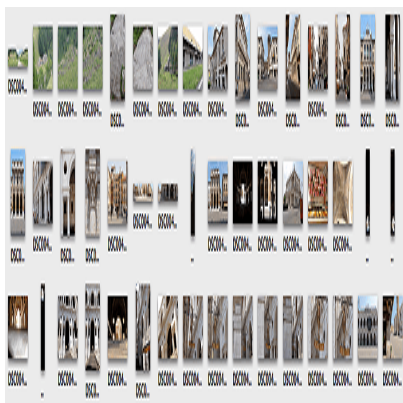
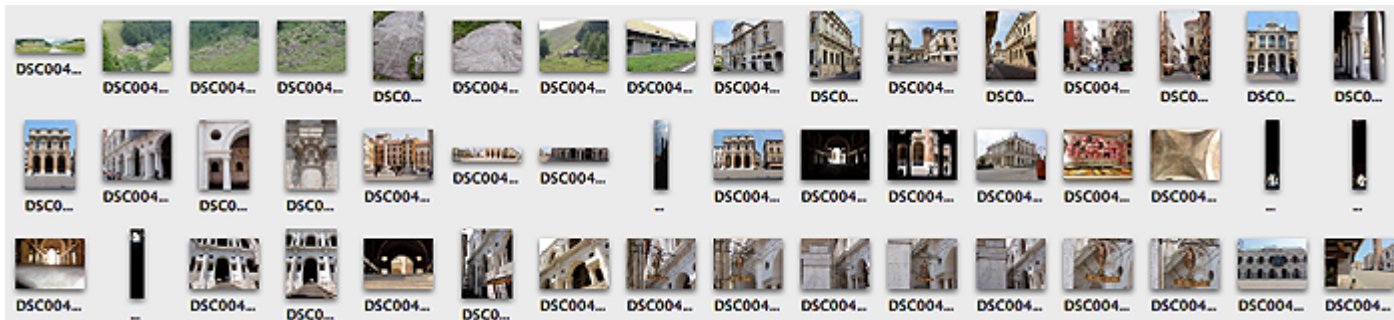




We are all multiples

Description

Digital photographs do not just come in ones, twos and as exquisite selections, but in vast numbers, arrayed in file stores, as outputs on web search engines, as well as social media and photo sharing sites. They appear as thumbnails arrayed on grids like postage stamps on the pages of an album. Stamps make little sense to the collector in the singular – so too for the digital collector photographs are downloaded in large numbers from digital cameras to be sorted, arranged, ordered and compared.



Amateur digital photography is an art of permutations and cherished misjudgements, differing in many respects from chemical film-based photography in the plethora of imagery it encourages, and in emphasizing processes of editing, archiving, embedding and sharing very large numbers of images, abetted by functions integrated into image capture software.

Rather than languishing unsorted in envelopes, boxes, and slide trays or lovingly folded into bulky and half completed photograph albums digital snaps are immediately and automatically organized on computer and tablet screens by date and location. They are displayed as thumbnail images to be tagged, shared, scanned visually, searched and embedded, ie brought into service – as illustrations in a blog for example. The deployment of such images is a commonplace in professional life, as images are embedded into electronic slide presentations, printed publications, reports, and webpages.

Innovations in camera technologies contribute to the glut of imagery. Mobile phones with cameras are ready to hand. Digital photographers can readily target subjects close up, via zoom, in wide angle formats, in panoramas, with or without flash. As well as providing records, digital cameras have

secondary functions as telescopes and periscopes – especially when held at arms length. The recent stream of mobile phone images from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other sites of political transformation, circulated and delivered eventually to news media websites, demonstrates the potential of this agile, prolific and arguably democratic medium.



Births, Chimneys and Lightermen – Collecting Greenwich Peninsula, an art installation by Julian Walker, Tate Modern, 2008.

Digital photography revives the art of the multiple, as practiced by Young British Artists (YBAs) in the 1990s. The organization of digital images, and their thumbnails, continues a fascination with, and necessity for, ordered arrays of graphical information. Printing processes encouraged the multiplication of images: wallpaper, fabric patterns, and gift-wrapping paper, for example. The concept of the –multiple– continues as an art form as illustrated in the artist Damien Hirst’s colorful wallpaper designs consisting of repetitive arrays of pills and biblical quotations, or rows of pharmaceutical products on ordered shelves, and more recent work by the artist Julian Walker, involving the meticulous organisation of small and ostensibly trivial found objects.

Edward Tufte’s seductive books demonstrating principles of information display similarly explore the logic of multiplication, of –visually enforcing comparisons of changes, of the differences among objects, of the scope of alternatives– (p.67). The proliferation of digital images continues this demonstration that we are after all captive to the compulsion of multiples.

Multiplication relates to repetition, a theme close to the uncanny, as developed by Sigmund Freud, Giles Deleuze, and many others. The sheer volume of easy and incessant digital image production represents a step change in our understanding of the image. Digital images are not only pristine targets for isolated theorising and interpretation as suggested by much of WJT Mitchell’s –picture theory,– but are also to be understood *en mass* as multiples, as vast archives in which may be buried hidden, non-conforming, and sometimes risky and toxic materials. This digital image matrix harbours the potential for revealing differences, and heightening as well as occluding aspects of the human sensorium and aspects of place.

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1. Media

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