

ARTICLE

Family Photography as a phatic construction

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ABSTRACT

When the camera became a domestic consumer good, photography was adapted to the needs of private production and reception (Slater, 1991: 50). The family archive contains images of self-portrayal, whose form is oriented towards established patterns, like *cartes-de-visite*, since they are received privately as well as in a quasi-public area (wallet, desk in an office etc.).

Family photography gains its performative character by means of its phatic function (Malinowski, 1923/1949: 315-7), inscribed in a historical and socio-cultural frame (Hirsch, M. 1997: 10-2). It actuates in the border between naivety and formality, and these *Memory-Pictures* (Keppler, 1994: 187) create an impression of reliability and authenticity by their ritualized reception.

The storage in a family archive and the performativity of its reception oscillate between the paradigm of scripture and the regime of narration (Langford, 2006: 227). The characterization of the media category 'family photography' by means of the phatic function of communication, and the identification of suitable tools for the analysis, are the topics of this article.

KEYWORDS

Photography, archive, family, communicative medium, phatic function, private media usage, orality, literacy, *Memory-Pictures*, *Familial Gaze*, *Context of Situation*, *Phatic Communion*.

Introduction

During my childhood, summer holidays meant three months living in a tiny cottage along with my entire extended family. Adults were allowed to leave the premises every day and go to town, but my cousins, my sister and I remained there. My grandma was there too along with all of her family photographs: on the mantel over the fireplace, on the wall at the entrance. And her albums too, far away from our hands, on the top of the hutch in the living room. Family photography is very individual, just like each family is. However, there is a common terrain by which we all can distinguish a family photograph when we see one.

While both the production and reception of family photography have been academically examined before, its definition, as a media category, is still problematic. Using the notion of family photography as a media variable for the investigation, the aim of this research is to characterize family photography as a unique photographic genre that has undergone changes and tendencies in the usage of photographic pictures during the last 150 years. These changes are further complicated by the ways in which family photography has moved from private to semi-public spaces, ranging from home wall displays to Facebook, made increasingly easier due to advances in photographic technology.

Kodak's invention of roll-film in 1888 reduced the photographic knowledge required to take family photographs to a minimum. Since then the industry has been following this pattern. Or perhaps it is the family who guides producers of photographic technology on the adjustment of their products to fit family necessities. 'The necessary technical knowledge is coded, understood entirely through the act of taking a snapshot.' (Slater, 1991: 53) This simplicity is extended to the ways in which photography is viewed as an automatic reproduction of reality, free from manipulation. Of course this is not so simple, and with photography technical and cultural factors come together which must be taken into account.

The process of taking a photograph using a snapshot camera has become both easier and more demanding, especially with the introduction of the digitalization process. On the one hand simple features, such as face recognition and red-eye reduction, are a way to handle aesthetic intentions

behind snapshot photographs making their production easier. On the other hand the range of adjustable features and complex selection-menus available, for example free modification of photographic parameters such as shutter-speed or focal distance, or preprogrammed picture effects, remind the snapshot photographer how challenging keeping records of family life can be. Technology continues to become more advanced, accessible and affordable, so much that a fixed-lens snapshot camera is now hard to find, except in mobile-phone cameras or children's digital cameras, and, granted, lomographic cameras too. Technological conditions evolve continuously and thus how to photograph shared moments evolves too.

When I first talked to my PhD supervisor about studying family photography in depth, he was not convinced of the viability of the project. Moreover he considered the topic as one of the most boring ones he had ever heard of. Then we started a conversation about conventions of family photography in Germany and in Spain. Although cultural differences between both these countries are not as extreme as trying to compare, say, Spain and Japan, we soon became aware of the profound divergences in practices in family photography within the German and the Spanish contexts. Looking at family albums in the company of other family members is 'normal' in our Spanish culture, especially for children, but my supervisor could not recall any experiences like that. Having a designated place in the living room or at the entrance hall for the display of family pictures was also something he had never seen before, while for me this was a completely natural thing growing up, as was commenting about such pictures when visiting someone at their home (it is just polite to do so). His German family was more into slide-show presentations, which require a distinct, formal frame of reception, while slides, for me, belong to a different context, namely lectures, seminars and classrooms. Because of these differences, studying family photography in depth became even more interesting and to some extent challenging to me. Then I asked my friends to tell me about their personal experience with family photography, to explore it further, and we discovered that patterns of production and reception in Germany and in Spain are worlds apart. As the present objective of my research is to achieve a transferable definition of family photography, looking academically at the similarities and differences across differing countries will be needed.

In this investigation of family photography, the main focus of my work will be set in the intersection between photography's technological and cultural conditions. It concerns a fundamental question of media studies, namely the relation between mediatization and sensorial perception.

Furthermore the extension of family happenings and events in the semi-public space arouses the question about its dynamicity and its flexibility.

Tools for a definition of family photography

Media representations of the intimate and the family have already a history of being academically and artistically explored before. Examples of this are: their link to traumatic or negative experiences, their relation to memory, and studies of single media outputs (such as the photographic album). These have predominantly been seen through a theory of looks and screens, and have gained in significance in academic and artistic debates over the past thirty years. However, family photography as a *media* category, that is a point of view which considers varied media outputs and the communicational function they address, is fairly recent and debated. Existing terms by which family photography is defined will be implemented in the research to find out at which communicational level interactions with media representations of the family occur and how to gain access to them.

Although carrying a camera with you all the time is becoming increasingly popular, when talking about family, not every moment is likely to be photographed. Usually meetings and celebrations will be well documented, whereas daily routine remain mostly unpictured. There must be reasons why birthday parties are felt necessary to document, while daily events, such as ordinary family breakfasts for example, remain unseen. Family photography acknowledges the importance of a concrete moment and makes it memorable. And by doing so, a shared horizon beyond the routine is constructed.

Finding blurry, faded or overexposed family photographs is not unusual. They are kept along with better ones because despite their poor aesthetic quality, they bring a sense of closeness with them. Due to their emotional value, images of the family are something special. The gaze of the one taking the photo is also the gaze to a family member. The act of photographing and the family life blend during the taking of the family snapshot, allowing a specific form of self-portrayal. Family photography is inscribed in a historical and socio-cultural context. The *familial gaze* “situates human subjects in the ideology, the mythology, of the family as institution and projects a screen of

familial myths between the camera and the subject” (M. Hirsch, 1997: 10-2). Therefore the family archive is made up of images of self-portrayal whose form and content are oriented towards established patterns, for instance when photographing places: “Porches, doorways, flights of stairs, appear again and gain in family photographs: the are discrete fragments of an address” (J. Hirsch, 1981: 51). An intimate look between family members exceeds the borders set up by the screen of the *familial gaze* and rarely finds its way into the family archive as a “showable” example of familiarity, especially if we look at carriers for a broader circle of reception such as a photo frame.

Both the emotional value and a shared and common horizon of experience characterize family photography. But there are other elements that shape production and reception and they need to be taken into account when studying family photography in depth. Family shots are often taken in order to be shown afterwards. Patterns of production are adjusted to the later form of distribution and here not only photographic means such as lighting or lens type play a role, but also technologies attached such as a flash or a self timer and elements of nonverbal communication like the pose. Reception-forms of family photography vary from showing a single shot, to longer compilations, which frequently take the shape of an album. If we follow the path traced by Martha Langford family photo albums are also produced in order to be “broadcast” afterwards (Langford, 2001: 22-64; 125-42). Some of them will be used as an integrative tool for the family as they are shared in the family circle. Extraordinary family events, such as a wedding, can easily find their way to a more public context of reception like the living room, the hall or the office. All these forms of reception fulfil a primary function in family life: the generation of common and shared experiences and the corroboration and confirmation of the family as a group (Bourdieu, 1965/1981: 38; Chambers, 2001: 89).

Looking at family photographs means not only retrieving information about a moment in the past, but also being reaffirmed as a part of the process. It is clear that lateral information in the form of comments or additional documents and items, which can be kept along with the family photographs, allows a more informative access to family photography. But it is this reaffirmation, which functions on a phatic level (Malinowski, 1923/1960: 307-16), what distinguishes family photography as a media category, as this paper suggests. A further discussion on the significance of the terms *phatic communion* and *context of situation* for family photography will follow.

How to approach family photography

My personal experience led me towards the question of how photography is used by nonprofessional individuals within a framed context, the family, and with a specific goal, namely the construction or preservation of a family identity or heritage. The questions of generation or simply preservation of shared moments will be addressed later in this article, when dealing with the term *familial gaze*. Regarding preservation, a further examination on the question of volatility and materialization will take place within this research. However at this point it is necessary to consider the differences between oral and written communication. Afterwards the role of digital data will also be taken into account. On one hand, specific aesthetic strategies will be discussed in order to outline characteristic pictorial forms of family photography. On the other hand, attention will be drawn towards the specificity of particular social situations in which family photography is employed.

A family is a group to which one belongs 'automatically', which usually takes record of mutual moments in life, and which often spends time and monetary resources on photographic equipment and material/devices to display pictures such as a photo frame or a photo album. Media output produced by families seems to be simultaneously singular and commonplace, individual and shared. Which tools do we as media researchers have at our disposal to analyze it? How could we gain access to such a private material? How are we aware of the contexts of production and reception of pictures and documents that are kept alongside them?

Looking at family photography as a researcher involves developing an effective method of analysis which allows us to retrieve on the specific data, but which is also transferable from case to case. As Chambers states, on the one hand:

Family photography's extraordinarily powerful combination of qualities of uniqueness, privacy and yet standardisation and conformity actually make it flexible enough to allow the medium to be extended beyond the rigid definition of the modern nuclear 'family' to embrace intimate relationships and contexts that were once excluded from the orthodox vision. (2001: 89)

On the other side, many variables must be taken into account, so that, although the objective is studying family photography in depth, one may need a broader approach. Some scholars have already ventured the journey before.

Julia Hirsch proposed in 1981 the categories *formal* and *candid* (J. Hirsch, 1981: 81-115) when talking about family photography. While *formal* family photography inherits habits of formal

portraiture set up during the Renaissance, which help to depict character, *candid* photography deals with emotion and ephemeral moments. This distinction goes along with Hirsch's research about the messages encoded in family photographs in Western culture. When it comes to contemporary photography this distinction seems to weaken: professional photographers may stage *candid* photographs and amateurs may adopt styles of *formal* portraiture. But, even if there are no clues to assure that a particular picture was taken by a professional photographer or vice versa, as long as the picture is kept by the family, often next to other family memories, that picture is part of the family's records.

Whether a picture has been staged or is simply a snapshot does not diminish its importance in the family album. It is true that *formal* portraiture must fulfil certain expectations, since the family has decided intentionally to be photographed, often by a stranger (usually a professional photographer, though sometimes by a family member using a timer). When a *formal* picture is shown, either in the family circle or in broader circles of reception, it is usual to highlight and share a specific occasion for which the photograph was taken. It is clear that the picture has an intended meaning. It is constructed by the photographer according to specific codes and conventions of family portraiture, and with later reception and display in mind. Moreover the photographer is usually instructed by the family about what must absolutely be pictured, also according to their understanding of these same codes and conventions. Yet a *candid* snapshot, despite its ephemerality, is just as important as the *formal*, and adheres to its own codes and conventions that are often placed outside a commonplace and seemingly unimportant. Therefore, when looking at *candid* shots, it is important to ask about the reasons why the picture was taken. This is because they seem to be taken almost automatically, without much thought. While this obscures their meaning, the meanings still exist and it is up to us to uncover them after the *candid* shot has been taken and it is materialized (J. Hirsch, 1981: 102-6).

A similar comparison can be made between fashion photography and those images taken by paparazzi. While the former requires a degree of preparation, and thus a level of encoding of meaning prior to the images being taken, the latter relies on ephemeral circumstances, with their meanings being determined after the photograph is taken, sold, and displayed. Yet both adhere to established codes and conventions, at both the points of creation and reception. Similarly, family photography needs to be analyzed not only according to how it is produced, but also according to how it is displayed, distributed and shared. The intrinsic qualities of *formal* pictures may reinforce certain individual characteristics which cannot be held in 'simple' *candid* shots, such as

highlighting facial complexion by means of professional lighting or conventions of visual composition. But *formal* images may distract our attention from looking at the picture in detail, as *formal* photography is always a good way to start a conversation or a small talk because you just ought to know the special occasion behind the picture. Either way, *candid* and *formal* portraits can equally easily find their way to the family archive and thus support the corroboration of the family as a group in equal measure.

Hirsch's definition of *formal* photography leads our gaze towards conventions inside the family. If a *formal* portrait is made "to permit us to look at the family, not into it" (Hirsch J., 1981: 97), then what is being hidden? And from whom? Talking about *formal* family photography in these terms means to acknowledge that family photography is to some extent public. This constitutes the first challenge of the present research: how to determine whether a picture is family photography. While Hirsch's research focuses on aesthetical parameters, and by doing so she studies the symbolic representation of the family in Western culture over centuries, here we must look not only at visual conventions, but also the interaction with photographic and non-photographic items like letters, postcards or milk teeth, which are decisive for our analysis. Using media change as an overall category means to acknowledge a certain adjustment or development of the family archive according to the momentarily available communicational tools. Other media forms such as written communication and tangible objects which were effectively a part of a past shared/common reality, allow or constrain phatic interaction and they will be therefore taken on account for the investigation and in part discussed later in this paper.

Marianne Hirsch proposed in 1997 the term *familial gaze*, which allows us to look closer at the conventions present in family photography. The *familial gaze* regulates the pictorial representation of the family according to a dominant ideology of acceptable behaviours, looks and events for a 'decent' family. This term allows a researcher to frame given conventions within a specific cultural and historical moment.

Family photography fits social and economic criteria that situate a given family inside a broader social group and a particular time in history. It 'writes' the family's biography, although the pictures are usually not representative of the entire family life. For Bourdieu family photography allows turning beautiful moments into beautiful memories and thus fulfilling the need for integration and generation of celebratory pictures. As a primary agent of generations of familial

memories, family photography already achieves its function during the moment when a shot is taken (Bourdieu, 1965/1981: 38). Later, when the copy is shown, its role is highlighted and easier to identify. As a social event, which is framed by diverse cultural and social rules and conventions, a wedding is a good example to use in order to see how family photography functions. Apart from the classical and essential ritualized steps to be photographed, such as the exchange of rings or the final kiss, there are other moments which in fact happen just for the camera: romantic portraits of the happy couple usually taken in highly aesthetic frameworks such as gardens or a historic city centres, or family portraits in front of the altar or outside the town hall. For many, a wedding without photos is simply inconceivable. Gradually, posed portraits are replaced by more casual ones, less rigid but still staged for the camera. Sometimes the photographer becomes more a paparazzi, haunting the happy couple for 'professional snapshots'. The final combination of *formal* and *candid* photographs looks like a journalistic reportage, which had required more closeness between the photographer and the couple, and more time for the production (A.G. Photonews, 2007: 17).

On the one hand family photography 'documents' a familial event. On the other, particular familial constellations, moments and meanings are 'constructed' in front of the camera. Therefore family photography is not only part of the family story but a product of the culturally defined family. It both generates and perpetuates these definitions and meanings of the family, and of the 'family story', as the actual shot is taken. The materialization of family shots into paper copies assures preservation of shared experiences. Beyond this storage function, family photographs also work as markers, since they allow the retrieval of a moment in a common past through their adjustment to certain criteria to be decoded afterwards. Furthermore this materialization in varied forms reinforces the significance of those pictured moments and enables a commemoration of the common past. So that later, when the wedding photographs are shown and shared, characteristics of production continue – the family story continues to be generated and perpetuated during its reception. Sometimes we remember a photograph but we cannot recall the past experience. Other times moments in someone else's life, for instance our parents, become part of our horizon of a common past through the interaction with the family archive. It depends on the intensity of the viewing: from a quick glance towards the photo hanging on the wall at the entrance, to an affectionate and deep look into the wedding album in the company of other family members, who expect not only to look at the pictures, but also to talk about them and to recall a shared experience. Family photographs act like markers: They allow for the retrieval of information and impressions of a common past, and at the same time they create the story of the family (or at least a significant part of it).

When we attempt to read family photographs as a part of the family story, focusing our attention on the familial look, we need to include interruptions and settings of visual relations among family members caused by the intervention of the camera and possibly other technologies attached. So on one hand, there is already a tool that enables the in-depth study of family photography within a particular context, namely the *familial gaze*. On the other, readings of familial looks and interactions, those characteristic of *candid* photography because they go beyond the picture itself, exceed the potentiality of the *familial gaze*. Therefore a new instrument to gain access to this intimate material and to its role in the family story is needed.

Martha Langford looked at photo albums in detail, tracing a path between the production and reception of photographic pictures. An album contains a collection of selected pictures of mutual moments, which will later be used to transmit or to relive past experiences and feelings. Family photo albums constitute in her classification an independent type, which is characterized by gazing into the future (Langford, 2001: 40-2). After determining the social and historical context in which one concrete album is located,¹ its presentation and transmission within the circle of the family had to be analyzed, too. The narrative strategies present in photo albums needed to be considered, which required an original approach. That is why Langford proposed her *orality-framework* (Langford, 2001: 120-40, 224-7) with roots in the oral theory of Walter Ong.

Working with mnemonical categories of *inclusion*, *organization* and *presentation*, which fit the “three canons of rhetoric: finding or researching; arranging or organizing; and fitting one’s material to audience and context” (Langford, 2001: 127), she focused her analysis on the later performativity of the album, which is inscribed into an oral and nonverbal situation of communication.

Although Langford identifies many strategies found in family photography like pose, order, lighting etc., which enable us to communicate or to relive mutual experiences within the family circle, all those are subordinate to the general and conventional ‘norms’ of how a family should be presented in the family album. So the concept of the *familial gaze* is still helpful within Langford’s investigation. Among the cited communicative strategies, the author acknowledges the existence of “small signs of intimacy” (Langford, 2006: 231), which can only be unveiled by family members.

¹ The cultural context was already narrowed as the author took only Canadian albums kept in the McCord Museum, Montreal.

This is another way to refer to those intimate looks and interactions characteristic of *candid* photography and which exceed the limits of the *familial gaze*.

Nevertheless there is a significant twist in Longford's analysis, namely the work with tools borrowed from oral theory and their application to an item that is presented under the regime of written language. The typical form of a photo album follows strategies used for written language - book form with cover and pages, linearity. Longford's focus on the performativity of the album is a direction my research will follow, in order to gain access to communicative strategies present during the production, compilation and reception of family photography. By doing so it will be possible to understand the role played by media changes within a given *familial gaze*.

Oral and written communication in family photography

The '*rounded*' character of fiction was born in the nineteenth century (Ong, 1982: 148-52). Walter Ong argues that this was only possible due to the effects caused by writing and printing (and later electronics) in our psychic resources (Ong, 1982: 77-114). Photography is also a cultural product of the nineteenth century, which saw the rise of the nuclear family and the downfall of the extended one. Soon after Niepce and Daguerre's breakthrough photographic portraits started to spread. While first taken by professional photographers in a studio, by as early as 1888 anyone could record or document family life with ease thanks to *Kodak* roll-film cameras, which greatly simplified the process of taking a photograph.² From that very moment families could not only actively arrange photographic shots, but they could also carry their cameras everywhere, so that all family events were suddenly picturable.

But how did families interact with the new representational medium? Going back to Ong we realize that human beings have been using pictures and other *aides-mémoire* for thousands of years (Ong,

² In this year the first Kodak camera was brought to the market, which marked the birth of snapshot photography. Ten years afterwards the *Folding Pocket Kodak* camera was released: "It produced a 2 1/4-inch by 3 1/4-inch negative, which remained the standard size for decades." See <http://www.kodak.com/global/en/corp/historyOfKodak/1878.jhtml?pq-path=2699> (14.08.2010). In 1900 the model *Brownie* was available for as little as US \$1, or around \$25 at current rates (see <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>) (14.08.2010). As the price of one film was only US \$0.15 (\$3,8 today), taking photographs became affordable for many.

1982: 82-4). Thus we could presume that photography has been used in a similar way, namely inscribed within an oral mode of communication. Therefore the presentation of photographic pictures in albums is an example of this, a mixed form of communication between orality and literacy that has been incredibly popular over the last 150 years. Maybe as a natural evolution from the scrap-book or, as Martha Langford argues, from the “family bible”, photographs were soon inscribed via a different paradigm, namely that of written communication. (Langford, 2006: 224) When Ong analyzes dynamics of textuality he emphasizes the lack of extratextual context of written communication and the strong fiction factor existing in written words. ‘Even in writing to a close friend I have to fictionalize a mood for him, to which he is expected to conform.’ (1982: 101) On the contrary, spoken words are inscribed in a total situation which contains more than just verbal interaction (Ong, 1982: 100). The main achievement of the *orality-framework* of Martha Langford is to take characteristic variables of oral communication into account and transfer them to the singular presentation of photographic pictures in an album. Using dynamics of orality for the analysis offers a new view of family photography. Strategies used by the family to narrate its own story can be identified and thus made clear. This gives space for an innovative analytical approach, which identifies the tactics used in creating and communicating memorable photographic family moments. When looking at the intersection of written and oral communication presented in a photographic output such as the album, it is necessary to take visual strategies into account. As Ong argues, “print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did. Writing moves words from the sound world to a world of visual space, but print locks words into position in this space” (1982: 119). Although digitalization can challenge this definition, the visual organization of space in a written or in a printed text still differs. When looking at a photo album the idea of montage and remaking are not unusual and together with oral strategies there could be a conscious visual organization of space which would enhance the delivery and interaction.

When Langford identifies her three mnemonical categories of the *orality-framework* (*inclusion, organization and presentation*), she leaves a key traditional rhetorical feature out, which is *invention* (Ong, 1982: 113-4). This probably has to do with her object of study: photographic pictures are taken before the album is arranged, so that the album-creator is ‘only’ allowed to choose among the available material. However, Ong’s definition on ‘rhetorical invention’ fits this pattern of choosing among pre-existing possibilities. Rhetorical invention is not about simplistically creating something from scrap, but about the complexity of analytically applying stabilised communicational formulas to these creations. Thus it leads us towards commonplaces which have “kept alive the old oral feeling for thought and expression essentially made up of formulaic or

otherwise fixed materials inherited from the past” (Ong, 1982: 109). When looking at family photography, *invention* can take place before and during the shot as well as later, once the picture has been materialized and is about to be part of the family archive. As suggested above, family photography oscillates between the paradigms of written and oral communication, and therefore it is natural to expect that its communicational strategies during the *invention* present characteristics borrowed from both paradigms, being agglomerative and analytical at the same time.

Regarding memory, also another traditional rhetorical feature which is not applicable to writing (Ong, 1982: 114) and which is not a key factor in Langford's *orality-framework*, there is a categorization of family photography by Angela Keppler called *Memory-Pictures* (1994: 187). Kepler developed this idea while analyzing family conversations that took place in the living room of the family home, when they were looking at family photographs. She highlights the reception-function of *Memory-Pictures* in shared conversation and viewing, since it is at this point that memories are traded. As Jens Ruchatz argues, a photograph is not born as a memory. It is later when it is observed, that the photograph functions as a trace from the past. That is why, so some extent, to remember means to contextualize (2004: 103). Kepler also emphasizes the importance of the social context and the influences of material conditions on the production, distribution and reception of images of familial memories. The transmission of knowledge, or the fact that (common) past experiences are recalled by a group, is a way to unify the audience and to look for harmony within it. Eyewitnesses, those who experienced the pictured moment, are considered as a trustworthy source of information. Their story is at the same time corroborated and enhanced by the photographs. Unlike the written text, which is defined by closure (Ong, 1982: 145), family photography is not finite or self-contained.

Family photographs leave room for customization and improvisation, but even so their delivery is highly structured. They complete their function within the family when they are shown in a ritualized form. (Bourdieu, 1965/1981: 30-5) Furthermore, in a given group a media-feeling structure emphasizes a concrete pattern, as a way to bind recipients. The emotional message shared between the recipients, reinforces their unity as a group (Döveling, 2005: 148-55; 173). Presentation of family photographs also follows non-written rules and conventions when they are displayed outside the family circle, such as standardized sizes of photo-portraits carried in a purse. They are a form of social contact, and social *contract*, and therefore act as a proof of belonging (Schneider, 2004: 172-4).

Following Ong, a code or a set of conventions is needed to situate photographs and to understand them. Moreover “a total human context” (1982: 83) is required. Therefore the delivery of family photography means to acknowledge that there is no fixed discourse. The audience, as a unit, is taken into account and the communicational context becomes relevant for the analysis. The *familial gaze* provides us with a historical and socio-cultural frame for the analysis within which the communicational context takes place. Nevertheless when considering family photography as an open, not self-contained discourse, it is necessary to look at the interactions which take place among family members and between media representations of the family and family members, if our aim is to go beyond the isolated information in the family archive. For Malinowski, who studied the use of primitive languages, each utterance has only meaning in a concrete *context of situation*. For him, this term is necessary when studying spoken languages and it could be compared to the *linguistic context* for written communication. When dealing with family photography, considering the context in which a verbal or non-verbal communicative act takes place allows us to identify at which communicational level this act occurs and the reasons behind it: “to serve purposes of common action, or to establish ties of purely social communion, or else to deliver the speaker of violent feelings or passions” (Malinowski, 1923/1960: 307). Both the *familial gaze* and the *context of situation* are useful frames for the analysis. While the former focuses on ways of regulation of media representations of the family, the latter lead us towards the study of verbal and non-verbal interactions. Since family photography is not self-contained, how meaning, feelings, action and narration are coded in the family archive will depend on the very *context of situation* and on the given *familial gaze*. There is no concrete materialization of a code, but rather a dynamical transmission, that takes place within the family circle.

With regard to the last traditional part of rhetoric, namely delivery, Langford has developed a singular mode to access opaque and closed familial presentations (2006: 223-46), which highlights the relevance of the *context of situation* and of a *phatic communion*, which will be later addressed in detail. She chose several women based on their positions within the family and asked them to present a foreign album to a given audience. In this way she has marked not only the importance of the human context when looking at photographic albums, but also highlights a key feature of family photography: interaction with the family archive and among the family. Although Langford states that only in the delivery is it possible to talk about a ritualized form of communication (2001: 38), the previous example of wedding photography shows how intensely customary the production of family photography can be. Bourdieu has also written about this function of photography (1965/1981: 31), which David Chaney defines as follows: “First, there are rituals which are to be

reported; secondly, there are ways of reporting which are themselves rituals; and thirdly, the medium may itself be a ritual of collective memory” (1983: 117). Therefore, interaction in family photography is not only rooted in its delivery but also in the ritualization of its production.

Phatic communication and family photography

A challenging step when looking at family photography in depth is how to gain access to it while observing both its singularity and its position in a broader context. Knowing that interaction is a key factor in the delivery of family photography, it is necessary to determine how this interaction takes place. Using the given *context of situation* to outline patterns of production and delivery seems viable. Since Malinowski’s conclusions are applicable to narrative speech also and the delivery of family photography means to provide the audience with a story, Malinowski’s instruments of analysis can be employed here (1923/1960: 312-6).

In his analysis of the *context of situation*, Malinowski identifies “customary types of behavior, which are well-known to the participants from personal experience” (1923/1960: 311). Each utterance fits the given *context of situation* and the aim of the pursuit. Their meaning depends on personal experience and its structure is adapted to the temporary situation in which it is said. They are subordinated to the need of creating bonds and sentiments. The exchange of words sustains certain traditions and conventions present in the given group. It is not a matter of transmitting thoughts, but achieving social engagement. And by doing so, a *phatic communion*, which Malinowski describes as a kind of speech in which bonds of union are attained by the mere exchange of words, which directly serves the purpose of binding hearer and speaker (1923/1960: 314-6), is accomplished. At the same time the generation of a common and shared horizon of experience takes place.

The delimitation of the context in which every single family photograph is produced and received assures a fair access to the family archive. Once this has been done, an investigator needs some instruments to carry on the research. Comments and other more or less informative documents and items kept along with the photographic family archive may allow an informative access, but the pictures themselves don’t offer many clues about the reason for the production and delivery of the

family archive. Therefore we need to consider these photographs on a different level: not the information they could supply as a key factor for the research, but the act they are pointing out. Once you are pictured, you are part of the family. If you own a copy of the picture, you are being confirmed as part of the process. Think about your mother in law: once she displays a picture of you in her home, you are undoubtedly and 'officially' part of the family. The act of binding is what these pictures stand for.

Fluctuation between different *phatic communities* characterizes family photography from its production to its distribution and reception. The *familial gaze* is also dynamic and provides the family with adjustable instruments for the 'staging'. Either arranged towards the outside or according to insider patterns, family photography gains its performative character by means of its phatic function, which not only reaffirms the *phatic community* as such and corroborates the integrative function of family photography, but also generates a place where meanings can be exchanged. The social usage of the later paper copy is already considered in the moment of shooting. There is arguably a pro-active approach of each family member towards the process of creating and corroborating a *phatic community*.

Outlook

Pleasure has replaced stability as the most important family goal. And yet we still treasure paintings and create photographs which relate, not matter how tenuously, to ancient metaphors of family unity and cohesion: we still seem to acknowledge the values we have shed. (Hirsch, 1981, 28 u. 32)

Family photography has been developed partially thanks to the commercialization of photographic products, as Slater proposes, and using inherited visual patterns of composition, as Julia Hirsch explains. It is embedded in a given *familial gaze*, which frames it in a historical and socio-cultural moment and regulates the entire process: from production to delivery. There is a non-written list of motives that need to be part of the family archive, such as birthday parties, Christmas celebrations or holidays; and those which must remain unseen, like photographs of those sick or ill. If the occasion is extremely remarkable, usually a professional photographer will be hired. Otherwise a family member or a timer is considered good enough. Only *candid* snapshots remain problematic

for the *familial gaze*, partially because they deal with ephemeral moments and thus move beyond the given frame.

Although we 'stage' some of our own family photographs, we still sense them as a trace from a common past. They invite us to interact with them and allow us to recall a lived experience. But their meaning still depends on how they are delivered, because family photography is not finite or self-contained. Patterns of production, presentation and display are adjusted to given audiences, or *phatic communities*, since the ultimate aim of family photography is to be shared (Kuhn, 1995/2002: 17-24). While a wedding tends to generate *formal* photographs, your first sea holiday photoalbum would probably include numerous *candid* ones. A large formal photograph of a couple can dominate a living room, while displays of affection tend to find their place in bedrooms or photo albums. The family archive is characterised by its performativity, which although open is also structured, ritualized.

But which questions arise once family photography has moved to digital? The transfer from haptic carriers to electronic ones means dematerialisation which arouses a doubt about the characterisation of family photographs as traces and proofs of a shared past (Assmann, A., 2004: 55-7). The new storage media are not so durable and to repair them is either impossible or too expensive. Furthermore they bring, especially in the delivery, an important break: Unlike paper copies, they can only be perceived by means of an external technical device. Electronic carriers sell us the illusion of having almost infinite storage capacity for our family photographs, which thanks to the increasing mobile storage loose their geographical link. But they are not tangible media representations of the family any more, and thus their sacred character could be challenged. Regarding to the delivery, new forms appear which are not linked to a singular place. The term home becomes mobile and thus family photography too. The photo album as a tool for the delivery does not disappear but mutates: as a family matter or as technique of a self-portrayal, photo albums go online. Some social networks such as Facebook present a range of access-restriction or allowance, which seems to share much with the different *phatic communities* involved in the delivery of a given family archive. Simultaneously private and public, a Facebook user page is flexible enough to cover the need for interaction and the search for a sense of belonging, both important factors of family photography.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, the focus of my research is located in the intersection of technological and cultural conditions of family photography. After trying to outline its characteristics as a media category, I will be examining the aesthetic forms of its performativity, the importance of pragmatics involved in its performativity and its social/symbolic relevance as a medium of collective memory. For the research, media breaks or media changes build the overall category. That is why not only the digitalization process, but also other technical and/or photographic developments such as the flash or digital photo frames, will be analysed as possible catalysts of changes in the usage of family photography.

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