts from Twitter and Facebook, recreating one's social networks on Instagram. The application also offers the ability to press a button indicating that they "like" an image, which is then publicly displayed under the image. "Likes" are also broadcast to followers, providing a way for individuals to connect with and see what one another find interesting or entertaining. Additionally, Instagram supports "hashtag" folk taxonomies, or classifications, that are created and evolve without hierarchical control. A user may create as many hashtags as they wish by adding a "#" sign in front of a word in the image caption, which then becomes a clickable link that takes you to a gallery showing all other images with the same tag. Additionally, hashtags are easily searched for within the application. These social networking features are subject to gaming, promotional effort, and hidden interpretive work, as seen in the example below.

Please describe the image briefly:
"This is a picture of a cat I crocheted for a friend of mine"

Why did you share this?
"I follow, and am followed by, quite a few people who also make these amigurumi crochet animals and other crafts so its nice to share with them…"

Who were you with and what were you doing?
"At home watching TV by myself and noticed the crocheted animal sat on the TV stand and realised I hadn't photographed it yet"

Figure 5. A crocheted animal, tagged #cat #amigurumi #handmade #crafts #crochet, which received 29 likes.

Did you have any special strategy for sharing this image?
"I always use the hashtags #crochet and #amigurumi for these posts as lots of people use these when posting these types of crafts and it's a good way to share with like minded people. I often look at those hashtags to find new people to follow too.

I also posted this pic on twitter but not directly from Instagram as I wanted the pic to show up on my twitter post rather than just a link - I think people are less likely to follow

the link."

Did sharing this photo add to, or in some way affect your
experience of the event or object in the image?
"Yes - got nice comments on twitter and some
Likes and comments on Instagram which felt nice! Also the
person I made it for is also on twitter and her and our
mutual friends commented on it which is nice."

What kind of response did the image get from people -
both inside and outside Instagram?
"13 likes and a comment on Instagram and 4 replies on
twitter. It's nice to have my handiwork appreciated, that's
why I share it."

(Laura, diary entry, February 2012)

Instagram's open and public nature (private profiles are an option rarely used) is another factor that makes it more likely to be used as a way to connect with or monitor wider practice communities beyond immediate friends, family, and casual acquaintances. The active and potentially embarrassing moment of a "friend request," which is the norm on Facebook and traditional social network sites, is replaced by the more passive option to "follow" anyone who is posting public photos. This is very similar to Twitter's broadcaster and subscriber mode of interaction. Indeed, many research participants mentioned that they sought out new users to follow based on hashtags or the curatorial "likes" shared by people they were already following. "Likes" can also be employed strategically as a means of gaining visibility and making ties, as a "like" results in a notification to the original image poster with a link back to the person who "liked" the image. For example, a participant in this study who maintained a blog dedicated to food photography "liked" an image from another well known photographer, writing that "I hoped she would notice me and start following me back," (Lima, diary entry, February 2012).

One may also very easily post Instagram images to other social network sites, like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, as a simple step within Instagram's posting process. This feature further extends photographic practice beyond Instagram by enlisting users of other platforms as audiences. This outbound practice of sharing is so widespread that at least half a million images are shared from Instagram users to their Facebook pages every day (Van Grove, 2012). This widens the social impact of mobile image practice,

meaning that far more than Instagram's 80+ million users are engaged in the act of viewing, commenting on, or otherwise interacting with the images produced. A measure of this impact can be made by the fact that Instagram's website receives at least 300 million views each month, even though its pages are little more than place-holders used to host images for viewing by those outside the Instagram mobile app ecosystem (Taylor, 2012).

The role of the user interface also exhibits a structuring effect on practice. Image posts exist within a chronologically ordered feed of individual images. This is the primary way in which one engages with Instagram, checking for updates, "liking" or commenting on newly posted images. Participation in these exchanges hinges on the continual submission of new images in order to renew the space and pretext for interaction (a comment box, a like button, and an option to follow). When one's interactions are primarily mediated by the contribution of imagery, the image-as-hypermedia object becomes one's presence. Posting infrequently amounts to absence, and becomes an existential threat, particularly within communities of practice that are electronically mediated and distributed across time and space. To maintain this presence, one must continually post in order not to be washed away by other's posts, drifting beyond the horizon of their follower's collective attention. The need for images structures practice such that one begins to look for images to create within daily life.

For the most dedicated and calculating users, this becomes a habitual consciousness of global time zones, rhythms of work, leisure, and rest, and their related "prime-times" for posting with the maximum potential for attention (Jerry, diary entry, February 2012). For more average users, this still implies a need to "keep it alive" or "maintain a presence" by posting fresh content (Deaton, diary entry, February 2012). This behavior becomes routinized and ritualized such that the extension of the "photographable" into mundane daily life creates habits that demand that certain things must be photographed. The juxtaposition of one's images and other's also invites comparison, competition, imagination, and self-reflection. This need for images to share reshapes the way users perform routines, engage with objects in their surroundings, and visually encounter daily life, even for relatively infrequent users like Nathan:

> "Often the fact that I use Instagram will trigger a photo opportunity, I will see
> something and think 'that would be a cool image to share,' […] looking back I

think this happens an awful lot and I would say probably 70-80% of the photos on Instagram I would not have taken if I didn't have Instagram." (Nathan, diary entry, February 2012)

Taken as a whole, the material qualities of the phone and the network help to structure a kind of photographic practice that is wholly different from that which has existed in the mainstream for much of the 20th century.

4.4 Implications: New Routines, Conventions, and Competencies

As the discussion above elaborates, it is through the material culture and practice of networked photography that distant rhythms and conventions enter one's daily routine and become embodied habits. The smartphone and the daily use of Instagram compels users to act as hybrids, seeing themselves and their worlds as if through the lens of the camera, and hence with the eyes of their mediated audiences' varying interests, judgments, and rules of conduct. Whereas early amateur photographic practice was patterned by family life and its performances as a unit within wider society, mobile-networked photography tends to serve as a vehicle for the integration of individuals in diverse communities of practice. I have argued that this practice has become widespread, in part, by numerous technological affordances that script behavior and construct subjectivity around the routine production of imagery. These developments are not purely technologically determined, but rather ride on a wave of changes in the nature of modernity, economic production, consumer culture, and identity. The de-traditionalization and individualization of modern society has heightened the role of lifestyle as a primary reference point for the construction of identity (Giddens, 1991; Lash & Urry, 1994; Lury, 2011). The impact of this is observed in the importance of communities of practice as audiences for mobile, networked photographic practice. Indeed, communities of practice are intimately bound up in the construction of lifestyle, vis-à-vis the development of taste, identity, hobbies, and more, which are all mediated through consumer culture and processes of consumption. Image practice thus emerges as an important entry point into an analysis of the construction of identity, and the meaning and practice of consumption, within late-modern capitalist societies.

5. Imaging and Imagining Consumption: Drive, Desire, and Disillusionment

One of Instagram's defining uses is the routine visual documentation and networked performance of consumption. This kind of communication does not emerge solely from Instagram, but it is amplified and mainstreamed by the material and socio-technical features discussed in the preceding chapter. The practice of sharing activities and thoughts grows out of the wider stream-of-consciousness style of microblogging services like Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook's newsfeed. On these platforms, brief status updates are used to mass-communicate current activities, locations, and often statements of mood or desire. Instagram makes it easy to include a link to an image of whatever it is you're doing, seeing, or thinking about, and many users can be seen to do this primarily during moments of consumption.

A practice based approach that sees consumption as a process that occurs within the logic of practice implicates three avenues of inquiry that I will pursue in this chapter analyzing the impact of networked mobile imaging on the nature of consumption, and the blurring of production and consumption. First, practices rely on things in use, and these objects can, in turn, be actants themselves, affording certain uses and capabilities, circumscribing others, and scripting the trajectory of one's practice (Shove et al., 2008). In terms of networked imaging, the situations in which the images are produced are loaded with object interactions as they are composed, cropped, framed, and edited to create the desired scene. These object interactions reflect the contours of the experience economy, with its emphasis on constructions of authenticity, the collection of memorabilia, and expressions of lifestyle. I explore the way imaging affects the object-oriented experience and prosumption of these consumptive moments. Secondly, the practices that are documented and shared often exist within wider communities, both local and imagined, through which conventions and competencies are established or contested. Conventions guide action and provide the means by which an individual's performances may be evaluated and thus positioned within the field of practice. The image sharing process introduces new ways of interacting within these communities, and configures new types of consumptive performances and group dynamics. Finally, for many Instagram users, taking and sharing photos is simply a fun way to pass the time when they would otherwise be doing nothing. Far from implying that Instagram is

trivial, this calls for an analysis of how the practice is embodied, driven by emotion, desire, and the pursuit of pleasurable stimuli. As such, I adapt Colin Campbell's theory of modern hedonism to explicate the workings of pleasure and imagination in Instagram use. These insights focus attention on the multiple agencies that enable, pattern, and constrain consumer action, providing the basis for a more nuanced understanding of networked mobile imaging and its role in processes of consumption.

5.1 Imaging and Object Relations: Framing, Composition, and Performance Props

As discussed in the prior chapter, the material qualities of networked mobile imaging create a need for images that insinuates itself into other practices. The need to construct hypermediated "presence" encourages an active and creative search for the photographable and shareable, especially within consumptive moments of appreciation or appropriation. This drive coincides with a consumer culture that is more experiential, memorable, customizable, and performative, along with consumer goods and services that often come loaded with narrative and symbolic meaning. All of this increasingly gives life a spectacular character, privileging representational consumption over direct experience. The ways in which self, identity, or "being" are enacted become more and more tied to "having" possessions, and "all effective 'having' must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d'être from appearances," (Debord, 1994, p. 16). Today, rather than watching TV or reading the newspaper, millions "tune in" to see what their online "followers" are doing, or to broadcast their own updates. Echoing Debord's analysis of an earlier media environment, Giddens argues that, as the "project of self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life [...] appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption come actually to outweigh the use-values of the goods and services in question themselves," (Giddens, 1991, p. 198). Much has been written on the topic, but what does the "artificial framing" and the work of appearance making look like in everyday life, and how does it function in practice?

Within Instagram, the participatory broadcasting of everyday life manifests itself in the search for appearances and the pervasive prosumption of the representational through performance and the use of props. Armed with a networked camera linked to social network sites, the full range of material qualities within any given moment in

practice are available as props for displays of having, being, or doing. This is illustrated in many popular accounts of Instagram:

> "I was out with friends recently, looking on as one of them stared down her nose at her iPhone the entire night, taking shots of her dinner plate, her drink, her boyfriend, the pendant light that hung above our table. She Instagrammed them (yes, 'Instagram' is widely accepted as a verb) and added them to her photo feed in minutes. Voila, her mundane night out was the stuff of legend. Or at least, the stuff of a fabulous Instagram feed." (Goulet, 2012)

Instagram expands the realm of things that are consciously consumed, as well as the way they are consumed, offering the means by which appearances may be easily created, captured, shared, and revisited. If, as practice theorists contend, consumption is a moment in every practice, then networked imaging increases the frequency of such moments, while lengthening their duration. As in the example, one directly consumes (or prosumes) a restaurant dinner by selecting the venue, choosing from a menu, eating the meal, participating in companionship and conversation with friends, appreciating the ambience, service, and decor of the restaurant, and so on. Now, however, one also looks for opportunities to create images of that moment, and begins to shape the moment so as to be imaged. The result of this work is a digital object that is representationally prosumed in the moment, and in moments of reflection later on, by means of digitally archived images and comments. The experience is also available for consumption by others through instantaneous online sharing. This adds a new external input to the situation through their comments and feedback. I explore this below in terms of the act of framing scenes, and the work of manipulating objects through composition.

Framing describes the way in which the photographer visually conveys meaning by guiding the image-viewer's eye through the scene to the intended subject, cropping, choosing perspective, directing focus, and showing (or hiding) context. Framing is thus inherently communicative, as well as situationally constructive. Instagram images typically frame a scene so as to represent the experience from a first-person perspective, and often meticulously manipulate this perspective to highlight the objects consumed in order to construct or conform to a culturally situated narrative or ideal type (i.e. a "relaxing vacation," an "exciting job with perks," a "VIP experience"). For

example, one participant shared an image of her laptop with a television show playing, placed in front of a large screen computer monitor with an image editing program displaying graphic design work in progress. About this, she writes:

> "I just like sharing pieces of how I work with others. […] I wanted to show a glimpse into my freelance life. […] I think it shows that I like to work and have fun at the same time. […] *It reminds me to have fun while working.*"
>
> (Pernilla, diary entry, February 2012, emphasis added)
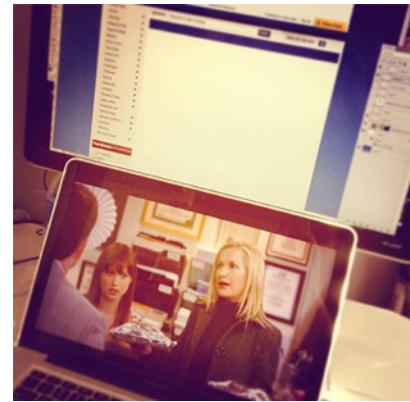
Figure 6. Television show on laptop placed next to larger monitor displaying graphic design work in progress.

The act of framing effectively forces the photographer to consider and construct their own performance and experience in the process, assessing what is ideal, what is worth sharing, what is relevant or irrelevant, what it can mean, to whom, and why. Furthermore, it forces one to consider the meaning and cohesion of the objects juxtaposed, the narratives or ideas they convey and how this will be variously interpreted by different audiences. This reflexive activity encourages users to seek out scenes to perform in the midst of ordinary activities, which may lead to practices that seek to conform very closely to conventional ideals, or to unconventional performances that creatively interact with expectations and cultural norms. Several research participants describe this drive to engage with their practices in a new way:

> I've always been a walker, but Instagram has helped me to enjoy my walks even more. I pay attention to detail and I'm eager to find something beautiful to share with my Instagram friends. (Samantha, diary entry, February 2012)
>
> At some places I feel like I have to take a picture first, not just doing what I was supposed to do. For example at a cafe, I have to take the picture of the nice latte art first, before I drink, maybe putting the cup at another spot than I am actually sitting. (Alisha, diary entry February 2012)

> Minor happenings like coffee breaks or everyday things can get more of a
> meaning if I can find a good way to share it. I share a lot of memories like that,
> coffee cups, newspapers, etc. (Stephen, diary entry, February 2012)

> Now when I travel, taking a walk or go anywhere I haven't been before, I'm
> always thinking about taking a picture there so I'd have something new, unusual
> in my feed, to surprise my followers and have more varied images. [...] And now,
> of course, being in any new place makes me think about "framing" and light and I
> deliberately take positions and walk around in a way to take a great shot and
> experience the place or thing in the best way. Put it in context: a shot of a
> monumental building doesn't impress without having people around. So I'm
> searching for views so I can experience these things in such a way. (Jerry, diary
> entry, February 2012)

These examples illustrate how "seeing photographically" (Lury, 1998) reshapes practice
and relations with objects and spaces to emphasize the prosumption of appearances.
Framing invests practice with an aesthetic reflexivity that imagines itself as if in a
mirror, and then poses or shifts the view to highlight that which is pleasing, desired, or
otherwise stimulating.

Whereas framing encompasses the initial choice of what to share and why,
composition, as I will adapt the term, refers to the selection and manipulation of the
objects within the frame in order to arrange them to produce a desired effect. Instagram
use is striking for the subtle work that takes place to ready a scene before a picture is
captured. For example, at a dinner party I observed the host, who works in marketing
for an alcohol producer, as she carefully framed and composed a performance. In a
flurry of little movements, she arranged the dishes to make all the prepared items
visible within the camera's narrow viewfinder, including decorative objects like a set of
candles, while removing extraneous objects like napkins and extra silverware. In the
midst of this, she nonchalantly turned the wine bottle to obscure the label and, in a
joking voice, said, "can't afford the fancy wine, so let's hide the fact that it's Yellow Tail,"
(Aria, personal communication, March 31, 2012). At the same time, others snapped
their own pictures to share within their own social circles. In this interstitial moment
between producing dinner and consuming it with friends, impressions were managed in
relation to an extra-local audience, and an idealized performance was staged, recorded,

and broadcast online in a matter of moments.

As the example illustrates, consumptive moments are rarely presented unfiltered and untouched. More often what is shared on Instagram are manicured scenes, where brand labels are rotated for maximum exposure and readability on-camera, or hidden to avoid unwanted associations. Objects are ordered, arranged, or overlapped to fit within the perspective of the camera's lens. Items are removed to avoid embarrassment, or brought together to create visual narratives. These and other actions ensure that the audience gets the point of the image, and also helps create a memorable and aesthetically pleasurable appearance. Participants mentioned many examples of this: dirty clothes were removed from the floor in a photograph documenting indoor bicycle training; a boyfriend's hand is brushed aside to avoid spoiling the focus on the ingredients of a dinner being made; a coffee cup was moved to capture a better background view of the café in which it was consumed; a beer was placed next to a homework assignment to tell a story about one's Friday night. More advanced users combine this manipulation with additional image editing tools to create diptychs and triptychs that combine multiple images into one "before and after shot," or to highlight several features of an object or experience. Image making, then, is not merely meant to document, but rather to perform and construct idealized or ritualized moments within practices.

These acts of composition and filtering drive individuals to begin changing the environment around them, especially in the midst of practices, in order to make scenes more photographable. This practice, once established, can filter further upstream in the decision making process. When cooking, for example:

> I start thinking about how it will look before I even make it. To make it Instagram worthy I cook it differently. For example, the ingredients, I don't really need to put it, but I put it for the color's sake." (Chloe, personal communication, July 9th, 2012)

Thus composition encompasses small movements and arrangements of objects *in situ*, but it may also result in a shift in the composure of entire practices in order to maximize their performative impact. This change in behavior is less directed towards one's own immediate pleasurable stimulation in the act of practice, but instead focuses on the

maximization of pleasure and desire in terms of the imagined audience. In this way, pleasure shifts from being primarily derived through direct consumption, and is instead derived from its performance and the contemplation of appearances, both real and potential. In some instances, this may mean that the objectified or mediated performance (that is, the image and the process of making the image) is more pleasurable than the actual moment of consumption. In other cases, this simply adds an additional dimension of pleasurability to everyday practices. This new source of pleasure reconfigures priorities in consumption, expanding the role of the imagined audience in shaping practice.

5.2 The Audience Factor – Fields, Competition, and Communities of Practice

Instagram is simultaneously a social network site and a sharing platform that easily links images and captions to other social networks. This is enabled by Instagram's simple cross-posting feature that allows the user to simply click all the linked social network accounts they would like the image to be shared to. As such, the 'audience' to whom Instagram users perform is multiple and fragmented, both within Instagram and across other platforms. Although a nuanced examination of these complex entanglements is beyond the scope of this thesis, it does seem clear that Instagram shapes a particular way of creating, organizing, and engaging with groups as audiences. For instance, study participants categorized their followers according to typical social groupings, like family, friends, coworkers, and so on, but many primarily conceptualized their followers in terms of groups engaged in shared practices with similar interests. These groupings included "foodies," "coffee lovers," "parrot owners," "street photographers," "software developers," "clothing store employees," and so on, with greater or lesser levels of nuance. As one user put it:

> It feels like I just start finding groups, there is the coffee group, the design group, the printmaking group…that is what interests me most. There are just a few of my real friends using Instagram. So the other people I find, especially the ones with same hobbies and interests, it's nice to see what they do. (Alisha, diary entry, February 2012)

> Although there are certainly overlaps between audiences on social networks,

differences do exist. For instance, contacts defined primarily by external social circumstances, like family membership or past school attendance, rather than presently shared practices, were often referred to as "Facebook friends." This seemed to describe those who wouldn't necessarily understand or appreciate all of the intended meanings or competencies displayed in many of the images shared on Instagram. Images shared with "Facebook friends" were generally those with wider, generic appeal, or a specific recipient in mind, in order to avoid boring or annoying this general audience. This suggests that Instagram, and networked mobile imaging more generally, may provide for a different kind of social environment that privileges the public performance of practice-based identities over other social roles. Furthering this, the stream of images posted by followers in the application provides a template for one's own posts by illustrating clearly what one's followers actively do and find interesting. Followers are often specifically chosen for their overlap with one's own interests, activities, and aspirations either through hashtag searches or shared membership in a community. For those that do not share practices, study participants remarked often that Instagram changed the way they viewed people they already knew from other social contexts (even SNS like Facebook and Twitter), reshaping their perception to account for hidden interests, unique routines, and creative perspectives. In this way, when thinking in terms of mobile image sharing, individuals define themselves, and through the reception of their performances become defined, less by ascribed features and more by their elective interests, practices, and creativity. The image allows a deeper level of expression and a different kind of intimacy or inter-subjective connection with individuals, as the following examples illustrate:

> Twitter is nice and all. But actually seeing how an internet friend spends their day and life makes me feel I know that person on a whole other level. It adds much more than just seeing a piece of text that tells me that they checked in somewhere, etc. (Monet, diary entry, February 2012)

> … it certainly gives me a more well-rounded view of people since they're posting pictures about a whole range of things that I wouldn't have connected them to otherwise. I also like the creative aspect. I'm often surprised by photos of people who I would have never pinpointed as creative… (Samantha, diary entry February 2012)

Instagram thus appears to open up more expressive space for self-reflexive experimentation, described by one participant in terms of a "lack of social freight with the transaction" whereas "Facebook is a social media fraught with expectations, baggage, concern about what others are doing, irritation, etc.," (Peter, diary entry, February 2012). This relative freedom to experiment with self, practice, and community might be one key to Instagram's rapid growth.

The shift toward relating to others based more on what they represent themselves doing in daily life suggests that "lifestyles" become more important as organizing principles. A lifestyle consists of the "more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity," (Giddens, 1991, p. 81). These shared lifestyle groups are best understood as being composed of communities of practice, or groups of people that are in some way engaged in a common activity or pursuit, from a shared profession to a shared hobby. Such groups may exist in closely linked instances, as in a sewing circle or basketball team, but may also extend to more or less imagined communities facilitated by media and communications technologies. Communities of practice play "an important role in forming their members' participation in, and orientation to, the world around them" by providing a logic or framework of conventions, values, goals, and competencies to be attained in order to advance or maintain one's position within the community (Eckert, 2006). What's more, within modern consumer practice one finds that brands, advertising, and products provide much of the common resources from which lifestyles are constructed, modified, and negotiated (Lash & Urry, 1994). The lifestyles and associated communities of practice to which one belongs play a supporting role in patterning the practice of image sharing by providing a short-hand language (of brand names, categories, objects, poses, values, styles, and so on), as well as an audience that understands the mediated situation vis-à-vis the wider field in which it exists. This informed audience can thus situate, "read," and potentially validate one's performance. Thus, images circulated across social network sites serve to integrate and position oneself within communities of practice. Alternatively, they provide the background against which disruptions or innovations in practice may be made. This "ambient awareness" (Thompson, 2008) of extra-local activity and affect constantly produces and reproduces the meaning of "normal" and "average," and thus creates a baseline to which

we evaluate ourselves and our own situations (Meyrowitz, 1985). Such images inspire and spread ideas, subtly synchronizing practical ambitions and conventions through visual dialog and awareness of what others are doing.

This situational awareness is unavoidable, as Instagram embeds users within a constant flow of images emanating from other's daily practices. The networked juxtaposition of life experiences leads naturally to comparison, especially around shared practices, and to an underlying occasional sense of competition, or at least a need to keep up with minimum expectations of adequacy. This is especially true of primarily mediated communities that exist largely online, given that other avenues for collective performance and positioning are rare. When asked whether they feel there is a competitive element to the photographs shared on Instagram, study participants described this in a variety of ways:

> Definitely. It may not be an obvious, loud competitiveness but more of a passive aggressive one. You see pictures of what you want, or want to be, and it gives you motivation to match it and surpass it. You want other people to have the same thoughts you're having while you desire something in their photos when they look at yours. (Yvette, diary entry, February 2012)

> There is definitely a need to post more and more and also styles of photography are influenced by the photos your friends post. (Lima, diary entry, February 2012)

> I've never taken the thought as far as needing to make my life "worth sharing" but I constantly think about needing to make the picture worth sharing. I'm in competition with myself. Does the picture look pretty? Interesting? Sam, there are a lot of photos out there–make sure this one is at least somewhat nice. My life, if anything, may seem quite boring. I drink a lot of tea, go on walks, read, make cards, look at owl photos. I don't expect anyone to be "wowed" by how I live. BUT, it's nice when people appreciate my life and see value or beauty in it. I think that's what I like most about keeping up with Instagram. (Samantha, diary entry February 2012)

> I'm sure that it's there for some people, but not for me. I think Facebook created

more of these feelings for me in 2008-9. I'm at a place in life where I feel really secure with what I have. Though it hasn't been easy, I live a privileged life in terms of where I've traveled, who my friends are, and where I live. There's a lot to be thankful for so I try not to spiral into any self-loathing, I-wish-my-life-was-like-his/her-life modes. (Clementine, diary entry, February 2012)

The subtle competitive element of imaged performance resembles Bourdieu's (1984) concept of fields. Fields are "the always existing, obligatory boundaries of experiential context" (Adams, 2006, p. 514) which may be conceptualized as social arenas (e.g. the fields of education, art, politics, food, etc.) in which individuals and factions jockey for position, struggling over boundaries and definitions of the value of various forms of capital. A field "operates like a game wherein agents adopt strategies in competition with others to gain the stakes" and "the boundaries of the field, and the definition of who populates the field, is a matter of constant struggle," (Warde, 2004, p. 12). This takes the form of expressions of, and struggles over, taste. This view does, however, risk overstating the role of self-interested calculation, while overdetermining the role of rigid class hierarchies in shaping tastes. With these critiques in mind, later scholars have pointed out that, now, through the rise of more reflexive consumption, there is a decline of tradition and more openness to personality and individual expressive decisions. In light of this, "whole areas of lifestyle and consumer choice are freed up and individuals are forced to decide, to take risks, to bear responsibilities, to be actively involved in the construction of their own identities for themselves" (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 61). Warde, for instance, revises Bourdieu's concept of field, emphasizing a more nuanced understanding of the internal structures within practice that affords room for various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, while still allowing for an analysis that accounts for competition: "we might differentiate between long-standing participants and novitiates, theorists and technicians, generalists and specialists, conservatives and radicals, visionaries and followers, the highly knowledgeable and the relatively ignorant, and the professional and the amateur," (Warde, 2005, p. 138).

For the purposes of this discussion, what is important is that practices themselves have varied structures, and may exist within wider structures, i.e. fields, in which individuals accrue various extrinsic benefits from the positions they hold, and through which one's various forms of capital effect capability and status. This is in

contrast to early forms of computer-mediated communication which were primarily anonymous and textual, and could, in some limited senses, be viewed as a level playing field (Reid, 1995). On Instagram, where total anonymity is less common and where visual expressivity takes over, the imaging of practices inescapably positions the individual. This takes place through straightforward expenditure of purely economic capital, as in conspicuous consumption, but also works more subtly through strategic, and inadvertent, displays of social and cultural capital.

Social capital refers to one's "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network" of social ties (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). On Instagram, images can be tagged with those present in the scene so that the image will be seen on other social network sites like Twitter and Facebook. In this way, the image becomes an object of exchange. As Bourdieu notes, "exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the group," (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 52). Instagram, as social network site, makes social ties visible by displaying how many followers one has. Comments and "likes" also play a part in visualizing one's social capital, as likes and comments show who, and how many, approve of an image. Comments attached to an image can also simultaneously reproduce and limit group membership through inside jokes, jargon, or esoteric personal banter. Additionally, images, as hypermedia objects, provide a pretext and invitation for further sociality, such that image sharing can materialize "online" social capital in "offline" settings. One participant describes how posting an image of coffee allowed him to turn it into a coffee break with a friend:

> I have posted a picture of my cup of coffee. At home, making breakfast. It was kind of a rush/quick picture. I wanted to share this picture because it's always so good. Most of the pictures are posted on my Facebook page as well. People will see my love for coffee. It's also an open invitation for friends to get together for a cup of coffee.
>
> No reactions on Instagram, but my Facebook picture did allow me to make an appointment with a friend. (Warren, diary entry, February 2012)

Furthermore, the seemingly banal act of "Liking" disguises what are often actually

highly nuanced responses to the content of images. One user writes about this after seeing that a friend had returned to town:

> [The like] was almost like welcoming him back. He posts very infrequently on Instagram so the like is kind of to acknowledge him and maybe encourage him to post more. Also I hope the like will remind him that we are supposed to be meeting for drinks and is kind of a stick to poke him to remind him hey, I am here. (Nathan, diary entry, February 2012)

Another resource employed in imaging practice is cultural capital, which refers to the "sedimented knowledge and competence required to make distinctions or value judgments," (Lury, 2011, p. 93). Within fields, different groups struggle to increase their cultural capital, and to raise the value of the cultural capital they have, often through struggles over what constitutes legitimate taste. This concept is useful as it highlights the way in which displays of taste are not just reflective of individual personality, but also structured by wider fields and the groups that struggle for a stake within them. Later approaches to cultural capital expand the concept to account for the performative element of tasting, which emerges within the organizing logic of practices. This approach sees that "justifications of good taste are constantly advanced and disputed as people consider the views of others in the community, change their minds, develop their competences, talk about their activity and justify their judgments," ultimately reshaping the notion of taste to emphasize "uncertainty, movement and perpetual learning and clarification," (Warde, 2008, p. 330). In the performances of taste, cultural capital "manifests itself as knowledge, preferences and participation," although "apprehension, knowing what to take cognizance of and what to recognize, rather than knowledge per se, is critical," (Warde, 2008, p. 330).

On Instagram this plays out subtly in every choice about what to frame and how to compose a scene, as the photographer must recognize a scene as photographable in the first place. In light of the importance of embodied knowledge in the performance of taste, those in the middle class with little economic or cultural capital tend to adopt a "learning mode to life," in which they strive to constantly study, and thus embody, "the field of taste, style, and lifestyle," (Featherstone, 2007, p. 88). As the earlier example of the wine label at a dinner party suggests, performances are constantly self-monitored to ensure that they perform the knowledge and preferences that reflect appropriate taste,

or the taste of the groups to which one aspires to belong. In order to make adequate performances, one must have researched what choices to make, developed competencies, and invested other prior effort to ensure that the totality of one's performance is well received by the intended audience. With this nuanced view of cultural capital, what becomes important to the functioning of taste is how individuals "characterize themselves in the face of how another might imagine them to be" (Warde, 2008, p. 330). Instagram and the imagined panoptic eye of the networked mobile device provides a controllable interface between performer and audience, enabling careful, self-conscious micro-management of the Other's impression of oneself.

An office worker might share an image of a fancy business lunch to show off the perks they enjoy, placing themselves and their employer within the structure of their field of business. A software developer at work might post an image of a screen full of code, a beer, and a popcorn bowl to project a certain style of corporate culture and to assert their own professional identity. A dog owner might show off their pet's breed, and show it doing something funny or cute, thus creatively 'consuming' it and demonstrating competence or creativity in their practice. Such seemingly trivial, intrinsically enjoyable displays also subtly position Instagram users within wider communities and fields, whether competing outright over the definition of taste and thus attempting to bolster one's capital and rise in social position, or merely "keeping up appearances" to stay in the game. One study participant illustrates this with a photograph of the outside of a specialty coffee shop in Stockholm, emphasizing that photographic appeal was not his primary goal, but rather that positioning himself and showing off taste was the objective:

> I thought it was nice to get to that café/store and wanted to tell others I was there. […] I realized that signs and other stuff hid the door and that it wasn't too good from a photographic point of view but that wasn't my main objective […] I think it tells that I'm a person who is interested in coffee and knows a place to find it that's not known by too many people. Since I'm not from Stockholm it also tells I'm on a trip. (Stephen, diary entry, February 2012)

Extrinsic benefits and motivators are even more clear in instances that elicit positive comments, or when followers ask for more information. For instance, asking for a recipe after a picture of a meal is posted places the original poster in the position of an

authority and competent practitioner. Likewise, a poster who shares many images from well chosen restaurants may be asked for directions or a review, building their status as an authority and a taste-maker. One might accept the above, but argue that many Instagram posts receive little, if any, feedback and thus little real instrumental value should be attributed to them. However, this view misses the fact that image making itself is a form of communicative interaction, and that a visual, performance-based dialog can be seen to unfold in the rhythm of daily postings, helping to establish an overall impression of an individual and their position within wider fields. What matters above all is not that a comment is made or a like is received, but the simple fact that the performance of taste occurs within the context of an audience that is practically guaranteed to see it in their various social network news feeds.

5.3 Desire, Daydreaming, and Disillusionment

Such instrumental, competitive consideration of performances and their audiences are rarely consciously and laboriously calculated. Rather, they tend to inform decisions without thinking, becoming embodied and implicit in the decision making process, only obvious if a moment of hesitation, the choice to turn a label, crop a shot in a certain way, or "like" an image, is called out and interrogated further. More often, Instagram is experienced simply as something fun, a pleasant way to kill time while 'doing nothing,' or a way to heighten an experience. As it turns out, both intrinsic and extrinsic motives merge in practice. One of the more effective or at least most common ways to hedge one's position within a field of practice is to frame and compose images that provoke emotional responses of admiration, jealousy, and desire, all of which can be pleasurable and intrinsically rewarding for both the photographer and the audience. However, as I will argue below, this heightening of pleasure exists in tension with an underlying threat to satisfaction.

Instagram use reflects wider historical trends in the changing connection between pleasure and consumption. As Bourdieu writes:

> The new logic of the economy rejects the ascetic ethic of production and
> accumulation, based upon abstinence, sobriety, saving, and calculation, in favour
> of a hedonistic morality of consumption, based on credit, spending, and

enjoyment. This economy demands a social world which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their 'standard of living,' their lifestyle, as much as their capacity for production. (1984, p. 310)

Traditional hedonism ties pleasure and satisfaction to discrete activities, valuing experiences for the pleasure they bring, e.g. through acts of eating, drinking, socializing, and so on. Modern hedonism changes this relationship to experience such that it is the pleasure derived, rather than the experience itself, that is valued. In this modern orientation toward pleasure, "the pursuit of pleasure in the abstract is potentially an ever-present possibility, provided that the individual's attention is directed to the skillful manipulation of sensation," (Campbell, 1987, p. 69). Whereas the traditional hedonist seeks to increase the number and variety of pleasurable experiences attained, the modern hedonist seeks pleasure itself:

> ...the primary object is to squeeze as much of the quality of pleasure as one can from all those sensations which one actually experiences during the course of the process of living. All acts are potential 'pleasures' from this perspective, if only they can be approached or undertaken in the right manner. (Campbell, 1987, p. 69)

Campbell, whose creative account of the origin and ethic of modern consumer culture informs this view, points out that this form of hedonism shifts the locus of pleasure from sensation to emotion, driven by the power of emotion to stimulate more intensely than the senses alone. Modernity, then, is seen to have relocated agency over emotion. Having once been conceived as an external force that acts upon an individual from without, emotion is now seen as an internal state arising from within and thus subject to willful techniques of self-control. The modern pursuit of pleasure thus emerges as the self-conscious "willing suspension of disbelief," such that, "through the process of manipulating belief, and thus granting or denying symbols their power, an individual can successfully adjust the nature and intensity of his emotional experience; something which requires a skillful use of the faculty of imagination," (Campbell, 1987, p. 76).

This activity, Campbell argues, is best described as daydreaming, given that "in modern, self-illusory hedonism, the individual is much more an artist of the imagination, someone who takes images from memory or the existing environment, and

rearranges or otherwise improves them in his mind in such a way that they become distinctly pleasing," (1987, p. 78). These imaginative acts are not merely mental games, but are tied to consumer goods and experiences, as "many of the cultural products offered for sale in modern societies are in fact consumed because they serve as aids to the construction of day-dreams," which is not to say that there is no value or pleasure gained in use, but rather that "the greater pleasure is likely to be derived from its open invitation to be used as material for illusory enjoyment," (Campbell, 1987, p. 92). This concept of self-directed daydreaming finds support in writing on the "prosumer" (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), "experience economy" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), as well as value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), in that the consumer is seen to be actively engaged in the prosumption of experiential value on the deepest level, and in the midst of an ever expanding arena of situations beyond the classic view of the marketplace. Such an understanding of the workings of pleasure shares much in common with the practice of framing, composing, and sharing images on Instagram. This particular mode of pleasure seeking is expanded as the mundane or routine practices of daily life are more and more turned into staged, edited, and mediated performances.

Instagram images function in much the same way as Campbell's imaginary daydreams, as they blend visual sensory stimulation with affective narratives to create pleasure. This is aided by the aesthetic quality of their selectively blurred, unnaturally colored, vintage looking filters, paired with images that often narrate the enjoyments and aspirations of the photographer. What's more, the act of framing and composing a scene disrupts practice and creates a space for reflexivity and daydreaming. Many users describe the way this heightens experience, as the two examples highlight below:

> I usually take photos of weird/unique things, food, landscapes, friends and trips. It shows what's important to me and what I enjoy most. To me it makes my life look awesome! And that's why when I look back at them I feel such a sense of satisfaction […] Instagram makes everything more desirable and romantic. There's a higher appeal, a greater attraction. (Kara, diary entry, February 2012)

> …there's the application of emotion via filters, manipulation and even degradation of the image. […] the visually 'analog' nature of these pleasantly distorted photos seems to reintroduce emotion and feeling to the practice of viewing that had been cleansed in many ways by easy digital photography.

(Michel, diary entry, February 2012)

Although Campbell insists that the act of manipulating emotion in self-directed daydreaming is "autonomous" and "covert," the prior discussion of fields and communities of practice makes clear that image sharing is, in part, communally shaped and situated. In this regard, Campbell does give some ground, conceding that "it may well be the case that the activities and attitudes of others exert an influence over which new products become the focus of desire," (1987, p. 91). However, this point is overlooked in Campbell's analysis and must be developed further, below, in order to fully understand the relationship between consumption, practice, and networked mobile image sharing.

The communal element of Instagram is represented most obviously by the photographs shared by one's followers. These images stream down the news feed, offering a voyeuristic window into others' actions, aspirations, and desires, usually framed for a first-person perspective. The effect of such imagery is often the stimulation of imaginative desire in viewers, and indeed many individuals willfully frame and compose images specifically to tie themselves to the subject of desire, as the examples below illustrate:

> I was with my good friend & we were about to eat a quick meal for dinner before heading out to our respective engagements. I moved the camera to the angle I wanted. Prevented myself from devouring my meal & made sure to get the right shot before eating. I first took a picture of an above shot of the entire dish but I like the clarity of detailing with the close up & decided to change it to a somewhat macro lens shot. *It made me happier to be eating something that could potentially make someone else want it.* (Kara, diary entry, February 2012, emphasis added)

> Sharing this photo made my experience a little bit better, I had a 'HAHA' moment where I felt like yeah I'm gonna make my friends a little jealous. (Umi, diary entry, February 2012)

Creating jealousy and envy are strategies that seem tailored to hedging one's position within practice communities and wider fields. It is a kind of impression management, and as such must typically conform to, or at least react to, the conventions and

ambitions scripted by the practice. On the other hand, such images are also enjoyable, and offer pleasurable inspiration for daydreaming on the part of the image maker and the image viewer. As Campbell describes it, "whatever one experiences in reality it is possible to 'adjust' in imagination so as to make appear more pleasurable; thus the illusion is always better than the reality: the promise more interesting than actuality," (1987, p. 90). For the photographer, the image composed emerges from one's own perspective in practice, and through framing and composing, whatever emotion or element of practice is desired may be heightened. For audiences, the strength of imaginative pleasurability is enhanced because these images are taken by 'real people,' sometimes close acquaintances, often in the course of everyday activities, and are thus grounded in the realm of possibility and potential attainability. What's more, the props used in many images are consumer goods that are available to be purchased, made, or used in new ways. Sharing such pleasurable images was described by study participants often as "sharing joy" or "sharing my appreciation" with others, and seemed to magnify the pleasure of an experience for both image-makers and image viewers. Such pleasure encourages the creative manipulation of stimuli in the everyday environment, expanding the logic of imaginative hedonism into all aspects of the everyday, including the mundane, as the following exchange indicates:

> **Who were you with and what were you doing?**
> "My friend John & I were going over the border to ND to pick up some tires […]"
>
> **Please describe the image briefly:**
> "Driving on the open highway. Just the road before us."
>
> **Why did you share this?**
> "To let people know I was getting out of the city. Even if just for a couple hours."
>
> **Did you move things, stop what you were doing, or go out of your way to take this picture?**
> "I stopped interacting with my friend to get the shot I wanted. To make it look dreamy & desirable."
>
> **What do you think other people think when they see this image?**
> "I think people feel like taking in a deep breath & feel like they're on the road with us. It shows how much we all like to get away sometimes. Even for brief moments. And how even though our land is so flat in the prairies…the never ending road & horizon are attractive qualities we admire."
>
> **Did sharing this photo add to, or in some way effect your experience?**
> "Made me enjoy the random drive because there really was no purpose for me to go […]"

What kind of response did the image get?
"People liked it. And I knew they would." (Kara, diary entry, February 2012)

Instagram and the networked camera thus emerge as an interface, that is, a point of interaction, between lived experience and imaginative pleasure, allowing the manipulation of appearances to inspire pleasurable daydreaming. This interface is subjective in the sense that it is self-directed and self-consumed *in situ* through the prosumptive combination of practice, affective framing through captions that indicate mood or desire, and performative composition. It is also inter-subjective in the sense that emotive images of joy, desire, and less commonly despair or anger, are published for others to consume and with other's potential responses and interests in mind. The intrinsic value of the pleasure derived from this contemplation of self and other in the prosumption of imaginative daydreams plays a powerful role in motivating image practice alongside the potential extrinsic rewards of social or cultural capital.

However, the flipside to this heightening of imaginative pleasure is the tension it creates between lived experience and the image, or appearance, of reality. At the extreme, awareness of this discrepancy can lead to disillusionment with actual experience. On Instagram, a similar phenomenon comes up in instances where the imaged performance conveys something better than what was actually experienced. For example, many commenters describe how they arranged their food for display in ways that made the actual situation less enjoyable, distracting from socializing, and simply composing the shot for so long that the food was no longer hot. In other examples, actual experiences were not very enjoyable, but were creatively framed in such a way as to convey a more pleasurable narrative than what actually took place. A popular comic that has circulated online humorously illustrates disillusionment:
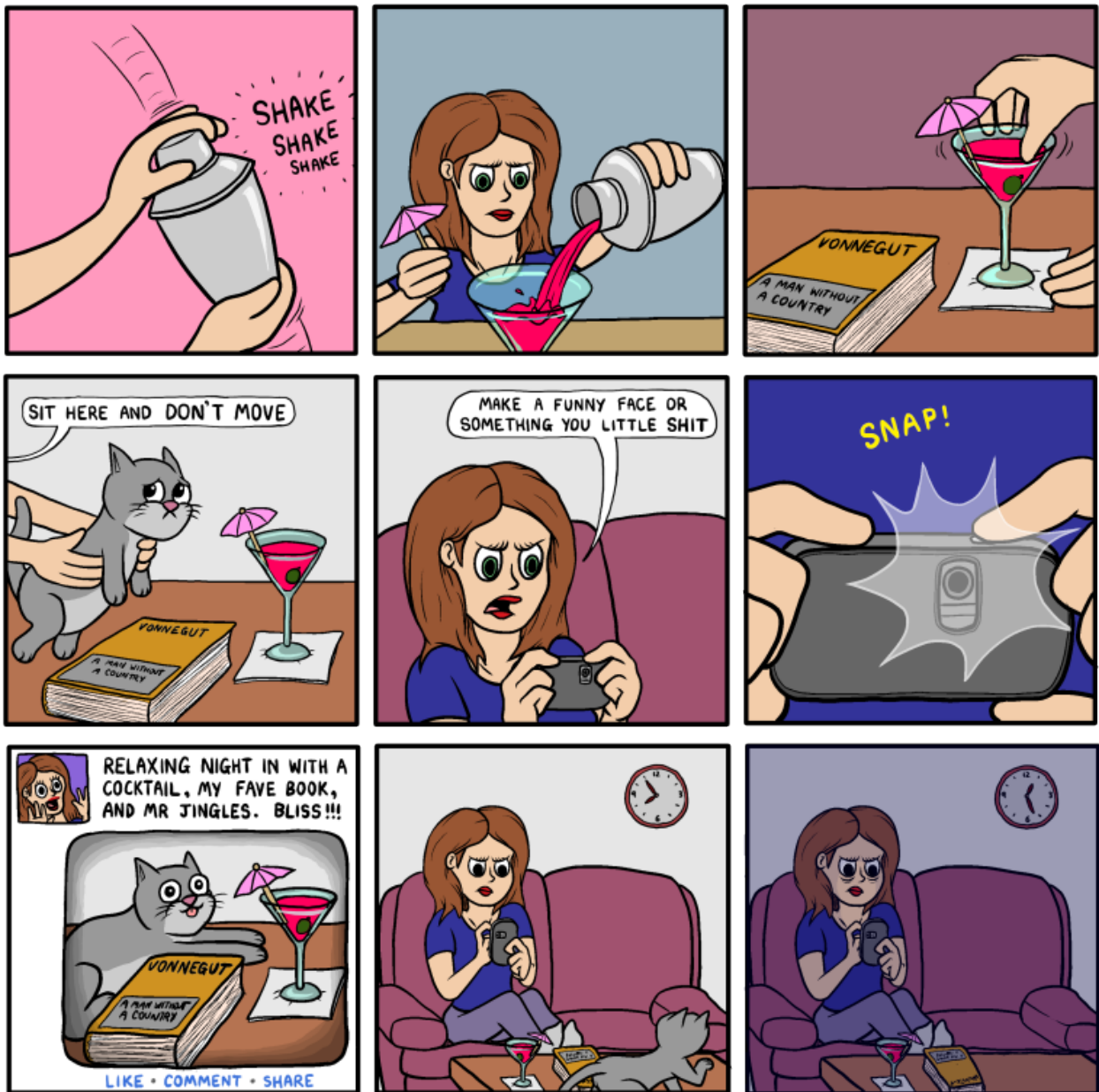
Figure 7. "Instasham" (2012), a comic image of Instagram in which all is not what it seems.

These disillusioning moments exist within the context of a communication environment full of seemingly ideal imagery emanating from others' lives, compounding the effect. Campbell's thesis suggests that this tension, seen in Instagram especially, but implicated in all modern hedonistic activity, is a major source of wants, or longing, and the perpetual drive that typifies modern consumer culture. What this means is that, through the endless consumption of novelty, one seeks, futilely, to become "an other" – the one whose imaginary longing is fulfilled. However, "the actual consumption or use of goods becomes a disillusioning experience" and "the actuality of consumption fails to live up to

the dream," (Lury, 2011, p. 51). As I will explore in the next chapter, this fundamental tension underlies both the pleasures, and the pitfalls, of the modern digital prosumer.

The above discussion details the intricate connection between networked mobile imaging, practice, and moments of consumption. Imaging is seen to expand the duration and frequency of what can be described as consumptive moments. The networked camera becomes an interface between the situated practice, wider communities, and imaginative desire. Acting as an interface, the disruptive moment of composing and framing a scene introduces an explicitly reflexive element to consumption that foregrounds consideration of one's performances, positions and stakes within a community and wider fields, and one's experience of pleasure and desire. Seeing and interacting photographically affects one's experience of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, creating greater affective intimacy between individuals, as well as greater self-consciousness through reflexive awareness and manipulation of pleasure, vis-à-vis daily practices. Taken together, these effects on daily life speak to wider changes in the culture of modernity and informational capitalism.

6. Reflexive Modernity and Prosumer Capitalism

The discussion above suggests that networked mobile imaging is directly implicated in shaping the work of identity and configuring subjectivity through the acts of framing, composing, sharing, and consuming images. In the following chapter I try to explicate and problematize the kind of subjectivity mobile imaging helps to shape. I begin by sketching a working understanding of the self in reflexive modernity that more accurately accounts for what is seen empirically in practice on Instagram. This account draws primarily on Giddens' (1991) writing on self-identity, counterposed to Lash's (1993, 2003) contributions emphasizing the limits of reflexivity and the role of communications technologies in shaping new quasi-institutions. I also incorporate Warde's (1994) practice centered critiques of the reflexive modernity thesis that fill in gaps in Giddens' model of self-identity. This analysis makes clear the importance of network communications technologies in shaping modern reflexive subjects, leading to wider questions about the role of social media in modern capitalism. Here I bring up Dean's (2010) critique of blogging and reflexive modernity, and incorporate her notion of communicative capitalism and circuits of drive. Finally, I end by grounding this theoretical discussion in the debates over the nature of prosumption in late-modern capitalism by problematizing Facebook's concept of one's "authentic self" and its relation to the broader participatory media milieu. This chapter thus seeks to come full circle, having earlier discussed the material-technical features of image sharing; the practical, communal, and pleasurable elements configuring its use; and now the effect this all has on the individual subject in relation to the evolving culture of modernity and informational capitalism.

6.1 Auto-biographical Narratives in Reflexive Modernity

Reflexive modernity describes individuals as increasingly individuated and empowered, unbound from traditional roles, authorities, and disciplinary structures, but simultaneously fraught with uncertainty and anxiety in the now reflexive, self-guided project of self-identity (Giddens, 1991; Lash & Urry, 1994; Lury, 2011). This is in contrast to pre-modern and early-modern social contexts where identities were more or less given in the "fairly unambiguous reflection of factors such as occupation or familial status," (Sweetman, 2003, p. 530). The shift to identity-as-project finds itself in

part enabled by a more explicitly cultural economy, and a consumer culture that "provides many of the resources with which individuals fashion their own personal and political identities" (Lury 2011: 199). Such claims must be somewhat qualified, as class, gender, race, tradition, and grand narratives can still be seen to hold sway over life courses, choices, and opportunities for many people (Lee, 2006). As Giddens points out, marginalization, difference, and exclusion can be seen in terms of differential access to the empowering effects of reflexivity and self-actualization (1991, p. 6). However, Instagram does indeed seem to mimic many of the phenomena described under reflexive modernity. The most obvious is Giddens' notion of auto-biographical narratives, which he describes as follows:

> In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. (Giddens, 1991, p. 5)

He goes on to write:

> A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography […] cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self. (1991, p. 54)

What are the images produced daily, even hourly, on Instagram, if not such biographical narratives? For some users this kind of reflexivity appears in a straightforward sense. As one writes, "for me, 'an examined life' is key to my happiness. Instagram allows me to document my life and line myself up with like-minded individuals," (Leo, diary entry, February 2012). However, a very small minority of users interviewed suggested that they didn't primarily intend for their photographs to enact lifestyles, and that they found others' seemingly self-conscious performances aggravating – in fact they fled Facebook to avoid it, finding refuge in Instagram's seemingly pure and 'authentic' photographic creativity. However, given that image making is inherently performative

and communicative, it is nearly impossible not to make some reflexive choice over how one's self will be viewed through what is shared. Moreover, those that expressed this view could nevertheless be seen sharing images of their baked goods, hobbies, and vacations, differing little in practice from those more explicitly embracing a reflexive mode of identity construction.

Building on Giddens and Bourdieu, Sweetman (2003) suggests that we might conceptualize the development of a 'flexible or reflexive habitus' that may be more prevalent in some groups due to the pervasive and constant set of events that demand reflexive action, which include the flexibilization of employment, breakdown of traditionally defined social relationships, new forms of community, and the impact of a consumer culture where styles and meanings change rapidly. For groups especially prone to such disruption, reflexivity itself may become habitual, given that, "for increasing numbers of contemporary individuals, it is becoming ever more difficult to leave the stage," (Sweetman, 2003, p. 546). That is, there is little or no 'back stage,' nothing solid to fall back on beyond the continual need to make choices and manage contingencies. The fragmentation of authority and explosion of choice inherent in reflexive modernity, Giddens argues, leads to doubt and anxiety over the fragility of these performances of self due to the lack of guidance as to which choices one should make (1991, p. 185-186). This applies especially to consumer choices given that identity performance is so wrapped up in symbolic consumption.

Several critiques help to qualify and expand the relevance of this account to modern social media and image practice in particular. Warde, for instance, critiques the extent to which Giddens and other theorists state their case. He suggests that there are 'counter-tendencies' represented by the creation of imagined communities that counter-act the decline of traditional social attachments, and that the trend towards stylization "by its very nature reintroduces a kind of discipline or regulation over both self-image and consumer practice," (1994, pp. 885–886). Additionally, Warde critiques the extent to which self-conscious identity construction pervades consumer choices, instead suggesting a variety of mechanisms by which the risk associated with choosing is allayed and re-structured. These include consumer oriented magazines; the recommendations that emerge through social networks of friends, family, and peers; long established class-based symbols of respectability that persist today; as well as

simple complacency and the primacy of individual, non-conformist personality (1994, p. 892). To this list we might add the awareness of others' practice provided by Instagram's image flows. Finally, those who would be most prone to anxiety and stress associated with highly reflexive identity performances are, paradoxically the most prepared, studied, and regulated, and thus least likely to make a mistake that would result in embarrassment (1994, p. 893). Following this critique, what emerges then is a qualified, nascent mode of reflexivity that does open space for transformation, but that is enabled only by certain social contexts rather than universally actionable, and not quite as disembedded, individualized, or liberated as it has been made out to be.

6.2 Quasi-Institutions and The Limits of Reflexivity

What, then, are the limits of reflexivity? Lash suggests that reflexive modernity theorists' emphasis on cognitive self-monitoring has ignored the complex and contingent cultural and aesthetic elements of reflexivity. Rather than this "one-sided notion of contemporary subjectivity," he argues, "modern subjectivity should be understood as only capable of subsuming a limited amount of content under the reflexive self" (Lash, 1993, p. 2). In this view, "aesthetic and hermeneutic reflexivity is rooted not in self-monitoring but in self-interpretation," which implies that subjectivity is situated and particularized within the meaning-making activities and everyday life of communities (1993, p. 8). Further, drawing on Foucault, Lash suggests that the reflexive extension of agency does indeed free subjectivity from certain institutional and traditional constraints, but that the situated and communally rooted nature of reflexive activity, as well as its reliance on 'expert systems,' may in fact be another form of discursive control. Rather than freedom from discursive limits, reflexive modernization may be seen to shift power to new quasi-institutions:

> Perhaps new second-modernity institutions must be comprised primarily of, not regulative but constitutive rules. And in this sense they may not be recognizable to us as institutions. [...] I think that a great number of these characteristically second-modernity institutions, if that is the word for them, are now not solely social, but socio-technical. [...] Pivotal for me among the socio-technical (constitutive more than regulatory) institutions that govern contemporary

> power relations are the likes of platforms, operating systems, communications
> protocols, standards, intellectual property, and the like. (Lash, 2003, p. 54)

Poster echoes this point, arguing that now more than ever, it is primarily electronic media that act as disciplinary institutions, as they "construct subjects, define identities, position individuals, and configure cultural objects," ultimately resembling a 'superpanopticon' that is even more pervasive in form than traditional institutions in that it is founded upon databases and information processing, among other new computer technologies (2010, p. 8).

Instagram is well positioned to speak to the nature of modern reflexive subjectivity. I have addressed many of the above critiques in the preceding chapters by accounting for the organizing logic of objects, materiality, fields, competition, communities of practice, and the embodied pursuit of pleasure as they relate to networked image practice. As I have argued throughout, imaging is inherently reflexive, creating disruptions in practice and ways of seeing that provide space to consider action, incorporate feedback, new information, and alternative scenarios. It is important to recall that identity is a communicative practice involving both internal and external factors. That is to say, identity emerges "both through self-aware reflections about whom one is and through everyday practices of doing work and life," (Wieland, 2010, p. 505). Networked mobile imaging extends reflexive identity performance into temporal and spatial contexts that were once considered 'back stage,' 'off stage,' or simply inconsequential. In the process of performing for an imagined or mediated audience in new contexts, Instagram users engage in imaginative self-reflection shaped by both individual and communal forms of idealized desire and pleasure. That is, what many Instagram users describe as 'sharing the moment' by 'capturing' it and sending it outward actually acts as a way of bringing others into the moment as imagined audience members. Dean (2010) writes about this in terms of blogging, but the same holds true for networked imaging:

> The subject has to imagine himself, in other words, as fascinating the Other, as
> doing something or saying something or even watching something that
> captivates the Other. As Zizek emphasizes, the gaze is thus reflexive, doubled
> insofar as the subject sees itself being seen. The one who is captivated, in other
> words, is the subject. (p. 54)

The role of the audience here is suggestive of the nature of modern reflexivity: rather than total freedom in the face of declining traditional and institutional authority, new regulating forms are adopted, e.g. lifestyles and their associated communities of practice. Indeed, the freeing of subjects from established identities and institutionalized courses of action may actually be "stifling," as Dean argues, because "it confronts users with their lack of skills and imagination," (2010, p. 7). Photography, a "middle-brow art" as Bourdieu describes it, is perhaps ideal to this situation given that it requires little in the way of formal knowledge or training, and applications like Instagram lower the threshold of competence even further. Rather than innovative expressive creativity or abstract exploration of meaning, many of the images produced on Instagram operate on the principle of facsimile, reproduction, or communicative documentation. Thus, it should not be surprising that mundane images of lunches, cute cats, home-made meals, crafts, or sunsets predominate. These are the easily created, acquired, and styled building blocks of modern identity intertwined with modern hedonism, and they tap into shared desires shaped by the trajectories of communities of practice and their intersections with wider fields.

As suggested by Campbell's description of modern hedonism, the underlying need to produce images that are pleasurable to one's imagined audience is also inherently pleasurable in and of itself, as it encompasses imaginative daydreaming. For Campbell, the pleasure of the daydream, here seen as the imaginative manipulation of the appearance of daily life shared with an audience, is one of self-illusion that leads to disenchantment with reality. The image is almost always better than the actual experience. This is seen on Instagram in the sense that images simultaneously evoke feelings of joy, pride, and accomplishment, while users acknowledge that the overall effect is to make their lives look better than they really are, given that most "images are highly curated to capture only those things that are worth sharing," (Artem, diary entry, February 2012). The effect of this, subtle as it may be, is a sort of itch that compels individuals to repeatedly attempt to realize their imagination through the acquisition of new material goods, experiences, competences, or through innovations in practice, or at least to create the appearance of such things for the sake of the imagined audience and their own image of themselves.

This can be conceptualized in terms of the tension between 'having and doing.' In

this view, future actions like purchases are "commonly desired, anticipated or justified as a means of bridging between the dissatisfactions of the present and an image of a better, or more appropriate future," (Shove et al., 2008, p. 26). In this sense, Instagram can be seen as an interface for creating and manipulating pleasurable daydreams and mental images of desirable futures. The spectacular images produced by followers, and many of those self-produced through careful framing and composure, take on the character of what Giddens (1991) refers to as counter-factual contemplation:

> Because of its reflexively mobilized – yet intrinsically erratic – dynamism, modern social activity has an essentially counterfactual character. In a post-traditional social universe, an indefinite range of potential courses of action (with their attendant risks) is at any given moment open to individuals and collectivities. […] Living in circumstances of modernity is best understood as a matter of the routine contemplation of counterfactuals […] an 'orientation to the future.' (p. 29)

Instagram provides a space for such counter-factual experimentation with one's identity and desires vis-à-vis the practices and the props that script them. The daydream like quality of these images seems to facilitate the imagination of counter-factual, often aspirational scenarios in one's own life. Likewise, images shared by others provide alternate images of potential futures that can be imaginatively consumed at face value, or actively adopted in one's own practice in a way that responds to new perceptions of the meaning of 'average' or 'normal.' Whatever is shared in these images is subject to judgments of taste through feedback in comments, 'likes,' and new followers, which underscores the potential for anxiety if a performance, or experiment with identity and practice fails. One user describes this below:

> There is also an element of vulnerability because the picture is by me and about me. I made the choice to take the picture and to share it so all comments are directed solely to me. The reactions can taint my view of the picture and/or its content and change my perspective, good or bad. (Yvette, diary entry, February 2012)

However, such uncertainty over how images will be received is itself often pleasurable because the potential downsides are carefully managed:

> It is always exciting. Do people like my image? Who will find it? Look at it? Will there be a response? Will people like it, who are they, what pictures do they take? But often it is also a question of what can I show to others, what do I want to show. How much 'private life' do I want to keep for myself. (Alisha, diary entry, February 2012)

By and large, the response to images ranges from neutral to positive (there is no 'dislike' button, after all). Additionally, Warde's paradox applies such that those on Instagram often are so carefully studied in what they do that they are very unlikely to make a mistake with any unexpected consequences. Conversely, those with little attachment to the communities in which a certain performance can be read as a 'mistake' have little to lose in their own experimentation. The multiple steps involved in shooting, selecting an image to share, editing, and captioning, also provide multiple instances in which to contemplate the Other's reception and to make a decision on whether or not to share an image publicly.

The result, then, is that image sharing's role in modern reflexivity reflects the limitations suggested by its critics. While more areas of life become subject to revision, manipulation, and self-guided experimentation vis-à-vis reflexive performances, choice is still embedded within conventions and trajectories that develop within communal practices, seen here in the influence of the omnipresent imagined audience generated by social networking software. Moreover, increased freedom from institutional discursive power may have ambiguous results, perhaps stifling creativity and leading, for instance, not to super-empowered, creative, active, and politically engaged subjects, but rather to the intensive discourse of the mundane, trivial, and narcissistic – cute animals, fancy meals, and non-stop consumption. However, for many, this is by-and-large a pleasurable experience, free from intense anxiety, and open to the imaginative consumption and manipulation of what is desired and pleasing within daily practice. What this pleasure obscures, though, is the underlying restless tension between having and doing, and between the image of practice and its actuality.

6.3 Networked Mobile Imaging and the Logic of Prosumption

Dean describes this restless tension using the language of Lacanian psycho-analysis, specifically the notion of "drive" as opposed to "desire," to argue that the

reflexive nature of blogging, including micro-blogging to which Instagram belongs, results in capture or paralysis. Drive, in this sense, refers to joy that emerges in the pursuit and failure to achieve satisfaction. As she writes, "the contemporary setting of electronically mediated subjectivity is one of infinite doubt, ultimate reflexivization. There's always another option, link, opinion, nuance, or contingency that we haven't taken into account," (2010, p. 6). In terms of image practice, we might rephrase this to say that there's always another way to frame a scene, always someone with a better looking stream of pictures, always a better image to try to live up to in practice. This entire process of creating, contributing, watching, and keeping up is entertaining in its endless novelty, creativity, and potential for momentary self-validation. Indeed, as Dean argues, image and affect may be "powerful, relevant, and effective. A picture is worth a thousand words," (2010, p. 6). The concept of drive locates pleasure in the journey, or the repetitive process of not reaching the goal. Put differently, she writes:

> Because failure produces enjoyment, because the subject enjoys via repetition, drive captures the subject. [...] The subject gets stuck doing the same thing over and over again because this doing produces enjoyment. Post. Post. Post. Click. Click. Click. (Dean, 2010, p. 40)

This has obvious parallels to Campbell's notion of the compelling disillusioning effects of imaginative hedonism, and adds an additional layer of motivation to Shove's account of the relation between image and practice. The restlessness, tension, or disillusioning effects that these accounts describe all serve to capture subjects within pleasurable 'circuits of drive,' doing the same thing over and over again for fun. As Dean writes, "communicative capitalism commands us to enjoy, at the same time that it reminds us that we aren't enjoying enough, as much, or as well as others are. Our enjoyment remains fragile, risky," (2010, p. 92). This constant unease inherent in the blogging medium, and indeed pervasive in many other forms of online communication like Instagram, is founded in the ambiguity of the audience's gaze, as well as the hidden gaze of third parties filtered through databases and algorithms:

> ...in communicative capitalism, the gaze to which one makes oneself visible is a point hidden in an opaque and heterogeneous network. [...] Our disclosures are surveilled, archived, remembered, in ways that exceed our ability to manage or control. On the one hand, this is what incites us to practices of revelation and

display. On the other, the media that incite us to create and express, to offer our thoughts, feelings, and opinions freely, to participate (but in what?), deliver us up to others to use for purposes of their own. (Dean, 2010, p. 56)

The value inherent in this type of activity underpins the prosumer-based economics of social media. As Lash suggests, these software platforms operate as quasi-institutions in reflexive modernity, helping to create subjects who enjoy the endless drive to prosume. The design of social media has a logic that is not neutral, as they exist to produce an 'audience commodity' whose attention to advertising is sold to marketers and advertisers (Fuchs, 2009a). Indeed, "the audience itself – its subjectivity and the results of its subjective creative activity – is sold as a commodity," which, in the more dynamic and participatory medium of the Internet, becomes a 'prosumer commodity,' (Fuchs, 2011, p. 155). This is true in that the content facilitating the production of the audience is largely user-generated, unlike television or radio, and is itself surveilled, 'mined' for valuable data patterns, and co-opted through 'social' or 'viral' advertising. This represents "the total commodification of human creativity" in the sense that all forms of creative expression, down to the most mundane status updates, are now captured for the sake of producing profits through marketing, in addition to being framed by targeted advertising (Beer, 2008; Dean, 2010; Fuchs, 2011). Critical media theorists point out that prosumer labor generates profit without monetary compensation, and that little if any control is given to users over how their information and participation is commodified (Beer, 2008; Dean, 2010; Fuchs, 2011). One might argue that a 'wage' of sorts is given in the form of free access to a highly effective and valuable communication service, but as Fuchs (2011) points out, the trade-off between free access and targeted advertising is not unproblematic:

> The problems of targeted advertising are that it aims at controlling and manipulating human needs, that users are normally not asked if they agree to the use of advertising on the Internet, but have to agree to advertising if they want to use commercial platforms (lack of democracy), that advertising can increase market concentration, that it is intransparent for most users what kind of information about them is used for advertising purposes, and that users are not paid for the value creation they engage in when using commercial web 2.0 platforms and uploading data. (pp. 159–160)

6.4 Instagram and Facebook: Surveillance and Discipline in the Mobile Web

At the time of writing, Instagram is not monetized, but having recently been purchased by Facebook for up to $1 billion in cash and stock, it will without doubt soon find itself integrated into Facebook's overall revenue strategy. Although speculative at this point, it is worth exploring what this might mean in terms of Instagram, and what issues this brings up in terms of the wider development of prosumer capitalism and the quasi-institutional ordering role of social media platforms that are moving more and more into the realm of ubiquitous, mobile computing.

Facebook's filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission prior to its initial public offering of stock, published before news of Instagram's purchase was known, reveal that the 'mobile web,' represented by broadband-connected mobile devices, is one key to its future growth potential:

> The global mobile advertising market was $1.5 billion in 2010 and is expected to grow at a 64% compound annual rate to $17.6 billion in 2015 [...] We currently do not show ads or directly generate any meaningful revenue from users accessing Facebook through our mobile products, but we believe that we may have potential future monetization opportunities such as the inclusion of sponsored stories in users' mobile News Feeds. (Facebook, 2012, p. 79)

Though plans have not been published, one plausible scenario for monetization does not take much imagination. The phones and tablets used to share photos on Instagram are equipped with global positioning system antennas, pinpointing the location that each photo was taken at and storing it in the image's EXIF data (tags that are automatically embedded in an image that include time and date, as well as esoteric information like camera settings). At the moment, on Instagram and Facebook, this is mostly employed as a way to find and assign a place name to the image. Instagram makes it easy to find or make your own label denoting the location of the image, which is then captioned above the image on the news feed, along with a link to a map of the general location. This is so easy that it is done almost without thinking, and that is perhaps one of the biggest potential sources of value for Facebook. Such networked

spatial location information represents a potential new stream of data for Facebook to capture, analyze, package for businesses, and incorporate into new monetization schemes. By purchasing Instagram they have acquired a system where users input this data willingly, even joyfully, as a byproduct of the image sharing process. What's more, users don't even need to input the data themselves, as the GPS coordinates are automatically embedded in the image file's meta-data, potentially available to Facebook to aggregate and analyze in conjunction with other databases to establish patterns for marketing purposes. Facebook is open about this potential:

> As you take photos, some cameras and camera phones add information about where you are, along with the time and date. ("How does Facebook suggest when and where my photo was taken?," n.d.)

> We may put together your current city with GPS and other location information we have about you to, for example, tell you and your friends about people or events nearby, or offer deals to you that you might be interested in. We may also put together data about you to serve you ads that might be more relevant to you. ("Data Use Policy," n.d.)

Additionally, in 2011 Facebook announced that it was incorporating back-end programming to allow developers new abilities to interactively connect 'verbs,' denoting actions, with objects in Facebook's ecosystem, moving beyond the simple and iconic 'Like' button. What this means is that programmers can incorporate much of the typical stream-of-consciousness chatter that goes on in the News Feed into database-friendly language. This is currently being implemented with Facebook's corporate partners, like the music service Spotify, in order to allow greater interactivity and monitoring functions, e.g. when individuals share songs they are listening to or recommend them to others. However, such a system seems perfectly suited to capturing the type of captions that accompany images of consumptive moments on Instagram. The language in many captions is formulaic, and partly driven by the fact that many Instagram users share their images on Twitter and must fit captions within Twitter's 140-character limit. A typical caption might read along the lines of: "Delicious French toast brunch at Blu Jam Café," or "Afternoon coffee with @Friend1 and @Friend2 at Intelligentsia Venice." These narrative bits (Mitra, 2010) play a foundational role in creating and maintaining an online presence, resembling Giddens' reflexive biographical

narratives, in that they compose and textually perform affect, action, meaning, and intent, or clarify the same in conjunction with images posted on Instagram. Such fundamental and simple language constructions could conceivably be captured or structured through user interface design to conform to a database-friendly format with implicit or explicit verbs, locations, and hyperlinks to related places or other individuals that are tagged in the scene. As Facebook attempts to make descriptions of activities machine readable, it is not far fetched to imagine that the images of consumption and practice that circulate on Instagram might be in some way incorporated into Facebook's systems, through manual input, image recognition algorithms, or some other avenue that would co-opt image sharing to produce ever richer, mobile data points in its stores of user-generated content.

This reliance on machine-readable sociality is indicative of the underlying quasi-institutional regulative force characteristic of Facebook and other social networking platforms. That is, the need to conform to a rigid information architecture imposes limitations on the sort of subjectivity that can emerge in practice by users of such sites. The early web, with its chat rooms, instant messaging systems, role playing games, and bulletin boards, was often conceptualized as a free-for-all, a 'cyberspace' frontier characterized by anonymity, psychological disinhibition, creative text-based imaginative fantasy, new community formation, and rampant exploration of identity (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Fast forward a decade and this has been partly tamped out by the commercialization of the internet and the need to impose order. Facebook illustrates this most clearly in their notion of 'Authentic Identity:'

> We believe that using your real name, connecting to your real friends, and sharing your genuine interests online create more engaging and meaningful experiences. Representing yourself with your authentic identity online encourages you to behave with the same norms that foster trust and respect in your daily life offline. Authentic identity is core to the Facebook experience, and we believe that it is central to the future of the web. Our terms of service require you to use your real name and we encourage you to be your true self online, enabling us and Platform developers to provide you with more personalized experiences. (Facebook, 2012, p. 80)

In other words, Facebook has a vested interest in foreclosing spaces that encourage

creative expression or experimentation that can't be easily captured, databased, and monetized. Moreover, anything that would challenge the perceived validity of the collected user data is, apparently, seen to represent a threat to the value of the 'prosumer commodity' the platform produces for marketers and advertisers. The affordances for expressivity on Instagram are, to date, less structured and more open to creative appropriation, but, as described above, there are many potential ways that Instagram use in particular may be captured and formatted. Space to challenge norms, conventions, and organizing institutions, that is, to engage in transformative reflexivity, is foreclosed, while more trivial, mundane forms of reflexivity amenable to consumption, marketing, and advertising, are encouraged. For instance, in just one example, although Facebook has incorporated same-sex marriage into its database structure, it still forces users to choose between Male or Female under sex, refusing to recognize calls by LGBTI activists to open up other forms of sexual identity (Protalinski, 2012). In making this argument it should be clear that individuals are still free to appropriate and subvert the affordances offered by the medium, but what is important to note is that, by design, it seems to work against such challenges.

6.5 Situating the Mobile Prosumer

In reflexive modernity, where one is more and more compelled to create self-selected auto-biographical narratives (Giddens, 1991; Lash & Urry, 1994) rather than adhere to those of tradition, the tools of social media slide easily into the gap. These new technologies of the self provide a platform for the development of subjects that are more flexible, more often engaged in elective lifestyle groups and practice communities. These tools are not neutral, but rather act as quasi-institutions (Lash, 2003) operating on the logic of communicative capitalism (Dean, 2010a), creating new subjects that are more reflexive, yet recaptured, reconfigured, and limited in the full extent of reflexivity's liberative potential. The prosumer model does provide pleasure, and as I have argued, can be utilized to build social, cultural, and on occasion, economic capital. Indeed it represents the seeds of a potentially revolutionary form of social production and organization that is "radically decentralized, collaborative, and nonproprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or

managerial commands," (Benkler, 2007, p. 60). Aspects of this can be seen in the free and open source software movements, Wikipedia, crowd-funding, independent media, file sharing, and many more examples too numerous to list. However, the digital mode of prosumption––its revolutionary potential, broadening of capabilities, and pleasurability notwithstanding––is also seen to facilitate the cooptation and configuration of creative expression for the purposes of economic exploitation. As mobile computing becomes mainstream, smart phones and tablets will become cheaper and more powerful, and more advanced mobile technologies will emerge, further entrenching networks into everyday practice and raising questions about how these quasi-institutions are designed and regulated. Such extensions break down the already artificial boundaries between online and offline, and broaden the potential for digital prosumption connected to daily experiences. This may result in even more of daily life taking on the character of drive as communicative capitalism expands the reach of its surveillance, data collecting, and targeting capabilities into our mediated daydreams and everyday routines – and we will by and large enjoy it, if we don't stop to consider the socio-technical limits on reflexivity and the totality of their potential effects.

7. Concluding Discussion

This thesis began by referencing the popular grumbling spurred by Instagram's exponential growth, which has foregrounded questions of authenticity and the nature of modern identity. However, I have argued that these popular arguments miss the point by ignoring what makes Instagram enjoyable for millions, while at the same time overlooking the wider social and cultural contexts from which these new imaging practices draw their underlying logic. In the arguments developed above, I have shown that Instagram represents the mainstream development of a new innovation in photographic practice. I proposed the term *networked mobile imaging* to capture this divergence and to suggest a type of practice that may evolve and insinuate itself into other practices as mobile devices advance and communication networks extend further into the objects and routines of daily life. Further, I have illustrated that networked mobile imaging functions within the communal, material, and habitual logic of practices and wider fields. It is the imagined audience that makes imaged performances intelligible and that communally shapes images of future practice. What's more, the networked camera as interface opens up an area of inter-subjective intimacy, experimentation, and pleasurable communal daydreaming reminiscent of the early days of the web. While this does create openings for greater transformative reflexivity, it simultaneously falls under the re-ordering disciplines of the mediated imagined Other, a consumer culture that is increasingly stylized, and the quasi-institutional socio-technical infrastructures that shape social relations and direct prosumptive creativity.

In highlighting a critical media perspective I have attempted to offer a balanced and nuanced analysis that counteracts the mainstream unthinking acceptance of 'information revolution' and 'democratization' rhetoric. What is intended is not a simplistic moralizing tale of good and evil, but rather a rigorous and complicating understanding of the multiple agencies at play in shaping and affording the practices that take place in this new media ecology. As Instagram is in the midst of being incorporated into Facebook's operations, there is perhaps no better time than now to present a clearer perspective on what it means to live with a networked camera almost always at hand to share moments from daily life, and how it is integrated into processes of communal endeavor, meaning making, imagination, and pleasure seeking. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that code is political, that platforms shape subjects

and social relations in ways that are not neutral, and that design and infrastructural choices should be considered responsibly with their full range of institutional effects in mind. This is no trivial endeavor, given the complexity of the emergent cultural processes that develop around every new communications technology, but difficulty is hardly an excuse for complacency. What's more, these issues are not merely of academic and activist concern, but are in fact picked up on by consumers as well, as some study participants mentioned concerns with Facebook's record on privacy, as well a general sentiment that Instagram and Twitter provided more interesting and pleasurable ways of interacting with others centered around the exploration of interests, experimenting with identity, imagination, and aspiration, all of which are far from Facebook's rigid notion of an 'authentic self.' Thus, a critical approach fused to a practice oriented perspective may provide a fruitful corrective to misguided models of identity and 'authenticity' that are currently in place at Facebook.

With this agenda and the preceding analysis in mind, several areas for further research are suggested. Graham proposes that "new media research needs to engage much more powerfully with the complex intra-urban and inter-urban geographies that so starkly define the production, consumption and use of its subject artefacts, technologies and practices," (2004, p. 19). Networked mobile imaging is at the cusp of this burgeoning mobile web, where mediated interactivity between individuals, objects, and communities are increasingly fragmenting and dispersing into new temporal and spatial environments through the expansion of information networks. Such advances in technology are disruptive and provide space for positive innovations, but at the same time deserve careful scrutiny and analysis to understand their inevitably complex socio-technical regulative effects. While this study has provided a broad overview of Instagram, exploring the contours of imaging practice and complicating its relationship to prosumer capitalism, it could be fruitfully complemented by more focused research on specific communities and places. Future research should explore how the introduction of a networked-camera-human hybrid transforms and makes durable particular ways of performing relationships or groupings, for instance "a company," "a family," or "a street protest," as well as new relations that challenge traditional notions of community and spatial boundaries. This concern with the socio-spatial elements of the mobile web, the practice centered approach, and theoretical engagements explored in this thesis sketch an agenda for both academic research, while at the same time

introducing key frameworks and concerns for understanding users and strategies in the applied practices of design, software development, and marketing, which will only become more important as information networks and the associated economic logic of prosumption increasingly becomes integrated and hidden in all aspects of everyday routine.

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