

FROM FAMILY ALBUMS TO GLOBAL SEARCH ENGINES: TRANSLATING
FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways digital photo-sharing platforms adopt, use and challenge the discourse of the material family album as a way of demonstrating the uses for new media within the private sphere. It analyses the digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, platforms which often take contrasting approaches to negotiating the relationship between material and digital cultures. By examining these platforms in terms of the way they reference and use the discourse of the material family album, the ways they allow content to be used and accessed, and their relationship to commercial culture, this thesis explores how these platforms use the discourse to transform the way the family and the family album interact with one another, and with geography, time and commercial culture. It argues that the discourse of the material family album is translated by digital photo-sharing platforms in order to ensure the family participates in the digital sphere, drawing more of human communication into the online space where it can be mediatized, observed, and commodified.

The thesis begins by defining the discourse of the material family album, drawing on the ways the family album is commonly described in academic literature. It identifies a common discourse in discussions of the family album which suggests a particular way of thinking about the album's functions and practices. The second chapter explores the ways digital photo-sharing platforms adopt and translate this discourse, and give these social practices a visual, media form. These platforms draw the family into the digital sphere by abstracting these practices from the material world and rendering them visible in their interfaces. As a result of this, however, the practices become subject to an increasing degree of standardisation and control from outside the family. The third chapter addresses the issue of access to family albums in both the material and digital contexts. It argues that the benefits of using digital interfaces lie in how they enable a reinterpretation of the significance of geography and time to both the album and its viewers. The characteristics of new media therefore challenge how access to the album was granted and refused in the material world. The final chapter explores the relationship between the family album and

commerce, and argues that the commodification of the family album and the practices involved in creating them are perhaps the strongest driving factor in the desire to connect the family with new media and the internet. When the discourse of the material family album is realised within digital photo-sharing platforms, the relationship between family albums and commodities is changed, meaning digital photo-sharing within the commercially owned platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* involve families and their leisure activities more and more strongly in the world of commerce.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM FAMILY ALBUMS TO GLOBAL SEARCH ENGINES: TRANSLATING FAMILY

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

“What is it that will be done away with, along with this photograph which yellows, fades, and will someday be thrown out, if not by me – too superstitious for that – at least when I die? Not only “life” (this was alive, this posed live in front of the lens), but also, sometimes – how to put it? - love. In front of the only photograph in which I find my father and mother together, this couple who I know loved each other, I realize: it is love-as-treasure which is going to disappear forever for once I am gone, no one will any longer be able to testify to this: nothing will remain but an indifferent Nature”

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 94

The visual representation of events in analogue photographs suggests a direct connection to what they portray, created by the shared light which once connected camera, film, and object in an indexical relationship. This moment of contact persists in photographs, given physical form through the material objects which this shared moment of existence creates. Roland Barthes suggests that we use photographs not just as visual representations of the past, but also as symbols of our relationships with one another; photographs are used to store and remind us of “love-as-treasure” (94). Yet photographs are also objects upon which control and power can be exercised through the ways we use them. While photography is a practice, photographs are practised upon. The family photograph album is one way in which photographs - as “love-as-treasure” , or symbols of the relationships people share within the domestic sphere - are gathered together and given meaning. As the basis for the images which the family album draws on shifts from analogue to digital photographs, new opportunities emerge for creating albums. Many of these opportunities promise to improve on material albums, filled with photographs which, like Barthes’ image which “yellows, fades”, are susceptible to damage and wear (94). Digital photo-sharing platforms draw on our sentimental attachment to the concepts of the family album and photographs as a way of demonstrating the roles new media can perform for us. The underlying principles of new

media include creating new means for exchanging and editing content, new ways of accessing material across the internet's network, and the commercial potential of these activities are introduced to the private sphere. These principles allow photo-sharing platforms to create new ways of producing, sharing and storing family albums, often resulting in changes to the way people create, manage and consume content, and how they communicate with others. Digital photo-sharing platforms introduce new media principles more commonly associated with business and data management to the private, domestic space of the family home, using the discourse of the family album as a way of introducing the opportunities of new media to the ostensibly conservative unit of the family.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to examine the ways digital photo-sharing platforms adopt, use and challenge the discourse of the material family album as a way of demonstrating the uses for new media within the private sphere. It takes as its objects of study the digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, platforms which often take contrasting approaches to negotiating the relationship between material and digital cultures. This thesis will explore how the assumptions on which the discourse of the material family are founded are undermined or reinforced through its digitisation. Such assumptions include those about the distinctions between work and leisure, the public and private spheres, and families and commerce. These digital photo-sharing platforms draw on the discourse of the family album, as a particular way of thinking about media and the family, in order to draw the family into ways of thinking about the sharing of communication, connections and content which new media create.

The discourse of the material family album is a vocabulary of actions and practices performed on photographs which reflect the album's perceived role as an archive of family identity and memory. It is one of the most influential ways of using photographs in the domestic sphere, and defines how photography and photographs are understood in the private sphere. Photographic practice can be understood as falling under two specific paradigms: those of amateur and professional practices. The discourse of the material family album is aligned with the amateur paradigm of photographic practices, and shares many of its ways of framing the role and significance of photographs. Amateur photographic practices draw on photography as a medium for personal expression and communication

within the domestic space of the private sphere, unlike professional practices which produce images for the broader audiences of the public sphere. These practices are consequently more commonly associated with family life and leisure, rather than labour and commerce.

These paradigms are, however, a construction. Roland Barthes describes the distinctions imposed on photography such as those related to empirical, rhetorical or aesthetic categories as being “external to the object of photography itself” (4). Distinctions such as those between amateurs and professionals are, he argues, to some extent arbitrary, rather than the necessary result of the medium’s characteristics. Barthes claims, however, that the finished object of the photograph is able to rise above these distinctions, through the power of the relationship between the image and the spectator. His argument nonetheless demonstrates the importance placed on such distinctions by discourse, despite there being little difference in their actual practices. Photographic practices performed by amateurs and professionals draw on the same underlying mechanisms for capturing images. Likewise, the production of photographs by either paradigm of practice requires a similar engagement with the economic sphere because of the consumable materials required. The labelling of the time spent by amateurs within the domestic sphere as leisure and the time spent by professionals in the public sphere as labour is therefore based on a judgement of what is done with the products of this time, rather than on the practices themselves. This judgement relies on the assumption that amateurs perform these practices out of “love”: love of photography, love of the photographs they create, or love of those they photograph. Amateur practices are associated with leisure because they produce photographs typically distributed only within the private sphere to people with whom the photographer shares a social or familial relationship. This distribution may form part of an exchange of social capital or play a role in forming and strengthening relationships, but it is rarely associated with monetary exchange. This demonstrates that distinctions between different paradigms of practices and discourses have important consequences in terms of how photographs can be used, distributed and thought about.

The notion of amateur practices consequently extends beyond the practice of photography itself to incorporate these ways of using photographs into the shaping of social

relationships. It is not only the photographer who is able to deploy photographs as tools for social interaction, though; all photographs, whether produced by amateur or professional practices, can be drawn on by anyone in pursuit of personal expression. One way in which amateur photographs are appropriated and used to record and shape social relations is by compilers of family photograph albums. Amateur photographs are collected and presented in albums as a way of exercising control over both the photographs and the family members represented by such images. The family album will be defined, for the purpose of this thesis, as a book-like object in which the album creator gathers together images of their own family in ways which suggest narratives. Albums represent personal expression about the collective of the family, drawing on photographs to communicate ideas about family identity and history.

The family is one of the most common ways of thinking about groups of people within the private sphere, characterised by the sharing of space and time, and of a common history and identity. The idea of family incorporates more than just genetic similarity; it suggests, ideally, an affectionate, intimate group of people from a number of generations who meet within the domestic sphere and share the same way of looking at the world. The apparent cohesion of the family is not a simple consequence of shared genetics or geographical proximity, though. Cohesion is to some extent created as a consequence of the exercise of power, including that carried out within the family photograph album. The album acts on one level as the group's archive, documenting their shared experiences and collective history, but on another level it also "creates" the family as a group through its narrative, addressing the audience as a family.

The notion that families must be called into being, rather than simply existing, highlights that the family is more than just a natural way of organising life in the private sphere; it is also a discursive formation. Family albums participate in the construction of the idealised family. Consequently, they construct family memory and identity in ways which conform with dominant social norms of propriety and appropriate social relations related to the ideology of the conventional family. This family operates as an economic as well as social unit, striving for unity as well as material success. From these norms, a discourse emerges related to the family photograph album, suggesting a particular vocabulary of practices and

meanings which can be deployed to reassure families of the propriety of their album and its contents. The discourse of the material family album prescribes preferred practices which allow both the exercise of control by individuals over the collective memory and identity of their families, and the deployment of dominant ideologies within the domestic sphere.

In order to examine how digital photo-sharing platforms adopt and revise the discourse of the material album in order to integrate family life with new media, it is necessary to first of all define this discourse. The first chapter of this thesis addresses the discourse of the material family as it is commonly described within academic literature. Within discussions of photography's role in the context of the family, a common discourse can be identified which accounts for particular ways of thinking about the album's function and the type of practices associated with albums which are widely accepted, as demonstrated through the degree of consensus in writing about this area of social life. This chapter will also explore the ways in which this discourse obscures inequalities of power and control over family history and identity, which are produced by the album's creation within the domestic space of the home.

The discussion of digital interfaces in relation to discourse based on material practices contributes to an understanding of how new media fit into existing social structures. A large body of knowledge already exists about the practices and vocabulary connected to the discourse of the material family album. This body of material includes Pierre Bourdieu's work examining the practices associated with amateur photography in *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, while Susan Sontag explores how photographs are used and how they contribute to our knowledge of the world in *On Photography*. Richard Chalfen addresses the "home mode" of representation through amateur photography in *Snapshot Versions of Life*, examining how images are used to create normative narratives about the family, while Martha Langford examines the relationships between albums, memory and identity in *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*. Rather than leave behind this wealth of understanding when the technological basis for practices moves from the analogue to the digital, a comparison of knowledge about a discourse of material practices with digital interfaces recognises the connections between analogue and digital media. It acknowledges that changes in the context of communication are shaped by

existing discursive frameworks.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the ways these digital photo-sharing platforms mediatize and structure practices associated with the discourse of the material family album. It focuses particularly on how they mediatize the nostalgic, emotional appeal of the material album within the technological opportunities promised by the rhetoric of new media in order to draw the family into the digital sphere. This “mediatization” is carried out within the interfaces of these platforms by abstracting user actions and behaviour from the material world and rendering them visible within the interface, and therefore also subject to standardisation and control.

Digital photo-sharing platforms give a media form to the practices involved in the discourse of the family album, demonstrating through such mediatization that they form part of a trajectory of pictorial representation of the family. These platforms go beyond only mediating the discourse of the material family album, though; they “mediatize” it (Hjarvard 113). Stig Hjarvard describes mediatization as the process by which media “contribute to disembedding social relations from existing contexts and re-embedding them in new social contexts” (132). Mediatization will be used to describe how new media objects give visual, digital form to the discourse of the material family album, which by itself is not inherently visual but rather a mental construct which is realised through the use of visual, textual and oral elements. These digital platforms engage in more than just a simple representation or even the remediation of an existing category of media objects. There is no single material object on which these platforms model themselves. Instead, they make a particular way of thinking about photographs and families visible for the first time. Previously, this discourse existed as an intangible social and imaginative construct, created in the relationships between albums, the families who share them, and their context within the domestic sphere.

The digital photo-sharing platforms of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* have been selected for this analysis because they represent two paradigms of mediatizing the discourse of the material family album. *Shutterfly* is a website characterised by a nostalgia for the material world, as

the preferred outcome for the hypothetical users of the site is the creation of material products using digital images. It is possible however to share content online through its “Share Sites”, blog pages for displaying user images within prefabricated templates. *Shutterfly* frequently references materiality in its interface, particularly the physical form of books and analogue photographs. The platform operates as a commercial operation, adding economic value to digital images by drawing them back into the material world. *Picasa*, conversely, appears to offer an experience more firmly rooted in the digital environment. The interface acts as a hub which connects the user’s home computer and the images stored there with online nodes from the *Google* brand such as *Picasa Web Albums* and *Blogger*. While users can order material prints of their images through *Picasa*’s links to external providers, or use the interface to publish their images online in *Picasa Web Albums* or other online platforms, neither outcome is significantly privileged within the interface. *Picasa* offers a greater number of tools for managing images than *Shutterfly*, and the interface is downloaded to the user’s computer as software. Consequently it is able to manage all content stored on the computer without requiring the user to first of all upload it to the internet. Both *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* do however share many common features despite their different focuses, such as their use of the same vocabulary and selection of editing functions. By choosing two digital photo-sharing platforms which use different approaches to adopting the same discourse for the digital context, an analysis of these platforms has the potential to produce insight into processes of remediating and mediatizing of discourses, as well as into how the social unit of the family is incorporated into the framework of the network and digital platforms.

As these interfaces present every user with the same prefabricated spaces in which to create albums, the interfaces of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* are a rich source of information about the discourse of the material family album which is open to textual analysis. By exploring the functions and interfaces of these photo-sharing platforms, it is possible to understand their interaction with and translation of the discourse of the material family album. Textual analysis of the interface provides information about the preferred or idealised consumer’s experience of the platform. These interfaces are designed to be recognised by a wide audience as replicating the discourse of the material family album for a digital context, meaning they must provide references to this existing discourse and encourage the type of

practices already associated with it. The interfaces provide frameworks for communication; therefore, a study of these frameworks can reveal the type of communication made possible, or even privileged, within these platforms. Textual analysis of the platforms also acknowledges their static nature, in that users can not, in the case of proprietary software and websites like *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, alter the appearance or processes of the platform. Textual analysis enables a focus on how the discourse of the material family album is reflected in these platforms, rather than on how the platforms themselves are used, looking at their structure and practices on a discursive level.

Digital photo-sharing platforms address the same area of social life as material family albums, making a comparison between existing knowledge about the discourse of the material family album and these platforms all the more relevant. The functions provided by *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* and the rhetoric with which they communicate suggests they are aimed at amateur users who employ these platforms to manage their family photographs in ways which reflect those associated with the discourse of the material album. Many of the functions in these interfaces explicitly reference the physical form of material albums, such as replicating their book-like appearance or the ways material photographs can be arranged on the page within the digital space of the screen. Within the discourse of the material album, however, “album” status is defined more by their contents and the practices involved in their creation and viewing than by any particular appearance or format. A family album may be constructed so it resembles a scrapbook, with photographs glued to the pages of the book, or it may be created using a prefabricated album with plastic sleeves for storing photographs, yet both are understood to belong to the same genre of objects. The definition of a family album is, loosely, a book containing numerous family photographs which are collected together to be looked at by the family. How this definition is executed by individual families is subject to their own interpretation, although they are guided by the social norms associated with the album’s discourse. While the discourse of the material family album suggests a particular mode of communication and practice, it does not specify a particularly strict form for the album itself.

These digital interfaces do however suggest that they are based on or referencing an ideal album which epitomises the most desirable characteristics of a family album. In

referencing an idealised version of a family album, these interfaces promise their users that they too can create the “perfect” family album. Digital photo-sharing platforms translate the discourse and attempt to visualise the idealised interpretations of the practices the discourse prescribes, placing a significant emphasis on the physical form of material albums. They make physical actions, such as the turning of pages in the album, which are inherent yet unacknowledged in material objects visible, even though they are unnecessary within digital interfaces. They echo the physicality of materiality within the space of the computer screen, evoking the experience of encountering an album.

The third chapter addresses the issue of access to family albums in both the material and digital contexts. It argues that the benefits of using digital interfaces lies not in the openness of the network’s infrastructure and software, which is so often celebrated as the dominant feature of network technology, but in how they enable a reinterpretation of the significance of the relationship albums and their users have with geography and time. The way access is framed within the discourse of the material family album is compared with the opportunities for access within *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, as well as exploring how these platforms restrict access.

At the same time as they make references to the materiality of the album, digital photo-sharing platforms are also able to extend the family album beyond the limitations of this physical form. They incorporate new practices related to remotely distributing albums across geographic or time distances, and allow images to be edited and used across a number of different media objects without altering the original file. It is only by comparing these opportunities with the limitations of the discourse as it relates to material albums that the significance of these functions and their potential impact on social relationships within families and the private sphere can be understood. These digital photo-sharing platforms offer an opportunity to examine new media and existing discourses in a new way.

Discussions of new media and digital photography often focus on the new opportunities for sharing and distributing media content on a global scale, whether this content was created for personal or for general use. This is typically described as having the effect of weakening traditional power structures and distinctions between amateurs and

professionals. Discussions of digital photography online display a tendency to privilege the ways amateur, digital photography is used by individuals, rather than by collectives such as the family. Susan Murray, for example, claims in her 2008 article “Digital Images, Photo-Sharing and Our Shifting Notions of Everyday Aesthetics” that the social uses of digital photographs by amateurs are characterised by a shift away from using photographs to record the important moments of domestic life, as was associated with amateurs using analogue photographs, towards using digital photographs to record mostly everyday, mundane images (151). José van Dijck argues from a similar perspective in her 2008 article “Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory”, emphasising that digital photography is practised in a way that is less focused on family or collective memory than its analogue counterpart, and more on the creation of an individual’s narrative (58).

Both Murray and van Dijck address an individualisation of narrative creation using photographs, and consider how digital photography enables some users to operate outside traditional discourses of family photographs. These users are engaging, Murray suggests, with debates about aesthetic achievement not typically considered to be particularly significant within the domestic sphere, and are also making use of the public space of the internet for carrying out communication within the private sphere. These discussions also highlight some of digital photography’s most salient characteristics which make the medium useful for both individuals and collectives. Murray claims digital photographs shared online represent a liberation, to some extent, from traditional distinctions between amateurs and professionals because of the ability to perform editing or distribution tasks previously available only to professionals operating in the public sphere (151). She also highlights the importance of the ways digital photo-sharing enables shifts in the temporal relationships between users and images, as it alters the ways they can be used, for instance, in the construction of personal narratives (151). Van Dijck highlights the opportunities new media provide for memory to take place across a distributed network, such as when images are sent and shared within a virtual space rather than only in a single physical space like a material photograph album (59). Such characteristics of the new media environment are what challenge the discourse of the material family album’s understanding of how access to the album can be granted or refused, requiring a re-evaluation of how content is accessed and distributed.

The fourth chapter explores connections between commerce and production, typically associated with the public sphere, and leisure and consumption, more usually associated with the private sphere, and their influence over the material family album. The commodification of the family album is perhaps one of the strongest driving factors in the desire to connect the family with new media and the internet. When this discourse is realised within digital photo-sharing platforms, the relationship between family albums and commodities is changed. Digital platforms frame the elements of production and consumption differently from the discourse of the material family album by more explicitly merging the two processes, in what George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson describe as “prosumption” (13). Digital photo-sharing within the commercially-owned platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* also involves family leisure activities more strongly in the world of commerce, as their labour is used to create additional commodities in the form of data about users which can be circulated within the commercial sphere separately from family albums. The sentimental attachment to the family album and the traditional distinction between the album and commerce means however that the discourse of the material family album acts to obscure many of the commercial aspects of these platforms.

The discourse of the material family album involves shared practices which allow for the identification of certain collections of photographs as family albums, and which suggests a particular way of interacting with these objects which reflects widely accepted social norms. Many of these practices and norms are unspoken, in that they are not often explicitly recorded or even referred to, yet they are also widely recognised. Digital photo-sharing platforms mediatize this vocabulary of accepted practices, translating internalised norms into standardised, external processes which are used in the creation of software and digital objects. While the existence of a discourse of the material family album already suggests a degree of standardisation of practices through consensus about what is appropriate, these platforms impose standardisation by openly articulating normative practices within their interfaces. The functions these platforms perform represent the practices and activities users are presumed to participate in when creating and viewing family albums, representing the tacit agreements on which the discourse is founded. Yet while these digital platforms participate in the replication of practices associated with the discourse of the material

family album, they also challenge many of the relationships which shaped this discourse, such as those between the album as a material object, and the family as a social unit. It transforms the family's and the album's interaction with one another, and with geography, time and commercial culture.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DISCOURSE OF THE MATERIAL FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM

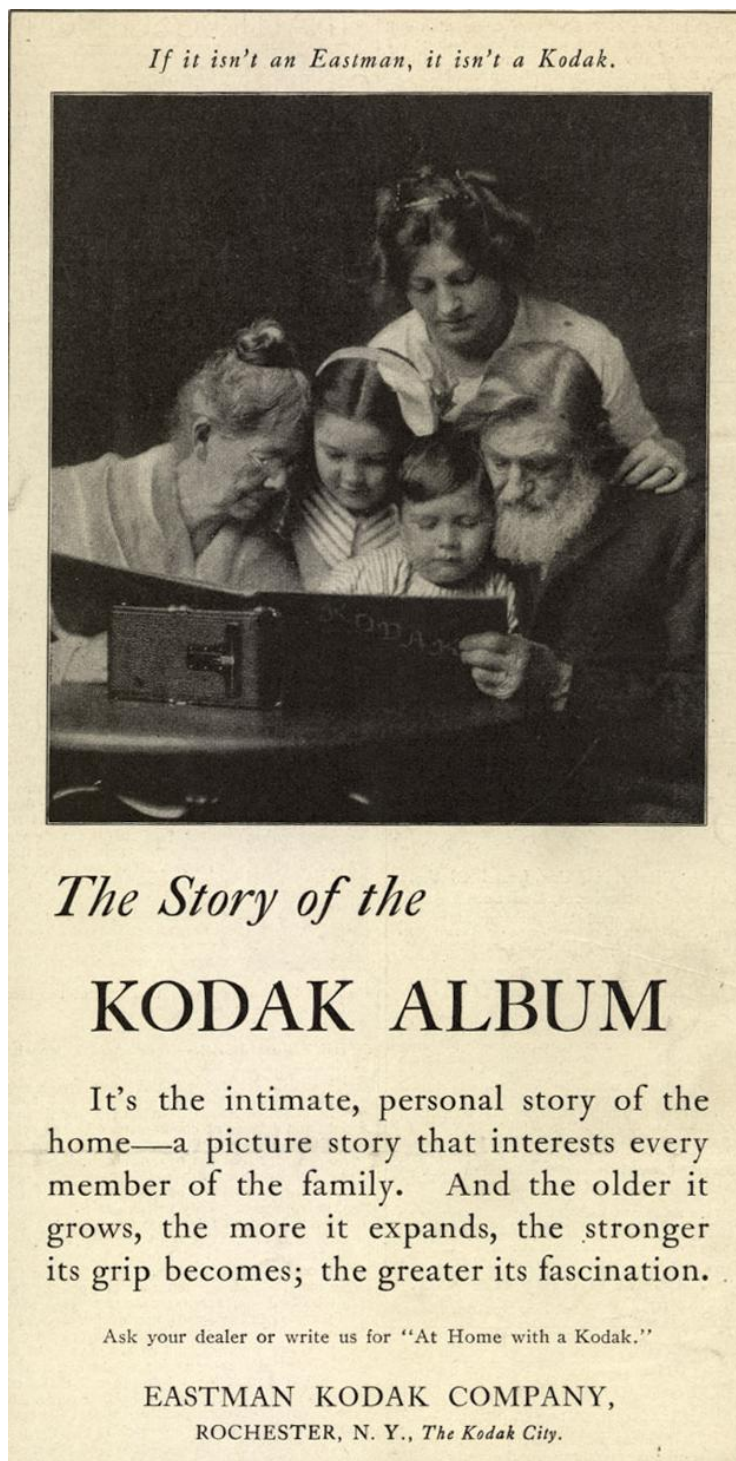


Figure 1 "The Story of the Kodak Album" 1915; Duke University David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Durham, North Carolina *Emergence of Advertising in America, 1850-1920*; Web, 17th Sept. 2011.

In 1915, Kodak advertised its cameras, films and processing services by drawing on the discourse of the material family album (see figure 1 above). As different generations of a family gather around their album, Kodak describes the album as an “intimate personal story of the home” which has the power to capture the interest of “every member of the family” (*The Story of the Kodak Album*). The auratic and powerful nature of the album’s “picture story” contents is suggested through the advertisement’s claim that the older the album becomes, and the more images are added to its expanding narrative, “the stronger its grip becomes; the greater its fascination”. Kodak’s advertisement participates in the rhetoric which surrounds the family album, imparting meaning and significance to collections of family photographs in the domestic sphere. Nearly a century later, the digital photo-sharing platforms of Picasa and Shutterfly continue this tradition. Picasa claims on its introductory page, “About Picasa 3.8 & Picasa Web Albums” that it is the “[p]eople [who] matter in your photos”, while Shutterfly describes its site as helping users “[k]eep track of all your memories” (“Shutterfly: Photobooks”). The discourse of the material family album is a lasting, persistent feature of descriptions of photography and photographic practice in the domestic sphere. The use of the same discourse and claims by Kodak in 1915 and by digital photo-sharing platforms nearly a century later is an indication of the influence this shared understanding of the family album has over the way people think about families, memory and identity.

As the discourse which appears to have the strongest influence over digital photo-sharing platforms and their users, the discourse of the material family photograph album plays a significant role in how people understand how to use and react to these digital objects. This discourse forms part of a complex framework of ideas about the qualities and uses of photographs, such as their objectivity and evidential qualities. The discourse of the material family album suggests that the way photographs are used in family albums and the qualities thereby ascribed to them occur as a result of the apparently essential qualities of the photographic medium. While the objectivity and evidential qualities of photographs seems to be the focus of many discussions of material family albums, albums also draw on other mediums, such as written language and oral commentaries. The discourse suggests particular ways of reading photographs and using them in our social lives, while also

suggesting a specific type of social life: that of the family. Unlike other categories of photography, family photography takes place within the domestic context and is typically shown only within the domestic sphere.

The significance of this discourse extends, however, beyond the domestic sphere. While it shapes private practices in the home, it also influences the design of new mediums for communication. Digital platforms which involve family photographs or social contact built around viewing and discussing photographs, particularly in the ways that Shutterfly and Picasa do, reference the discourse of the material family album, drawing on the nostalgia and intimacy associated with this familiar discourse. As a widely recognised way of using, understanding and talking about images connected to the family, the discourse of the material family album is a way of making such platforms appear familiar, encouraging communication through them by using frameworks established in discourse. In order to establish how and why digital photo-sharing platforms benefit from claiming such genealogical connections with older photographic practices, it is necessary to first define this discourse. The discourse describes the qualities and ideals associated with material albums, providing a set of widely established practices which are generally considered to constitute a vocabulary of acceptable behaviour for album creators and viewers.

This chapter outlines common ways the family album is described and understood in order to define the discourse of the material family album. This discourse refers to a cluster of practices which involve several mediums of communication, drawing on photographs, text and oral discussion in order to create meaning. It privileges, however, only certain of the characteristics attached to each of these mediums, while ignoring others. The discourse of the material family album is able to exert such influence over the way people think about and treat albums because its practices appear natural and habitual, and are widely recognised. While these practices may take place within the private sphere of the home, limiting opportunities for accurate observation, the degree of consensus amongst those who describe these practices in the public arena of academic writing demonstrates widespread agreement about how family albums should be created, viewed, and thought about. The influence of this discourse is created through the way its practices combine the objective medium of photography with subjective commentaries to create albums which

can act as evidence but which can also be shaped to suit preferred narratives about the family's memories and identities, often in ways which align with the conventional ideology of the family in Western societies .

INDEXICALITY AND EVIDENCE

“Picture-taking transported everyone into the future, when their more youthful selves would be only a memory. The photograph was evidence – Maryna would send one of the prints she'd ordered back to her mother, another to Henryk, another to Bogdan's sister – evidence that they were really here, pursuing their valiant new life; to themselves, one day, it would be a relic of that life at its hard, rude beginning or, should their venture not succeed ... of what they had attempted.”

(Sontag *In America* 194)

The family album is typically framed as an archive for narratives about the family. In Susan Sontag's novel *In America*, photographs are used to record evidence of immigration, and of a Polish group establishing a colony on a ranch in California. Photographs, for the novel's characters, served as a record of their exploits and new beginnings. As they have their photograph taken, they already anticipate the way these images will fit into the narrative of their lives together, and what will be done with the images. The idea of the photograph as evidence is particularly significant in this passage, as it shows not only how the photographs will be used, but the qualities they will have as both images, which provide evidence of the life they experience, and as objects to be treasured, which symbolise the past . In order to suggest the authority required of an archive, the discourse of the material family album borrows from the objectivity and evidential quality associated with a more general discourse of photography, and created by the indexicality of photographs. Indexicality is suggested in/by the connection between the photograph, its referent and its viewers, founded on the moment of contact between the camera and the image's referents. Photographs appear to offer us a direct connection to what they depict in their images. As a result, they are typically used and understood with the presumption that they are able to offer realistic renderings of the past through the accuracy of photographic reproductions. Because of their indexicality, it is assumed they can reproduce visual aspects of the past

without passing judgement or directing the viewer's understanding. Discourses of photography suggest its indexicality means the medium can provide accurate representations of the past.

As a result, photography has frequently been assigned uses which reflect the objectivity which indexicality supposedly supports, such as being used for the documentation of history and family membership in the material family album. The notion of objectivity lends the family album authority. Although the discourse of the material family album is more typically associated with social rather than factual uses of photography, the impression of objectivity remains vital. Martha Langford claims family albums draw on the typical characterisation of photography as “objective, evidential and formulaic” (93). By drawing on photographs and discourses of photography, the discourse of the material family album aligns itself with such objectivity, suggesting albums provide factual evidence of the family's activities, and encouraging viewers to invest albums with the authority to do so (93).

The notion of evidence is central to the ways the material family album's role in social life is described and justified. Richard Chalfen, for example, claims photographs have “perceived evidentiary qualities”, and can be used therefore to validate experiences, relationships and achievements, particular in relation to the family (134). He describes family photographs as being “expected and even required artifacts” which are widely considered as legitimate forms of evidence for documenting family membership and activities (80). The medium of photography is privileged over others, Chalfen claims, for its ability to reduce large amounts of information about people, places and events into “manageable and convenient units for future reference” (136). Susan Sontag notes a similar privileging of photography, claiming that by photographing people and events, we confer importance upon them (28). The role of photography within a family album is, she suggests, to “furnish evidence” and provide what appears to be “incontrovertible proof” about events (5). The family album acts as evidence because it collects together photographs to build a narrative about the family, its members, history and identity.

The discourse of the material family album not only incorporates particular ways of thinking about the evidential qualities of material albums, it also influences perceptions of a

family's history and identity. The discourse describes albums as drawing on indexical connections to the images' referents in order to establish a link between the viewers of an album, and the family members shown in its images. The indexicality of family photographs results, Roland Barthes suggests in *Camera Lucida*, in a focus on the image's content to the degree that viewers fail to see the image itself because they trust so implicitly in this indexical connection (6). The photograph's role in shaping the family's history and identity is therefore overlooked, and viewers trust absolutely in what photographs show. In doing so, the narratives which family albums create are treated as reality rather than representations, and they become part of the family's history and identity .

Indexicality is able to imply enduring connections between living family members and their deceased or distant relatives because of the moment of co-existence created by the technical characteristics of a photograph's production. Yet while this moment of production starts these connections to the past, it also stops the passage of time. While photographs remind us of the time that has passed since the moment of creation, their indexicality also enables what Barthes describes as the "return of the dead", showing those who may now have aged and died still alive and living (9). The past is, paradoxically, depicted in the present tense. The referent of the photograph appears so alive and immediate within the image that the effect is to make them seem powerfully present, returned to life and to youth. They become once again a part of the family, because the viewer participates in reviving their image. In doing so, photographs produce the family as a mental construct. Indexicality is an important element of the discourse of the material family album because it serves the purpose of connecting family members together through looking at one another in photographs. Family members both look upon the image's referent, and look out at the viewer from the past, eliding the intervening time and space which separates them. In "*The Story of the Kodak Album*" advertisement at the head of this chapter, for instance, we see family members gathered around their album. Through the mutual viewing of the family album, looking at photographs of one another in such company, the family is brought into being.

While the discourse of the material family album is associated with objectivity through its powerful associations with photography, the practices commonly involved in creating family albums are far from objective. Richard Chalfen claims that unlike the discourse of photography, the practices involved in making family albums are not “grounded in theories of empirical truth” and objectivity (120). While albums direct possible readings through their practices, the discourse of the material family album obscures this manipulation of meanings because of its associations with the “realist semiotic paradigm” of photography (121). The characteristics associated with photography remain potent and pervasive within the discourse of the material family album, associating the discourse with a vocabulary of objectivity and indexicality. To argue that some uses of the photographic medium are not objective or indexical is difficult, because it undermines our understanding of photography at a fundamental level. While for the purposes of this discussion the potential of photography to be ‘objective’ and offer indexical connections to what it depicts is not in question, many of the practices associated with the discourse of the material family album exploit these associations while acting in ways which contradict objectivity. These practices include the way albums represent the subjective selection and organisation of images into configurations chosen by the compiler, which direct the possible readings of these photographs. Yet the framing of albums as evidence and as an archive remains a powerful influence over the structure of albums, particularly in the ways the album’s narratives are given substance and documented through photographs. Martha Langford describes the type of evidence favoured by those who make material family albums as being highly repetitive, often to the point of redundancy. Important ideas are “constantly recycled,” and therefore amplified through their restatement, by the inclusion of numerous images of the same events, places, people or situations (139). Albums provide an overabundance of evidence that a family exists and that family members share their lives with one another, supporting the ideology of a cohesive family unit even if this does not translate into lived experience. Langford explains that this accumulation of images “accrues to excess through reiteration or exaggeration” (140). Through repetition and elaboration, family members become the subjects of “praise or vituperation” for their contributions to, or, alternatively, their absence from, the family’s life through their representations within the album (139).

Langford's description of album practices suggests family albums take advantage of the objectivity associated with photography while also directing the ways viewers read the albums towards particular perspectives, such as the admiration or derision of family members. Pierre Bourdieu shares Langford's concern with the notion of accumulation, arguing that creating collections of photographic evidence is one way in which families can assert their "unity and continuity in urban society", by proving their continuing connections with one another through images (28). This reiteration of ideas within family albums suggests that the meaning and authority of family albums relies greatly on context and structure, rather than only on the images themselves. While the discourse of the album may be frequently aligned with the discourse of photography, with its characteristics of objectivity and indexicality, and its evidential qualities, the discourse of the material family album and its practices involve more than just photographs, meaning its influence extends beyond image content alone.

While the discourse of the material family album is enabled and supported by widely accepted assumptions about the factual qualities of photography, albums create narratives through their structure, materiality and discussions rather than through image content alone. Unlike in other areas of photographic discourse, it is the compiler who is commonly thought to exert the greatest influence over the family album's images and who decides upon their meaning. While the photographer may determine the content of the images, it is the compiler who determines their meaning and significance within the album through the ways the photographs are used. Discourses of photography only account for the image's content, rather than the ascription of social meaning, which is the focus of the discourse of material family albums.

CREATING MEANING, MEMORY AND IDENTITY

"'Eyes wide open, that's right. Now I would like to see a pleasant expression. You're going to be very glad to have this record of yourselves in the years to come.' And so they will be. And the brash light of the hot March afternoon will become the sepia

grace of bygone days. Then we were like that. Young and innocent-looking. And so picturesque.”

(Sontag *In America* 187)

The evidential role played by photographs is significant because photography is so frequently aligned with memory. The characters of *In America* are encouraged by their photographer to present themselves as they wish to be remembered, reminding them even as the photograph is taken of the role it will later play in recalling this time. Discussions about family photographs often emphasise the role photographs play in memory creation and retention, particularly for collective memory. Photography’s apparent ability to prompt memory is a potent element of discourses of photography, and of the discourse of the material family album in particular. Discussions of memory and photography often take the form of two paradigms; the first addresses photography’s structuring role in the creation and retention of memory, while the second paradigm addresses the issues which arise from relying on a medium such as photography for recording memory.

Photographs are commonly described as closely bound to memories, to the extent that photographs are said to have the ability to contribute to the structure and content of memory. The paradigm for discussions of this structuring role describes photographs as a prompt for memory, initiating recollections. Geoffrey Batchen for instance identifies a common tendency in discussions of memory and photographs which results in the two often being discussed as if they were synonymous, such is the intensity of their relationship (41). Sontag demonstrates this tendency, by describing images as a short cut to the past and to memory (68). The viewer’s distinction between the memory and the photograph is supposedly blurred, the image bringing the memory closer in much the same way as indexicality seems to bring the image’s referent closer. The distinction between memory and the photograph is erased to the extent that when confronted with a photograph of the past, we see through the image directly to our own recollections, rather than seeing only the image.

Yet in addition to prompting memory, photographs are also described as suggesting and

structuring the contents of these memories. José van Dijck describes photography as widely considered the “most reliable aid for recall and for verifying memory” (“Digital Photography” 58). Chalfen also claims photographs help organise memories and ensure the “retention of details” (137). For photographs to take on such a role, they must be commonly considered indexical, objective and accurate; perhaps more so than human memory. Photographs are treated as though they offer unmediated access to the past, and consequently they are privileged over personal memory. We see this occurring in the family album through the way the images are contained in albums with little labelling or captioning, an idea addressed further later in this chapter. Photographs are considered significant enough to collect and preserve, but personal memory is not inscribed on the album explicitly. The claim that photographs are able to prompt memory recollection suggests that human memory, when left unassisted, is far from perfect or infallible. This paradigm for describing the connection between photography and memory suggests that media are more durable and resilient to the corrupting effects of time than human memory. By associating memories with media, these memories are also able to become enduring and permanent.

A contradictory paradigm for discussing the relationship between memory and photographs suggests that the use of media for storing information leads to growing inadequacies in the memory capabilities of their users. The ability of photographs to act as a “repository of memory” is therefore subject to a degree of scepticism and opposition, according to Langford, because of fears that reliance on media to record and retrieve memory will ultimately lead to “mental degradation” and a “condition of mnemonic atrophy” (4). Both these paradigms for discussing memory and photography reflect the precariousness associated with entrusting the longevity of narratives to any medium.

The discourse of the material family album is, however, most frequently aligned with the first of these two paradigms, as it justifies the album's role in family life. This paradigm suggests that viewing an album leads to the retention of memory, as it recalls the past and encourages discussion about events. Each time a photograph is seen within an album, stories are told about the related events and family members. The family photograph album is therefore valuable, because it visualises memories and gathers these memories together

within an apparently permanent collection. In aligning itself with the first paradigm, the discourse of the material family album obscures the possibility that a reliance on media to prompt memory may result in the loss of the mental discipline required to recall the past for ourselves, or that those memories which lie outside of the album or which contradict its narratives may be suppressed in favour of the album's single, and apparently authoritative narrative.

The album's role in shaping the recollection and retentions of memories is significant because it appears to provide the raw materials from which identities are formed. Discussions of the material family album often refer to the album's ability to articulate and negotiate identity. This mediation of identity occurs through practices commonly associated with the discourse of the material family album, such as the role of compilers and viewers, and the type of content typically included. The discourse primarily addresses individuals as part of a wider collective, rather than on their own. While photographs of individuals are included, their context within the album means they will always be read in reference to the collective identity represented in the album. Andrea Kunard argues that this is because within the album, individuals are presented as “integrated into larger social structures”, affirming their relationships to others and position within the family (237). Through the accumulation of indexical evidence about the family and of memories about its past, family albums shape family identity.

The family album's role in producing and reiterating identity is significant because it is frequently seen as emerging alongside growing threats to the family unit from outside the domestic sphere. The family album became an important social rite, Sontag claims, at the same moment in history as the institution of the family was endangered by industrialisation and the resulting dispersion of extended families (9). The discourse of the family album responds to the demands of contemporary society, ascribing to the family album the role of recording, and perhaps standing in for, the comfort and sense of belonging which membership in the extended family apparently provided. Industrialisation, these claims suggest, demanded a “lean, mobile workforce” which Deborah Chambers argues is at odds with traditional ideals of community (14). Under these circumstances and facing increasing industrial demands, the family structure favoured by society changed. The nuclear family

was preferred for its mobility, while the extended family was no longer required by industry (14). Family life was faced with what Sontag describes as its own “imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness” (9). The family album is required to furnish proof of an extended family that is in actuality dispersed and fragmented. Sontag claims that albums to some extent replace lived experience of the family, providing the “token presence of dispersed relatives” (9). Through albums, families take “imaginary possession of a past that is unreal”, the collective past of the extended family, as well as asserting the family’s presence in contemporary industrial society where its position is increasingly insecure and peripheral (9). The discourse of the material family album uses the continued existence of photograph albums to symbolise the survival of the family and its identity.

Yet the disintegration of a previously close-knit extended family unit is to some extent a discursive construction, rather than a simple reflection of economic and social conditions. Discussions of the material family album as a way of overcoming geographical separations overlook the necessary contact between family members required in order for the album to be maintained and viewed. Material albums require the same familial contact that these discussions claim no longer exists, because families must remain in physical contact in order to view their albums. Rather than disrupting this pattern of familial contact and visits, geographic separations perhaps only disturbs intergenerational contact. The nuclear family became the basis for everyday family life, while contact with the extended family became less common because of geographical separations. The family album enables the intergenerational contact which geographical separation lessens, as it takes the extended family group as its subject, and brings the family together whenever it is viewed.

The discourse of the material family album consequently privileges collective identities over those of individuals. Don Slater suggests that as a result of their creation through the family album, such collective identities are able to transcend the everyday (138). They are apparently resistant to change, as they are built from the gradual accumulation of stories and signs within the album, rather than from everyday events. Slater describes the family album as created using a “privileged selection of images” to represent family identity to both themselves and to others (Slater 138). As a result, the album includes only those images which fit with the compiler’s and the family’s collective understanding of identity

and history. The use of photographs to communicate ideas about family identity relies on the widespread acceptance of the photographic medium as a way of constructing meaning and reflecting on collective identities. José van Dijck describes photographs as a common way for people to “articulate their connections” to groups and identify members through their presence at the “ritualized moments” associated with group membership (“Digital Photography” 60). As well as showing people’s presence at these moments of collective life, photography also provides evidence of the group’s identifying characteristics. Barthes claims photographs can reveal the “persistence of the species”, as families are shown to thrive over a number of generations, reminding the viewer of their lineage which he describes as a reassuring thought when faced, in contrast, with the uncertainty of the future (105).

In order to create such collective identities, the discourse of the material family album is associated with particular types of images. The content typically associated with the discourse of the material family album are those images which reflect this theme of family relationships. Chalfen claims that by depicting people together the family album asserts the existence and strength of “intergenerational ties and kinship bonds” (77). Images which include family members from different generations are treasured, as older relatives may die while younger ones may be unable to recall the meetings such photographs record (Chalfen 77). In this way, the album both creates and maintains connections between generations. Chalfen describes the type of photography associated with this discourse as being part of the “home mode” of communication. He describes it as a tool for the affirmation of the social self of the “conforming corporate-family”, rather than the idiosyncratic and autonomous individual (136). One common example of such images described by Chalfen is that of relatives such as parents or grandparents “holding a baby while standing outside near the front steps...or by a side wall of the house”, affirming the corporate-family through the symbol of the house, as evidence of success and stability (77). Events such as “birthdays, social gatherings during calendar or religious holidays, and other parties” are heavily documented in such photographs (81). The discourse’s preferred content is also a restrictive measure, as albums typically only include images which Bourdieu describes as meeting the “norms of propriety and suitability” associated with family life (80). The collective identity of the family is demonstrated and recorded through what the images communicate about

their relationships with one another, the activities they participate in, and signs of material accumulation and purchases.

The discourse of the material family album consequently celebrates the memories and meanings associated with such banal images, rather than any aesthetic, photographic achievement. The album is a predictable, familiar format to many people because individual albums are created using a formulaic selection of images, producing what Langford describes as a “litany of clichés” (128). Formulaic photographs are the preferred mode of communication within family albums, Kunard claims, because they allow individuals to present themselves and their families “within the parameters of established, socially accepted visual codes” which refer to the aspirations of living a successful and satisfying family life (227). The value of these images lies in their connotations and association with the ideology of the family, rather than their aesthetics. The album consecrates such stereotypical images and becomes according to Langford a “reliquary of socialization and faith” in the ideology of the family (26). The content of their images is stereotypical, and conforms with existing social conventions connected with the family.

The discourse of the material family album is therefore one of cultural reproduction and socialisation. These are tasks performed by the family itself, transmitting values and memories between one generation and the next and to newcomers through contact between members and shared experiences. Slater claims that the family album encourages such cultural reproduction through its representations of the family (138). Children and newcomers are introduced to the family through the presentation and discussion of the album, a socialisation process which Chalfen describes as an exhibition of the family’s collective identity. For Chalfen, the album has an “agenda-setting function”, as it demonstrates a particular model of family life which younger generations and newcomers are expected to internalise as part of their initiation into the group (140). Bourdieu claims that the presence of children in particular acts as a catalyst for family album practices, because their arrival “reinforces the integration of the group” and families feel compelled to record this integration in photographs (26). He describes photographs as participating in the “continual updating of the exchange of family information” (22). The introduction and integration of children and new members of the family reflects the album's role as a tool of

cultural reproduction, storing and distributing information about the family for and to a limited audience of family members. The reproduction of family identity is mediated by the album as it makes social practices into a visual form of communication, as well as through social contact between family members as they view the album. The album and its practices provide the opportunity for such socialisation to occur.

Yet while these descriptions of the album's role in cultivating and sharing family identity recognise the communicative aspects of album practices, they ignore to some extent the restrictive nature of such practices. The information about the family which the album holds is necessarily restrictive, in that it reflects only the information which the album's compiler knows, or, perhaps, the information which the compiler wishes other family members to believe. Kunard claims albums are an opportunity for compilers to demonstrate their understanding of the social relationships around them (228). She argues that by providing evidence of particular relationships and values through images, the album can illustrate the compiler's interpretation of what it means to belong to a "larger community of shared interests" like the family (240). The compiler negotiates the "desired identity" of themselves and of the family, although usually within the confines of wider behavioural codes from the "social, professional and familial spheres" (240). The discourse of the material family album involves a privileging of the social values and preferences of wider society over those of the individual, even as the individual exerts their influence over representations of the family as a collective. Kunard's description suggests albums must satisfy the expectations and desires of the wider family, not only those of the compiler, and as a result they are able to act as articulations of collective identity.

Kunard's references to wider behavioural codes suggests that by communicating the family's collective identity through a material family album, this identity must also become subject to the demands of the practices and ideologies associated with the discourse of the material family album. Mindi Rhoades describes the album as a site where the master narratives of the family interact with the "dominant sociocultural discourse[s]", including those of sexual identity, gender, race and class, in order to "organize and enforce cultural norms" (48). The stories and memories commonly communicated by albums, as well as the type of images they use, are highly conventional. She claims that since the 19th century,

family albums have been the primary site for arranging idiosyncratic family images into “culturally-appropriate narratives” (49). In doing so, they arrange family members into widely recognised roles and functions. Chalfen notes the same phenomenon, describing formulaic family photographs and albums as a way in which to “restate and reify social structure and social organisation” which consequently shapes relationships and collective identities (84). The discourse of the material family album can be considered a remarkably conservative discourse, as it is associated with the reiteration and reinforcement primarily of existing dominant social norms, despite albums being considered an articulation of individual family identities. The type of identity which the discourse of the material family album therefore makes it possible to articulate through albums is that which conforms with existing ideologies of the family as a cohesive social and economic grouping, shown thriving through a number of different generations by a limited range of formulaic images which indicate success. Those albums which do not conform with this ideal are likely to be considered outside the social norms of propriety, or perhaps not even recognised as a family photograph album.

One example of where family photographs taken outside the ideal context of the family album is the website *AwkwardFamilyPhotos.com* (see figure 2 below). While the site uses reader contributions in the form of family photographs, the function of the site is to highlight the awkwardness which occurs when these images are taken outside their original context in the home. The public nature of the site and teasing commentaries which accompany each image mean *AwkwardFamilyPhotos.com* is unlikely to be recognised as a “family photograph album”, even though its photographs are clearly the typical material family albums are made of, featuring children in costumes, or family groups in studio portraits. This site highlights, though, the conformity of images created by families, and that what might seem slightly absurd when shared outside the home is considered acceptable in a family album.



Figure 2 “Balancing Act 3”; *AwkwardFamilyPhotos.com* 21st Oct. 2011; Web; 22nd Oct. 2011.

The willingness to trust representations of collective identities presented in family albums is based on the album's raw materials, photographs which are apparently objective evidence of the past and of people's identities. However the discourse of the material family album suggests only a limited selection of preferred contents, as shown in many of the discussions of family photography, preventing the album from being a truly objective format. The guiding role of the compiler and the normative narratives which restate existing social structures are concealed by the discourse's connection with notions of photographic objectivity.

MATERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND ORAL COMMENTARIES

“‘The pants were red,’ Ryszard will say to his wife (his second wife), fingering the picture and staring back at his own old-colored stare. ‘And the flannel shirt fastened with a hook and eye, that was my favourite shirt. Try to guess what my attire had cost me, all together? One dollar!’”

(Sontag *In America* 187)

In order for memory to be communicated through a family photograph album, its contents need to stimulate discussion and recollections. This is most commonly described in discussions of family albums as occurring through the material organisation of photographs in the album, and through the way albums are commented on. Ryszard, in the quote above, uses his photograph as a prompt as he narrates his arrival in America to his wife. The sepia photograph does not show the colour of his pants, or the details which he describes to her, yet these are the parts of his story he chooses to dwell on. The materiality and oral commentaries which characterise family albums define their social meaning and significance as much as the content of their images. They are perhaps the strongest ways of shaping the possible readings of the album because they are subject to the control of the album’s compiler and presenter, unlike the content of their images which is created by numerous photographers. As such, they are able to mould the family’s history and identity. While compilers and presenters exert a powerful influence over the family album, their authority usually remains unquestioned because of the indexical, evidential qualities of the photographs found within family albums.

Martha Langford claims that while images in an album may not appear to have an explicit narrative connecting them together when the album is viewed by an outsider, the selection and organisation of photographs in an album should show “narrative potential” which can be developed by the album’s presenter (140). Both Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Chalfen also highlight this idea that the photographs chosen for inclusion in the album should exhibit narrative potential. Bourdieu claims the photographs included in album should ideally demonstrate “narrative symbolism” (91). This enables them to act as catalysts for stories

about the family, even if they do not show this story directly through their image content. Those which are included in the album contribute to what Chalfen describes as its “visual narrative style”, delivering “culturally significant tales and myths about ourselves to ourselves” (142). The presentation of these images should stimulate such stories, even though the photographs themselves, as Chalfen argues, “don’t literally ‘say’ anything – people do the talking” (70). The interaction between image content, their physical arrangement and their discussion is commonly seen to be more powerful in their communication of narratives about the family when they operate together rather than separately.

The notion of photographs acting as a prompt for memory and creating narratives in albums highlights the significance of the editing processes involved in creating family albums. Memories are inscribed on material family photograph albums through editing and selection, bringing together significant images and creating meaning through the way they interact across the pages of the album. Chalfen claims that the collection of photographs within albums acts to juxtapose and sequence the images as symbols, communicating through these symbols the compiler’s interpretation of family life (6). Albums connect images together, encouraging viewers to understand and interpret their meanings in specific ways through the way the images interact with one another. According to Sontag, it is their positioning in the album, such as the order they are presented in, which establishes the order the compiler wants the photographs to be seen and understood (*On Photography* 5). In addition to selecting which images to include in the family album, the compiler also shapes the narrative the album provokes by the way they structure images within albums.

The order and structure of images within albums is commonly considered to not only shape the narratives albums tell, but also to shape the way memories are recalled. The materiality of albums enables them to take on a mnemonic role in the recollection of memory, connecting their physical organisation to memory. The framing of images within collections such as albums gives memory what Langford describes as a material presence, encouraging “remembering by visual association” (42). The creation of an album reflects the desire to retain information about family history and identity, because it provides a lasting structure which can be revisited and used to retrieve memories (21). Langford describes

albums as attempts to preserve stories about ourselves and the past in a “concrete and bounded report” (63). The materiality of the album is cherished in the hope that by maintaining these tangible objects, the intangible memories we attach to them will also be preserved. The materiality of family photograph albums is therefore central to its discourse, because it prescribes what Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart describe as “embodied conditions of viewing” (11). The practices associated with the discourse of the material family album reflect the physical nature of the album, incorporating this into the ways albums generate meaning and interact with memory and identity.

The interaction between the traditions of photographic, material and oral cultures makes the material family album a powerful repository for the conservation of memory and creation of meaning, but also highlights the constructed nature of memory and identity. Many discussions of the material family album dwell on the repetition which defines both the contents of the album and the commentaries which accompany them. Such repetition, like the accumulation of clichéd images perform an important role in how the family album are presented. Langford argues that the elements of recitation and repetition are built into the family album through the choice and order of the photographs, which consequently structure the accompanying oral commentary and facilitate the “retention and presentation” of crucial ideas (139). Chalfen describes albums as characterised by their processes of “intensification, elaboration, exaggeration, and repetition” (92). This process of amplification occurs through viewers and presenters returning to and repeating key stories to emphasise their significance to the family’s narrative. Jenny Kidd claims that the narratives accompanying the presentation of albums are themselves rehearsed and repetitive, allowing the presenter to “maintain a sense of master and authority” over the story as they reveal their prepared stories to the audience (169). These elements of repetition and reiteration encourage a sense of familiarity within the album, as each story echoes others in terms of their themes or characters.

The meaning and significance of the photographs contained in albums is in part also created through the ways they are labelled, often through written annotations. Langford describes written captions as typically short and sparse, as the contents of the family album are supposed to be so familiar to their audience that there is little need for the compiler to

commit anything other than the bare essentials of “faces, places and dates” to paper (8).

Yet such limited labelling within the album also suggests that further embellishment might be needed in order for the social significance of the photographs to be recognised. When elaboration is necessary, it is typically provided by the album’s compiler, or another family member acting in their place, filling in the narratives which surround the images through an oral commentary. Kunard describes the compiler as therefore also acting as a presenter, with the role of explaining the album’s images and logic, and perhaps limiting the information they reveal according to their audience and their position within the family (237). It is this combination of photographs and oral commentaries which immerses the viewer in the stories that albums tell.

Oral discussions of family albums are vital to their function as a social archive as they reinforce the album’s role as a repository of memory. The content of oral commentaries commonly takes the form of a narrative about the images. Narratives exist, according to Jon Dovey, as both linear, time-based representations of events, and also as something which viewers can experience and feel “as a web of associations and meaning” (138). Such immersion in narrative highlights the different roles photographs and commentaries perform within the discourse of the material family album, and the type of experience they each offer viewers. Photographs provide representations of events, while oral commentaries enrich the experience by explaining their significance and connections to the viewer. When experienced as an oral narrative as well as images, Langford claims the album constitutes “lived experience” which blends the past and the present through the performance of narration (61). The result of reliving experiences, she suggests, is that the album is able to carry out the task of commemorating and communicating memory.

Orality is also described in many discussions of the material family album as a way of asserting authority over those individuals depicted within the images. Langford claims the authority of the album lies in the way it names and labels images and people (122). This happens not just through the meagre captions which assign names, locations and dates, but also through the stories which accompany the album. Orality is invested with power, as the presenter of the album claims the right to label and narrate the lives of others (122). Photographs participate in this too, using what Langford describes as the “modern authority

of mechanism”, the objective and indexical qualities of photography, to capture realistic images of people and label these as representative of some aspect of that person’s life (122).

The materiality of the family photograph album encompasses more than just the way images are physically arranged on the pages of albums; it also incorporates the tactile qualities of albums and their physical appearance, including damage. Image content, arrangement and oral commentaries interact with the album’s materiality and connections with the traditions of material culture to create meaning. Analogue photographs are always more than just their images; they are also material objects, with a physical presence which affects the ways they can be used and understood. Discussions of photography frequently emphasise the importance of being able to not only see photographs, but also being able to touch them. This is especially important in the realm of family photographs, because of the photograph’s indexical connection with the family members they depict. Geoffrey Batchen emphasises the role the tactile qualities of photographs play in the recollection of memories, as photographs and the family members they represent are not only seen but also felt and touched (42). Photographs which are touched and held, he suggests, stand in for the physical presence of family members (42). Thus, In Kodak’s advertisement *The Story of the Kodak Album*, we see family members gathered around the album. The grandparents of the family hold the album for the children to see, suggesting not only their ownership of the album, but also the powerful connotations of the act of holding and touching the family album.

Yet because of their physical nature, photographs transform the appearance of family members into a “portable visual sign”, which Batchen suggests mobilises and commodifies their image (39). The family can be “owned” or deployed by virtue of possession of photographs. Sontag describes albums as a “portable kit of images” which can be brought out whenever the family needs to demonstrate its connectedness (*On Photography* 8). While the circulation of the family album is restricted only to family members, it can be transported within the domestic sphere at events where family identity and membership needs to be reaffirmed, such as following the birth, death or marriage of its members. The portability of this evidence is vital if it is to successfully perform such a role; however

portability also evokes the geographical dispersal of the family unit associated with industrialisation. The family album can also only be successfully restricted to the family and domestic sphere because of its physicality, which allows the owners to keep it secure from outsiders. It is restricted to the home by its materiality, and must be accessed physically, which is used as a defence against unintentional viewing. This is, however, only important if the album is considered an intimate insight into the family's identity and history.

Treasuring material photographs is, however, problematic. The discourse of photography encourages an almost paradoxical attachment to photographs as material objects. Sontag describes most material photographs as "lightweight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, [and] store" (*On Photography* 3). Despite this, photography is widely appreciated and valued as if all photographs were rare and costly, an attachment which perhaps arises as a consequence of what photographs show, rather than what they are: their indexicality over their materiality. Photographs often seem to inspire viewers to move beyond the casual attachments typically associated with such cheap, popular mediums, to one of powerful emotional bonds. Yet recognition of the material photograph's fallibility also gives the medium poignancy. Barthes describes material photographs as mortal, as they share the same perishable fate of all paper even when "attached to more lasting supports" such as the family album (93). When exposed to the damaging effects of handling, light or humidity, the material photograph "fades, weakens, [and] vanishes" (93).

This interaction between image content, commentaries and materiality makes the physical form of a photograph or album as important as its content. We form emotional attachments to photographs, according to José van Dijck, through handling them, contemplating their touch and feel as analogue, tactile products ("From Shoebox" 312). The materiality of a photograph is therefore more than just a "neutral support for images" because, as Edwards and Hart argue, it carries its own connotations (2). It can reveal how photographs and albums have been treated by others, showing the "physical traces of usage and time" (3). An album's physical appearance works with its contents to suggest its purpose and reception. Their materiality influences the way images are interpreted, particularly with regard to assessments of their social value and significance.

Such interpretations draw particularly on visible signs of damage and aging in the material family album. Glen Williamson claims that the photographs which survive the longest are typically those kept in albums, as this is usually the result of personal attention from an album compiler (63). The survival of older photographs suggests that they were worth protecting and preserving, immediately investing images kept in albums with value, meaning, and authority. Damage and visible signs of aging encourage a similar re-evaluation of material photographs. Damaged photographs, Julian Kilker argues, require viewers to “reinterpret the original visual content” in light of how they appear to have been used and treated (55). Damage and aging play a role in the discourse of the material family album as they provide an additional layer of meaning from which viewers can determine the significance and authority of the albums they encounter. This suggests that not all family albums or photographs are treated with the same degree of esteem.

Damage has a variety of connotations. While it often suggests a lack of care and attention, it may also imply the advanced age of the object. In such circumstances, damage is an indication of history. There are therefore conflicting paradigms for understanding damage to photographs, depending on whether the damage appears to be the result of neglect, caused by human carelessness, or of use, caused by the object’s age and frequent handling. These different interpretations of damage arise from cultural attitudes towards the preservation of objects. Kilker identifies two key paradigms for understanding damage, the first valuing the “ideal pristine artifact”, avoiding and repairing damage, and the second creating the “entropic artifact”, acknowledging and valuing damage as the product of the object’s “mortality, temporality, and serendipity” (52). Damage acts as a reminder that photographs are material and mortal. Seeing a treasured yet damaged image suggests a connection with how the people in the photographs have also aged. It highlights the family album’s nature as a fallible object, as it is just as vulnerable to age and deterioration as the family it depicts.

Through their frequent description as an archive for preserving family photographs and retaining memory, family albums are framed as a way of mitigating against damage and preserving family narratives, while also acting as a poignant reminder of the losses which damage and the passage of time may have already created. By depicting and preserving

images of deceased or distant relatives, the family album relieves some of the “anxiety and remorse” which Sontag claims their absence from daily life creates (*On Photography* 16). These photographs provide both a pseudo-presence and a token of their absence (16). Through them, family members seem almost present once again, as their image is repeatedly encountered and handled in the album. Yet such images also act as a reminder of their current absence, as there would be little need for such images to be owned and treasured if these people remained part of everyday life. Absence is not only a poignant aspect of family life, but also a significant part of the discourse of the material family album. While some absences are ignored, such as the deliberate exclusion of ostracised relatives, others become part of the album's presentation, as gaps in the visual narrative are filled with an oral explanation. Absence is part of the album's discourse, reflecting the impossibility of visualising and documenting every event, person, and story through photographs alone. Absences are not only a necessary part of albums; they are also desirable. Many descriptions of family albums claim they act as assertions of a single, collective narrative. Sontag for example describes albums as an illustration of the “ongoing biography or history” of the family (166), while Bourdieu describes album compilers as historiographers of the family, preparing an heirloom for future generation in the form of images of what the family used to be (30). These descriptions suggest the album creates a single authoritative explanation of the history and identity of the family, which overlooks any loss of detail caused by damage or exclusions caused by disagreements or challenges to social norms.

The discourse of the material family album is created through widespread agreement on the propriety of certain practices rather than others, the preference for particular types of images, and consensus about the ability of the album to act as a repository for the family's collective memory and identity. It also reveals a great deal about prevailing ideologies of the family and the relationships and responsibilities individuals have to the collective. The use of photographs within albums connects this discourse to broader discourses of photography and the notions of indexicality and objectivity. Discourses of photography commonly assign photographs the task of memory retention because they are said to prompt recollection, and structure the content and form of memories most often in ways which conform with rather than contradict the photograph's content. Photography's ability to perform this role

is so widely accepted as arising from the medium's inherent characteristics that its role in obscuring other memories within the collective archive is ignored.

This ability to conceal certain memories and stories within the family's narrative, collective memory and history is a consequence of the album's incorporation of not only photographic images, but also the materiality of these photographs and the album which contains them, and the oral commentaries which typically accompany their presentation. These shape the ways family albums are understood and used. Oral discussion of the family album is often described as a key element of the material family album's presentation. The medium which exerts the most influence over the album's contents is photography, although many of the album's stories are also communicated and clarified by its use of the spoken word. Oral narratives have the ability, however, to undermine the apparent objectivity of photographs, ascribing meanings to images which their content may not immediately suggest. Recognising the importance of oral elements of the discourse of the material family album allows us to acknowledge the album as a socially produced object, rather than one in which meaning is inherent and natural.

As seen in the ways so many descriptions of family albums and their practices agree upon the same conventions and the meaning of these norms, the discourse of the material family album has become a dominant influence over the way collections of photographs of people in the domestic sphere are conceptualised. Kodak's description at the head of this chapter of the "picture story that interests every member of the family" is not unique; it forms part of a century-long discussion about families, memory, identity, and the family album. The degree of consensus which emerges in these discussions suggests that practices related to the material family album are well-established as social norms, and have become deeply implicated in the ways people conceive of families and albums as the family's archives. This also implies that the discourse of the material family album is an inherently conservative discourse, as changes in the way albums are created, presented or thought about would also necessitate a reconsideration of how family memory and identity is created, reproduced, and controlled. The familiarity of the discourse encourages a sense of reassurance and nostalgia, as it offers familiar ways of dealing with any photograph within the domestic sphere, and of constructing a family identity under any circumstance, such as

following the disintegration of a family, or migration. By drawing on the discourse to approach collections of personal photographs, we invoke feelings of nostalgia not only for our own particular family members or past, but also for the ideological ideal of the extended family.

The existence of such a powerful discourse presents digital platforms designed for handling personal photographs with both challenges and advantages. While the discourse of the material family album encompasses a rather prescriptive set of practices and vocabulary for dealing with photographs and creating albums, its familiarity is also a useful tool for establishing a line of genealogy between material and digital objects, making the purpose and functions of such digital platforms immediately recognisable to their users. While *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* emphasise different elements of this discourse, both participate in extending the discourse in to new territory. Within digital platforms, as the next chapter will demonstrate, nostalgia is augmented, becoming nostalgia for the material format which this discourse references, as well as for the location-bound, close-knit extended family.

CHAPTER TWO

MAKING THE DISCOURSE VISIBLE: DIGITAL PHOTO-SHARING PLATFORMS, REMEDIATION AND MEDIATIZATION

“Shutterfly has made it easier than ever to tell your story. All the tools you need to view and organize your albums and pictures are now in one place.”

(*Shutterfly.com*)

The new media context offers a unique opportunity to examine the norms which direct the compilation, presentation and distribution of family albums. These norms are not however the only influence shaping digital photo-sharing platforms. The structures of these platforms are subject to three influences: that of the discourse of the material family album, of the computer and its database logic, and the platforms’ development and maintenance by corporate institutions. The discourse of the material family album is, arguably, made visible for the first time within digital interfaces such as *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, because they bring all the practices involved in album-making together, as *Shutterfly* claims, “in one place” (“Shutterfly: Share Sites”). Digital photo-sharing platforms therefore offer a concrete object of study compared with the discourse’s previous articulation only as idealised notions of what constitutes a family album, communicated in tacit oral and gestural codes. Consequently, the digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* give visible form to something which previously existed only as thoughts and social norms, because the processes involved in creating an album are made visible within their interfaces. They participate therefore in a “mediatization” (Hjarvard 113) of the discourse of the material family album, making the discourse visible.

Such a translation of the discourse from the material to digital context is made possible because, as Bourdieu argues, photographic practice is adaptable to any medium “as long as it is capable of carrying out the function assigned to it, namely that of supplying pictures

which permit recognition” (32). This prioritisation of purpose over format allows the discourse of the family album to be transferred from photographic prints to digital objects displayed on screens and stored using computers and networks. The translation of the discourse of the material family album by *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* is characterised by both continuity and rupture: continuity, in that they perpetuate many of the social norms and ideals attached to the discourse and the material object of the family album, and rupture, because as they mediatize these elements in their digital interfaces, they inevitably also alter the discourse.

The suggestion of continuity between analogue and digital albums is significant, as the digitisation of photography and photographs seems to promise the opportunity for the revolutionising of photographic practices. Continuity is, however, characteristic of reports of how technology is used within the domestic sphere. For example, Richard Chalfen claims that previous technological innovations have not created significantly different use patterns in the home mode and family photography (165). There has been, therefore, a large degree of continuity in the practices surrounding how people use photographs, regardless of the technology they use. Chalfen also suggests that the majority of people do not regularly take advantage of the “technological potential” available to them (165). The potential for creating alternative “settings, topics, participants, and code conventions” do exist, but according to Chalfen’s survey of home mode practice they are rarely exploited (166). As a result, the “traditional patterns of appropriate subject matter” and practices related to the home mode and the family album remain stable and conservative (166). Chalfen sees this as evidence that technological innovation is less important to the home mode than the continuity of the “model and pattern of personal pictorial communication” (166). In the *Shutterfly* interface, the use of images connects the platform to the existing “settings, topics, participants and code conventions” which Chalfen describes (166). The site is heavy with images, often depicting examples of the material products which *Shutterfly* sells and which refer to the “traditional” products which make up or surround the family album, or images which resemble the family photographs its users are expected to upload themselves (see figure 3 below). These images are often of children, family groups, or pets; they show people engaging in activities such as wedding, or family parties. The images echo Chalfen’s notion of the “conforming corporate-family”, documenting their successes through photographs (136).



Figure 3. “Photo Books, Holiday Cards, Photo Cards, Birth Announcements, Photo Printing: Shutterfly”; *Shutterfly.com*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

By drawing on the discourse of the material family album and rendering it visible within their interfaces, the platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* claim to be part of an overall trajectory of image making throughout history. They claim a connection to analogue photography and photographic practice, rather than representing a significant departure from what went before. As a result, these digital photo-sharing platforms can both draw on the discourse of the material family album, and embellish upon it. Both platforms emphasise the discourse of the family album through what the interfaces suggest about user navigation, rather than emphasising the technological basis of their interface.

Shutterfly's users create "projects" and add their photographs to "galleries", rather than creating files or providing user-generated content for a website. Both *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* refer to image files as "photographs" or "pictures", and to collections of image files as "albums", establishing their claim to a line of continuity between themselves and analogue photograph albums. Both sites use the vocabulary of analogue media and of the discourse of the material family album in particular to position themselves as part of existing social structures and demonstrate how they can be used.

Thus, digital photo-sharing platforms claim to offer an experience similar to the family photograph album and, in some ways, also claim to replace it. Joanne Garde-Hansen argues that the appeal of such interfaces lies in the way they draw a number of memory practices together in one place (135). *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* incorporate the practices of compiling, displaying and discussing which constitute the family album's process of memory making. *Shutterfly* claims its site contains "[a]ll the tools you need to view and organize" albums in one place, while *Picasa* claims that its software and the *Picasa Web Albums* website "make it easy" to organise photographs and "then create online albums to share with friends, family, [and] the world". Both platforms suggest that the albums they create offer the same functions as the material album, while also making album practices easier to perform because both the creation and presentation of the album happens within the space of their interfaces.

The digital nature of the photo-sharing platform used to create digital family albums is what makes the merging of practices in the same space possible. Digitisation also changes, however, the way photographs can be created, stored, and shared. In the material family album, images are enshrined in a rigid structure, dictated by their organisation on the page and within the book format of the album. Digital interfaces separate images from the structure of the book, recalling Sean Cubitt's description of digitisation as adding "additional dimensionality" to the material forms being remediated (6). This dimensionality described by Cubitt takes the form of new, flexible and temporary ways of creating links between files, or allowing items to be ordered and retrieved according to themes, rather than being ordered solely through a linear narrative, suggesting chronology.

In contrast, material albums are linear in that they are usually presented chronologically, which Bourdieu describes as “the logical order of social memory” (30-31). However, such chronology is not a consequence of its materiality; rather, it is a result of the norms associated with the book format, and with how narratives typically develop. *Picasa*’s interface exemplifies the notion of “added dimensionality”. The computer’s folders where images are stored are displayed in *Picasa* in a column down the left side of the interface. These folders can be displayed in two different ways: either as a “flat folder structure” which organises the folders according how they are used in *Picasa*, or in a “folder tree structure” which shows they are stored on the computer’s hard drive. The “flat folder structure” shows projects such as collages and movie presentations created in *Picasa* gathered together at the top of the column, and a list of the image folders users have previously viewed or created in *Picasa* arranged chronologically (see yellow box in figure 4, below). Folders which have not been viewed or created in *Picasa* are listed at the bottom of the column. The “folder tree structure” shows how folders are arranged and stored on the user’s computer hard drive (see yellow box in figure 5, below). Importantly, any changes made to the organisation of folders within *Picasa* do not affect the location of the folder on the hard drive. Photographs stored in this digital photo-sharing platform can be organised according to these different logics or “dimensionalities”, arranging material on a number of different axes such as chronology, content or location.

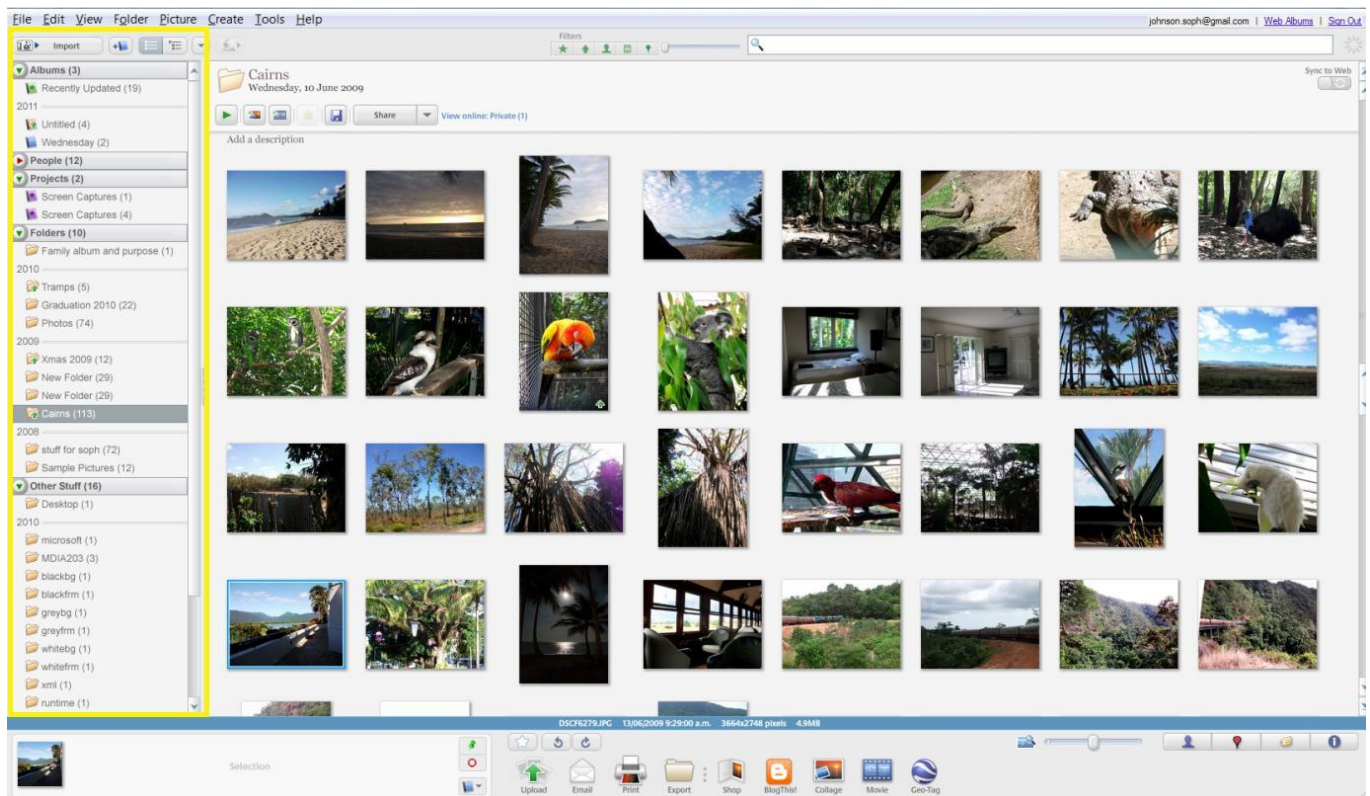


Figure 4 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010.
Software.

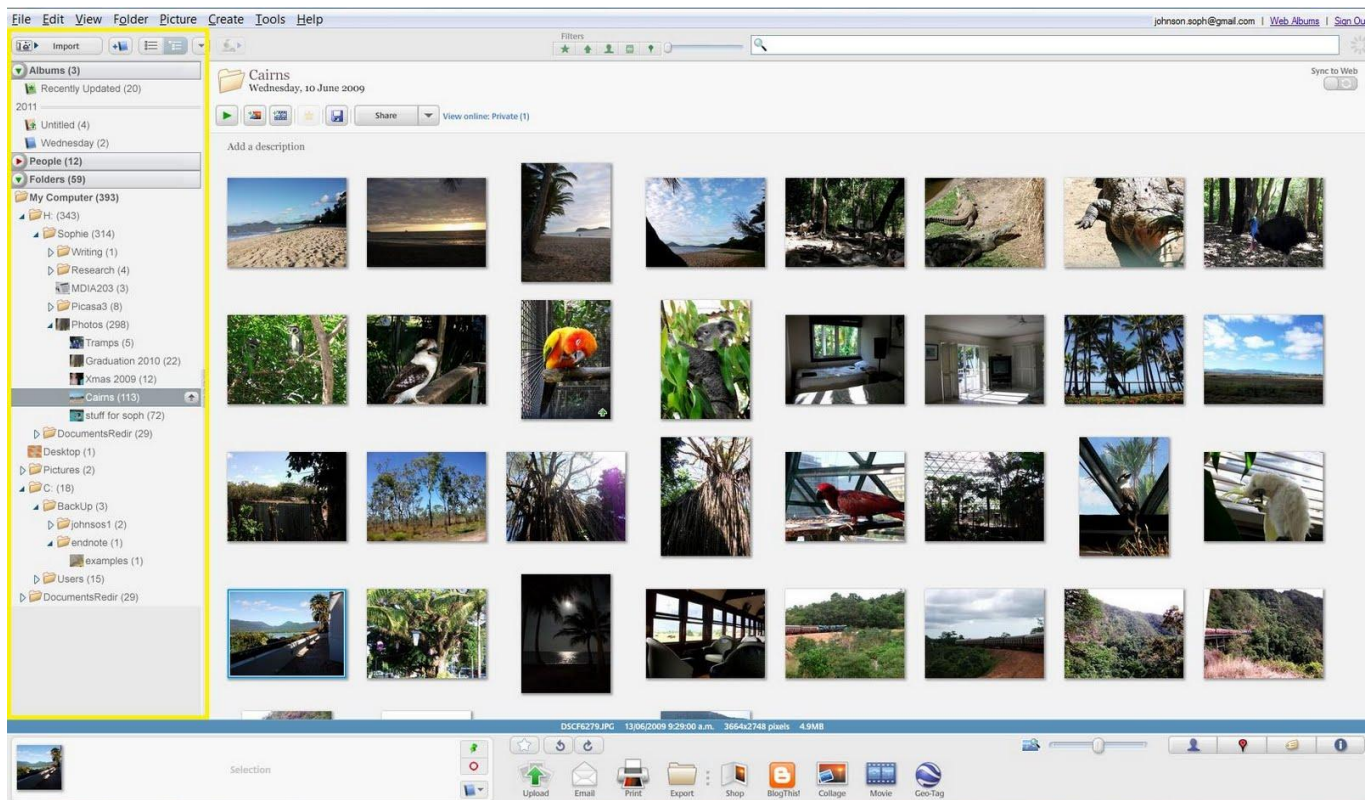


Figure 5 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

The ways in which *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* translate and transform the discourse of the material family album can be understood to represent, to some extent at least, what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin term “remediation”. They describe one of the “defining characteristic[s]” of new media as being the way they refer to and represent other media (45). New media are described by Bolter and Grusin as oscillating between claims of immediacy and hypermediacy: that is to say, between claiming to offer a “more immediate and authentic experience” than the older medium they refer to, and at the same time making us more aware of the medium itself and of processes of mediation (19). Different digital media “remediate their predecessors” to varying degrees, ranging from representing them without critique to attempting to “absorb the older medium entirely” and therefore replace it (45). *Shutterfly* is a platform which does not directly question the status of the material album, but instead offers itself as an improvement on the album. It is deeply invested, in fact, in propagating the discourse which creates material albums, as in order to fulfil its commercial purpose it must encourage users to print material copies of their digital photos and albums. *Picasa* on the other hand does engage in a degree of critique of the material family album, but, like *Shutterfly*, does not dismiss the importance of the discourse of the material album. This is shown through the way the platform uses the opportunities presented by new media to extend the discourse beyond the limitations imposed by the material album’s status as a physical object, such as allowing users to use their images in non-narrative ways and encouraging them to share their images.

Such a degree of continuity between analogue, material family albums and their typical practices and content, and digital albums, is an indication that new media absorb traditional cultures, as Manuel Castells argues in *The Rise of the Network Society*, rather than departing from them (370). Bolter and Grusin argue a similar point, claiming no medium is able to perform its cultural work “in isolation from other media or from other social and economic forces” (15). New digital technologies emerge from existing cultural contexts and refashion existing media which this context has previously created (Bolter and Grusin 19). The discourse which digital photo-sharing platforms employ emerges from the domestic context and creates the material photograph album, and these platforms are able to absorb the

practices and meanings associated with the discourse. In doing so, these platforms claim to perform the same social functions which the discourse previously ascribed to the material family album.

The notion of remediation therefore suggests these digital photo-sharing platforms reference elements of analogue photographic practice attached to the discourse of the material album in order to demonstrate that they perform the same social functions. Thus, while *Picasa* may critique the limitations of the material album, it still references the album. Users can create collages using their digital photographs. As they browse through their library, users add images to their photo tray at the bottom left corner of the interface's tool bar, which covers the lower part of the screen. By selecting the "Collage" icon on this tool bar, they are taken to a new tab within the interface. The photographs in the collage are presented in a way which mimics material photographs, as they can be moved freely around on the screen using the mouse and rotated as material photographs might be moved around on a table or page. The default background for collages is a white background, resembling a piece of paper, although this can be changed to either a colour background or to a photograph. This example of remediation demonstrates the tensions inherent in the relationship between digital interfaces and material objects. While digital interfaces promise to improve upon the experiences offered by material objects, they nevertheless refer to them, often through references to the materiality and ideals associated with these objects. As digital photo-sharing platforms draw on the discursive ideals of what family albums should be, they not only remediate material objects, replicating their appearance or functions but also their discourse.

Yet while digital photo-sharing platforms can be seen to clearly represent part of an overall trajectory of photographic practices within the private sphere, they also represent a departure from the past as a consequence of their digital nature. Edmond Couchot describes new technologies as troubling the distinction between continuity and rupture, or significant departures from what came before (19). New technologies neither break away from the analogue world completely, nor continue all the practices involved in creating analogue media. The idea of remediation, for instance, suggests continuity, particularly when it involves only the representation of an analogue form in a digital medium. Many of

the functions performed by *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, however, do more than only represent or reorganise material from analogue objects, as they also reassert many of the ideals associated with family albums. As such, they participate in a “mediatization” of the discourse of the material family album.

Stig Hjarvard defines “mediatization” as the process by which society and culture are submitted to “the media and their logic” (113). Mediatization, he argues, is a process by which the media brings about changes to social and cultural institutions, and the ways they interact or communicate (114). Hjarvard distinguishes between mediatization and mediation, which he defines as the use of media form communication which does not necessarily have an effect on the social institutions which provide the context for that communication (114). Mediatization, on the other hand, has the effect of “disembedding social relations” and communication from their original context and “re-embedding” them into new contexts (132). Hjarvard claims mediatization is characteristic of developments in the latter years of the twentieth century, particularly in industrialised, western societies (113). Such mediatization can be seen occurring in *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* through the way they make discussions of the album visible within the media interface. Photographs uploaded to *Shutterfly*, for instance, can be shared via a “Share site”, which resembles a blog filled with user-generated content presented within a standardised template provided by the *Shutterfly* platform (see figure 6 below). Each post to these “Share sites” can be commented on by visitors to the site using the “Write a Comment” boxes which appear beneath each update and photograph. If comments regarding material family albums typically took the form of an oral discussion, through mediatization the practice of commenting is disembedded from a shared physical environment and re-embedded as text in an online context. Mediatization also occurs in digital photo-sharing platforms through the way they make the discourse of the family album and practices associated with this discourse visible, when they existed previously only as social norms and a particular way of thinking. The purpose of mediatizing the discourse of the material family album in *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* is to attach the value and meaning of the analogue album to the digital album.



Figure 6 “Family Sample Site: Nichols Family Site”; *Shutterfly.com* n.d.; Web, 16th Oct. 2011.

Yet while using this way of thinking, the possibilities digital photo-sharing platforms offer for the reproduction of images means they also depart significantly from what came before. Through analogue reproduction, Walter Benjamin claims, objects were liberated from the “parasitic subservience to ritual” which governed how the original was used and understood (24). Digitisation therefore presumably has the ability to further free images and objects from their relationship with custom and ritual. Digital photographs are computer files, open to easy duplication and reproduction at a distance through sharing via networks. Digital albums represent an aggregation of these files within the same virtual space, no longer requiring material photographs to be brought together within the same physical space.

However digitisation also affects the ability of digital photographs and photo-sharing platforms to lay claim to the same connotations of value and authenticity which material rituals suggest. Benjamin claims “authenticity eludes technological...reproduction” (21). Despite Benjamin’s original claim, the original photographic print *does* assume auratic qualities, especially as a consequence of the patina of age, such as marks of usage, and their

indexical connections to lost or absent family members. While the duplication of an analogue photograph into the digital realm may not affect the visual properties of an image, Benjamin's argument suggests that it does affect the aura of the duplicate photograph, as it is this aura which can never be reproduced because it is the product of the original photograph's individual, and material, history (22). Although supposedly freed from material rituals, digital photo-sharing platforms mediatize and replicate the discourse of the material family album in order to suggest their connection with the existing discourse and the authenticity and authority associated with analogue albums. *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* cannot claim that either the reproducible digital files which they store and distribute or their standardised interfaces maintain the same aura as a material family album. To some extent, this undermines their continuity with the discourse of the material family album. Consequently, they must seek new ways of conferring value and meaning on the images stored in their interfaces, and establish new ways of using photographs outside those of traditions and rituals.

MANAGING MEMORIES AS DATA

"Picasa automatically finds all the photos on your PC, wherever they are, and will organize them in second"

("Get Started: Picasa and Picasa Web Album")

The digitisation of photography has resulted in the mediatization not only of the discourse associated with the family album, but more specifically of the processes used to create and view family albums. Through mediatization, people creating albums are in turn made subject to computers and their ways of structuring information. Joanne Garde-Hansen claims many digital media are consequently built on "computer database logic rather than the narrative logic of older media" (141). The use of a computer interface like *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* to create, store and display family albums should therefore have a significant impact on the underlying logic which structures the album.

The shaping of the ways content is stored and ordered in a digital platform is an example

of how mediatization renders communication and the discourse of the material family album subject to the underlying logic of the media. Hjarvard argues that media logic influences the form taken by communication which occurs via the media, as well as the social relations it makes possible (113). He defines this “media logic” as the “institutional and technological modus operandi of the media”, such as the resources it draws on and the formal and informal rules media impose through their operation (113). Mediatization implies, he claims, that institutions become increasingly dependent on the resources provided and controlled by the media (117). As institutions depend on the resources provided and controlled by the media, families also rely on these resources for online photo-sharing and communication provided by *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, and submit to their rules.

In the case of these photo-sharing platforms, mediatization makes the abstract ways of thinking about family albums and social norms associated with this discourse into a concrete experience, as they are made visible and observable within the organisation and functions of the interface (117). In addition to making abstract concepts into concrete experiences though, mediatization also acts upon the experience of space, separating space from concrete locations. Institutions which were previously bound to particular locations are made subject to what Hjarvard describes as a “virtualization”, in that people can participate in the social institution “irrespective of their physical location” (129). Neither *Picasa* nor *Shutterfly* require their users to occupy particular physical locations in order to participate in the family album. Instead, their mediatization of the discourse of the album frees participation from the physical world and renders it a virtual experience accessible from any location with the necessary internet connection and computer.

One consequence of the mediatization of the discourse of the material family album by computer interfaces is what Manuel Castells describes as “informationalism”, which he claims also has a significant influence on social structures. Informationalism is itself shaped by the “restructuring of the capitalist mode of production” in the late twentieth century (*Network Society* 14). Castells describes the “corporate ethos of accumulation [and] the renewed appeal of consumerism” as the cultural forms which drive the organisation of informationalism (*Network Society* 198). Photographs and the stories associated with them,

realised as information recognised by computers and networks, are able to be systematically collected and stored within interfaces like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*. Everything which is stored on a computer or communicated via a digital interface must first be transcribed as data in order to be understood. *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*, for instance, demand that images are stored using particular file types. The *Shutterfly* interface accepts only JPEG files, while *Picasa* accepts a wider variety of files but replaces the original file with a JPEG copy upon saving any edits to the image, moving the original file to a hidden nested subfolder, which is only shown if the user chooses for their operating system to show hidden folders. Informationalism manifests itself not only as preferences about the form user content takes, but also in the processes of “[k]eeping track, recording, retrieving, stockpiling, archiving, backing-up and saving” which Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading suggest are reactions to the perceived risk of information loss, which they describe as one of the greatest fears of this century (5). *Shutterfly*, for example, advertises its services by claiming they “never delete your photos. Ever” and that they “securely store your photos at full resolution”.

The fear of memory loss manifests itself within these platforms not only as promises about the infallibility of digital storage, but also as a nostalgia for the material forms of analogue media. The concern which arises from the use of new technologies of memory is that they “do not seem substantial enough and lasting” (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading 5). New memory technologies are subject to distrust, as if older technologies such as analogue photographs are “somehow more faithful to the past” than their digital counterparts (13). *Shutterfly* in particular structures its digital offerings around their material counterparts, and the site promotes the creation of material products using digital photographs. Users are encouraged, for instance, to create material prints of the digital images they upload to their *Shutterfly* account. As well as choosing from a variety of print formats, and glossy or matte finishes, users can also add a “Back-of-print message” to their material photographs. They can either specify a different message for each print, or include the same message on each photograph being printed. *Shutterfly* describes these messages as ensuring that the user “and future generations will always remember the who, what, and where of special times”, suggesting that the older technology is a better means for storing information about the family and its history.

Shutterfly also offers two “Image Services” which aim to ease concerns about the ability of online sites to store photographs long-term. Users can create “Archive DVDs” containing the images uploaded to their *Shutterfly* account, which the site claims will help “protect your special memories for years to come”. The second of these services is “Uploading by Mailing a CD”, inviting users to send *Shutterfly* CDs containing image files they wish to upload to their account. These two services appear to contradict one another though, as they question both the infallibility of online storage, by suggesting users need a DVD copy of images stored online, and also the infallibility of digital media, suggesting that storing images on a home computer or CD is also insufficient. *Shutterfly* incorporates a number of conflicting impulses in the services and functions it provides, a manifestation of concerns about entrusting particular media and technologies with memories, history and identity.

This distrust arises out of tension between the technological capabilities of these platforms, and common connotations of damage and loss in relation to the family album. While damage to a material photograph has a range of connotations in relation to the discourse of the material family album such as indicating frequent usage, and therefore care and attachment, or indicating a lack of due care, damage in a digital context can result in the destruction of the image altogether, and it is not necessarily the consequence of the user’s own actions. Digital files can, theoretically at least, be reproduced with minimal changes to the file and image quality. They are commonly thought to “resist entropy” (Kilker 51). However, when degradation of the file occurs, it is often invisible or unnoticed by the human eye. The damage which occurs to a digital image often appears less organic, and happens as a result of “decoding erroneous data rather than visible accretion or erosion to the underlying medium” (Kilker 59). As a result, Julian Kilker claims damage which occurs as a result of digital rather than physical handling is more subtle – again, invisible to the naked eye (59). Once such damage reaches a certain point, the file may no longer be usable or recognisable to digital interfaces, and may fail to open. Damage is however built into the way *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* handle images, as both platforms use the JPEG file type which employs a “lossy” form of file compression. *Picasa*’s “Help” pages note that this results in a loss of image quality, as the default quality of the file each time the photo is edited and saved is eighty-five percent of the original (“*Picasa and Picasa Web Albums Support*”). Repeated editing of images within *Picasa* or *Shutterfly* ultimately reduces the quality of the

image as a consequence of this digital handling. Damage in a digital context affects the data which creates the images on the user's screen, and is connected to the digital handling of the image, rather than its physical handling.

Mediatization acts not only on how photographs are used and displayed, but also on how they are stored and retrieved. Storage of the digital album and images occurs in the form of data, rather than in terms of how people remember particular events or stories. As previously discussed, Cubitt claims that a consequence of digitisation is that many interfaces and websites are organised in ways which have more in common with an index than with the narrative more often associated with analogue media, due to the prioritisation in database logic of efficiency over memory and emotional connections to stories (7). He argues such "logico-semantic" models like the spreadsheet or database are "explicitly and consciously designed to facilitate the mechanical retrieval of data", as computers lack the same "innate predilection for narrative forms" as humans, with the consequence that narrative which previously provided the structure for many media objects – in the stories told, for example, through and about the family album - is increasingly marginalised (Cubitt 8). Arranging data and material in such a way that it is more accessible to machines than to users suggests a particular configuration of priorities, whereby data and its readability by machines is more important to the design of the interface than its affinity with human social behaviour.

This database logic is significantly different to the organisation of images according to narrative, which has been the mode favoured by the family album. Narratives can be understood as a series of linear events and, as an experience for the viewer or user, are understood in relation to their knowledge of external associations and meanings (Dovey 138). They are linear in that they are usually presented chronologically. External associations and meanings are communicated through oral narratives, as people discuss the images and their presence within the album. The use of narrative can also be understood as part of wider literary traditions. Cubitt claims narratives are founded on the notion of a protagonist occupying a perpetual present, who moves through "a story whose beginning and end have already been determined" (4). They develop, through a series of linear events, as an "unfolding of destiny" rather than "a journey towards an uncertain future" (4). This has an

obvious appeal for the family and for compilers of family albums. By claiming to represent a narrative rather than an arbitrary arrangement of photographs, the family album can lay claim to knowledge of a beginning and end which “have already been determined” (4). Narrative is closely linked to memory and to analogue media, but is not however easily translated into the digital context of photo-sharing platforms structured by database logic, as these cannot contain these external associations and meanings.

While analogue media is most commonly associated with this type of linear narrative organisation, digital platforms are able to extend what is possible. Cubitt’s description of digitisation adding “additional dimensionality” to analogue media forms applies not only to how material is stored in digital platforms, but also to how it is retrieved and presented (6). In material albums stored in the book format, images are enshrined in a rigid structure, dictated by their organisation on the page. In separating images from the structure of the book, digital platforms enable images to be connected together in a number of different ways, rather than only through a linear narrative dictated by the physical arrangement of material photographs on a page. *Picasa*, for instance, has a range of filtering functions which demonstrate how thematic, temporary connections can be made between images without the need for a narrative created by the user (see yellow box in figure 7, below). . The interface’s search box enables users to search for particular file names, captions, tags, folder names, cameras or dates associated with their photographs using key words. As well as searching and filtering photographs according to their folder, location on the computer’s hard drive and other textual markers, *Picasa* can also automatically filter images according to their content, to some extent. The filter function located in the upper toolbar of the interface filters the user’s photographs, showing only those which have been “starred” (marked as a favourite photograph by the user), those which *Picasa* recognises as showing faces, those which are movies, or which have already been uploaded to *Picasa Web Albums*, those which have been geotagged (labelled with a particular location using *GoogleMaps*), or those created within a specific time frame. These search functions and filters allow for temporary changes to be made to the organisation of images, perhaps reflecting different narratives, while the underlying structure continues to be one which is understood by the computer and arranged according to a database logic.

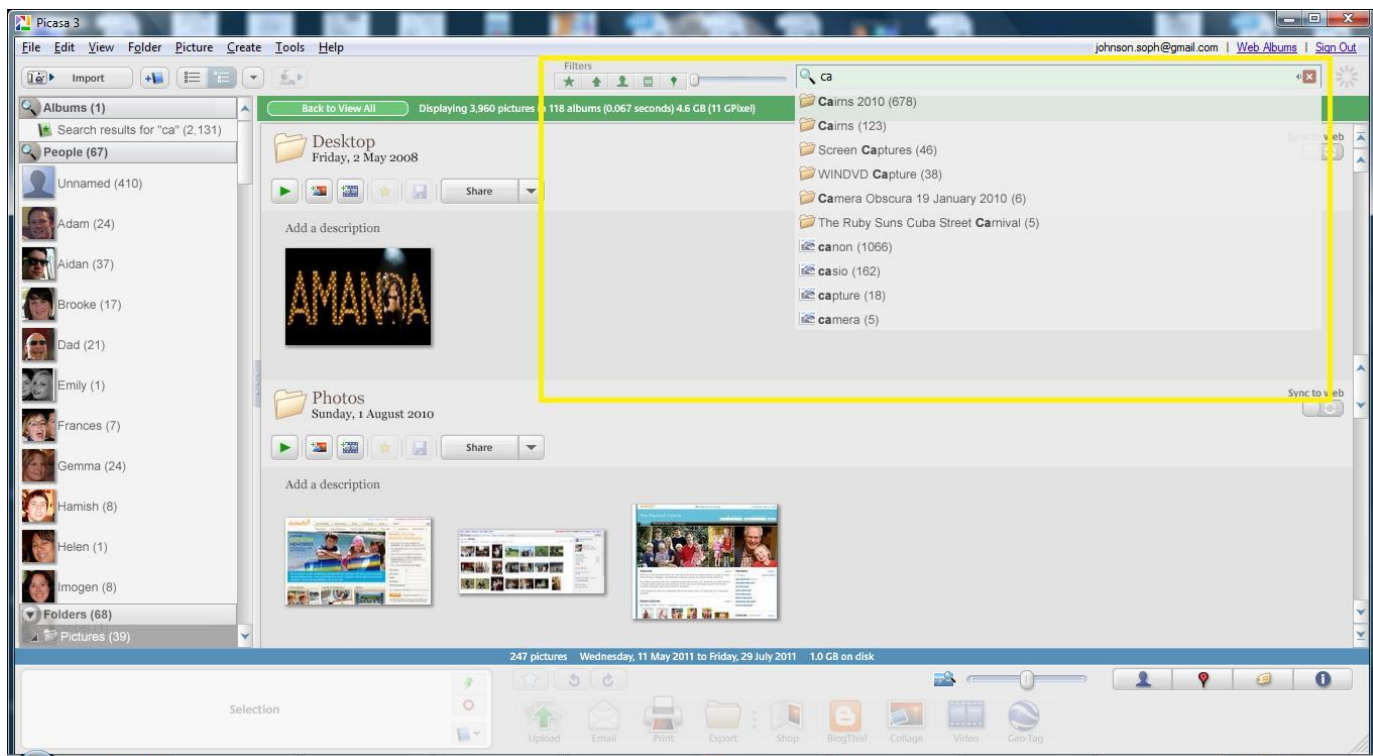


Figure 7 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

These filters and searches are however limited to those understood within the logic of the database, and do not function in the same way as a narrative. For example, *Picasa* may be able to find images of a family member, but only if the user has specifically tagged those images with that person's name, thus making the search possible. *Picasa* cannot however find the photographs of that relative's home, or their garden, or a party thrown in their honour which the user may strongly associate with that person, unless these images have been labelled and this information stored in *Picasa's* database. Filtering and searching allow the creation of temporary linkages between photographs and across folders, superseding the organisation of files according only to their location on the computer's hard drive. Importantly, *Shutterfly* does not share the same "additional dimensionality" as *Picasa*. Users can arrange the photographs stored on their *Shutterfly* account according to the date taken, the order in which they were uploaded, or the file name, or they can arrange their images themselves. There are no search or filtering functions for sorting through their photographs. This is an indication, perhaps, of *Shutterfly's* closer relationship to the discourse of the

material family album and an unwillingness to take up the opportunities which digitisation presents, as they often represent a challenge to this discourse. Temporary linkages and re-making of the family album can only occur on the computer screen, as this spontaneous re-arrangement of images would be too time-consuming to carry out on a material album. The screen therefore changes the logic of the family photograph album, allowing it to exist not only as a single narrative but as a collection of photographs which can be continuously redefined and rearranged. The opportunities presented by the screen are not however always taken up by platforms mediatizing analogue discourses.

Shutterfly's reticence to adopt these new ways of retrieving and presenting content is perhaps the result of an unwillingness to separate itself from the norms of the discourse of the material family album and analogue media. Paul Longley Arthur notes, for example, that despite the popularity of such non-linear interactive digital forms in other areas of social life, people still feel reassured by "familiar, sequential, chronological narratives" which give order and meaning to fragments of information, particularly when dealing with material related to biography or memory (52). This is demonstrated in these digital photo-sharing platforms by the inclusion of opportunities to create narratives, despite their interfaces as a whole being structured by an underlying database logic. *Shutterfly's* "Photo books" represent a space for creating narratives similar to those commonly associated with analogue media and, therefore, the discourse of the material family album, communicated through the order and organisation of photographs on the pages of the album. In addition to remediating the material album through the on-screen representation of "Photo books" as a book format with pages that can be turned, users participate in a remediation of narrative (see figure 8 below). The photographs in the book can be arranged into an order which the user feels creates the appropriate narrative. This narrative may have a social meaning, but it nevertheless has no impact on the digital structure used to represent the "Photo book", nor does it change how the images are stored as part of the user's *Shutterfly* account.

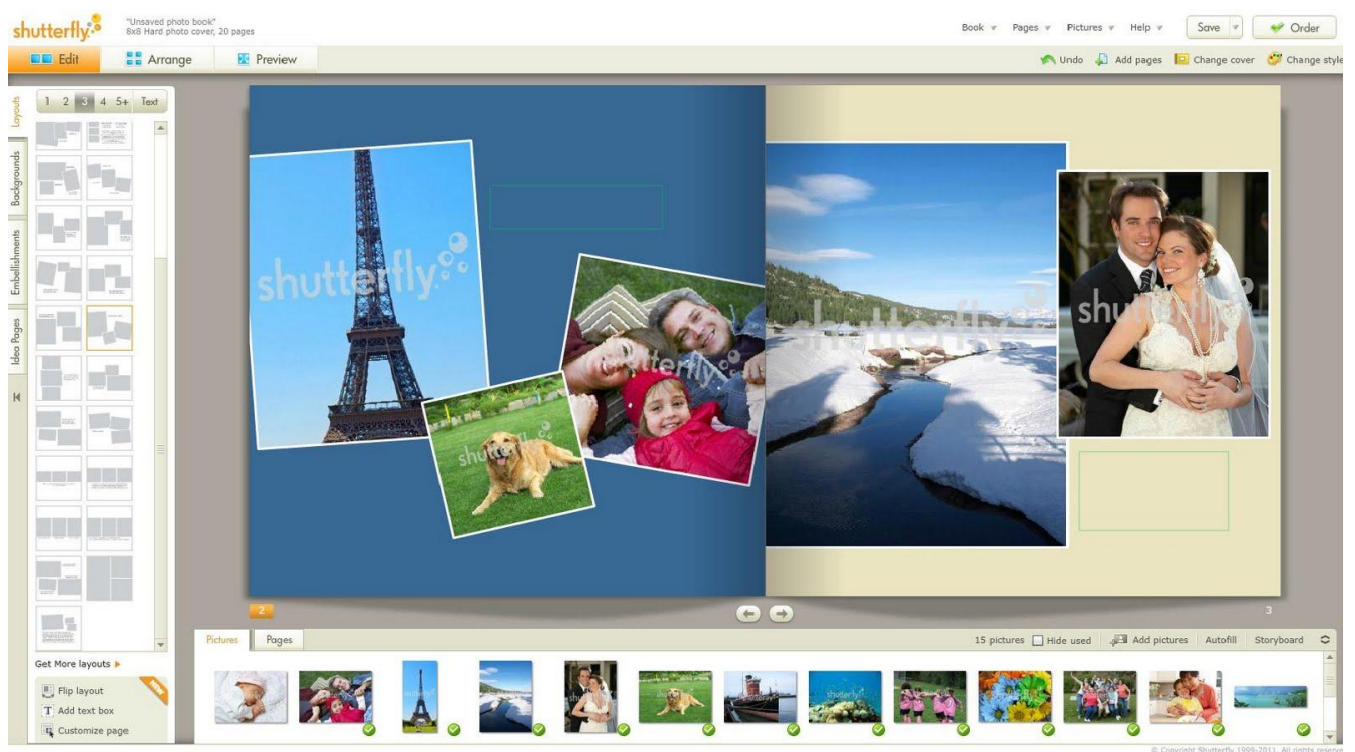


Figure 8 “Custom Path: Photo Book”; *Shutterfly*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

Picasa’s relationship to narrative is even more explicitly articulated. The way narrative is used by the platform is evocative of the lessened role narrative plays when the discourse of the material family album is mediatized and submitted to the logic of the underlying media. *Picasa* makes a distinction between folders, which represent how image files are organised on the user’s hard drive, and albums, which are created by the user through gathering together images, and which can be used to represent narratives. Unlike folders, which represent the database logic of the *Picasa* software and of the user’s computer, albums exist only within the *Picasa* interface and represent a narrative logic created by the user. Albums are associated, through these processes, with personal choices and the user’s own logic and narrative, rather than that of the computer. Albums are created by gathering together photographs in the “Photo Tray” at the bottom left of the interface then clicking on the “Album” icon, represented by an image of a book (see figure 9 below, with albums created using the interface indicated by the upper yellow box, and the “Photo Tray” indicated by the lower yellow box). Albums can be labelled with titles, dates, the place the

photographs were taken and a description of the album. Albums do not however affect the arrangement of the original image files on the user's computer, and the album's contents can be added to, moved or deleted without affecting the files. *Picasa's* albums represent temporary arrangements open to modification and rewriting without altering the material they incorporate into their narratives. At the same time, the underlying database logic of software, computers and folders remains unaffected.

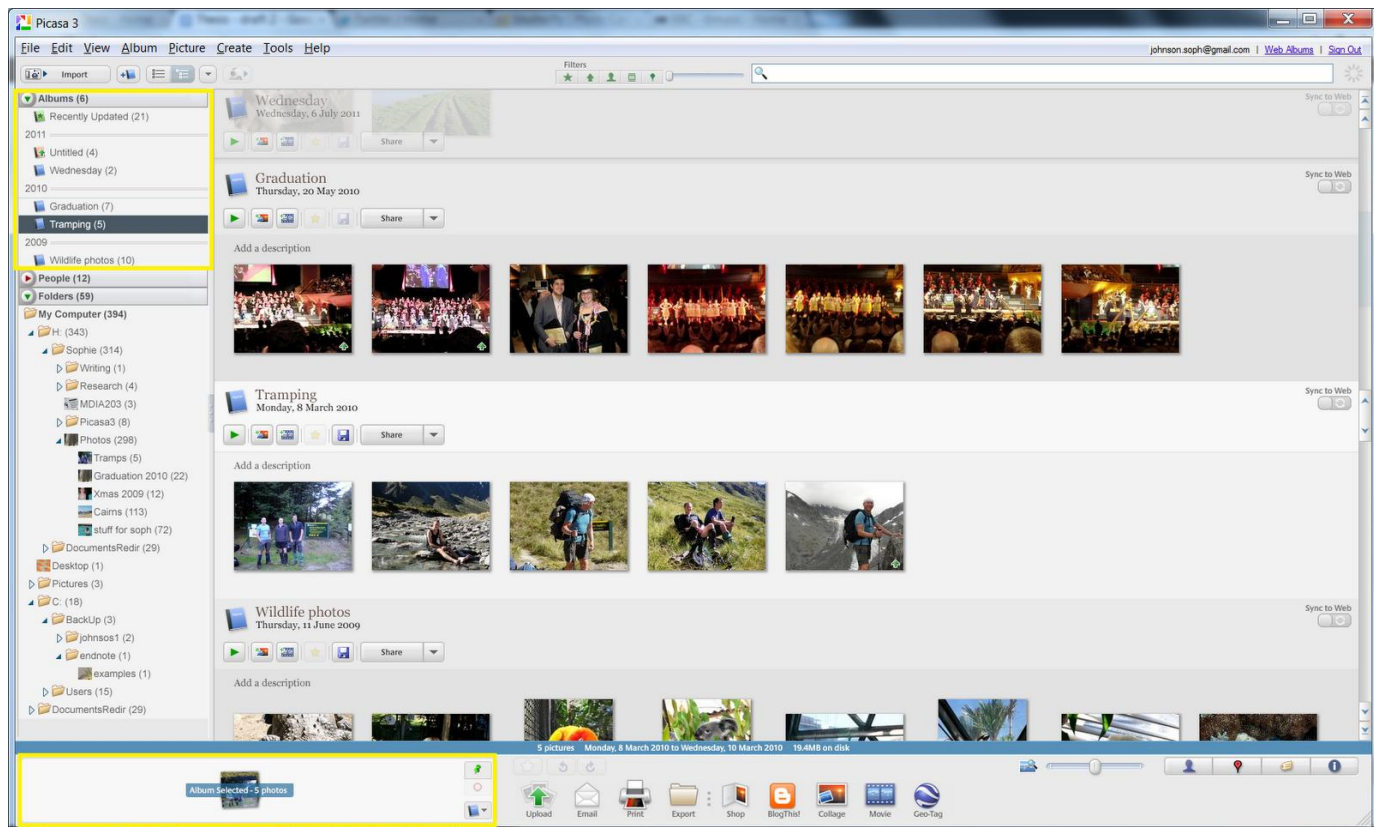


Figure 9 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

STANDARDISING THE PERSONAL

“Photo books are the new way to cherish and preserve your memories...Shutterfly has a professionally bound photo book that's perfect for you. Our one-of-a-kind, high-quality custom photo books make wonderful gifts for special occasions, but they're also a great way to keep your favourite memories close...Choose from five different sizes and a variety of

cover options and unique backgrounds, then fill the pages with your story.”

“Shutterfly: Photo Books”

“Improve almost any picture with Picasa’s one-click fixes for common problems like red-eye, color, and lighting. Or, use tuning and effects to make your best photos look even better.”

“About Picasa 3.8 & Picasa Web Albums”

The use of language and visual markers in the digital photo-sharing platforms of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* serves to both draw users in, and to keep them at a distance. While they are shown how to use these platforms through on-screen instructions, users are not given insight into the technological basis of the interface which makes it work. Users of these platforms are placed in a position of restricted interaction with the underlying technology because their actions only ever involve uploading and manipulating content, rather than interaction with the structure used to present their images. In his work on how the internet as a technology affects society on an economic, political and social level, Castells in *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, makes the useful distinction between “producers/users” and “consumers/users” (*Internet Galaxy* 36). Producers/users’ engagement with the internet and technology “feeds directly back into the technological system”, contributing to its social production (36). Consumers/users, on the other hand, may use the internet’s applications and interfaces, but their individual interactions do not have a specific impact on the way the internet develops as a technological system (36). As such, their influence is far less than that of producers/users. *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* position their users as consumers/users, rather than producers/users: they can use the interfaces, but they have only an “aggregate effect on the evolution of the system” (36). These consumers/users are kept outside the system by the use of language, and by the technological requirements placed on them. Users of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* operate at a surface level, interacting with these standardised interfaces while they upload and view their personal content.

As digital photo-sharing platforms represent a mediatization of the discourse of the

material family album they require the processes involved in this discourse to be recorded and rendered visible in the interface. Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading claim that both analogue and digital media share the common intention of externalising internal processes and making public and collective what was once private and personal memory (13). In using digital means to store and display family photographs, Paul Longley Arthur similarly argues that users are relying on external mechanisms separate from themselves “to do the memory work” for them (56). While family albums are to some extent an externalisation of memory, the use of digital photo-sharing platforms pushes this metaphor further, taking on many of the functions previously performed by users such as memorising the names of those in the images, or the dates and occasions when the photographs were taken. Captions can be attached to images in both platforms, while information such as the date the photograph was taken is part of the image’s file. In *Shutterfly*, users can add descriptions explaining their images, while *Picasa* allows both people and locations to be tagged in photographs for later identification. Hoskins argues that the increasing ubiquity of technologies for memory means that theoretically all one needs to carry in one’s mind is the knowledge of how to access memories stored elsewhere, and where to look for these memories (29). *Picasa*, for instance, automates the process of collecting photographs together to put into an album, because it searches the user’s computer hard drive for all image files and presents them as a unified collection. The user no longer needs to remember where their images have been stored on the hard drive in order to recall them, nor even “what” or “when” the images refer to.

All digital interfaces draw on their own particular set of technical requirements and processes which must be adhered to in order to be used successfully. This regulates the behaviour and actions of users working with the interface, and results in a standardisation of practices. Nick Couldry describes the digital environment as motivating interfaces to standardise elements such as formats and layouts because of the volume of material online, and people’s lack of patience with interfaces which are difficult to navigate (382). These standardisations manifest themselves in the structure and format of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*. For instance, the layouts in *Shutterfly* are standardised through the use of templates. A variety of templates are offered for creating different media formats, such as “Photo books” and calendars. Within these templates, users are presented with a selection of different

background and page designs. While the arrangement of images within the layout can be altered by the user, this can only occur within the confines of a template which determines the size and placement of images.

Shutterfly users can select between “custom path” and “simple path” processes for creating “Photo books”, which are professionally printed and bound copies of albums they have created using the *Shutterfly* website. These processes attempt to suggest a degree of user autonomy, although the processes are still highly standardised and rigidly structured. On both the “custom path” and “simple path” pages, the *Shutterfly* toolbar which appears across the top of most other pages within the website is not shown. Instead, both pages display a great deal more white space, suggesting that this is a space for the user to express their own intentions. The first step of the “Photo book” creation process in the custom path is to select a style from the list on the left of the page; a number of different style categories are listed, such as “Seasonal”, “Baby”, “Travel”, or “Wedding”. Within each of these categories, a number of different styles are listed. Clicking on different styles presents examples of “Photo books” in these styles. These examples resemble remediations of material books, in that users can navigate the page using their mouse, and animations make this movement resemble the way the pages of a material book move when they are turned. Each of these example books uses images of children and families which reflect the style’s purpose, such as the “Seasonal” category, which uses images of children with fallen leaves or playing in snow. Once users have selected the style they want, clicking the orange “Next” link at the top right of the page moves them to the next stage of the process, where they add their own photographs to the template (see figure 8 above).

Users select the photographs they wish to use in their “Photo book” in the “custom path” by selecting between photographs on their computer’s hard drive, those already uploaded to their *Shutterfly* account, from the *Shutterfly* “Share sites” they own or are a member of, or from *Facebook*. Once they have selected the images they wish to include, users are taken to a new editing page, which shows their images displayed in a strip across the bottom of the page, below a large image of a “Photo book” with blank spaces for their photographs. A message appears when the user’s mouse hovers over these boxes, instructing them to “Drop picture here” and also noting that if the box is left empty, it will not be printed in the

final book. This means the final book cannot contain empty spaces or pages. Along the right side of the screen, an editing bar allows users to select from a number of different page layouts, which determine the size, shape, number and position of the photograph slots available to them on each page, different backgrounds, which change the colour and pattern of the book's pages, different embellishments such as borders, or phrases which match the book's particular style and theme such as "Favorite Family Photos" and "Childhood", and different "Idea Pages" which suggest the type of content users can create, such as individual pages for family portraits, weddings, collages, or family trees. Although users can select the order in which images appear by dragging their photographs from the strip at the bottom of the page onto the template of each page, the "Autofill" option shown on this strip can fill all the spaces in the book automatically using their photographs, while the "Storyboard" option takes the user to a new page where they can put their photographs into the desired order, creating a narrative, before these are automatically placed into spaces in the book. The "simple path" for creating "Photo books" follows a simplified version of this process, but cedes control over the narrative to *Shutterfly*. The first step in the "simple path" process is to add photographs, presenting options for collection photographs from the user's hard drive, *Shutterfly* account, "Share sites", *Facebook* or *Picasa*. Once photographs have been added, their "Photo book" is automatically filled with their images (see figure 10 below). While *Shutterfly* users may be creating these albums using their own images, they remain subjects to the interface that they are using. Their actions are standardised by their interaction with the interface, and each step in the process of creating a "Photo book" must be followed in order for the book to be successfully created.

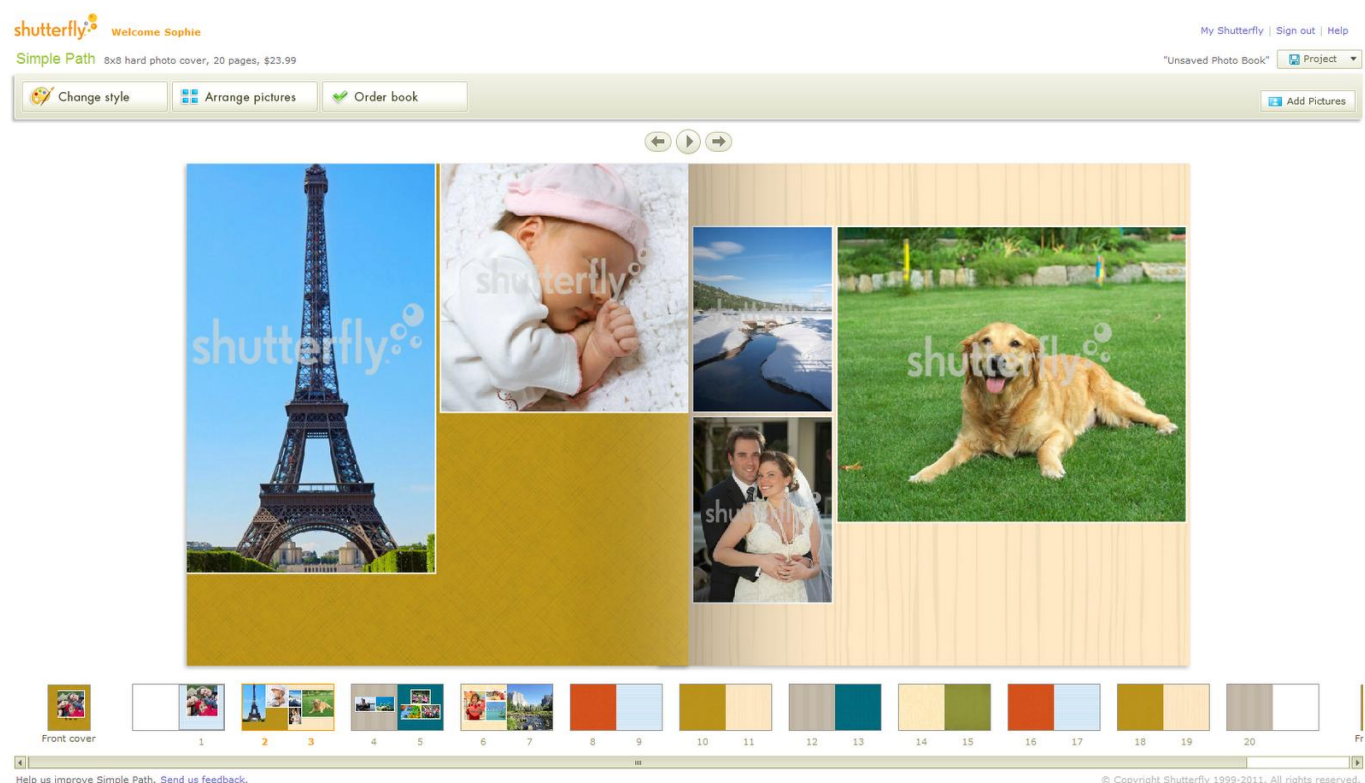


Figure 10 “Simple Path: Photo Book”; *Shutterfly*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

Standardisation applies not only to the ways family photographs and albums are presented, but also to the images themselves in a digital context, particularly in terms of aesthetics. While the standardisation of photographs’ aesthetics in the analogue context was typically restricted to suggesting particular types of content, such as family members with their children outside their homes, as described by Chalfen (77), the standardisation of photographic aesthetics in the digital context is more extensive. The editing functions provided by *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* suggest that attitudes towards aesthetics in amateur photography have undergone a fundamental change as a result of digitisation. Editing and improving photographs aesthetically was not previously a central concern of the discourse of the material family album. Bourdieu argues that within this discourse, aesthetic judgement is limited only to a consideration of the function the image is intended to fulfil, and the classification of photographs within genres of social uses (89). It is the clarity of relationship between signifier and signified which is traditionally valued and sought after in

family photographs, rather than particular aesthetics (92). Bourdieu argues that family photographs in fact “presuppose the suspension of all aesthetic judgement” because of the “sacred character of the object”: family members (90). The sacred and esteemed nature of images of family members allows these photographs to be considered above aesthetic judgement, seeking only to “express the glorification” of their subject, achieving success in terms of their “perfect fulfillment of that function” alone (90).

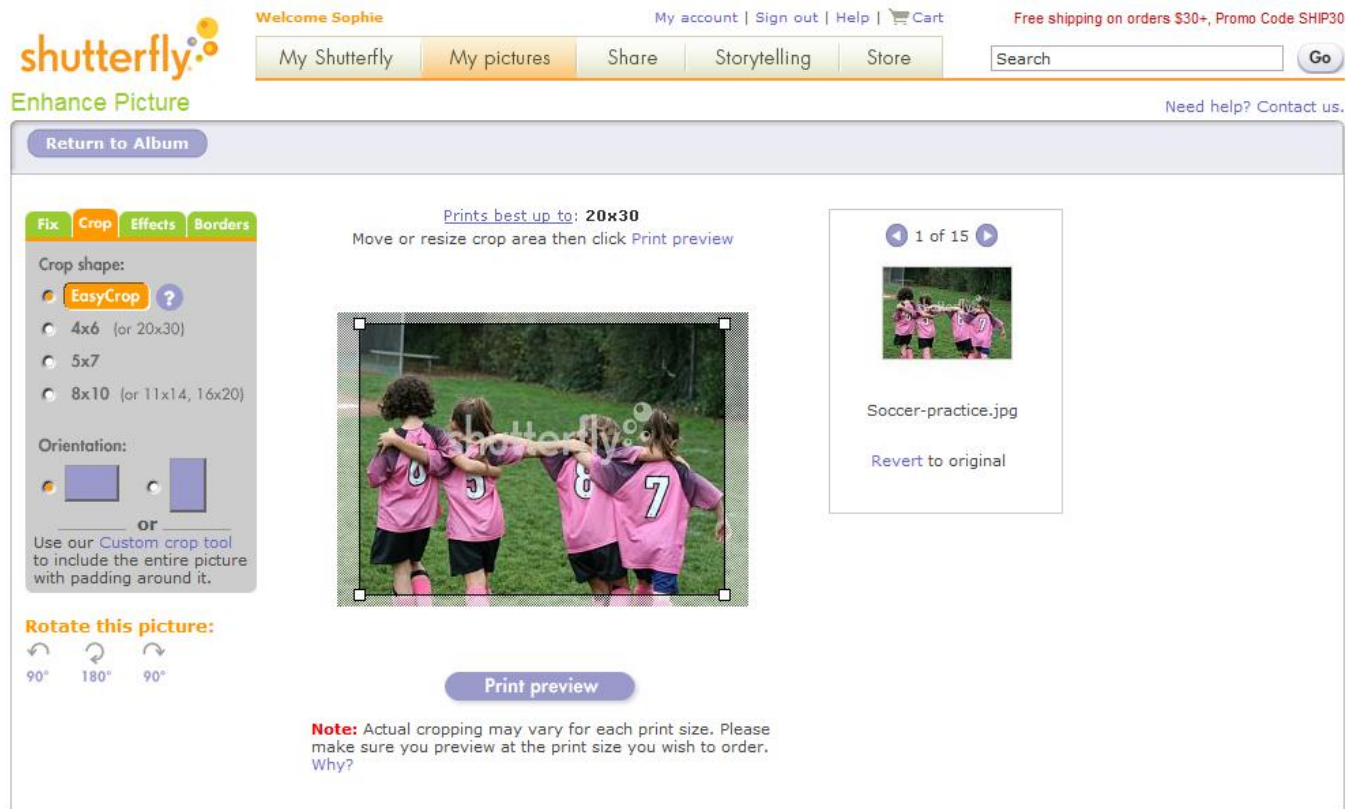


Figure 11 “Manage My Pictures”; *Shutterfly*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

The digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, however, demonstrate the importance of aesthetics when family photographs are mediatized in the standardised environment of computer-mediated interfaces. Photographs can be altered using a number of tools and programmed effects. *Shutterfly*'s editing options are limited to a small range of functions, including fixing red-eye, adding borders to images, and applying effects such as black and white, or soft focus (see figure 11 above). Like several other features of the *Shutterfly* platform, such as its strong attachment to the material album, lack of search and

filter functions, and the automated pathways for creating narratives, the site as a whole appears to connote a less technologically-skilled user who is less likely, therefore, to use extensive aesthetic remedies for editing family photographs. *Picasa*'s editing functions are more extensive than *Shutterfly*'s (see figure 12 below; note that the same photograph is being used as in the *Shutterfly* interface below to demonstrate the difference between the editing tools of each interface). The editing bar appears on the interface when images are opened up for editing. This bar has three tabs for "Basic Fixes", "Tuning", and "Effects". The "Basic Fixes" include cropping, straightening, and a selection of "one-touch" fixes for contrast and colour, which alter these elements in the photograph to within standardised ranges determined by *Picasa*. The "Tuning" tab features editing tools allowing for greater user control. Highlights, fill light, shadows and colour tuning can be adjusted using slide bars to achieve different aesthetics. The "Effects" tab offers a number of predefined effects including tints, soft focus, colour filters, black and white effects, and graduated tints.

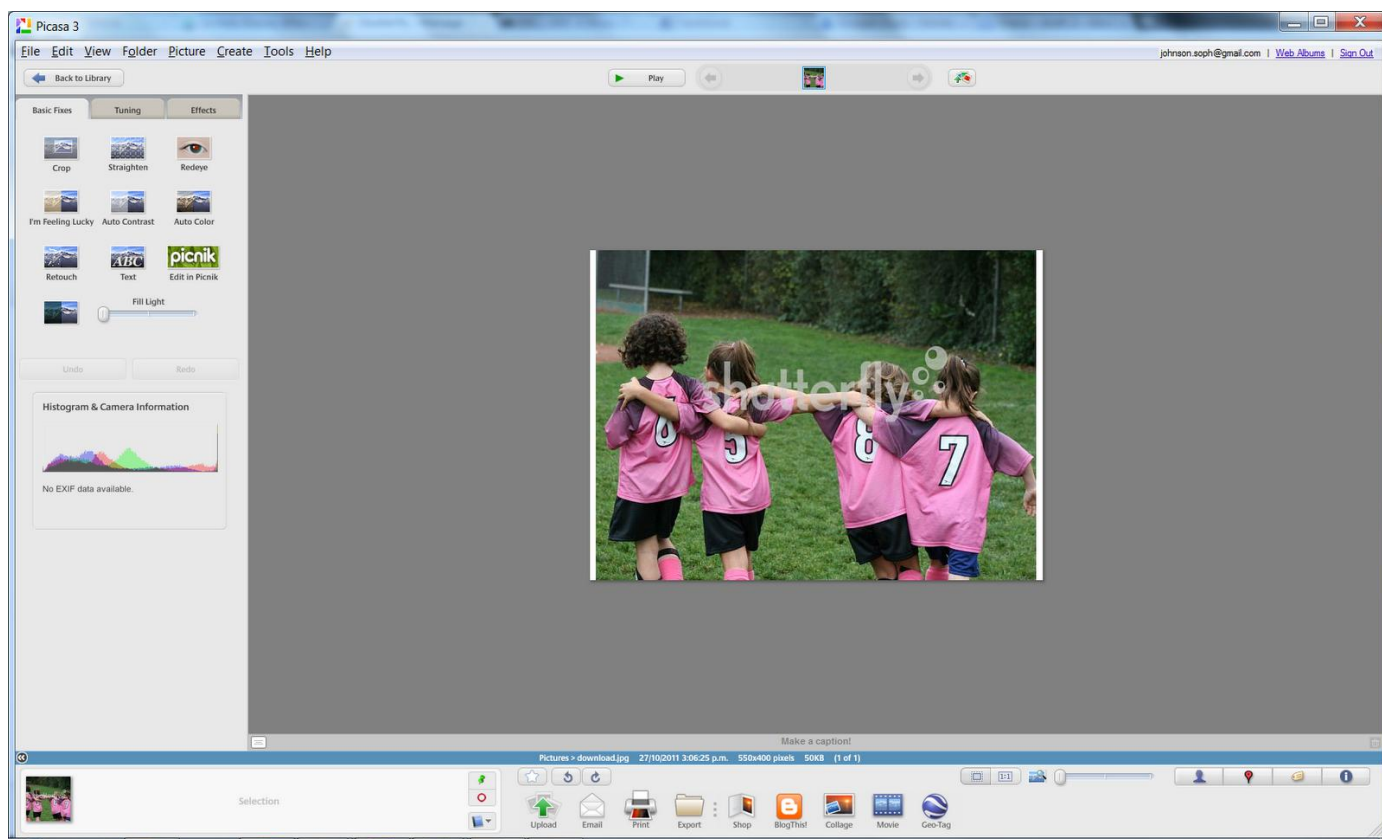


Figure 12 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

These editing functions draw on the rhetoric of the “perfect” image, suggesting that all images should be “fixed” and edited until they reach a particular aesthetic standard. While the definition of the “perfect” image is never clearly articulated in either interface, it is certainly not the same as the perfect family image Bourdieu describes, valued only for the “clarity and interest of the information that it is capable of communicating as a symbol, or, preferably as an allegory” (92). The mediatization of family photographs and albums within these interfaces results in this new focus on aesthetics. The functions offered by *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* suggest that digital album are expected to be aesthetically pleasing, and are made subject to a number of different editing processes in order to achieve the necessary aesthetic. The individual character of each image is now subject to standardisation as these interfaces encourage improvements and homogeny, demonstrating the connection between images not only through their presence in the same interfaces but also through their shared appearance and aesthetics.

The other aspect of aesthetic standardisation is that which occurs through the ubiquitous branding and on-screen appearance of these interfaces. As users view their images or carry out edits, they are in constant interaction with the interface as designed by the commercial entities which own them through what they see on the computer screen. Within interfaces, each page or section shares a similar aesthetic and format. The layout of the interface is consistent, no matter what process is being carried out, acting as a constant reminder of the interface’s corporate identity. The interface’s development and maintenance by corporate institutions influences how the discourse of the family album is combine with computer mediation and database logic as they also search for profitable opportunities. Garde-Hansen argues that rather than liberating personal memory, digital interfaces and websites actually enslave it “within a corporate collective in order to shore up abiding ideologies” (136). It is necessary for the platforms used by these institutions to standardise their interfaces as a way of branding their product.

This process of standardisation has three main implications. The first is that all photographs viewed using these digital photo-sharing platforms are subject to the branding and character of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*. The appearance of these interfaces makes them “consistently and instantly readable”, and recognisable as part of that particular platform

(Garde-Hansen 147). Interfaces structured in this way, Garde-Hansen argues, suggest that the interface is “not disrupted unduly by the millions of users’ differentiated mental structures” (147). Regardless of the mental structures of those using them, and the memories or narratives the images stored in the interfaces provoke, the logic of the interface remains foremost, because it is the only one made visible on the screen. While the contents of the *Shutterfly* homepage change to exhibit the most recent promotions, the site as a whole has a consistent aesthetic which plays a role in determining the appearance of family albums stored within its interface. The same toolbar appears on most pages within the site, the only exception being those pages where a product is being assembled, such as a “Photo book”. This tool bar shows *Shutterfly*’s orange logo in the top left corner, and a row of links directing users to different parts of the site, labelled “My Shutterfly”, “My Pictures”, “Share”, “Community”, and “Store”#. The site structures the user’s experience, rather than the other way around.

The second implication is that regardless of the functions used, the user is subject to a standardised experience. The tools which they have access to are the same as all other users of that interface, and their experiences of it are consistent. Whatever tasks they perform within these interfaces, they are presented with familiar, standardised pages. When users sign in to *Picasa Web Albums*, the home page shows recent activity from their account, and those of their contacts, while a panel on the right side of the screen lists new features on the site. All user pages use this same structure of a white panel on the left displaying images, and a grey, thinner column on the right displaying information about the creator of those images, whether the user is looking at their own photographs or those of other users (see figure 13, below). Other than the emotional attachments they may feel towards their own images, there is no visible distinction between familiar family photographs, and those of strangers.

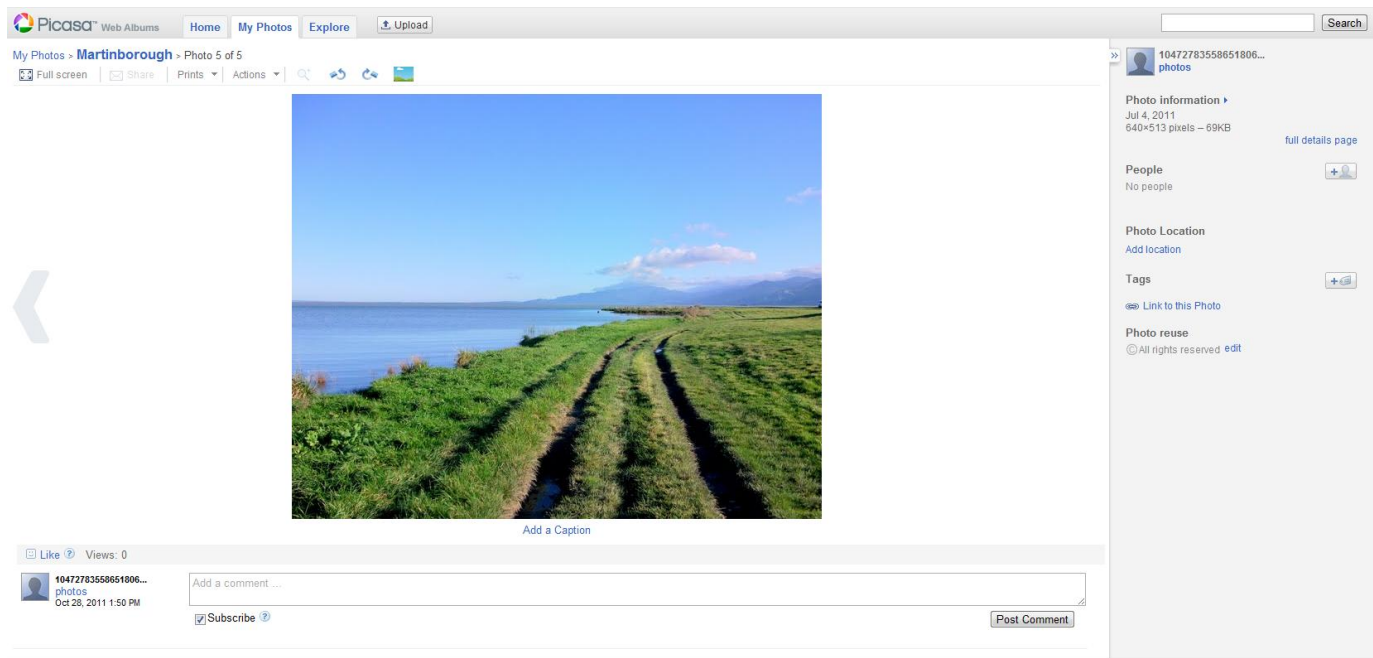


Figure 13 “My Photos”; *Picasa Web Albums* n.d.; Web, 16th Oct. 2011.

The third implication is that each interface becomes part of a culture of standardisation common to all digital and online interfaces, intended to ensure their efficient operation. This standardisation is a result of the discourse’s mediatization. As a format firmly tied to the private sphere, only a broad definition of the family album as a genre could emerge in the analogue context. The family album’s exposure to the public sphere of the internet and computer mediatization results in the album becoming a format, subject to the standardisation and rationalisation necessary to operate under a media logic. The vagaries of individual memory and subjective methods of compiling an album are placed into interfaces which Garde-Hansen describes as “rule-bound and homogenous” (137). Yet Garde-Hansen also compares interfaces to memory, claiming that the interface “like memory itself can be fleeting” and its structure may be subject to change as their owners shift their corporate focus or as new technological developments take effect (136).

The digitisation of family albums results in an exteriorisation of practices, making them visible within the structure and functions of interfaces like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*. These platforms emphasise practice over the finished object of the album, by encouraging users to participate in a continuous making and re-making of the album, enabled by their digital

structure. Yet the mediatization of these practices by computers results in a necessary favouring of database logic over the narratives which were the main influence on the structure of the analogue, material album. Databases approach family photographs as files to be indexed, searched and retrieved, unable to distinguish their content and focusing solely on the types of textual, visual and digital information which computers recognise. This database logic is hidden from the user behind the interfaces of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*, keeping users at a distance from the structures which store and retrieve their family photographs. In order to interact with these databases, the actions and behaviour of users are subject to a degree of standardisation unknown to the material album. Attitudes towards aesthetics are changed by these interfaces, away from those associated with the discourse of the material album, as they offer users a number of ways of altering images. As a result, the sacred character of family photographs no longer excuses them from the need for aesthetic improvements.

While representing a significant departure from material albums, and despite several changes which could easily exclude them, these digital interfaces still operate within the discourse of the family photograph album. Their functions could without doubt result in the marginalisation of narrative, which is not easily recognised by the databases which now store family images. Similarly, users are separated from their images by their exclusion from the inner working and knowledge of the database. This could, in other circumstances, represent the exclusion and ostracism of users from these interfaces and their images. The content of these images should prevent this though, as the sacred nature of family images means users are likely to continue to feel emotionally connected to their images because of the influence of discourse. The language and discourse of the family photograph album, used so liberally by these interfaces, masks the influence of database logic and the computer mediation of family albums. Digital interfaces cannot be fully understood by themselves, and must be seen through their connections to their analogue predecessors as well as the ways they can be used within human relationships and families, both online and offline. Their structure alone can only reveal so much without also addressing how they can be accessed and used.

CHAPTER THREE

ACCESS TO THE FAMILY ALBUM: SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS AND PRIVACY IN PUBLIC SPACES

Kodak's 1915 advertisement *The Story of the Kodak Album* (see figure 1) shows generations of a family gathered around their album. Access to the album, this advertisement suggests, is as simple as opening the pages of the book, and listening as the older generations tell stories about the album's contents. In the digital context, one would suppose that access would be as simple as this advertisement suggests. The power of new media apparently lies in the ways it expands opportunities for communication and sharing. However many photo-sharing platforms, including *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, incorporate in their interfaces ways of limiting access to family albums. The use of technology to restrict access to the family album and its contents is not however a significant departure from restrictions on access to the material album. Social access in these digital photo-sharing platforms is restricted in ways similar to those associated with the material family album, which are carried out by the physical restrictions of the material album. Such social restrictions are consequently a more significant influence over who has access to the family album, whether material or digital, than restrictions created by the use of particular technologies. What *Kodak's The Story of the Kodak Album* advertisement cannot show are the social norms which shape who is allowed to view the album, and how these restrictions are carried out.

In order to access family photograph albums, viewers must overcome social restrictions imposed on albums by gatekeeping practices, as well as the limitations of the material album's presentational form. While the limitations and restrictions of material and digital presentational forms differ significantly, digital platforms engage in selective adoption and translation of the social norms associated with accessing the material album. One of the most significant points of similarity between access to the digital and material album is founded on the discursive ideal that while family photographs and albums may travel between family members, they do not typically leave "domestic circulations" by entering

the public sphere (Rose 4). Thus, although digital albums use publicly available interfaces and a public network infrastructure to share family albums, this does not necessarily result in the album leaving the private sphere or the discursive space of the home. Access to digital family albums therefore remains subject to the same choices as analogue family albums about who should be allowed to view the album, and who, therefore, is part of the family. Whether material or digital, family albums are subject to gatekeeping practices which restrict access to the album and its contents.

Access to the family album is restricted through a number of gatekeeping practices because of the album's position as a product and record of the private sphere. As its contents reflect behaviour and identity within the private sphere, it would undermine social norms of propriety to share such material publicly. Social practices which limit access to family albums are based on the cultural separation of the family home and the outside world: the home, as part of the private sphere, from which the public sphere and outsiders must be excluded. The home is often described in academic literature about the family album, such as in Gillian Rose's work *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public, and the Politics of Sentiment* or Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, as somehow separate from the public sphere, and in need of protection from the gaze of the public. The family album, as a record of life in the domestic sphere, or, as Kodak's advertisement described it, the "intimate, personal story of the home", therefore demands that access to the album is restricted to the family itself (*The Story of the Kodak Album*). These contents typically include photographs which Bourdieu claims reveal something about the "individual gestures of a member of the family" (29). As a result of what they reveal, albums demand we make a distinction between images which can be shown to those he labels "outsiders" and images "reserved for family contemplation" only (29). Bourdieu's distinction suggests that those images which reveal something about the identity, history or character of family members must be protected from the outside world in order to uphold propriety.

Access to the material family album is also enabled and restricted by the album's status as a physical object. Family albums often remain within the spaces which created them, and which they typically address. They remain within the home, and as a result demand the

simultaneous physical presence of both the viewer and the album. Access is granted or denied through the physical movement of the album and viewers within the private sphere. The album's presence can also play a role in constituting spaces as belonging to the private sphere: to "home". Gillian Rose argues that the mobility of family photographs and albums is limited quite strictly to include only "familial routes" between family members (59). These circulations "trace and perform" what Rose describes as "affiliations of kin" (72). The circulation of the family album is restricted by the social norms attached to the album and its contents, and to the space of the home. Such restrictions are enabled by the limitation of access to the album as a physical object.

It is on the unique physical presence and conventions of circulation of the album which digitisation primarily imposes its influence, rather than on the discourse which creates separations between public and private. The location of family albums within the home results in viewing practices which differ from those associated with mass mediums of communication and circulation. Most obviously, access to albums within the home is granted to a private audience. Martha Langford writes that the "normal spectatorial experience" against which other means of accessing the album can be measured is viewing albums with other family members in the home, based on her analysis of the discourse of the material family album in "scholarly and literary description" (5). Similarly, Rose describes a typical viewing encounter, based on interviewing mothers about their family albums. According to Rose, in the home material albums are spread on tables in front of viewers, or passed between them as they sit beside each other on sofas in living rooms (22). Viewers participate in the album through holding, touching and discussing it (22). The album is typically encountered within this domestic space in the home, accompanied by an interpreter who explains its contents (5). Richard Chalfen describes these interpreters as "image custodians" who provide a "verbal, ongoing commentary" which accompanies the visual display of the album (129). Such commentary is necessary, Langford argues, because the contents of albums are too individual to be easily comprehensible, consequently requiring explanation even within a restricted, domestic "circle of intimates" (5). Access to the material album is constituted not only physical access to the album as a material object, but also by being granted access to the narration and viewing rituals. Viewing of the album incorporates both being shown the album, and becoming privy to the stories which

accompany its contents.

Social restrictions imposed on access to photographs stored in albums are somewhat at odds with the accessibility typically associated with the medium in more general discourses of photography. While access to material family albums is rooted in restricting their circulation, access to photographic culture more generally is characterised by openness. The practice of photography, and the subject matter of the images these practices create, are easily accessible because the degree of understanding necessary to create and view family photographs is commonly described as intellectually undemanding and requiring little skill. Pierre Bourdieu claims access to photography and photographic culture is different from access to “more demanding cultural activities” because many of its practices do not presuppose knowledge of a formal and “academically communicated culture” like that of “fully consecrated artistic activities” (5;7). Chalfen concurs that participation in pictorial communication is open to anyone because no training or skill is required to successfully use most cameras to produce meaningful “statements about private aspects of life,” such as the family (97). *Shutterfly*, for example, claims to make it “fun and easy to be thoughtful and creative with your memories”. Use of a camera constitutes one aspect of photography’s perceived accessibility; the other aspect is the photographs these practices create. The content of photographs, particularly those produced by amateurs, is accessible in that ideally they clearly show what they wish to communicate. While the form and content of photographs may themselves be accessible and open to viewing and interpretation by a wide audience, their accessibility is curtailed by social practices associated with the discourse. Access to the practice of photography and the contents of photographs is relatively open, but this does not mean access to the material object and contents of the album are characterised by the same openness. Restrictions imposed on access to the material family album are therefore the result of social practices, power relations and the operation of discourse, rather than restrictions created by the medium of photography or by photographs.

In restricting access to only a limited audience, the discourse of the material family album makes a number of assumptions about the identity of these audience members. Rose claims that traditional rituals of viewing material albums “constitute the viewer as a certain sort of

viewer,” requiring particular practices be observed and certain reactions given (21). However the use of a digital interface for accessing family albums changes the subjectivities involved in viewing the album. Mass media and an accompanying increase in mass migration have combined to create conditions Arjun Appadurai describes as defined by rapid motion and instability, quite different from the stable space of the home prescribed by the discourse of the material family album (4). These conditions result in the “production of modern subjectivities” which differ from those associated with analogue family albums (4). As users of digital photo-sharing platforms are engaging not only with family albums and family members within the home but also with the computer, network, and interface, the subjectivities they are called on to perform change significantly.

GEOGRAPHY AND TIME: FROM THE SPACE OF PLACES INTO THE SPACE OF FLOWS

The encounter with the material album within the home demands co-presence with the album. In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells distinguishes between the characteristics and possibilities of communication through analogue and digital means by labelling the first as belonging to the “space of places” and the latter as belonging to the “space of flows”. The space of places is founded on social proximity and a shared experience of time. Those who carry out communication within the space of places are subject to the limitations of both the human body’s, and analogue, material media’s relations to geography and time; they are restricted to social interactions grounded in the places in which they find themselves. The lives and experiences of these people are rooted in their connection to locales, cultures and histories (*Network Society* 415-6).

Likewise, material albums in the space of places are subject to control by their owners because access to their contents and stories can be limited by restricting physical access to the space where the album resides. Before Castells, Walter Benjamin explored the idea of access to material objects through a discussion of the physical existence of artworks in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”. Benjamin describes reproductions as escaping from the “unique existence in a particular place” which restricts access to the original, auratic artwork (21). He claims that reproductions can be placed “in situations which the original itself cannot attain” (21). This creates opportunities for

revolutionising the relationship between the artwork and the audience, because the reproduction can “meet the recipient halfway” (21). Through reproduction, he suggests that it is possible for the relationship between audiences and objects to evolve. Original artworks are those which we must be granted access to by being in the same location; a characteristic shared by the material family album. This location is open only to a select audience, based on historically significant distinctions between the preferred audience and outsiders. When copies are made of unique objects, whether they are artworks or family albums, this creates new opportunities for access outside these spaces. Benjamin’s work suggests that reproduction allows objects such as artworks or albums to overcome the limitations of the space of places. In a similar vein, digitization of the family album enables its reproduction, and changes the relationship between the viewer, the album, geography and time. Benjamin claims one of the consequences of reproduction may be the “liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage” of society (22). Following on from his argument, digital reproduction of family album practices perhaps therefore have the potential to create a disintegration of the traditions associated with accessing the albums created by the discourse of the material family album. Digital photo-sharing platforms represent a removal of the album from the space of places, with the associated physical restrictions on access and circulation, and relocation into the space of flows.

This escape from the space of places is enabled by the use of networked communication. Castells claims electronic networks allow for a separation of spatial proximity and the functions of everyday life, removing the need to share physical space in order to communicate in real-time (*Network Society* 394). In the space of places, he argues, space and geography provide the “material support for time-sharing social practices”, meaning people need to be in the same place in order to simultaneously experience the same things and that this sociability must be enabled by material culture (411). In the network society enabled by the internet, he argues that this need to share physical space is replaced by the network’s “space of flows” and technology which allows us to share time and experiences without sharing a physical co-presence (412). Castells defines these “flows” as “sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions” (412). The space of flows is created by sharing time and social practices through these flows.

Castells observes that the ability to participate in online communication has frequently been interpreted as representing the “culmination of an historical process of separation” of social practices and geographic proximity (*Internet Galaxy* 116). Technology marginalises the importance of geography for communicative social practices because it allows for verbal, visual and textual communication at a distance. Darin Barney describes the technological mediation of life through communication interfaces as extending the “limits of place, enabling the artificial constitution and coordination of communities on a scale...greater than was possible under the localizing constraints of nature”, echoing Castells’ belief that digitisation expands and extends opportunities for communication and socialising (29). Community, and by extension family, can be produced and maintained in the non-geographic space of flows by exchanging information about what it means to belong.

The use of networks is often described as liberating communication not only from the restrictions of geography, but also from the power relations and social practices which previously limited access. Electronic communication using networks is characterised, according to Castells, by its “global reach, its integration of all communication media, and its potential interactivity” (*Network Society* 329). Networks have the potential, Castells proposes, to create technological conditions which enable “horizontal, global communication” (352). The opportunities these conditions afford network users demonstrate the potential to transform the power relations involved in communication. The idea of “horizontal” communication suggests a situation where all those involved are given an equal ability to contribute and act within the space of the network, regardless of their positions outside the network.

The move towards global, horizontal exchanges is made possible by the technological characteristics of the network. Most significant of these characteristics is the ability of computer-mediated communication to merge different media formats so they can be viewed and used in similar ways within the same interfaces, and manipulated not only by their original creators but also by other users. Castells describes computer mediation as

imposing a “universal, digital language” used by every media type within the system (*Network Society* 2). This use of code, he argues, offers users a system potentially able to integrate text, images and sounds, and enable access from various points and times across a global network, promising “conditions of open and affordable access” (328). Taking these opportunities into account, Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading claim a consequence in the area of memory and history practices is that those practices previously restricted to elites because of the expense associated with material practices are opened up to “unprecedented global accessibility” and participation because of affordable data storage, easy retrieval and networked access (“Introduction” 1). This should have the effect of democratising access to practices such as album creation and viewing, because these technologies allow for the removal of both geographic and monetary limitations.

Using a digital interface to create and view family albums changes not only the technological basis of accessing the album, but also the type of visual encounter experienced by viewers. The use of digital photo-sharing platforms undermines many of the social norms of access associated with the discourse of the material family album because the point of access becomes computer screens and interfaces, rather than access being rooted in a material object in a particular physical location. *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* can be accessed wherever users have access to a screen and an internet connection; *Picasa Web Albums* is also accessible via mobile phone screens, with a portal designed specifically for use via mobile phones with internet connections. The use of an interface and computer screen makes access to the family album a textual and visual interaction, rather than an experience involving visual, verbal and physical interaction. Instead of using the body, space and material objects to articulate narratives about family identity and history, digital albums use interfaces built from code, text, and images as expressions of identity. The use of a computer screen, furthermore, suggests an individual rather than collective encounter, as the computer’s arrangement of a single screen, keyboard and mouse demonstrates. It is awkward for a group of people to gather around the same computer screen because only one of them can control the computer at a time. The screen’s display is also designed with an individual user rather than collective audience in mind. This is significantly different from the collective experience of the presentation of a material album, where a number of people might gather around a single album. Access to digital albums using a computer

screen presupposes a single user, demonstrated by the configuration of the computer's hardware.

While access in terms of using a computer as a means of entry to the family album presumes a lone user, once album content is moved into online spaces the interfaces used there suggest a more collective experience. This is, however, collective experience as defined by the user of the interface, rather than the freedom of global, horizontal access anticipated by Castells. Thus, users of *Shutterfly's* "Share Sites" can determine the levels of accessibility and exclusion for different people (see figure 14 below). *Shutterfly* distinguishes between the creator of the "Share Site", who reserves control over the site and may change the rules of access at any time, members whom the creator has invited via email to join the "Share Site", other visitors whom the creator has sent the site's address but not invited to edit or customise the site, and all other internet users. Permission for these groups to view or interact with the "Share Site" can be micro-managed, as creators can determine whether members, visitors or strangers can view, comment, contribute, edit or customise the site or individual pages within the site. Online, privacy is created by denying others access to the digital space where the family album is stored. The online context requires album creators to actively manage access, as the default form of access enabled by the structure of the network, according to Castells' description of networked communication, is far more open than that associated with the discourse of the material family album and physical access to material albums stored within the home.

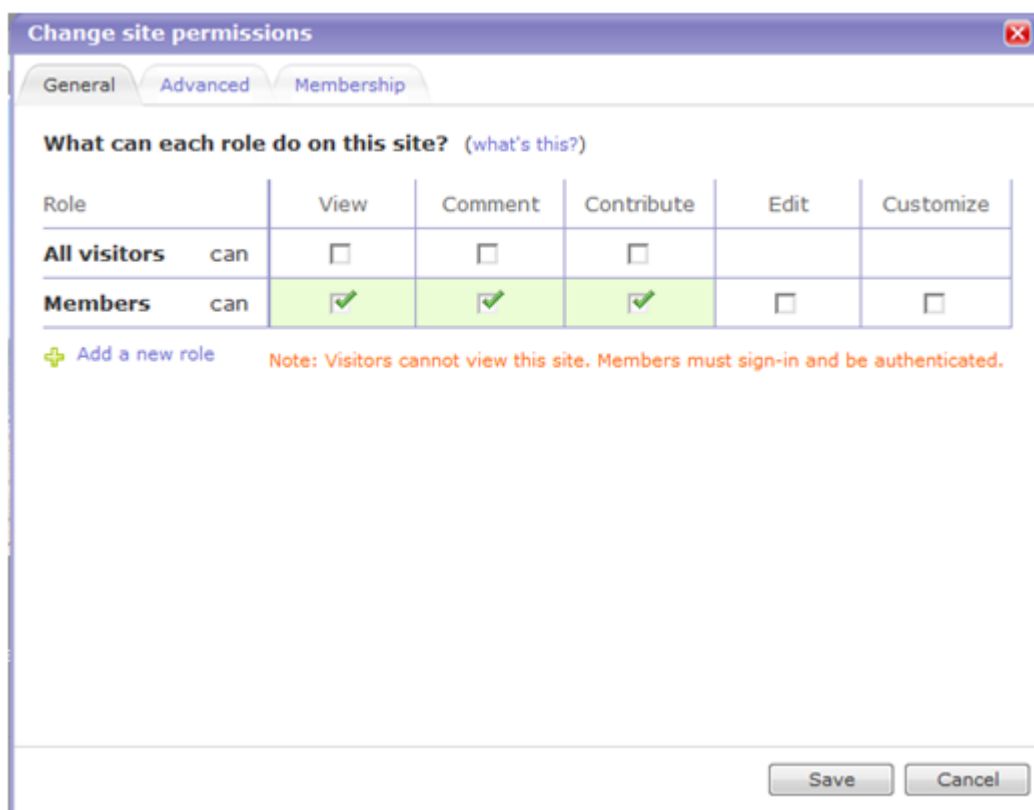


Figure 14 “Share Site: Customize – edit site permissions”; *Shutterfly*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

As well as involving shifts between individual and collective visual encounters, moving the basis for communication from the space of places to the space of flows results in album creators and viewers experiencing a new relationship to geography and time. Those who operate within the space of places remain subjugated to the limitations of time which those who operate within the space of flows, however briefly, have opportunities to manipulate their experience of time. Networks do not deny the existence of time, but they do deny it influence over social interactions, freeing them from the time restrictions which geography imposes. Time is a fundamental part of the experience of geography; therefore, overcoming the limitations of geography can create a new relationship to the experience of time. This is demonstrated in many instances by the ability given by online photo-sharing platforms to communicate asynchronously, or mix together media from different time periods into a new object. One such example would be the digitization of analogue photographs or albums, as

these can then be shared across a global network, viewed and used in new contexts rather than only in one place at a time. The ability to overcome geographic separation is also a surmounting of the restrictions of time. Castells describes the “manipulation of time” enabled by networked communication as the “recurrent theme of new cultural expressions” carried out online (*Network Society* 463). Castells describes the space of flows as being characterised by “timeless time”, defined as the “systemic perturbation” of sequential time within its flows, while the space of places is characterised by “time discipline, biological time, and socially determined sequencing” (464-5).

While the space of flows does away, for the most part, with geography, elements of the physical world remain influential. Barney, for instance, claims place matters in a network society in so far as it determines access to the network used to overcome the limitations of geography (48). Barney notes though that while an increasing proportion of communication is “mediated primarily or exclusively via digital networks”, the physical world persists and its “stubborn reality cannot be denied” (63). A consequence of this is that while users may engage with the space of flows, the ways of thinking created by the space of places persists. Appadurai claims that a result of our constant fluctuating and merging encounters with a “complicated and interconnected repertoire” of both electronic media and the physical world is that the geography and landscapes we experience in the physical world blur with the fictional, electronic landscapes we encounter on screens (35). Our “real” geography blends with a “virtual” geography to create a distinctive condition of being at once highly aware of place, and also ignoring the role of place and geography in our everyday lives.

In addition to the geography of the physical world, Castells also notes that the network itself has a geographical element. Rather than heralding an end to all geography, Castells suggests that the internet generates a “geography of its own”, constituted by its technical geography of material networks and nodes which support it, the “spatial distribution” of users which make it necessary, and the economic geography of its production (*Internet Galaxy* 207; 208). Instead of claiming that networks have completely overcome geography, he argues that the space of flows has merely redefined our experience of distances and place (*Internet Galaxy* 207). Geography, distance and time continue to exist, and continue to matter, but the space of flows works to minimise rather than eradicate its influence.

PRIVACY AND THE ORGANISATION OF SOCIAL SPACES

The translation of the family album from the space of places to the space of flows requires a reconsideration of who has access to its contents. The social practices of access associated with the discourse of the material family album are founded on the assumption that access can be limited by restricted access to the album as a physical object; time and space must be shared in order to share the experience of the album. In the space of flows, however, the same album can be reproduced at a distance for users to access despite not sharing the same physical location as the creator, enabling conditions which seem to promise open, equal access to all users. Technology transgresses the “boundary which protects the privacy and solidarity of the home” from the outside world, maintained through physical distances (Morley 5). The use of a digital photo-sharing platform, for instance, therefore requires restrictions of access to be explicitly articulated within the interface through the use of passwords and user names, rather than being implicitly carried out through physical distance. Both *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* draw on the tools of user names and passwords in order to identify family members and approve access. Albums uploaded to *Picasa Web Albums* can be designated as “Public” open to anyone, “Limited”, open only to selected users who must log in using their *Google* user name and password to see the album, or “Only You”, restricting access only to the creator, who uses their own user name and password to gain entry. Similarly, *Shutterfly*’s “Share sites” can also restrict access to include only certain *Shutterfly* members, who must log in using their user name and password or to those with whom the creator shares the direct URL address.

Concern with privacy within the home and with the ways technology affects the experience of this space has been a frequent topic in academic literature about domestic spaces. Lynn Spigel, for instance, analyses reactions to the introduction of television sets into homes in post-war America, finding that a frequent concern was that having such technology in the home would “collapse the necessary ‘distance’ between the public sphere and the private individual” (*Make Room for TV* 127). A similar concern may lie behind the extensive privacy controls offered to users of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*. The *Picasa* suite, for example, appears to react to fears about control over the family album by privileging the

album's creator, as it is they who allocate the right to view the albums they shared through *Picasa Web Albums*. *Picasa's* "Help" pages claim every album created using the interface is potentially collaborative, as tools are provided to allow users to "open up" their online albums to contributions from others such as adding comments or images to the album ("Picasa and Picasa Web Albums Support"). Collaboration is however structured in such a way that the control of the album and its contents remains ultimately with the album's creator rather than being equally distributed amongst participants. The creators of albums in *Picasa* retain control over the contents of their albums, even when they are opened up to other users. Privacy in *Picasa* and *Picasa Web Albums* is described as "Visibility" (see figure 15 below, with visibility settings indicated by yellow boxes), allowing users to determine who can "see" their albums, and who albums are hidden from. In many ways, the privacy involved in restricting access to the material album could also be considered in terms of "visibility", as lack of physical access prevents outsiders from viewing the album, therefore ensuring its privacy. In *Picasa*, meanwhile, creators can share albums either on an individual basis via email, or by using *Google* contact groups, part of *Gmail*, and designate the right to contribute by adding individuals or contact groups to their "Shared With" list when uploading photographs from to *Picasa Web Albums*. In addition to these invitations, collaborators must have a *Google* account to participate. The default contact groups provided by *Gmail* are for co-workers, family and friends, suggesting the groups users are expected to want to share or exclude from their family albums. Access to an album can be revoked at any time by the album creator by removing participants from the "Shared With" lists or editing their contact groups. While contributors may edit the content they upload and receive credit in the form of their *Google* user name displayed alongside their images, the album's creator retains the right to edit and delete their content. The creator of the album, however, is able to edit all uploaded content as if it were their own, while contributors can only edit their own images. The privacy of the family album can no longer be guaranteed by physical distances, as the technology of the network collapses boundaries between home and the outside world. Privacy controls create artificial boundaries which delineate private, domestic spaces from the more general spaces of the network which are theoretically open to all users. This openness is suggested in *Picasa* by the fact that the software is free for anyone to download or use.

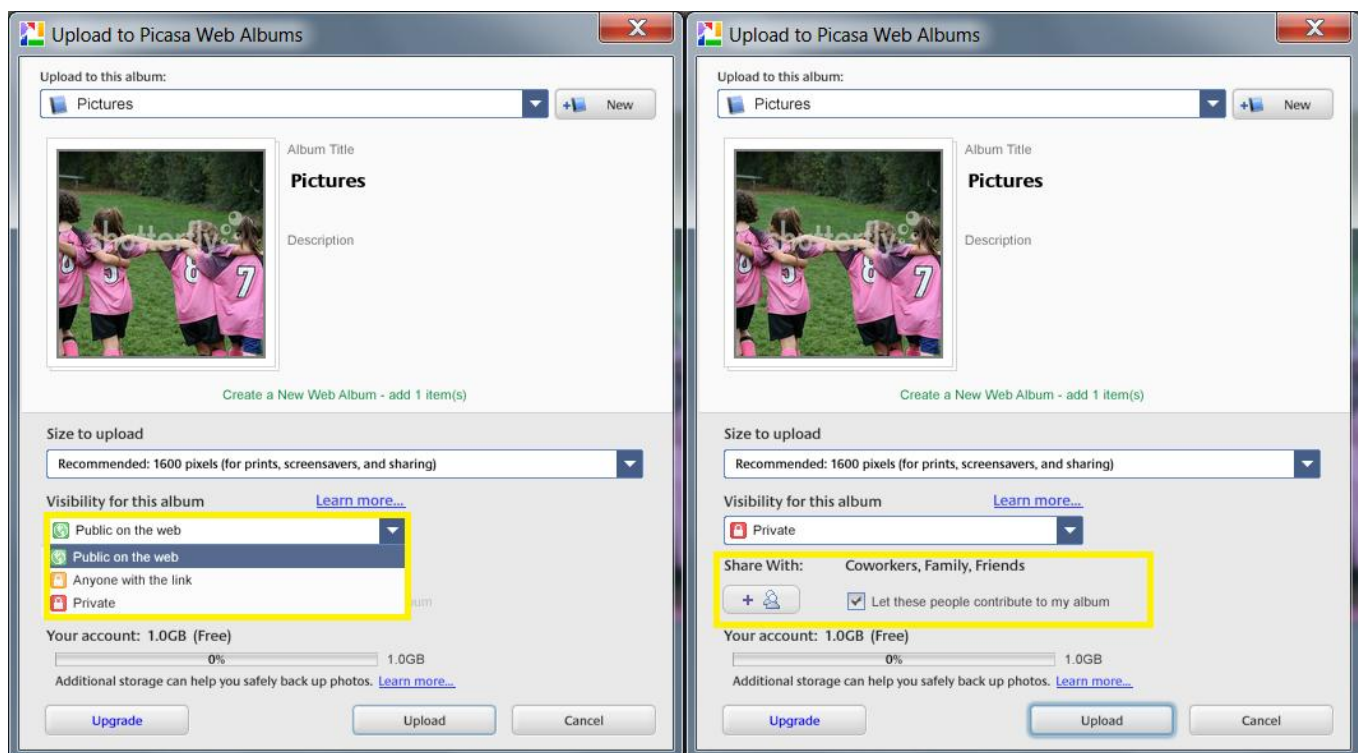


Figure 15 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

Technology changes not only the boundaries separating the home and the outside world, but also how the space within the home is experienced. Ruth Furlong suggests that technologies have a schizophrenic relationship with domestic space (184). While they are frequently designed and marketed with the home in mind, as a way for people to enjoy the time they spend in their domestic spaces, they simultaneously promise a “means by which [users] escape the confines of the domestic” (184). While television, for example, may have brought the family together within the home as they watched, Spigel claims that it also enabled family members to leave the home through television’s representation of the outside world. This changes the experience of domestic space and distance in ways comparable to those of networked communication: Spigel claims technologies such as television give people the ability to “travel imaginatively into the outside world while remaining in the comforts of home” (*Make Room for TV* 182), which Friedberg has shown creates a mobilised form of subjectivity, operating through representation rather than experience (2). The type of encounter promised by digital photo-sharing platforms, however, works in a slightly different manner. While these platforms do promise escape

from particular physical locations into the space of flows, the online destinations where family albums are stored and family members gather to view and discuss albums are themselves marked as domestic spaces, rather than public, through rituals of exclusion and access. This has the effect, Rose claims, of reproducing the space which users occupy as domestic (23). While imaginatively leaving the home through the use of the network to overcome physical distances, users of digital photo-sharing platforms are also using these networks to reach new domestic spaces, as the presence of family albums and of restrictions on access mark these spaces as part of the private sphere.

Thus, technology creates situations in which the public sphere is accessible from within the private space of the home, while domestic spaces where family albums can be stored are created in the public space of the network. This demands a reconsideration of the distinctions between the public and private spheres on which practices of restricting access in relation to the discourse of the material family album are based. In her work, Spigel found such distinctions were often based on what she describes as a powerful group of cultural beliefs which articulate the home and the outside world as “essentially separate and antithetical spheres of action” (*Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 4). She suggests that this “division of spheres” is in fact ideological and used as “a means of control and power” rather than reflecting “universal human needs” (9). As such, this division is able to change over time as social and political needs change and new expectations are placed on the organisation of social space (9). She also argues, however, that any change to the boundaries between spaces of public and private action is likely to be interpreted as a threat to the “sentimental ideals of family life and privacy itself” (1). Consequently, although digital media make new patterns of accessibility and sharing possible, the digital photo-sharing platforms align themselves strongly with practices associated with the discourse of the material family album as a way of upholding the social ideals of family and of privacy, despite the increasing encroachment of the public sphere and horizontal forms of participation, where in theory all participants have an equal say in discussions, into the domestic space of the home.

Users are faced, then, with a number of conflicting approaches to access, participation and sharing within digital photo-sharing platforms which cannot be adequately accounted for in terms of belonging solely to the public or the private spheres. Spigel argues that rather than the use of technology in the home resulting in a “total collapse of private and public spaces”, we are instead facing the simultaneous existence of several “different models of domesticity” (*Welcome to the Dreamhouse* 9). She claims that many users may experience what she describes as “hybrid situations” where they draw on different models of home and privacy depending on their needs (91). The digital interfaces of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* are representative of these hybrid models of privacy, domesticity and the home, as they allow for private actions and communication to be carried out using a public structure across a public network.

Using public networks to carry out private communication consequently draws personal, intimate material out of the home, and to some extent, exposes it to the risk of scrutiny. In using networked communication for a significant proportion of our social practices, we expose ourselves and our activities to what Castells describes as continuous monitoring (*Internet Galaxy* 180). He claims there is an “absence of explicit rules of behaviour” online and an inability to predict the possible consequences of exposed online actions, which results in users internalising censorship (*Internet Galaxy* 180). Nick Couldry argues a similar point, claiming that if users create their media objects with the assumption that private stories may easily become “public narratives...that can be used against them for years to come” because of this inability to predict the consequences of their actions, they are likely to adapt their stories appropriately (383). As a result, he argues the notion that computer-mediated communication simply represents “mediatisation (and publication) of formerly private self-narratives” is problematic (383). Digital interfaces which draw on the discourse of the material family photograph album do not, and in fact cannot, reproduce the same boundaries between public and private and the same communicative experience as the material album. Users may choose to restrict the narrative they share using online interfaces in order to protect “an older public/private boundary” which is closely aligned with that of material culture rather than being willing to change this boundary (383). The use of publicly available platforms like *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* may result in a restriction on the type of content and narratives people choose to include in their family albums, and in a

stronger conformity with the social norms prescribed by the discourse of the material family album.

DECENTRALISATION AND DISLOCATION

Along with the traditional separation of the public and private spheres, networked communication also problematises the idea of “home”, because its definition has typically been one which refers to a common physical space shared by family members. The home is central to the discourse of the material family album as the space in which the album is created, stored and viewed. Yet Rose claims that it is the act of looking at the family album which produces “familial togetherness” and domestic space, rather than a specific location or building (41). This domestic space is “not necessarily coterminous with either family or house” (41). Hamid Naficy, for instance, distinguishes between a house - the literal, material place people inhabit - and a home, which can be moved, and “carried in memory and by acts of imagination” (5-6). The notion of “home” is a feeling of togetherness created through social interaction, not necessarily by a particular place, relying on shared communicative experiences like those provided by the family album. This definition of home is, moreover, compatible with the opportunities offered by networked communication.

Using digital interfaces to carry out social practices traditionally staged within the home removes the need for physical proximity in a shared location, while also having some of the same affective ability to create a sense of “togetherness”. David Morley claims that this is because communication technologies are able to “articulate together that which is separate”, bringing together in our imagination things, locations and people that may be physically far away (153). Morley claims that because technology transgresses the home’s physical boundaries while also acting as a “symbolic centre” for activity within the home, it has the potential to either “enhance or...disturb viewers’ symbolic sense of community” (162). *Shutterfly* participates in this type of rhetoric in its descriptions of “Share Sites”, claiming they are a way to “[k]eep everyone connected...[a]ll in one place”. Morley argues that technology alone does not necessarily improve or damage a person’s experience of home, community and family, but it does have significant consequences for the ways these things can be thought about and imagined. The type of togetherness *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*

refer to suggests that the idea of “home” can be reinvigorated online through the idea of a digital, domestic space where the album can be shared, as their interfaces allow for the production of a domestic space in a networked environment.

The decentralisation of the family album enabled by networks allows not only for the reproduction of its contents at a distance, but also the reproduction of its practices. In the case of using analogue photographs to reproduce unique objects or images, Benjamin claims that the reproduction of the originals results in a “shattering of tradition” (22). This claim provides a way of understanding how the decentralisation of practices might change the character of the family album, as the result of separating practices from the locations which created them. In producing domestic spaces and a “home” outside specific locales, networked digital platforms create a disassociation of social practices from the locations which produced these practices and discourses, which are overwhelmed by the influence of the network.

The most significant reorganisation created by decentralisation of the family album across a network is the arrangement of the album’s production. The discourse of the material family album suggests a single album created within a specific home before being shown or transported to be presented to a particular group of family members. Barney proposes that the networking of personal computers creates a decentralised environment not only in terms of geography, and the reduced need to share the same physical spaces, but also in how material is produced, distributed and accessed (173). Decentralisation of production and access rearranges the practices associated with producing a family album. While an album’s creation may be initiated within the home, *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* do not treat albums as a final product designed only for presentation and viewing. Unlike the discourse of the material family album, which characterises later addition to the album as a form of damage, these interfaces encourage a continuous process of updating, altering and editing albums. Once content has been uploaded to a user’s *Shutterfly* account, it can be used and reused any number of times in numerous different products, such as “Photo books”, stationery or “Share sites”. Similarly in *Picasa*, content can be edited as frequently as the user wishes. Albums created in *Picasa* do not affect the way the original photographic file is stored on the user’s computer, so albums can be edited or deleted with few

consequences.

Digital albums within these interfaces are never finalised, and remain permanently open to alteration and reinterpretation as a result of practices of production and distribution being dislocated from their origins within the home, and because they can occur from wherever in the network users choose to access the interface. New comments can always be added to older albums, and photographs added or removed. This can be done not only by the original creators of digital albums, but also by those who previously would have acted only as viewers of the album. Nick Couldry claims this ability to tell stories and represent the world around us was previously a scarce resource, but claims that now networked communication allows for the distribution of stories across a shared interface, creating new possibilities for the “transmission, retransmission and transformation” of stories available to those who would not otherwise have the opportunity (374). Both *Shutterfly* and *Picasa Web Albums* share material by uploading copies of digital photographs stored on the users’ home computers to the interface’s server. Other users can view copies of these images across the network, rather than accessing the original files on the creator’s home computer, although due to the nature of digital reproduction little difference is visible between the original and the copy.

The use of networks to create and distribute family albums decentralises not only processes of production, but also social relationships. The significance of networked communication lies in its new ways of constructing and maintaining communities across geographic and temporal divides. Barney claims networks allow communal bonds to be formed and sustained based on a “common symbolic order” rather than only between people “who interact routinely and directly”, enabling their users to overcome any “lack of physical proximity” (156). Networks allow relationships to thrive despite the mobility of the individuals involved and despite “spatial and temporal dislocation” (165). The family and the family album can be seen as providing the necessary “common symbolic order” which binds physically dislocated people together.

While both material and digital albums may provide the necessary connections between spatially separated groups, the distinction between material albums and their digital

counterparts can be seen in the ways they employ different modalities of home and place. The disassociation of production, viewers, and particular locations in the digital context changes the connection between users, space, and other people. Naficy claims that these new connections and sense of distance are communicated through media, which reflect different “modalities of placement and displacement” (4). Through the media we use, we experience a sense of our own place, other locations, and the distance between these. Material albums reflect the experience of exile, and a family irrevocably separated by distance. Naficy describes the notion of exile as incorporating the desire for a possible yet elusive return to a homeland (3). Naficy claims it is also possible nowadays to remain at home yet still feel a longing for the “other places and times” we encounter through media (3).

Exile is however just one of the consequences of the type of subjectivity which media encourage. Digital albums, depending on how they frame issues of access and production, evoke subjectivities associated with diaspora and nomadism. John Durham Peters differentiates between the ideas of exile and diaspora by noting that while exile is always associated with solitary pathos and woe, diaspora emphasises “lateral and decentered relationships among the dispersed” and a “network among the collective” (20). Digital albums provide the element of “communication and contact” that Peters claims is vital to a decentralised diasporic community (20). This subjectivity remains connected to the idea of an original homeland from which the family has later dispersed; a family separated by industrialisation and increasing urbanisation, but nevertheless maintaining contact through the production and discussion of family albums.

Yet what digital photo-sharing platforms ultimately promise is the ability to construct an identity which may exist entirely online, with email addresses and contact groups rather than blood ties and a shared physical history. Lacking a “real world” basis, families take on a nomadic existence online, one which can perhaps also incorporate groups of friends and work colleagues, as shown in *Picasa’s Gmail* contact groups for friends, family and co-workers. Nomadism, Peters claims, suggests a kinship unit whose community is sustained by face-to-face contact as they travel, which makes their “home” mobile rather than being rooted in a particular location (21). Those living in a state of nomadism feel at home

everywhere, according to Peters, but lack a “fixed-ground” or physical place to call home (21). Peters contrasts exile and nomadism by arguing that the concept of exile is typically associated with primordial identity, and the concept of nomadism is associated with a constructed identity (31-2). The concept of nomadism therefore represents a way to understand how people experience feelings of contemporary community and family online, as it denies the need for a physical homeland, making feelings of “home and togetherness” mobile, and therefore “available everywhere” (31-2). No longer bound to specific locations or even particular histories, these photo-sharing platforms promise a new type of subjectivity which will transform not only our understanding of distance, community and access, but also of the private and public spheres.

ACCESS AND EXCLUSION: WORKING WITH AND WITHIN TECHNOLOGY

Digital interfaces like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* claim to offer opportunities for collaboration, emphasising the accessibility which technology makes possible. They do not, however, guarantee accessibility, because of the social practices associated with family albums and the private sphere. On the surface, these interfaces frequently discuss how users do not need expert knowledge of photography or of new media and computers in order to successfully create and share digital albums. *Shutterfly* for instance claims its interface makes it “fun and easy” to be “thoughtful and creative” while making family albums online. By employing software that can be used wherever there is access to the necessary hardware and the internet’s network, these interfaces suggest a different understanding of access to that of the discourse of the material family album, one based on claims of universal access, collaboration and informally communicated photographic and digital cultures. There are however two types of access involved in these platforms - access in terms of creating the album, and access in terms of viewing the album. While these two genres of practice are separated in the material album, these platforms seek to elide the difference. In doing so, they suggest that mediatization of the discourse of the family album will have a revolutionary effect, promising new patterns of accessibility and a undermining of traditional practices. Digital photo-sharing platforms imply that what is at stake is only the opportunity for overcoming traditional restrictions placed on material family albums by their materiality; however, they do not address the discourse which exerts such a significant

influence over access to the album, whether material or digital. Access to material albums is subject to a variety of rituals and social practices which keep the album within the domestic sphere, to be viewed only by the family itself. The use of digital technologies obviously therefore affects the influence these social practices have, but it does not remove them entirely.

Access to digital albums and the interfaces used to create them is subject to restrictions which operate both at the level of culture - those created by the discourse of the material family album - and of the computer, created by the ways the majority of users are unaware of the inner workings of the interfaces and technology they use. Users of digital interfaces are able to act only in very limited and restricted ways because they lack access to the “products, information and knowledge” which would give them full control over the software they use (Arthur 44). In *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, this is demonstrated in the way both interfaces use proprietary, closed-source software to create and view digital albums. Neither interface can be edited or changed by their users in order to make them perform new tasks, or perhaps to perform the same tasks in user-defined ways. Barney claims most people are only able to use interfaces in ways which have been “allowed for” in the interface’s design (58). Even when used in ways not intended by the creator, such as using *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* to display art photographs rather than family photographs, the interfaces cannot be used in ways which the design specifically “disallows” or prevents, such as skipping steps in *Shutterfly*’s “Photo Book” creation process (58). The coding and “fundamental design” of an interface are the result of what Barney describes as “necessarily *political* choices” on the behalf of the creator, as they determine what users can and cannot do (51). These choices allocate power, control and access within the interface.

Digital albums may not be literally subject to the same access conventions as material albums, but they sustain many of these conventions in the way they structure the interface and content, signalling how these interfaces should be used. By mediatizing the discourse of the material family album, digital photo-sharing platforms and their users become subject not only to the discourse, but also to the logic of the media they use. The use of digital photo-sharing platforms cannot, consequently, release the family album and their users from all discourse-based restrictions on access. Indeed, by using a digital interface, users

become subject to additional restrictions inherent in the software, as well as on access to the internet. Users must cooperate with the requirements and processes of the interface in order to use it, becoming subjects to power relations which extend far beyond the home. Terry Anderson and Heather Kanuka describe the use of computer interfaces and network connections for communication as imposing a “sociological and psychological filter” on the practices and imaginations of users, as the interfaces demand their users adopt particular formats and structures (13). Castells claims the network demands users “adapt to its logic, its language, to its points of entry, to its encoding and decoding” (*Network Society* 374). The way individuals may conceive of stories about their family and of photograph albums is consequently shaped and standardised by the interface, as the networks and platforms through which albums are created and accessed privilege a particular type of communication and make others difficult, if not impossible, to carry out. While *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* incorporate text and photographs, for instance, they do not allow for oral communication, or the influence of body language which has such impact in person-to-person communication in the physical world. The interface has preferences and a discourse of its own, shaped by both the discourse of new media and that of the material family album, which users must work within.

The asymmetrical distribution of knowledge and access in the interface results in clear distinctions between those who have control and are consequently able to manipulate interfaces and the online environment they experience, and those who are able to make some use of the opportunities promised by new media, but have little knowledge of how to change or influence the technology they use. This leads Castells to make two sets of distinctions which he uses to identify the opportunities open to these groups. In *The Network Society*, Castells makes the distinction between “the interacting” and “the interacted” as groups which experience networked communication in very different ways. The “interacting” are those able to navigate and direct circuits of communication, while the “interacted” are the recipients of a “restricted number of pre-packaged choices” (*Network Society* 371). This distinction is founded on the degree of autonomy users experience as the result of particular knowledge and skills.

In *The Internet Galaxy*, Castells develops this notion of autonomy by exploring its consequences. He differentiates between those he labels “producers/users”, whose practices contribute to the development of the internet as a technological system, and those he labels “consumers/users” who are provided with the internet’s applications and systems, as has already been described (*Internet Galaxy* 36). The actions of “producers/users” have consequences because they have the knowledge required to make an impact on the sphere of networked communication. The “interacted,” or “consumers/users” are simply presented with fully developed tools and applications which they can choose to use, but their use has little impact on how the technology or network develops. *Shutterfly’s* Share Sites are an example of such pre-fabricated tools, as users can only manipulate pre-existing objects within the templates these sites provide, rather than modify the essential elements of the pages. Castells’ argument suggests that many of these technologies operate under the assumption that access can be restricted in ways which benefit those who control the software, websites and networks. This, he claims, relies on two conditions: that creators and not users understand the codes networks use, and that control can be applied to specific spaces online, often based on points of access (173). As users are often unfamiliar with the codes of the network, Castells claims they become “prisoner[s] of an architecture” they do not understand (173).

The “interacted” or “consumers/users” are consequently excluded from interacting with the underlying structure of the interfaces they use because of their lack of knowledge and skill. Not only are they unable to act upon the architecture and coding of the interfaces they use, they are often not aware it exists. Sherry Turkle claims the “bare machine” of the computers we use is hidden from most users by graphical user interfaces (23). She argues that interfaces actively encourage users to interact only “at a surface level of visual representation” by masking the inner mechanisms which support it (34). This appears to be what *Shutterfly’s* “Share sites” suggests, as users are told changing their page is as simple as moving boxes around within the template without referring to the necessary changes to the site’s code which make these changes happen. These mechanisms are vital yet made to seem irrelevant, Turkle claims, because the interfaces make no reference to them (35). Such interfaces encourage an emphasis “on surface manipulation and ignorance of the underlying mechanism” (55).

While users may be encouraged to remain ignorant of the interface and its technological demands, they nevertheless *place* demands on those using the interface. Although both *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* draw on the universally recognised digital language of code, certain technical requirements must still be met in order to use these interfaces. *Shutterfly* requires a stable internet connection, as well as particular software configurations. To use *Shutterfly*, the user's computer must have a minimum of 500MB of memory available to the programme, as well as version 10 or higher of Adobe Flash Player installed. The interface can be accessed only through a certain group of internet browsers, which include Internet Explorer 6.0, Firefox 3.0 or Safari 4.0 or later versions of these browsers suggesting users must have access to the most recent software. There are also demands placed on the material aspects of their access to the internet, as the site stresses that a dial-up connection is insufficient due to the considerable amount of bandwidth required to access and use the interface. Users must also use a screen with a minimum resolution of 1024 x 768 and a minimum colour depth of 256. *Picasa's* software is downloaded from the internet to the computer's hard drive, meaning that in addition to internet browser requirements similar to those of *Shutterfly* the user must also be using one of the operating systems listed by *Picasa*, which include Windows XP, Vista, 7, or Linux. Users must have 100MB free memory on their hard drive in order to use this interface. Use of *Picasa Web Albums* also presumes similar access to browsers and internet connection as *Shutterfly*. While both interfaces place extensive demands on their users in terms of the minimum level of digital and material requirements, we can presume that the majority of potential users must be willing to meet these; otherwise, these requirements would impinge on the interfaces' success. For now, the integration of different media texts, rather than a suggestion of open, democratic access, is the most significant characteristic of computer-mediated communication, because this potential integration of texts is something no other means of communication offers. What is more, it appears to be a characteristic which widely available interfaces like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* are actually able to offer their users. *Shutterfly* "Share sites" incorporate, at the very least, numerous text elements and photographs within the same online space, but users can also add videos, calendars and forums to their site.

Despite promises of increasing accessibility across geographic and temporal divides, and of opportunities for engaging in conversations characterised by open, horizontal and equal

communication, access to digital interfaces can be understood as subject to much the same restrictions, exclusions and marginalisation of certain groups of the population as any other means of communication. While the rhetoric surrounding new media may promise equal access for all, participation in networked communication is subject to many restrictions on access. While the internet promises conditions of “global, free communication”, Castells reminds us that its infrastructure is much the same as any other in that it can be owned, and therefore controlled (*Internet Galaxy* 277). He claims that those people, places and social practices which remain outside computer-mediated communication lose much of their structural meaning because they cannot participate in the network where value, power and cultural codes are now determined (*Network Society* 477). In making the internet a central part of social, economic and political life, Castells claims we effectively marginalise all those with little or no access to it (*Internet Galaxy* 247). The existence of digital interfaces for the mediation of the family album is on the one hand a sign that the family as an ideological form continues to provide important cultural codes. Alternatively, if family albums exist only as part of digital interfaces, they risk excluding large portions of society and become tools for reinforcing social inequalities by limiting membership in the family, at least as it is articulated through the viewing and discussion of family albums, to only those who can participate online.

Castells’ argument highlights that while new media and the internet are often discussed in optimistic terms for their ability to engender open, democratic communication, they are not yet available to every group in society. *Picasa* for example claims that any albums uploaded to *Picasa Web Albums* is “is potentially collaborative. This means you can open up your albums so friends and family can contribute their photos and videos” (“Picasa and Picasa Web Albums Support.”) Castells acknowledges that computer-mediated communication is not yet “a general medium of communication” (*Network Society* 358). This creates a new level of gatekeeping which can exclude those who lack the necessary resources to participate. Castells observes that those most likely to have access to the internet and computer-mediated communication are the “most educated and affluent segment of the population of the most educated and affluent countries”, living in the “largest and most sophisticated metropolitan areas” (360). These groups may even use the technology in ways which further limit the ability of other groups to engage with them online. Privacy settings

such as passwords are used, according to Paul Longley Arthur, to routinely “block access in user-defined ways” (55). This is certainly what *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* enable through tools enabling the restriction of access to certain email addresses. Those interacting using digital interfaces online are most likely part of the educated, affluent, urban population Castells describes, who use the interfaces to interact primarily with other members of that group. While exclusions in relation to the material family album are typically articulated as informal restrictions, often unspoken but shared through an awareness of the discourse of the material family album, exclusions from the digital family album come not only from those associated with the discourse of the family album, but also from the formal architecture of computer-mediated communication and the internet itself.

By excluding groups from outside this limited audience of educated and affluent populations, existing inequalities of society are reinforced. Castells describes access to computer-mediated communication as subject to restrictions based on culture, education and economics which privilege pre-existing elites. Subsequently, he suggests, the cultural impact of networked communication could be limited to the “reinforcement of the culturally dominant social networks” and “increasing social stratification among the users” (*Network Society* 363; 371). The exclusions which prevent outsiders accessing the material family album are perhaps only further entrenched by the use of a digital interface, as existing power relationships within the family are reinforced by the use of networked communication, in addition to a further emphasis of cultural, educational and economic divisions not normally considered to influence the private sphere. However, while these divisions are a topic of concern for scholarship about new media, they are infrequently addressed by the discourse used by the interfaces for networked communication themselves.

Digital photo-sharing platforms require a transformation of the ways in which users understand geography and time, which were formerly the most significant restrictions on access to material family albums. Their interfaces liberate communication from the restrictions imposed by geography and time, consequently decentralising the production and distribution of albums beyond the boundaries of the home. This results in a new subjectivity, created through visual rather than physical encounters which take place on

screens. The concern such transformations raise is whether the flow of information about the family can still be restricted only to domestic circulations. Boundaries between public and private spheres are being weakened, if not erased, by the use of shared networks for private communication, which many fear will result in a self-censorship of family narratives to match with common ideologies of the family as a way of avoiding unexpected and damaging exposure of private lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMMODIFICATION OF THE PERSONAL: THE FAMILY ALBUM AND COMMERCE

A Christmas Morning

KODAK

All the child-world invites your Kodak. Wherever the children are there is endless opportunity for a Kodak story — a story full of human interest to every member of the family. And there's no better time to begin that story than on the *home* day—Christmas.

There are Kodaks now to fit most pockets and all purses and practical little Brownies, that work on the Kodak plan and with which even the children can make delightful pictures of each other. There are Brownies as cheap as one dollar and Kodaks from five dollars up—no excuse now for a Christmas without the home pictures. Write for our catalogue—or better still, let your dealer show you how simple and inexpensive Kodakery has become.

Make somebody happy with a Kodak

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, Rochester, N. Y. *The Kodak City.*

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

Figure 16 “A Christmas Morning” n.d.; Duke University David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Durham, North Carolina *Emergence of Advertising in America, 1850-1920*; Web, 17th Sept. 2011.

As a commonly shared way of thinking about photographs and the domestic sphere, the discourse of the material family album is used not only by families themselves, but also by the companies who provide the materials used to create family albums. Companies providing cameras, photographic supplies and albums invoke this discourse, as Kodak does above, as a way of connecting their products to the domestic sphere. Kodak describes having children in the family as an “endless opportunity for a Kodak story” (see figure 16, above), while *Shutterfly* invites users to “[c]elebrate the little ones”. *Picasa*’s “Getting Started” webpage claims photos “take on more meaning when you share them with friends and family”, echoing Kodak’s claim that the family photograph album is “full of human interest to every member of the family”. The use of the discourse’s rhetoric by commercial enterprises such as Kodak in the early twentieth century and by *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* in the early twenty-first century signals the discourse’s influence, longevity and significance.

The discourse of the material family album, however, positions the album as outside commerce. While albums may be created using the products of commercial culture, their role within the domestic sphere as an archive of family identity and memory appears to elevate them above their origins as commodities. Many of the purposes assigned to the material family album which have been discussed in previous chapters rely on maintaining clear boundaries between the public and private spheres, which the recognition of the album’s relationship to commodities would undermine. Digital photo-sharing platforms such as *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* have the potential to challenge the discursive framing of family albums and domestic spaces as physically and ideologically separate from the public sphere of commerce. Their digital nature requires a blurring of boundaries between production and consumption, a distinction which defined the album’s relationship to the public and private spheres in the analogue age, and, secondly, requires interfaces and processes explicitly related to a commercial logic.

The discourse of the material family album treats production and consumption as separate stages in the album. Production takes the form of the initial photographing, developing photographs, collection by an album creator, then organisation within the album. Consumption of the album happens once the album is complete, or at the very least “up to date”, and does not typically involve adding to or changing its contents, which would

constitute damaging the album. Digital photo-sharing platforms merge production and consumption within the same interfaces, creating new conditions for making, viewing and re-making the album. The conditions created by these Web 2.0 interfaces allow for “prosumption” (Ritzer and Jurgenson 13), where production and consumption occur in a fluid, revolving state in which neither activity is final. As a result, the relationship between users, the interface and capitalism changes, creating the possibility, George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson claim, for the “emergence of a whole new economic form” (22). Many Web 2.0 products are given away for free because the cost to the company of hosting material online is relatively low (28). Instead of selling content to users, Web 2.0 companies provide the platforms for users to generate their own content, and pursue profit through the “creation of various revenue streams” other than the sale of content (29). Ritzer and Jurgenson claim these revenue streams can include the selling of information provided by users, or by restricting certain parts of their products only to paying customers (29-30). The consequence of “prosumer” capitalism is that content is increasingly abundant when previously it was scarce, and the means of producing this content, while still owned by corporations, is increasingly open to users (14; 26). The influence of “prosumption” affects how the discourse of the material family album is mediatized in commercial digital photo-sharing platforms like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*.

The relationship formed between family albums and commerce when the discourse is mediatized by these platforms continues to reflect the unequal distribution of control and capital which is characteristic of capitalism. Companies continue to create profit from consumer behaviour; what changes through mediatization in Web 2.0 situations characterised by “prosumption” is how that behaviour is given commercial meaning. In an analogue era, production of family albums occurred through the use of commodities and services such as photo developing, while consumption took place later on, within the home, and made little reference to the album’s commercial origins, as discussions of access and presentation of the album in the previous chapter showed. Prosumption in digital platforms draws both production and consumption inescapably into commercial culture, as companies commodify both production processes and consumption.

Consumption can also be understood as a form of production and labour, but it is often rendered invisible because it occurs through the appropriation of commodities to create a unique collage of use, rather than creating objects with exchange value, as production is typically defined. Michel de Certeau claims the type of production involved in consumption lies in the art of how people use commodities, rather than in creating products (31). Agency thus lies in the ways they use objects created by commerce to express themselves, their interests, and their views on the world. Commodities are deployed through consumption as symbols of the user's identity. The time spent on the consumption and leisure involved in using these photo-sharing platforms may be pleasurable, but it is also a type of labour because it is productive. This production is articulated through consumption and as a collage of commodity uses, as well as the ways users engage with the platforms to create new meanings out of the commodities they interact with, drawing them into the private sphere. The user's agency does not however necessarily contribute directly to commercial culture. Digital platforms, in contrast, produce commodified information about users which benefits the owners of such platforms, making leisure time spent engaging with digital albums a form of labour in ways other than that suggested by de Certeau, albeit labour which does not benefit the users themselves. The productive element of these platforms is often obscured, concealing the inequities involved in producing commodities from people's leisure.

The discourse of the material family album also has a complex relationship with commerce and commodities, relying on commodities to create albums while celebrating the finished album's status as a non-commodity. While production and consumption have never been separate, as de Certeau's description of consumption as a type of production demonstrates, the discourse treats them as such. The discourse depends on the assumption that family albums are unique objects, while commodities are characterised by their interchangeability, and involvement in processes of exchange outside the domestic sphere. Thus, Arjun Appadurai describes exchangeability as their most socially relevant feature ("Introduction" 13). The work of Igor Kopytoff extends this definition, suggesting commodities typically have use value, and noting that they can be exchanged either for other objects or money judged to be of equivalent value (68). He argues that anything that can be exchanged for objects of a similar value is a commodity, at least at that moment in its life (68). The separation of the material family album from commerce in discourse

emphasises the incongruity of such definitions of commodities. Family albums are discursively framed as lacking exchange value, because of their highly personal contents.

Commodities are commonly attributed a number of specific characteristics which render them incompatible with the sentiments associated with the discourse of the material family album. Kopytoff argues Western societies use the saleability of an object to indicate more than just its economic worth, because it also implies a “cultural shorthand” used to distinguish between different classes of objects (69). Commodities are ordinary objects which can be bought and sold, while non-commodities are distinguished as a special class of objects which have a “special aura of apartness from the mundane and the common” (69). These objects are separated from the sphere of commodities because they cannot, or perhaps more importantly should not, be bought and sold.

The commodity state is not however a static condition. While photographs may be the product of commerce and initially have value as commodities, once they have been drawn into the private sphere by the discourse of the material family album they undergo social processes which obscure their exchange value. Objects like photographs can both become and stop being commodities. Appadurai describes this movement in and out of the commodity state as being a reflection of the different stages in the object’s social life (“Introduction” 13). Objects move through a trajectory “from production through exchange/distribution to consumption” (13). At this point, some objects may stop being treated as commodities and become what Kopytoff labels “discommodities” (69). Analogue photographs are an example of this process. Photographers pay for the raw materials and services involved in taking photographs and developing their films. The price for developing films is determined by the format, size or quantity of photographs, rather than their content. Regardless of what the photographs show or the social meaning they may carry, photographic material at this stage in its social life is treated as a commodity which can be ascribed monetary value. Once the films have been developed, though, some photographs lose their commodity status while others continue to have an exchange value. Family photographs generally leave the commodity state behind at this point because they typically have little aesthetic value or meaning for those outside the preferred audience of the family. Some family photographs may remain commodities because they have aesthetic or

informational qualities, but the majority end their trajectory in the private sphere of the home.

Gillian Rose makes the distinction between family photographs and commodified photographs based on their participation in different modes of circulation and display. Family photographs are not circulated in exchange for money, and are typically displayed within the home; commodified photographs are produced for sale and displayed in spaces “that are more or less accessible to many people” (73). Family albums, she argues, may use commodities to produce their photographs but the power of their indexical connections to the family members which they depict prevents them from being substitutable or exchangeable for any other image, excluding them from most definitions of commodities (127). The discourse of the material family album suggests family photographs are divorced from the commercial sphere which produces them, because the photographs by themselves have little monetary or exchange value. The value of albums lies, typically, not in their use value, but in the experiences and sentiments they promise. Paradoxically, the indexical connection to what they depict, which prevents them from being considered commodities by a wider audience, is also the reason why people take photographs of family members and pay for their prints to be developed. This indexical connection consequently both defines photographs as commodities, because it makes people willing to pay for them, and also defines them as non-commodities, because their links to specific people, places and histories set them apart from the class of ordinary objects .

The discourse of the material family album therefore emphasises the role of photographs as non-commodities. It is in fact a necessary emphasis, as in order for this discourse to venerate the ideology of the family, the family must be seen as separate from the sphere of commodities, and the album’s auratic nature as a socially, but not financially valuable object must be stressed. Placing photographs within a narrative about the family and restricting access to only a select audience of family members restricts them to the private space of the domestic sphere, framed by the discourse of the material family album as separate to the sphere of commerce. In order for a photograph to be thus detached from its role as a commodity and, as Glen Williamson describes it, “domesticated within the sphere of the personal”, they must become subject to the personalised practices of album making which

engage them as part of an “intensely individualistic expression” (63). By incorporating photographs into family narratives within an album, the album creator is apparently able to separate it “from its links in commerce and mass production”, highlighting its personal significance (63). The intimate, personal contents of the album not only work to limit access to the album, as was seen in the previous chapter, but also give the family album a privileged position in relation to commodities, as the discourse of the material family album suggests this lifts the album above typical definitions of commodity status.

ALBUMS AS COMMODITIES

The domestic sphere is not free from the influence of commerce, but it is discursively framed as an enclosed sphere of private, intimate action which offers escape and refuge from the outside world of work. However, despite the discourse of the material family album working to separate the private sphere of the home from commerce, and the album from its origins as commodities, albums continue to have use and exchange value even within the home, albeit only for a limited audience. Nonetheless, the value of album and photographs as commodities is not static,; it evolves depending on the phase of the album’s life, and whether it is created in the material or digital context.

The commodity value of material family albums manifests itself in two distinct phases. The first phase is their value as the “raw materials” from which albums are created, such as films, photographs or albums, and is connected to the production of the album. The second phase is connected to the consumption of the album. The commodity value of the album in this phase of the album’s life is as a particular type of emotional experience. By connecting photographs and albums to family history and identity, the discourse of the material family album invites participation in feelings of nostalgia, as albums invoke indexical connections to people, times and places now lost. Paradoxically, however, while the discourse works to separate family albums from commerce, nostalgia has the ability to transform objects into commodities by conferring value on them. The value of nostalgic objects is socially constructed, rather than lying in the object’s physical properties, exchangeability or uses.

Objects promising nostalgia take on the attributes of a 'service commodity', rather than those of a physical commodity. Thus, Family albums take on the characteristics of a service rather than a material commodity, generally acting as a catalyst for emotions and memories rather than having a more practical purpose. The album and its contents act as a materialised reminder of particular sentiments and feelings, creating nostalgia through references to the past. Anne Friedberg describes commodities which replace the losses and absences created by the passage of time as offering a "commodity-experience", distinct from other commodities because they act through satisfying the aesthetic desires of the imagination rather than through providing particular material products (55). Family albums, both material and digital, offer an aesthetic, imaginative experience, created through the use of commodities, and are consequently transformed into a "commodity-experience".

While family albums may involve material products, such as photographs or the album itself, these are perhaps not the most significant source of satisfaction for the viewer, which is, rather, the imaginative and nostalgic recollection of the family, its members, and history - an experience, rather than only a physical encounter with a material object. The notions of commodity-experiences and nostalgia are central to the translation of the discourse of the material family album by digital photo-sharing platforms. Digital albums extend the imaginative processes of the "commodity-experience" further, because they provide the aesthetic experience of material albums without the need for material objects.

One way in which nostalgia is incorporated into digital photo-sharing platforms is in the ways they reference the idea of patina. Appadurai defines patina as the suggestion of the "right sort of duration in the social life of things" (*Modernity at Large* 75). Certain types of wear and use create the "gloss of age" which in conjunction with appropriate consumption contexts enables "certain things to evoke nostalgia" (76). Appadurai discusses the concept of patina in relation to objects which gain it through the type of wear associated with aristocratic lifestyles. He suggests that patina in that context acts as an index of the "special status" of the object's owner and their way of life (76). The disappearance or decline of the aristocratic way of life makes this type of patina a "truly scarce resource", as well as excluding those who are "newly arrived" and have only recently acquired such objects (76). Digital photo-sharing platforms seek to make the duration which suggests patina available

to their users; digital albums are not subject to the same type of damage or decay which inappropriate consumption of material albums might create, making patina more readily available to users. The scarcity of patina is replaced with an abundance of patina, no longer restricted to particular social groups but available to all who use the platform.

Patina functions for many people as the symbol of the losses which nostalgia refers to, as it recalls earlier, and apparently better, times which can no longer be reached. Nostalgia refers to loss, particularly to losses which we have not ourselves experienced. The patina associated with photographs, for example, frequently draws on outdated photographic formats to suggest the special aura of scarcity and authenticity. The popularity of sepia, black and white or Polaroid photographs can be explained by the patina associated with these formats, as they refer to previous eras of photographic technology, giving images the necessary “gloss of age” (Appadurai *Modernity at Large* 76). *Picasa* provides computer algorithms which transform ordinary digital photographs at the click of an icon, manipulating their aesthetic so they replicate the visual characteristics of these older forms. As part of its photo-editing options, *Picasa* can make digital photographs resemble sepia or black and white photographs, or add the film grain associated with analogue photography. As part of the platform’s photo collage tool, users can select between a number of different borders. User can apply white borders to their image which resemble those of material photographs, including one border which “looks like a familiar brand of instant camera” and replicates the appearance of a Polaroid photograph (see figure 17, below). The use of borders is suggestive of analogue formats, and refers to the patina of these formats. These functions suggest patina can be created, rather than requiring specific types of wear and passage through time, by replicating the distinctive visual characteristics of older forms. They also demonstrate the strong desire for nostalgia and patina which results in privileging these functions within digital photo-sharing platforms.

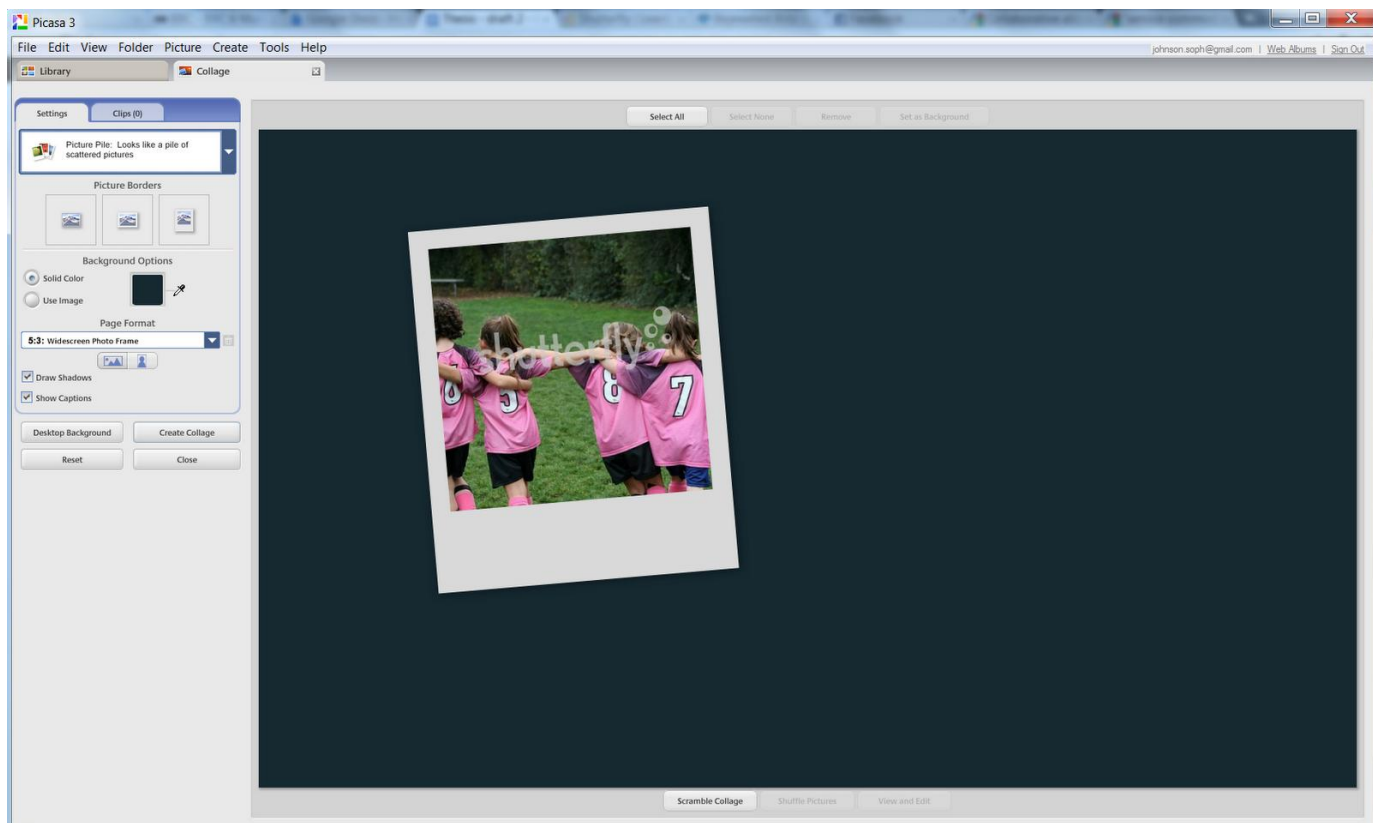


Figure 17 Google. *Picasa* (Version 3.8). 2010. Software.

The translation of patina into digital photo-sharing platforms is only one aspect of the digital album's relationship with commerce and commodities. As the example of remediating patina shows, platforms like *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* manufacture and recognise the commodity status of albums in a very different way to analogue media. The two phases of the commodity associated with the discourse of the material family album are undermined in digital photo-sharing platforms because instead of treating production and consumption as distinct stages in the album's life, the platforms enable "prosumption" (Ritzger and Jurgenson 13), merging these stages within the same interfaces. Digital photo-sharing platforms position themselves as improvements on the material family album through the new, more flexible opportunities they offer for making and remaking the album. These improvements are not only of benefit for the users, though; through prosumption, the album can be made and remade, and phases of production and consumption are no longer distinct. Consequently, the different commodity statuses

associated with the distinct phases of production and consumption, the raw materials used in album creation and the commodity experience of nostalgia, can be returned to over and over again as the user continuously oscillates between the two stages in the album's life.

The use of a digital photo-sharing platform therefore has the effect of formalising the relationship between the family album and commerce, because the period of the album's life in which it acts as a commodity is greatly extended. As a result, digital family albums are increasingly part of the public spheres of commerce and work, because of their heightened relationship with commodities. The commercial imperative to make family album practices into commodified processes within digital photo-sharing platforms is a reflection of wider trends in society. Castells argues that technological innovations are never isolated instances but instead represent a "particular institutional and industrial environment...[and] an economic mentality to make such applications cost-efficient" (*Network Society* 37). The existence of platforms like *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* indicates particular technological achievements have been made and that the economic conditions exist which make them possible and perhaps even attractive for businesses, but also indicates a more rigidly structured relationship between albums and commerce.

Before these platforms can profit from this relationship, though, their success relies on their ability to balance nostalgic references to the discourse of the material family album, and its accompanying demands on the relationship between albums and commodities, with the systematic rationalisation of album practices into processes of prosumption. Bolter and Grusin, in their discussion of remediation, argue that new media must always claim to improve on older media in order to find their place in the economy (68). For digital photo-sharing platforms, prosumption is a key tool in making such arguments about improving on the material experience, in which production and consumption remain distinct. These claims take the form of offering a more immersive and interactive commodity-experience, as well as continuing to offer users the material products of photographs and albums. *Shutterfly*, for instance, celebrates the ways digital photography is superior to analogue photography by describing how digital photography allows users to "showcase, archive, enhance and upload" their photographs, allowing them to safeguard their images for future use as well as customising these images. In addition to these online, digital services, *Shutterfly* also offers

users the opportunity to make material copies of their digital images, which the site/platform claims “revolutionizes digital photography by delivering film-quality prints from digital pictures”. The digital printing process, it claims, is however also an improvement on the analogue printing process, using “exclusive VividPics technology” which “automatically enhances photos for color and sharpness”. *Shutterfly* claims to improve on the older medium of analogue photography by offering a commodity-experience which satisfies the desires of the imagination, in the form of online archiving of digital images, as well as providing material reproductions of these images.

The other way in which digital photo-sharing platforms formalise the relationship between family albums and commerce is through their associations with labour, production and consumption. Sean Cubitt notes that using the “same machines”, computers, both at work and at home leads to a blurring of separations between leisure and labour (6). According to Castells, this results in the weakening of the “institutional separation of these spheres of activity” and confusion of the “codes of behaviour” associated with each (*Network Society* 361). The leisure activities involved in digital photo-sharing platforms may consequently be approached by users with a mindset and practices associated with work and productive labour; more significant, however, are the ways that corporations approach these leisure activities as a source of economic value. The use of computers as a point of access to the family album creates conditions in which commerce and domestic practices meet.

According to the discourse of the material family album, production and consumption correspond to the distinct activities of labour, and of leisure, and have very different relations to commodities, the first connected with the use of material commodities, and the second connected with the idea of the commodity-experiences of nostalgia and patina. The consumption involved in creating a family album is framed as a source of leisure, and the work it requires, such as selecting and arranging images in a book, is pleasurable rather than laborious because it does not produce commodities with exchange value. Yet because they involve both processes within the same interface, digital photo-sharing platforms lessen distinctions between production and consumption, labour and leisure, because as people engage in the leisure activity of creating a family album, they also contribute their labour,

which, as will be demonstrated, is used by the corporations who provide the interfaces to create monetary value.

COMMODIFICATION OF THE ALBUM

The digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, like many other Web 2.0 services, provide their products to users free of charge. Users are given access to the interfaces for free, but create the content they consume within these interfaces themselves. As both platforms are owned by commercial operations, though, they must create ways of generating revenue from these interfaces, even though they do not provide users with any content, which in the analogue era was what gave products their monetary value. *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* create revenue through the sale of material versions of the user's own digital content, moving digital material back into the economy of material goods, through the commodification of information about users, and by restricting access to certain services within the interfaces to paying customers.

Shutterfly, the more explicitly commercial platform, offers users the opportunity to create a large number of different material objects using their digital images. The "Store" page promotes this material merchandise. At the top of this page, the site's current promotions are advertised, which usually relate to a particular season or holiday, or to discounts on certain products. Beneath this, images and brief explanations list the merchandise the site sells, including "Photo books", "Cards & Stationery", "Prints", and "Photo Gifts" (see figure 18 below). Users can order copies of this merchandise for themselves, or they can send them to other family members. Invitations created on *Shutterfly* using photographs, for example, can be sent to the user for distribution themselves, or they can elect for *Shutterfly* to send the invitations directly to the intended recipients by adding their addresses on the "Order" page.



SAVE 20%
ON PHOTO BOOKS

[SHOP NOW](#)

SAVE 20%
ON CARDS

[SHOP NOW](#)

Photo Books



Save 20% on photo books

Capture life's moments in a professionally bound photo book.

[Shop Photo Books](#)

Cards & Stationery



Save 20% on cards

NEW holiday cards. Choose from stylish designs and jolly wishes.

[Shop Cards & Stationery](#)

Calendars



Save 20% on calendars

NEW calendar designs. The new year is right around the corner.

[Shop Calendars](#)

Photo Gifts



Save up to 25% on select gifts

Turn a favorite photo into unique mugs, home décor, blankets and more.

Figure 18 "Order Photo Books, Photo Cards, Personalized Stationery, Photo Prints, Custom Calendars and Photo Gifts: Shutterfly"; Shutterfly, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011.

What *Shutterfly* promises, as a digital interface, is to improve on the experience of making material products compared to analogue photography. This is demonstrated, for example, through the variety and flexibility of the printing options the interface provides. Users can select between matte or glossy images delivered to their home address, or, if they live in certain urban areas of the United States, they can choose to pick up glossy 4X6 prints from a local retail chain store in as little as an hour. The “Learn More” link explains that the home delivery option allows for a greater variety of options and products, while the basic printing option can be quickly picked up from a local store, with pricing for this service varying based on the store used. For those who choose home delivery, there are a variety of printing options. Customers can choose between glossy or matte finishes, and select from 4x6in, 5x7in, 8x10in, or wallet sized prints. Larger sizes can be ordered, but only in matte finishes. Users can add a “Back-of-print message”, which can be different for each image or applied to all prints. Before users can move to their “Shopping Cart”, the final stage of the ordering process where they enter their payment details, they are taken to a promotion page. The page shows an image of a *Shutterfly* “Photo Book” created automatically using the “simple path” process and arranging the images chronologically according to the date they were taken. Icons invite the user to either “Preview book” or decline using the “No Thanks” icon before they move to the next page to finalise their order. Digital photo-sharing platforms include these types of promotions and prompts as a way of adding value to the freely accessible interface they provide.

While *Picasa* does not offer these types of material products directly, the “Shop” icon on the tool bar across the bottom of the interface opens a pop-up window listing different printing providers. Once users have selected their location from a drop-down list, they are shown a list of the providers available in their country. Beneath this, *Picasa* states that the user’s information is not disclosed to the providers, nor is the content they send to the provider monitored by *Google*. It also states, however, that *Picasa Web Albums* may record the “size and success of the user’s upload in order to “monitor and improve performance”. This statement about how the user’s information will be used is a reference to the ways digital photo-sharing platforms, like many other online services, treat information as a commodity.

Digital photo-sharing platforms are distinguished from the commercial services which supplied the commodities from which material albums are made by their ability to create commodities as a by-product of the processes involved in creating digital albums. These platforms produce commodities in the form of information about their users, their practices and personal details, which are separated from individual family albums and circulated independently from their sources. The result is that digital photo-sharing platforms create two sets of commodities: the first is the commodity-experience of the family album, enjoyed by their users, and associated products produced from and of this album, and the second is the user data.

Information about consumers and their interests has always been a valuable commodity, but what distinguishes the digital age from the analogue era is the ability to gather such information more efficiently and in far more detail than ever before. In the broadcast era of television, José van Dijck argues, the power people had over cultural content lay in their ability to act as consumers (“Users like You” 47). The targeted advertising which sustained media industries during this period was based on information about the presumed connections between specific types of media content, and the disposable income and consuming behaviour of those people most likely to view such content (47). Only the most desirable audiences with the greatest amount of disposable income and consumption potential had any degree of control over cultural content, as advertisers and broadcasters needed to attract their interest in order to fight for their attention for the products advertised during programmes and promotions. This process was relatively inefficient, and relied upon a great deal of conjecture about reactions to particular types of cultural content.

The digital age, by contrast, is distinguished by the ability to gather increasingly detailed information about the consuming behaviour of those using digital interfaces and content. Rather than making inferences about possible connections between media content and audiences, the internet allows “the tracking of individual social behaviour”, and encourages an increasingly intimate relationship between “content producers, advertisers and consumers” (van Dijck “Users like You” 47). This relationship is based on producers’ and advertisers’ increasingly detailed knowledge about the habits, preferences and identity of those using online platforms.

The increase in information-gathering about users is a consequence of the commercial applications of new media. In order for the internet to be used for business, the identities and activities of its users must be verifiable, which requires that interfaces incorporate various “protocols of authentication, authorization and identification” which users must submit to as a “condition of access and use” (Barney 56). By recording this information, online platforms generate vast quantities of data about their users. This data is often treated as a valuable commodity in itself, as a source of information about consumer identity, behaviour and preferences. Users provide this information willingly, if sometimes unknowingly, participating in the production of commodities while they themselves engage in leisure activities online. Castells suggests that the majority of people are willing to “waive their rights to privacy” in exchange for the opportunity to use the internet and its applications (*Internet Galaxy* 174). In doing so, their personal data becomes a commodity because it is owned by the corporations which provide the interfaces they use, and can therefore be used by these corporations, or even sold to third-parties.

The information provided by users typically requires little effort on their behalf as it is produced through their normal use of the internet or software. Nonetheless, it gives the companies who collect it extensive, detailed information about their users which can be used to direct the development of future products or improve their products in ways which this information suggests will give them a greater market share. Van Dijck insists the metadata which protocols of authentication and identification produce are not simply a “by-product of user-generated content”, but is in fact a “prime resource” for recording the movements and lives of “real people with real interests” (“Users like You” 49). Information about the user’s identity and behaviour may be used to understand the composition of the platform’s audience, or the ways they use the interface.

Google, for instance, states on the *Picasa Web Album* “Help” pages that whenever users access the platform, information about their use is automatically recorded, including account activity such as the number of log-ins and the use of online storage, what the users looked at, and log information (“Picasa and Picasa Web Albums Support”). This log information is perhaps most significant of all, as it reveals details of the users’ actions

beyond the scope of this platform. *Picasa Web Albums* automatically collects information about the user's browser type, IP address, the date and time of their visit, the cookie ID which identifies their computer, and the URL of the page they visited beforehand. This information can potentially reveal a great deal about the user's online behaviour. *Google* describes their collection of this information as a way for them to improve their services, masking the commoditisation of data by referring to the service economy in which *Picasa Web Albums* participates.

Platform owners frequently include a clause granting permission to use such metadata in the site's service agreements or Terms of Use (van Dijck "Users like You" 47). *Shutterfly*, for example, asks that anyone who does not agree to the terms and conditions of its privacy policy about metadata not use its service. This privacy policy gives *Shutterfly* the right to both collect data about users, including their server log files, environmental variables including the type of computer, browser, operating system and screen resolution, and the right to use and share this data at *Shutterfly*'s discretion. This includes, according to *Shutterfly*'s "Help" pages, sharing this information with third parties for direct marketing purposes, including, specifically, *Amazon.com* and Sony. If users do not wish their information to be disclosed to third parties, they must submit an opt-out request. Van Dijck claims that in agreeing to such conditions, users are left with "no power over data distribution" ("Users like You" 47). Giving such consent for the distribution of information is significant with regards to digital photo-sharing platforms because the discourse of the material family album privileges a controlled circulation of information about the family through the restriction of access to the physical album. Digital photo-sharing platforms contradict this discourse by circulating information about users in ways which users themselves cannot limit without being excluded from these platforms.

Users presumably allow the gathering of metadata for two reasons. The first is that it forms part of the terms of use for many internet services. They submit their details in exchange for the opportunity to use these services, engaging in a commercial transaction in which information is exchanged for access to services. The second reason is that the information users provide to these platforms seems so different to the confidential, privileged information prioritised by the discourse of the material family album. According

to this discourse, it is the intimate information about the family which the album's owners must protect from unauthorised consumption. Such information usually constitutes the family's history, a narrative filled with details which typically have little value to those beyond the family. The information users provide to these interfaces seems, by comparison, inconsequential, because it does not reveal the family's history and is not linked to these narratives.

These platforms consequently reassure users that the collection of such data is not a threat to their privacy. *Picasa* privacy policy, for instance, identifies a distinction between non-personal information, such as about how the user interacts with the interface, which is collected and mined by the interface, and "sensitive personal information" which relates to confidential information associated with an individual's health, race, ethnicity, politics, religion or sexuality. While non-personal information is deliberately collected and then recorded in such a way that it apparently "no longer reflects or references an individually identifiable user", *Picasa* promises not to use "sensitive personal information" in ways which may result in an individual being identified. These reassurances about the privacy of information which might identify individuals obscure the wide variety of detailed data about their activities and locations which the platform's privacy policy enables *Picasa* to collect about their users. *Google* justifies its collection of information about users through the use of cookies in *Picasa* by claiming it helps them improve the quality of their service; users apparently shape the development of *Google* and its photo-sharing platform by providing information about themselves ("Picasa and Picasa Web Albums Support"). This reflects Castells' argument that "consumers/users" have an aggregate rather than direct influence on the way the internet and its related software develops (*Internet Galaxy* 36). The information gathered about *Picasa* users is analyzed to discover trends which *Google* uses to "improve your search quality and build helpful innovative services". While information about specific individuals and their use of these platforms is gathered in great detail, it is only cumulative trends which influence the development of *Picasa*.

This is at odds with many of the claims made about the promise of new media. New media objects are characterised by their use of the ethic of consumption associated with post-industrial societies in which the appearance of making self-determined choices

available to consumers is crucial. Lev Manovich claims that in post-industrial societies, citizens are offered the opportunity to construct a “custom lifestyle” and choose their own ideologies “from a large (but not infinite) number of choices” (42). Users of new media are given choices in how and what they use, but these are choices from a limited range of options. *Shutterfly* users who create “Share sites”, for instance, are offered a variety of different style with which to format the visual appearance of their site, as well as the ability to rearrange the organisation and content of the site. There are however limits to the choices offered (see figure 19 below). One detail, which seems minor but which indicates the extent of these limitations, is that the font and colour schemes are determined by the style the user selects. The font and colour are built into the style templates, meaning users cannot alter it themselves without changing the style and overall appearance of their site. While users are presented with a restricted range of styles provided by *Shutterfly*, the element, or at least appearance of, personal choice remains important.

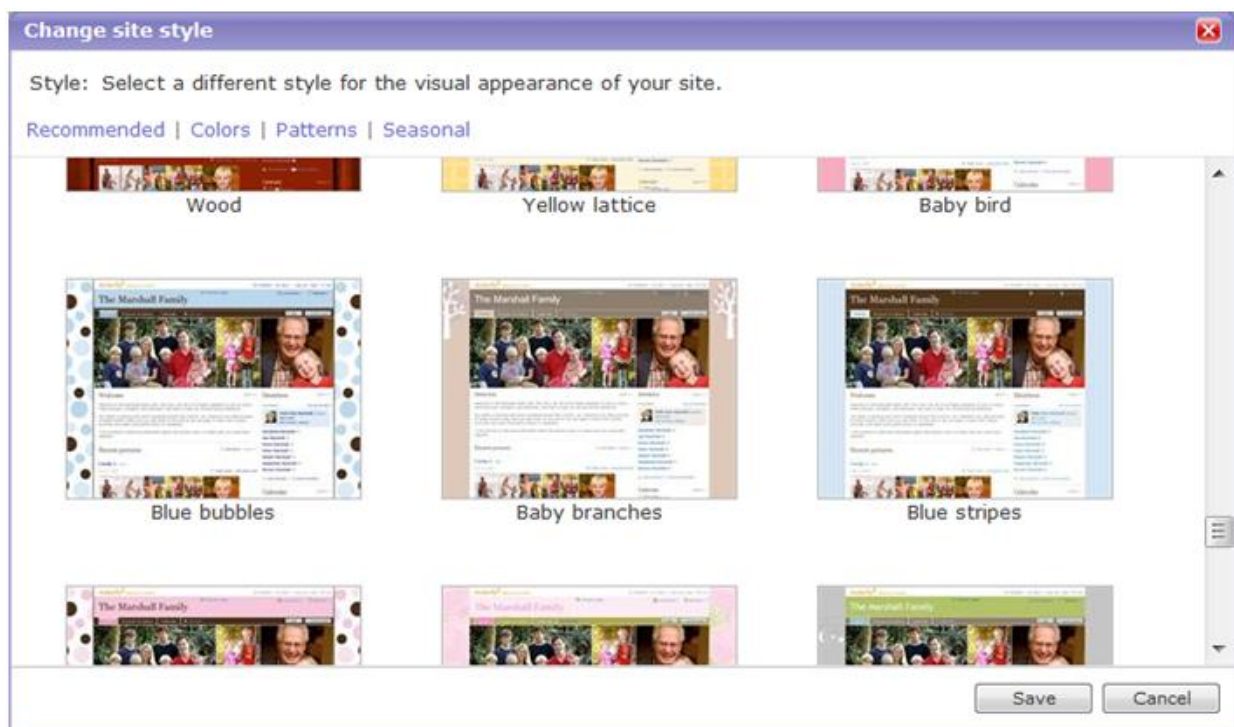


Figure 19 “Share Site: Customize – change site style”; *Shutterfly*, n.d.; Web; 16th Oct. 2011

Citizens in post-industrial societies are addressed not as a mass audience, all seeing the same media objects and information, but as individuals to be targeted separately, albeit that the choices are limited to those shared by other users. This creates what Manovich describes as a “new social logic” reflected in the logic of new media technologies (42). New media objects are well suited to cater to the demands of customisation, perhaps more so than analogue media, because their digitisation enables them to respond instantly to a user’s input, fostering a sense of immediacy and agency (37). The ability to create a degree of variation in commodities which respond to user preferences, even if only within a small, predefined range of possible variations, is described by Barney as “an effective technique for the regeneration and management of demand” (14). Customisation reminds users of their roles as “prosumers”, participating not only in consumption within these interfaces, but also in production.

Customisation brings the idea of labour back to the foreground of discourses around these platforms, because it acknowledges user agency and input. While the discourse of the material family album obscured the labour invested in the finished product, customisation and individualisation remind users of their role in creating and accessing albums. Like many commercial activities, the type of production involved in these post-industrial new media platforms creates commodities without necessarily creating physical products with exchange value. Yet the use of these platforms is, perhaps disarmingly, framed as part of consumption and leisure activities because of their association with the family and the private sphere.

Appadurai suggests that consumption has become a form of work or labour in contemporary society (*Modernity at Large* 82), much like de Certeau who describes the consumption of commodities as being in itself a form of production (31). The “work of consumption” operates as a form of “social discipline of the imagination”, whereby consumers must learn to connect their fantasies and nostalgia with a desire for further commodities (Appadurai *Modernity at Large* 82-3). This disciplined work, demanded of consumers by the commodities they consume, creates a particular mindset. This form of labour aims, Appadurai argues, to create particular “conditions of consciousness” in which maximum consumption and purchasing can occur (83). Consumers are now subjects of the

“disciplines of purchase” which require the “work of the imagination” (83). This work results in a state which encourages continuous consumption, but also continuous discipline. Digital photo-sharing platforms are particularly well suited to creating these conditions because they make it possible to avoid the conclusion of consumption events by allowing for “prosumption”. For example, albums created using these platforms are never completed, in that they can still be broken apart later on, rearranged, or added to. While this can also be done to material albums, when they are remade or rearranged there is no further consumption; the commodities they draw on have already been purchased. Revisiting digital albums requires users to participate in the production of information about themselves and their habits again, as logs of their actions are updated.

The final way in which the owners of digital photo-sharing platforms create revenue despite offering their interfaces to users for free is by limiting some areas of this interface to paying customers. Ritzer and Jurgenson claim the cost to the company of hosting material online is relatively low (28). As a result, hosting can either be provided for free, and users diverted towards other revenue streams such as through the commodification of information, or it can be managed in ways which generate revenue. While *Shutterfly* users are provided with unlimited storage space but also encouraged to purchase material versions of their digital albums, *Picasa* restricts the amount of material users can upload to their *Picasa Web Albums* account. The first 1 gigabyte of storage is provided for *Picasa Web Albums* users for free, while all further storage space must be purchased. There are 9 plans available for additional online photograph storage, ranging from 20 gigabytes for USD\$5 a year, which *Picasa Web Albums* says is equivalent to 10,000 photographs from a 5 megapixel camera, through to 16 terabytes for USD\$4,096 per year. *Picasa Web Albums* manages user storage space as a way of generating revenue from something that has very little cost to itself, while *Shutterfly* provides free storage but promotes its material products heavily throughout the site.

The state of “prosumption” and continuous discipline facilitated by digital photo-sharing platforms blurs distinctions between work and leisure, and consumption and production, which make each of these activities difficult to recognise and separate from one another. In doing so, the inequities of power involved in this confusion and blurring of different

activities, where consumption forms the basis of leisure time, where unacknowledged labour produces commodities from which the platform owners but not the platform users benefit, and where consumption is extended indefinitely, are obscured. By concealing these inequities, they are made to seem an inherent part of leisure activities and of digital platforms. Users of digital photo-sharing platforms are encouraged to overlook the unequal distribution of control over their information in exchange for the more immersive commodity-experience of albums created using these platforms and their appeals to nostalgia.

CONCLUSION

The familiarity of the discourse of the material family photograph album presents both challenges and benefits for digital photo-sharing platforms designed for creating, storing and distributing family albums in a digital context. The discourse prescribes particular ways of making, using and viewing albums which reflect the social functions assigned to the album as an archive of family memory, identity and history. The digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* respond to these challenges by demonstrating their connections to the existing practices which surround family photographs and albums in the domestic sphere through remediation and mediatization of this discourse. These references to the discourse of the material family album render their interfaces, functions and purpose immediately recognisable to their users.

These platforms do however adopt and translate the discourse in different ways. *Shutterfly* emphasises its connection to the products of the discourse of the material family album, encouraging its users to create material versions of the digital albums they create using the site's "Share sites" and "Photo books". While incorporating many of the opportunities presented by the digital context within its interface, *Picasa* also demonstrates the importance of the discourse of the material album through the ways it allows users to create digital objects which reference material formats like Polaroid pictures, restrict access in accordance with the social norms of the discourse, and organise their images into albums with narratives. While these digital photo-sharing platforms represent a significant departure from material albums created within the home using analogue photographs, they still operate within the same discourse.

The ways *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* use the discourse of the material family album acts to mask the underlying digital structure of their interfaces. This works in conjunction with the deeply personal content which users store and use within these interfaces to keep the user at a distance from the inner workings of the platform. Users consequently occupy a different relationship to the albums they create in digital platforms to those they create in

the material world. Albums created using digital photo-sharing platforms are subject to the influence of database logic and computer mediation, which affects the ways content is created, stored and retrieved. At the same time as the user's actions are shaped and restricted by the mediatization of their actions within the digital interface, they are however also liberated from many of the restrictions which the material world previously placed on communication. The album's relationship with geography and time is transformed through the use of these platforms which allow for decentralised and detemporalised communication over the internet.

In addition to minimising the influence of geography and time, networked communication through the interfaces of *Shutterfly* and *Picasa* also changes how the relationship between production, consumption and the user is framed. These platforms encourage a state of prosumption, blurring the discourse of the material album's distinctions between the stages of production and consumption in the album's life. In order to facilitate this, however, both platforms also commodify album processes. The unacknowledged labour of users within these platforms is given commercial meaning through the commodification of data about users and of the network itself through the sale of hosting space online.

Remediation and mediatization of the discourse of the material family album within the digital photo-sharing platforms of *Picasa* and *Shutterfly* acts upon the relationship albums have with traditions and rituals founded in a material world shaped by the influence of geography and time. These platforms incorporate domestic practices into publicly available interfaces which allow for private communication across the public space of the internet. Digital photo-sharing platforms are part of a trajectory of representation of the family which started in the home, using analogue photographs like those Kodak provided, and which has now moved into the online spaces created by *Picasa* and *Shutterfly*, but which nevertheless continues to demonstrate many of the same social norms and practices. The longevity of this discourse in both the material and digital context demonstrates not only the appeal of familiarity and nostalgia, but also the significance of the idea of the family as the centre of the domestic sphere.

Digital photo-sharing platforms use the powerful appeal of this discourse to structure the type of tools they offer to users. By drawing on this discourse and its vocabulary, the tools new media can create are made to seem compatible with the family, and beneficial for family life. As a result, family activities which traditionally took place within the home are drawn into the digital context, and given commercial meaning within platforms like *Shutterfly* and *Picasa*. At the same time, users are shown how new media can transform how they produce and manage content, and how they communicate with one another. The discourse of the material family album is translated by digital photo-sharing platforms in order to ensure the family participates in the digital sphere, drawing more of human communication into the online space where it can be mediatized, observed, and commodified.

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