

Placing the Digital Photograph

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I

Surveying contemporary photographic art it is hard to think of the marriage of photography and digital technologies as anything less than momentous. No other artform would appear to have been as deeply affected by the digital revolution as photography has been.ⁱ Indeed, it has become a commonplace among theorists of photography that digital technologies have wrought such significant changes upon our understanding of what a photograph is that we have begun to enter a 'post-photographic age'. According to this view, these changes affect not only how we think about and treat digitally produced photographs, they will in time affect how we think about and treat all photographs, including those produced prior to the advent of digital photography.

There is something that is right about these claims, but there is also a danger of over-generalisation resulting from an exaggerated sense of the momentousness of the changes brought about by the new photographic technologies. Perhaps it is true that trust in photography as a source of visible evidence will be eroded in relation to *some* photographs, but little reason to think that trust will disappear or even be diminished in relation to many of the photographs we encounter, particularly those whose origins we are aware of. Nevertheless, photography's transformation from analogue to digital has had a number of significant effects upon the nature, use and role of the medium. Ease and speed of manipulation heightening the power to lie photographically is obviously significant in this respect, but so too is the far lower unit cost of digital photographs, storage and search technologies, and the ability to near instantaneously make them available to viewers around the world. Most of these consequences are familiar, and although I think there is still much to be said about their impact, they are not my subject matter today.

Instead, I want to confine myself rather narrowly to the aesthetic significance of digital photography, or what effect these new technologies have upon photographic art and our understanding of it. In particular, I am interested in whether there is any meaningful sense in which digitally produced photographic art represents the emergence of a new medium. This is something that is occasionally claimed and which is consonant with the thought that digital photography is a radical departure from its analogue predecessor. But are such claims exaggerated, and digital photographic art in fact sufficiently continuous with analogue photographic art to justifiably deny claims that a new medium has emerged? As we will see, there are considerations that draw us in both directions on this issue, and the nature and history of photographic art, as well as the issues around what a medium is, how we distinguish media and why, will all come into play in assessing the options. I will be arguing that digital photographic art is radically different

from the predominant forms of analogue photographic art that preceded it, and that a distinction between two photographic media is warranted, but that it would be a mistake to suppose digital photography itself constitutes a new medium.

I want to begin with an observation about the conditions under which digital photography becomes aesthetically significant, and draw a distinction important to understanding where within the photographic medium the new digital technologies have their impact. This will be followed by some reflections about the nature of an artistic medium, and together all of this will pave the way for a consideration of the main issue: where do we place digital photography in relation to the photographic medium and other art media?

First the observation: there are no interesting aesthetic implications arising from digital photographic technologies *per se*. That is, a digitally produced photograph employs different technologies of production to analogue photography, but the pictures that result from these processes of production can be identical or nearly identical. Digital photography only becomes aesthetically significant in its own right, in contrast to analogue photography, when these digital technologies change the fundamental nature and perceptible properties of the photographs produced. That is, when the use of associated digital imaging tools and techniques assist the artist in achieving an intended outcome significantly different from the photograph (analogue and digital) that was used at the outset. Digital photography, therefore, becomes a topic of significant aesthetic inquiry in its own right when the digital images produced by the camera (or scanner) have been transformed through the purposeful use of image processing software. If the new technologies merely provided a new way of recording an image produced by reflected light, or different ways of producing a straight photography, then the invention of colour photography could be judged to have far greater aesthetic significance than the invention of digital photography.

This leads directly to an important distinction between two steps in the production of a photograph. First, there is the production by means of a camera of an originating image. This is the creation in a camera of a digital file that certain software can present to spectators in pictorial form. In the case of analogue photography this might be thought to be the exposure of film to focused light, with the resulting creation of a latent image on undeveloped film, or it might as easily be thought of as the negative or positive film image produced after the film is developed. I don't think much turns on exactly what you take the originating image to be – a latent or apparent image. The key point is that if we are talking about photography of any sort, the first step in the production of a photograph is the creation of an originating image.ⁱⁱ

If the first step is production of an originating image, the second step involves processing of that image – and an enormous array of techniques and activities might fall within this. Among these possibilities we have to include the minimal processing steps that result from using the kind of mechanical developing and printing machines that process and print films, as well as the self-developing Polaroid. The digital counterpart to this minimal processing would be the mechanical downloading of image files from a camera's memory card into a computer or printer. One might provide a detailed list of all of the

steps and operations necessary for this minimal processing, but as none of them are particularly interesting I will simply by-pass them.

More interesting are the array of processing options that are available within analogue photography and digital imaging. Cropping, enlarging, burning, dodging, toning, retouching, and combining are just some of the familiar processing options available within analogue photography. These and many more processing options are available to the photographer working with digital photographs and imaging software. One difference between analogue and digital processing, however, is that many of the techniques available to the analogue photographer can only be employed in the course of printing, or making a material photograph. By contrast, although the printing process may affect the digital photograph, in the main processing takes place prior to printing. Indeed, because a digital photograph or image may be made for digital display only, printing a material image is a dispensable step in the processing of the image. The same of course is true of analogue photographs made using positive or slide film, which would ordinarily be displayed by means of a slide projector, but then photographs like this are less susceptible to the array of processing possibilities available to the analogue photographer. Moreover, the possibility of digitising an analogue photograph – by means of a scanner, for example – further blurs the boundaries between analogue and digital processing, but it doesn't erase them. Digitisation and the possibilities that follow from it are just another processing option available to the analogue photographer. The important point for now is that if we want to think clearly about the differences between analogue and digital photography, we need to start with the distinction between the originating photographic image and the processing of that image.

Since there are no significant theoretical or aesthetic differences between the analogue and digital originating image, any differences between analogue and digital photography beyond the technologies upon which they rest, are to be found in the processing options available to the photographer. Notwithstanding the high degree of functional overlap between analogue and digital processing, and inter-convertibility between the analogue and the digital, there are important differences between the two kinds of processing. I will return to this later, but the most obvious is that digital imaging software significantly increases the control the photographer has over the processing of the image. But does this increase in control provide the basis for claiming there is an important difference in kind between analogue photography and digital imaging? Or to put the question a different way, are the images produced through the extensive use of digital processing technologies sufficiently different from those produced by analogue technologies to underwrite a claim that digital photography is a new medium or artform?

II

Before trying to answer this, it is worth briefly reflecting upon the notions of an artistic medium and medium distinctiveness. A natural way of thinking about what constitutes a medium is in terms of the physical stuff out of which artworks are made. So paintings are composed of pigmented

surfaces, and sculptures of some sort of material rendered in three-dimensional form. A photograph is a tonally or chromatically differentiated surface produced by the sensitivity of the surface to light. The problem with identifying a medium with its physical materials, however, is that it fails to connect the medium with the works of art produced within it. Most simply, a physical characterisation of a medium such as painting does not distinguish painting as an artistic practice and artform from all of the other applications of pigment to surfaces and pigmented surfaces.

If our interest is in understanding the media in which works of art are produced and present themselves to us, then we would do better to concern ourselves with artistic media or artforms rather than the physical materials artists' use. An artistic medium in this sense is 'a developed way of using given materials or dimensions, with certain entrenched properties, practices and possibilities.'ⁱⁱⁱ To think of an artefact as a work of art is to attribute to that thing certain 'patterns of purposiveness'^{iv}, and to think of it as a work of art within a specific medium requires a connection between the work as it presents itself to our senses and this purposiveness, as well as the cultural traditions which inform purposive artistic activity with those materials. David Davies makes this point when he writes:

While an artistic medium may be physically embodied, we must think of the work as made up not of physical elements as such but of elements like dance steps and brush-strokes that are informed by the purposiveness of the entire work . . . To think of a painting as in an artistic medium is to relate its perceptible properties to the agency of the maker whose purposeful composition in that medium is the source of those properties.^v

Photography as an artistic medium, therefore, is best understood in terms of the purposeful use of materials and techniques for the creation of pictures with certain perceptible properties. Distinguishing one artistic media from another is less a matter of differentiating the materials used by the maker than understanding the distinctive kinds of purposeful activity that render works made of these materials, and possessing certain sorts of perceptible properties, instances of a particular artform.

This is a very brief way through some complicated issues, but the purpose of this diversion is to make the point that as long as we keep focused upon the notion of an artistic medium, there would appear to be a *prima facie* basis for claiming there is no significant distinction between analogue photography and digital imaging as media. That is, in both cases the purposeful creation of an originating image and processing of that image in the darkroom or on a computer, together with the perceptible properties, practices and possibilities characteristic of the photographic medium, provide little basis for distinguishing analogue and digital photography as media-types.

Such a conclusion, however, does not sit comfortably with the prevalent talk of 'new digital media', of which digital photography is a prime example, and which clearly implies an important distinction between analogue and digital photography at the level of media-type. One might also recall the claim that digital photography has begun to draw us into a 'post-photographic age'.

If this is taken to mean that people will increasingly become more sceptical of the photography as a source of visual evidence because of the prevalence of manipulated images, we have little ground for supposing this indicates the emergence of a new artistic medium. However, some theorists have understood the dawn of a post-photographic age to mean more than this, and in particular that the medium of photography is being supplanted by a new digital medium. Related to this is the thought that the very notion of a photographic medium is rendered redundant by digital photography, which so transforms it as to leave little but the relic of a historical idea and practice.^{vi} Digital photography so understood is a new medium, but one that replaces rather than adds to what preceded it. Behind such claims is the sense that digital photography and imaging is being used to produce such profoundly different kind of pictures that it constitutes a different medium. However, if the history of photography is viewed in a certain way, and comparisons made between some of the most significant works of photographic art produced with analogue and digital technologies, then we find evidence that far from digital imaging being a new medium, it simply represents a resurgence of a particular photographic tradition grounded upon a new technology.

III

Here is a very brief version of a contestable, but not infrequently formulated, way of describing the historical origins of photography as a distinctive and recognisably independent artform. That is, the origins of photography as an artistic medium not in hock to painting, and thus capable of asserting its distinctive merits as an artistic medium. In the second decade of the 20th century photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston and others began to produce photographic art that broke significantly with what preceded it. They made images according to a certain conception of the medium and the practices appropriate to it that came to predominate among photographic artists for most of the century, until the arrival of new artistic concerns and the development of digital technologies took photography in a very different direction. The kind of practice that Strand and others inaugurated I am going to call 'realist' – by which I mean, roughly, what is often referred to as 'straight photography' combined with both formal and observational concerns. That is, a practice that emphasised the distinctively photographic through the use of sharply focused, well-composed and reasonably un-manipulated pictures of the world as the photographer found it. There are many photographers who didn't work in this way – and I will have something to say about them in due course – but there is a clear sense in which the dominant practice and 'great tradition' of photographic art for most of the 20th century was realist in this very general sense of the term. Although it is the realist work of the long list of photographers who worked according to this conception of their medium that were responsible for the gradual acceptance of photography as an independent artform, the predominance of this kind of practice perhaps explains the predominance of a broadly realist paradigm of photographic theorising during this period. Indeed, this tradition of realist practice and

theorising, more than any other, defined the artistic medium of photography, or photography as an artform.

Beginning in the last quarter of the 20th century, and accelerating rapidly, realist practice began to be superseded by a very different set of practices and purposes that were at least in part enabled and inspired by the advent of digital technologies. It is not merely that analogue film technologies were increasingly replaced by digital imaging technologies, realist practice was giving way to a more constructed (Jeff Wall, 'A Sudden Gust of Wind, After Hokusai'), manipulated (Andreas Gursky, '99 Cent Store'), performative (Orlan, 'Omnipresence Venus'), fictional (Pedro Meyer, 'The Strolling Saint') or fictionalised (Yasumasa Morimura, 'Mona Lisa in its Origin') photographic practice. The concerns, interests and practices of photographic artists began to change, and coincidentally new technologies appeared that served, nurtured and developed these new purposes. The end result is contemporary photographic practices and art dependent upon digital technologies, and standing in sharp contrast to that great realist tradition that established photography as an independent artform. Seen in this way, it is not surprising that digital photography is understood by some to be a new medium, or even the source of the redundancy of the photographic medium altogether.

However, we need only to expand this brief historical outline just a bit, to bring the matter into a different light. For the aspiration to a fine art photography did not pop into being with the early realist photographers like Strand and Weston. I'm thinking in particular of the pictorialist photographers of the late 1880s through to the first decade of the 20th century, who formulated their conception of what would constitute photographic art from painters and other non-photographic artforms. The idea that photography is not primarily an independent artform, but rather just another means of achieving what painters do, and therefore best thought of as continuous with and part of a broader and more integrated pictorial medium is an idea as old as Fox-Talbot.^{vii} Indeed, one can find a good deal of imitating of painters of one sort or other among 19th century photographers with artistic ambitions, or at least a shared set of concerns. Pictorialism produced quite a wide variety of work, and therefore a degree of generalisation will be required, and it is beyond the scope of this talk to establish the ways in which they sought to invest their photographs with the values and styles painting of the time. Nevertheless, only a few examples are needed to see what is was that the realists were reacting against, and why indeed they saw in realist practice the best prospect for an independent art of photography. For the pictorialists not only shared the concerns and aims of certain schools of painting of the period – not always the ones that have retained their reputation with contemporary audiences – their work also often appears to have a certain painterly quality. This is not true of all of the pictorialists, but many of the most significant of them sought in their work to overcome the perceived 'objectivity' and recording nature of photography, to create pictorial (rather than a distinctively photographic) art with visible properties and values closer to those of painting and other graphic arts. The point of drawing attention to the pictorialists, and some of their predecessors in previous decades, is that within the scope of the technologies available to them, their images are based on a photographic practice emphasising construction (e.g. Oscar Reijlander, 'The Two Ways of Life'; Camille Silvy, 'River Scene'; H. P.

Robinson, 'Bringing Home the Hay'), a high degree of retouching and other means to painterly presentation (e.g. Heinrich Kuhn, 'Still Life'; Robert Demachy, 'Behind the Scenes') fictional or fictionalised subject matter (Julia Margaret Cameron, 'Mother Mary'; Constant Puyo, 'Mirth'; Gertrude Kasebier, 'Blessed Art Though Among Women') and in some cases a concern with the performative (Fred Day Holland, 'Crucifixion').

Moreover, despite the dominance of realist practice that followed the pictorialists, a significant non-realist practice continued throughout the 20th century. The vortographs of Alvin Coburn, the work of constructivists such as Lissitzky and Maholy-Nagy, photomontagists such as Haussmann, Heartfield, Hoch and Bayer, with their Dadaist, surrealist or political concerns begin a tradition that lasted for many decades, and all of these provide a link to the work of some of the 'thinking photographers' of the 1970s and 80s (Burgin, 'Zoo IV', left panel). So from the 1850s through to contemporary digital imaging there has been a continuous non-realist tradition and practice; that is, a use of the medium that at least points in the direction of practices and possibilities that predominate among contemporary digital imaging artists.

Of course it would be absurd to suppose the pictorialists and some of their predecessors in the 19th century, and their non-realist inheritors in the 20th century, shared the concerns and purposes of contemporary photographers who extensively use digital processing technologies. My point, however, is that contemporary digital imaging *appears* to constitute more of a profound break with the practices and conception of the medium that precedes it because so much of our understanding of photography as an artform derives from the more dominant realist tradition. Indeed, many of the significant theorists and aestheticians of photography have treated their subject matter as if realism were the very essence of the medium – its distinctive quality; the pursuit of which gives aesthetic significance to photographic practice. When new artistic concerns and theoretical models began to emerge in the 1970s and 80s, and new technologies emerged that heightened the abilities of photographers to pursue and develop these non-realist concerns, it is no surprise that what resulted was a practice, materials and techniques in such stark contrast to what had pre-dominated for most of the preceding decades that claims that digital imaging was a new medium were common. Some of this plausibility disappears however as we discard the significance of digital technology to the characterisation of photography as an artistic medium because it relies too heavily upon a physical conception of what a medium is. Add to this the fact that some of the practices and possibilities that appear to give digital imaging its distinctiveness have less technologically sophisticated precursors in non-realist photographic art practices and are therefore as constitutive of an historically informed artistic medium of photography, and the plausibility of the claim that with digital imaging a new medium has emerged wanes further.

So reflection on what constitutes an artistic medium, and some observations on the history of photographic practices leads to a conclusion that analogue photography and digital imaging are not distinct media, and indeed that there is a clear continuity between these practices that draw them together within a single medium. But there are other reflections that lead in a different direction, toward a distinction into two media.

IV

The new direction of thought might begin by acknowledging certain continuities between photographic practices of the past and the digital imaging of today, but make the point that these continuities can obscure some significant differences. At the heart of this idea is the thought that the new digital technologies do not merely extend the powers the photographer to do things that have been done before. Rather, they heighten these powers so significantly as to introduce new practices and possibilities having a transformative effect upon the medium. Indeed, so significantly is the medium transformed by these new technologies that it makes little sense to deny that what results is a new medium, with different practices, possibilities, and qualities.

Consider for example that digital image processing technologies provide the artists with a degree of control over the perceptual properties of their work unimaginable within analogue photography. The division of a digital image file into a vast number of picture elements, or pixels, arranged in grid, with the perceptible properties of each being determined digitally means that each pixel is precisely manipulable by the artist. The digital photographer therefore has an extraordinarily precise control over detail in their picture at the processing stage. At least this is true in principle, but of course digital photographers do not, and could not easily, alter or even consider each pixel within their image. Nevertheless, image-processing software provides the photographer with the means to this control, as well as numerous other tools that provide precise and full control over detail. Adding to, or subtracting from the image, moving things around in the image, merging or morphing images, changing tonal and chromatic values with great precision at specific areas of the picture, sharpening, blurring, inverting, solarising and anything else one can imagine at the most local level and with the greatest precision. By contrast the means the analogue photographer has of controlling detail at the processing stage are more limited and less exact, and many of the most effective techniques available to them have a global rather than a local effect upon the image. Indeed, the distinction between a global and local effect only makes sense in the case of analogue photography where there is a real difference between effects like re-touching that are confined to a particular part of the picture surface, and those like toning that have an equal effect across the surface. For although imaging software enables a very wide range of global effects to be applied, when this is done the effect is simply the cumulative result of an effect being applied to every pixel. For the digital photographer global effects are a choice rather than a limitation of the technology that achieves that effect.

As important is the fact that changes to detail can be tried and very quickly abandoned over and over again, enabling the artist to experiment and then settle upon a particular effect. What can be tried out in a day with digital processing software could take weeks in a darkroom, and this heightened potential for experimentation transforms the possibilities and practices that characterise photography as an artform. Likewise the potential for interactivity that digital technologies introduce, providing a dimension unavailable in any practical sense with analogue photography.

Of course all of this is familiar, but does it add up to a case for a medium so significantly transformed that we are justified in thinking of it giving rise to a new medium? Setting aside the question of how significantly a medium must be transformed before we are justified in supposing a new medium is created, if we were to suppose digital photography met the conditions for being a new medium, it would be fanciful in the extreme to suppose all connection with analogue photography was severed in the transformation. As a consequence, if we are to suppose digital photography is a new medium, it will have to be a new medium that retained some connection with photography, and that means the new medium would have to be a hybrid medium.

Hybrid artforms combine two or more existing media to create a new medium. Opera, prose poems, graphic novels, kinetic sculpture, concrete poetry and shaped painting are all reasonably familiar examples of hybrid media. In each case two existing artforms are combined, as Jerry Levinson has argued, in one of three ways.^{viii} They might be combined in juxtaposition, which is to say the two artforms are simply brought together in a single artwork, the two elements simply accompanying each other – such as, for example, in an illustrated book of poetry, or to take a more concrete example, some of Tacita Dean’s photographs which are accompanied with recorded music.^{ix} Alternatively, the two artforms might be combined in synthesis, or fused together. Opera, for example, fuses song and narrative theatre. Finally, and most relevant in this context, some hybrid artforms are what Levinson calls ‘transformational’ hybrids. He writes that ‘A transformational hybrid of [artforms] *A* and *B* is not *halfway* between *A* and *B*, which would imply that the two artforms were fused and present in the hybrid in equal degree. Rather:

‘*A* is transformed in a *B*-ish direction. A good example of this sort of hybrid is kinetic sculpture . . . [which] can be seen as ordinary sculpture modified in the direction of dance. It is not an equal fusion of the two, but rather an incorporation of *some of the special or distinctive characteristics* of dance in what remains recognisably *sculpture*.’^x

The claim with regard to digital imaging is that the degree of control the photographer gains with digital processing technologies transforms photography in the direction of another medium or media – painting and collage being the obvious candidates – while remaining recognisably photography. It is worth underlining that the point is not that painting and photography are fused in digital imaging, for that would be patently false. Rather that the power the artist has over the composition and detail in digital imaging transforms what remains distinctively photographic in the direction of painting – where a similar degree of control is exercised over the detailed appearance of the picture. The purposeful activity that characterises digital imaging shares something of the purposeful activity characteristic of painting and collage, significantly transforming photography in that direction without ever becoming painting or collage, and yet ceasing to be photography. What results is a new, hybrid, medium.

So we have two arguments pulling in opposite directions. The one presents digital imaging as continuous with longstanding photographic practices and possibilities, and therefore firmly part of the photographic medium. The second presents digital imaging as a transformation of the photographic medium into a new hybrid artform that remains related to, but distinct from, photography. The weakness of the first is that it premised upon a degree of continuity between *prima facie* very different practices and possibilities sufficient to warrant the conclusion that they can be gathered together within a single medium. Realist and non-realist photographic practices share something – a grounding in the photographic, which includes the originating image as a starting point – but they are ultimately very different kinds of picture, with different possibilities, contexts of purposeful creation, and aesthetic properties and values. The weakness of the second approach is that however plausible it may be to think of digital imaging as a hybrid artform, the position unjustifiably privileges the case of digital imaging, begging the question of the status of its non-realist photographic predecessors.

At this point a third possibility, one that we haven't considered and which draws upon elements of the previous two, becomes readily apparent. Some artistic media require division into first and second order levels of specificity. Literature, for example, is a first order medium encompassing the second order media of prose, poetry, plays, the hybrid prose poem, and perhaps some others as well. Music is likewise a first order medium encompassing a number of second order media, including absolute music, song, and opera. Perhaps what we need to grasp is that photography is a first order medium encompassing at least two second order media into which realist photography (whether analogue or digital) and non-realist photography and digital imaging are properly sorted. Although this way of making the point will not do as it stands, a modified version of this broad suggestion is, I believe, correct, and I will conclude by exploring and making the case for it.

The first point to note is that we cannot use the distinction between realist and non-realist photography to distinguish two second-order media. For these are terms associated with style rather than medium identity, and there are examples of non-realist photographs that would properly be instances of work produced within a non-hybrid photographic medium – Alvin Coburn's Vortographs and some camera-less photographs being good examples. At the same time, if we are to distinguish two second-order photographic media we will need names to refer to them by, and these names together with the ground of the distinction, need to be as value-neutral as possible. This is worth noting because in the literature on hybrid media it is common to find non-hybrid media referred to as 'pure' media, and I suspect the use of this term in relation to non-hybrid photography will be taken to express a value. However, rather than try to introduce new terms, I will simply stipulate that the distinction between 'pure' and hybrid should be understood as value neutral, and assume it was taken as such. The nature and characteristics of pure photography are to be found in the practices, purposes and possibilities that distinguish it from other media, and do not overlap with or are significantly informed by the practices, purposes and possibilities of another medium, such as we find with hybrid photography.

Secondly, in making such a distinction between photographic media we are engaged in an exercise in taxonomy, the aim of which is the ordering of the phenomena, the clarification of significant differences, and the improvement of understanding. What we want to do is improve our ability to get to grips with the phenomena, and we should not expect that distinctions of this sort within the arts are uniformly unproblematic because they carve up the phenomena according to essential features. That is, we should not expect to be able to formulate a distinction between two photographic media that will enable us to unproblematically sort all of the pictures that we intuitively judge to belong within the broad first-order category of the photographic into the two second-order media we have identified. Many pure photographs will exhibit to a greater or lesser extent elements of processing that point toward hybrid status, but which are not properly classified as such. A realist photograph that has been minimally retouched, for example, is no less a pure photograph for that reason than a piece of music ceases to be instrumental music because the performer can be heard to be humming along at certain points while they perform. Likewise, a novel or essay does not become a prose poem because we discover passages in which poetic techniques such as rhythm, alliteration or rhyme are employed. That said, there might be cases that strike us as ambiguous, standing somewhere between pure and hybrid photography. Such cases should be treated as interesting rather than as counterexamples to a taxonomic organisation of artforms, or evidence that the taxonomy is flawed. Since distinctions between media are there to help us clarify the phenomena and aid understanding, problematic cases are best dealt with by judgment and reflection, and we can rightly invoke the notion of mixed-media if that helps us.

Finally, making such a distinction between photographic media reminds us how under-theorised a significant tradition of photographic practice is – and indeed how little attention has been given to the historical documentation of non-realist and hybrid photography. Hybrid media often suffer from this neglect in comparison to pure media, and why this should be so is an interesting question, but one that I will have to set aside in this context. For the moment it will suffice to observe that the nature of hybrid photography, its purposes and values, its aesthetic qualities and effects upon viewers remain largely unexplored – no doubt in part because until the emergence of contemporary digital imaging among contemporary artists it remained very much a minority interest and practice among photographic artists. By understanding digital imaging as a kind within a distinctive hybrid medium, with pre-digital precursors, the hope is that aestheticians, theorists and historians will be better equipped to understand the significance of digital imaging artworks within a broader historical and intentional context.

I want to close by very briefly drawing attention to two broad issues of a theoretical nature that arise immediately in relation to hybrid photography, as soon as it is distinguished from pure photography. First, what is the significance for our understanding of the property of representation in hybrid photography given that an originating photograph or photographs are the starting point for pictures produced within this medium? Theorists of pure photography have expended considerable effort upon understanding the nature of realist photographic representation. There is considerable difference among the accounts theorists have provided, and I will make no effort to

describe the options here. However, whatever our best theory of representation in pure photography is, this will apply to the originating image or images that constitute the starting point hybrid photography. How should we understand what happens to, or becomes of, representation as the hybrid photograph is created?; how should we characterise it, and place it in relation to other modes of pictorial representation?

Secondly, according to one line of thought about representation in pure photography, the viewer of the photograph has a particularly intimate connection with the subject matter they perceive in (or through) it. Andre Bazin, Roland Barthes, Stanley Cavell and Kendall Walton, to name just a few, have sought to characterise this intimate relation, connecting it to photography's defining features and rating it among the medium's greatest values. But what happens to this intimacy in hybrid photography? Is it lost, or only fragmented, and what values replace it, and how?

There are more issues as well for the theorist and aesthician to ponder, but I have tried to suggest that the attempt to circumscribe these investigations to work produced with digital technologies alone – ignoring the non-realist photographic traditions that precede the digital – will provide answers too narrow for the media-type. Digital photographic technologies signal and support momentous changes in photographic practice and possibilities, but we won't be able to get to grips with what is important about these changes unless we first satisfactorily place digital photography in relation to photographic history, practice and an understanding of what is distinctive about the medium.

ⁱ One might suppose music has an as yet unrealised potential for an equally significant transformation through digital technologies.

ⁱⁱ I am not forgetting the possibility of the camera-less photograph, such as photograms, rayographs, luminograms and the like. Rather, I'm going to treat these as special cases and set them aside for the moment. They have a certain relevance to my argument, but will need to be returned to later.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jerry Levinson, 'Hybrid Art Forms' in *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 29

^{iv} Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, p. 41

^v David Davies, 'Medium in Art' in Levinson (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 183

^{vi} For example, Joel Snyder in *Photographic Theory*, (London; Routledge) 2007, pp. 184 - 192

^{vii} Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*.

^{viii} Levinson, 'Hybrid Art Forms', op.cit.

^{ix} Tacita Dean, 'Text of Light', 2004

^x Levinson, op. cit. pp. 22-23