

Statement to Experience
Semester Project 2019-2020

“Take a picture to be forgotten” OR
“Take a picture to forget”
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The goal of this project is to demonstrate in a creative manner how we use photography to enhance and protect memory in order to fabricate personal life experiences, and how it negatively impacts our memory.

INTRODUCTION

Through the decades, photography has been used to capture and store special moments, events and personalities. The value it creates lays in its uniqueness and unrepeatable property, as well as power to evoke emotions and vivid memories. Due to technological advanced, however, photography as a tool has gone through irreversible changes in regards to how people utilize it. The built-in camera in computers, smartphones, iPads and other devices help to distribute over 3 billion images of “precious moments” across various online networks daily. Humans walk though life and search constantly for “proofs of their existence”.

The intense and obsessive desire to record our lives by the means of instant photography seems to influence the way we understand, remember and experience the world. We started to rely heavily on devices to store information. As such, photo-taking has taken a role of cognitive offloading - we rely on the fact that it is possible to keep our memories externally. Once we are assured the device remember the event in behalf of us, what happens with the memory in our brain?

SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT

In light of the presented problem, it seemed compelling to investigate the relationship between the form of contemporary fast-paced, omnipresent photography and its effect on memory. The habit of obsessive picture-taking has been studied as a phenomenon called *photo-taking impairment effect*. A number of studies confirmed that instant photography impair the ability to store memories in our brain (Henkel, 2014; Soares & Storm, 2018). The underlying hypothesis suggests that once a person decides to take a photograph, he disconnects from the present moment to perform this quick task (Tamir, 2018). As a consequence, the memory of an event or situation disappears quicker than it would be the case if a situation was experienced through observation. Our brain does not put any effort into sorting them anymore. It lets them fade away instantly to make them invaluable, unnoticed and forgotten. This, by large, defames the beliefs and ideas that humans are able to offload organic memories and embed them in pictures.

MOTIVATION AND RELEVANCE

The phenomena of instant taking-picture and impairment effects is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it stays in opposition of the common, cultural beliefs that photography helps to capture an experience and store it forever. Secondly, it contradicts the prolific social media use that it is all about protecting our memories. As the act of taking pictures has changed its form irreversibly, it raises further questions in the longer run: What is actually the value of modern, fast-paced photography? How we will manage the huge amounts of “moments to remember” to make it meaningful?

STATEMENT

After multiple alteration, the following statement has been chosen as the final one: *“Take a picture to forget”*. It was favoured above others because it states the contradictory to what’s commonly assumed and to widely-spread cultural. At the same time, we appreciated its simplicity and the fact that it goes in line with the scientific insights that constitutes the basis for our work.

PROPOSED IMPELENTATION

To translate the statement into an experience, it was chosen to build an interactive installation through which the participant can witness the disappearance of a given memory embedded in an image. We aimed to convey the negative relation of photography on the remembrance through digital demonstration. To engage the visitor with the topic, we chose to create a visualization to show how the memory of the given moment disappears, once one tries to capture it with a photo. By putting the visitor in the center of the process, we hope to wakens his curiosity and reflect upon the phenomena - lost of memory of the moment, which we initially wanted to remember.

INSTALLATION

The key interaction elements of the work are: taking a photo and attempt to save it, while it slowly disappears. It offers the participant to witness the process of memory decay by showing how the initial image is being decomposed. The visualisation of the disappearing of memory is inspired by biological decomposition, digital distortion and physical deformation, where the memory bits are shuffled, reorganized, confusing. It decays slowly and disappears in the end.

EXPERIENCE

There is only one person that can take part in the experience at the given time and place. The installation is located behind curtains to protect against distraction and provide privacy. The visualisation and interaction take approximately 1,5 min. and we would like the visitor to focus on it fully and take it personally.

In the first phase, the visitor is exposed to a short welcoming message that provides framing to the visualisation. Its function is to put emphasis on generating the image, as well as to encourage to engage with the work by saving the photo, he is about to take. The visitor is seated in the front of an Apple desktop computer, keyboard and mouse. This device might not seem like an optimal choice at first, however, we believe that the brand image is strongly embedded in our minds as a symbol of modern times and interchangeable connected personal devices that serve as information storage.

The play with the naive belief that photographs help to store memories, the visitor is encouraged to manually save the image with the mouse. However, due to “system malfunction” and random movement of the mouse pointer, it is not possible to hover over the ‘save’ button.

The first mouse click initializes also the water drops falling in the keyboard. The nine drops falling in the 5 seconds interval are synchronized with the distortion effects applied to the image. Each drop that touches the computer keyboard, advances the process of disappearing memory. It seemed compelling to use water as a surprise element because it causes both, the decomposition of paper images and damaging force of the device that serves as a generator and storage of images. It signals the passing time and events that make memories blurry, melancholia and transformation.

The disappearance of memory is translated as a combination of ripple drop, glitch, squared decomposition leading into fading pixels. It was chosen for these as they mimic or reflect the process of dissolving the image in the water, a short circuit in the system which figuratively damage the device memory storage, fragmented reorganization of memory bits and slow decay of rests, respectively.

In the final stage, in order to strengthen the message, the visitor sees a note formatted as a blue screen of death, which clearly implies the failure of saving the given memory. It also contains the counter indicating that it is possible to take the next photo in 20 seconds. As it is a one-person experience, the visitor is free to repeat the process as many times as he wishes.

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