

# The Rise of Digital Reproduction Against Mechanical Reproduction: “Tech-Nostalgia” in Photography\*

Mekanik Yeniden Üretime Karşı Dijital Yeniden Üretimin Yükselişi: Fotoğrafta “Tekno-Nostalji”

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## Abstract

As a result of advancements in contemporary digital technology, the production tools utilized in art, alongside new instruments that facilitate daily life, are becoming increasingly diverse and sophisticated. The innovations offered by technology provide a wide range of creative opportunities, particularly for artists. However, since the 1990s, there has been a notable tendency towards a retrospective return and mimicry in both daily life and art. This research primarily focuses on the paradox of returning to the past, despite all technological developments and digitalization, as explored through the medium of photography. In this study, the reasons for looking back and mimicking the past in defiance of contemporary realities and technologies are analyzed within the framework of the concept of “tech-nostalgia.” Concrete examples of “tech-nostalgia” in the realm of photography, such as the Lomography movement and Polaroid productions, have been examined in detail. Despite the high-resolution image quality achieved through current technology and the conveniences of the image production process, the reasons for the observed increase in analog photography have been addressed. The investigation delves into how this increase is shaped within the nature of art and photographic aesthetics, and this trend is attempted to be elucidated through psychological and sociological perspectives with relevant examples.

**Keywords:** *Tech-nostalgia, Lomography, Polaroid, Nostalgia, Retromania*

## Öz

Günümüz dijital teknolojisinde yaşanan gelişmeler sonucunda, günlük yaşamı kolaylaştıran yeni araçların yanı sıra sanatta da kullanılan üretim araçları çeşitlenmekte ve gelişmektedir. Teknolojinin sunduğu yenilikler, özellikle sanatçılar için geniş bir yelpazede yaratıcı imkânlar sunmaktadır. Ancak, 1990'lı yıllardan bu yana hem günlük yaşamda hem de sanatta geçmişe yönelik bir geri dönüş ve öykünme eğilimi dikkat çekmektedir. Tüm teknolojik gelişmeler ve dijitalleşmeye rağmen geçmişe dönüş paradoksunun fotoğraf sanatı üzerinden açıklanmaya çalışılması bu araştırmanın ana konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmada bugünün gerçeklerine ve teknolojisine sırt çevrilip geçmişe öykünmenin nedenleri “teknö-nostalji (tech-nostalgia)” kavramı çerçevesinde analiz edilmektedir. “Tekno-nostalji (tech-nostalgia)” kavramının fotoğraf sanatındaki somut örnekleri olarak lomografi fotoğraf akımı ve Polaroid üretimleri detaylı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Günümüz teknolojisi ile ulaşılan yüksek çözünürlüklü görüntü kalitesi ve görüntü üretim sürecindeki kolaylıklara rağmen, analog fotoğrafçılıkta gözlemlenen artışın nedenleri ele alınmıştır. Bu artışın, sanatın ve fotoğraf estetiğinin doğası içinde nasıl şekillendiği araştırılmış ve bu eğilim, psikolojik ve sosyolojik perspektifler üzerinden örneklerle açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır.

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tekno-nostalji, Lomografi, Polaroid, Nostalji, Retromania

## Introduction

When the history of art is examined, it is seen that the styles, methods and techniques adopted by the artists in every period are fed by social life and scientific discoveries. The photography, which has existed in the history of art since the 19th century, has also been influenced and nourished by social life from its early periods. However, when the works of art produced in 1990 and later are examined, it is observed that the past is preferred as the subject rather than the effects of the age, and works produced with old techniques are frequently encountered.

Simon Reynolds (2011) claims that 'instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the "Re" Decade. The 2000s were dominated by the "re-" prefix: revivals, reissues, remakes, re-enactments. Endless retrospection' (2011, xi). This trend for regurgitating the past – particularly the visuality of the past – has continued in the second decade of the new millennium.

Parallel to this situation, in today's art, where postmodernism is widely adopted, it is encountered that concepts such as reproduction and intertextuality are frequently on the agenda. contextually, the old is constantly turned into the subject of the new. In addition to reconsidering the old in new contexts, it is common to emulate the past with formal and production tools.

It is obvious that as in all areas of life today, the nostalgia tendency is adopted technically, formally and contextually in art. In photography, there are artists who push aside the image quality achieved with today's technology and emulate old analog productions and image aesthetics. As Groys (2017: 12) states, art does not predict the future, it reveals the ephemeral nature of the present and thus lays the groundwork for the new. From this point of view, turning to the past appears as a paradox of today's photographic art. To tell and explain this paradox, first of all, it is necessary to talk about the concept of technostalgia and to look at its application areas in the art of photography.

## 1. The Concept of Tech-Nostalgia

The cultural attraction of the past is felt in every aspect of life today. Concepts such as nostalgia, vintage and retromania are frequently encountered today. Remembering outdated technologies and yearning for these old technologies is called "tech-nostalgia" (Wiktionary.org, 2020).

One of the most beautiful examples of tech-nostalgia that can be used in art is Johan Kramer's "Bye Bye Super 8 – In Loving Memory of Kodachrome" project in the field of motion picture production.

On January 1, 2011, the last remaining Kodachrome processing facility ceased the development of Super 8mm Kodachrome 40 ASA (commonly referred to as 'K40'), signaling the end of an era for one of the most beloved amateur film stocks. Renowned

for its distinctive yellow packaging (see Figure-1), Kodachrome was widely praised for its color accuracy, durability, and vividly saturated tones. Its discontinuation prompted Dutch filmmaker Johan Kramer to initiate the project *Bye Bye Super 8 – In Loving Memory of Kodachrome*, a tribute to the film that, in Kramer's words, "made reality look even more beautiful than it was." Super 8 Kodachrome, introduced by Kodak in 1965 as an enhancement of the standard 8mm format, gained immense popularity, particularly among amateur and family filmmakers, due to its unparalleled aesthetic and 'timeless' quality. Kramer reflected on the unique attributes of Super 8 Kodachrome, contemplating whether its enduring appeal stemmed from "the intimacy, warmth, or imperfection of the images, or perhaps its limitations." He noted the challenges associated with the format, highlighting the fact that an 8mm cassette was costly and held only about three minutes of film. However, despite its brevity, Kramer observed that films captured in this format often portrayed "a world of happy moments," where "the sun always shines, people are always laughing, and they often wave," as if attempting to preserve fleeting joy indefinitely. As part of his tribute to the film stock, which he affectionately described as having "the most beautiful blue in the world," Kramer collected 25 of the final Kodachrome boxes. He then selected 25 children of the age of 8, including his eldest daughter Isabella (see Figure-1), to record on Super 8 Kodachrome, with the intention of creating a three-minute 'souvenir' of their youth, mirroring the 8mm films his own father had made of him during his childhood (Van der Heijden, 2015: 110).



**Figure 1.** The scene with Isabella waving at the camera and the Original Super 8 Kodachrome 40 film box where this scene was filmed.

Although the project was carried out in the 21st century in terms of content, it was produced by emulating the aesthetics of the 20th century, which references the past. As Kramer stated above, in this period, a production of nostalgia in contrast to today was achieved with the girls waving to the camera, similar to the movies in which family members were viewed in order to keep them as memories. The project, which his own father designed in the same way he viewed himself in the past, also bears traces of the artist's own childhood. Beyond being a homage to Super 8mm Kodachrome film, analog technology today, the project also winks at the artist's past and childhood.

Freud (1957a: 90) asserts that according to the type of narcissistic response a person may seek:

“a) what he himself is; b) what he himself was; c) what he himself would like to be; d) someone who was once part of himself. Particularly in choices b) and d) we can see narcissism’s connection with children and childhood, and the trope of idealized childhood so often encountered in nostalgia. Freud observes that ‘the charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility’ (Freud, 1957a: 89)”.

When the subject is approached from a Freudian point of view, it is seen that there is a strong connection between nostalgia and childhood. As experienced, the time or event that a place, object or person makes us feel a sense of nostalgia usually belongs to childhood. For this reason, Kramer's project also carries traces of his childhood.

Technically, in the production and exhibition of the project, it is far from today's digital technology. The video was produced using Super 8mm Kodachrome 40 ASA, reflecting the image aesthetics (image quality, colors, format) of this film. It is seen that the nostalgic approach adopted throughout the project was also adhered to in the final stage, by using the original Super 8 film projector in the video presentation.

Groys (2017: 121) stated that the copy lacks authenticity not because it is visually different from the original, but because it has no place in history and is not ultimately engraved in history. For this reason, according to Benjamin (2002: 217), photography and especially film are the most modern art forms, because from the beginning they were destined for a circulation that was mechanically produced and not topologically determined. From this point of view, the age of mechanical reproduction does not produce anything original; it can only erase the authenticity of originals inherited from previous eras.

In line with the views of Groys and Benjamin, although it is seen as the most modern art forms, it can be said that the nostalgia elements used in photography and film productions originate from their own nature in parallel with the mechanical reproduction age not producing anything original.

## **2. The Concept of Technostalgia in Photography**

Tech-nostalgia trend in photography is used not only in artistic productions, but also in social media because of the photography is an important visual element of today's communication. In addition to focusing on subjects that make the old valuable, praise or evoke contently, tech-nostalgia in photography in form; As Van der Heijden (2015: 104) states: “The re-staging or simulation of ‘authentic’ analogue elements such as film grain, scratches, flickering lights, torn borders, and degraded colours contributes to something that can be called ‘technostalgia’: the reminiscence of past media technologies in contemporary memory practices.”

Visual aesthetic perception created by the above-mentioned "authentic" analog elements can be achieved with applications that allow image editing in photographs used both in

artistic productions and new media channels, or with filters from programs that enable digital image processing on a computer.

In addition to the contemporary memory applications that enable the memory of past media technologies, it is frequently encountered applications where outdated technologies are used in the same way as they existed in the past without needing to be updated in a contemporary channel - even if it seems anachronistic-. At this point, it is thought that mentioning the concept of zombie media is important for the understanding of the subject.

"New media theorists, Jussi Parikka and Garnet Hertz have written in recent years about media archaeology and 'zombie media.' Loosely speaking, zombie media can be understood as 'dead' or unused media experiencing revitalization as either repurposed (used in a way not originally intended) or revitalized (resuscitated to its original state) media. In many ways the concept behind zombie media can be applied to hauntology and tech-nostalgia because, at its core, it concerns itself with the revitalization of 'dead' media and, more significantly, is re-worked into new concepts and creations (Campopiano, 2014: 78)."

Groys (2017: 7) stated that avant-garde writers and artists see the past as more valuable than the future, but this is unfair, even absurd, because it is emphasized that we live in the present, not in the past. The artists and writers of this period have often studied the question of "Can we say that our own values are less than the values of those who lived before us?". Similar to the equality of people, it is stated that the equality of things, places and, more importantly, periods are asserted. When we return from this period to the present, it is obvious that similar discussions, which are the main subject of this article, still take place.

Since photography is a permanent method of making the present past by immortalizing the moment, it is already a tool or method for nostalgia. Photography, by its very nature, exists as an object that provides nostalgia. However, in this study, it is desired to examine how nostalgia is handled in artistic productions, not that photography is an item of nostalgia as an object.

As it is known, the development of photography from the beginning to the present day can be examined under three headings:

"First of all, photography aims to reflect the reality perceived by the eye exactly. Secondly, the determination of the realities that exist but not perceived by the eye, whether they are visible or not, the results are of an objective nature, that is, they express the object and the event exactly. In the third category, the artist's will to form goes beyond certain measures. Instead of picking out only one or another section from the existing, the current, there is a tendency to put reality in a new guise or to create a completely new reality (Duygun, 1998: 3)."

The tools that will enable the realization of the titles within all these three phases are much more advanced today than in the past with the development of technology. With today's technology devices, production is much easier and higher quality than in the past.

Thanks to the image processing programs used in digital cameras and computers, the image quality has reached the highest level. Images are created comfortably and easily thanks to the camera and computer, without the need for film or a bathroom. Again, thanks to digitalization, images can be stored, preserved and archived in their original state without being damaged or corrupted.

So, despite all these advantages, why is the effect of tech-nostalgia frequently seen in the photographic productions of artists today? In the next part of the study, an answer to this question will be sought through examples.

### **3. Polaroid Productions as an Example of the Tech-Nostalgia Concept in the Photography**

Polaroid productions are at the forefront of the subjects that can be dealt with within the concept of tech-nostalgia in photography. Edwin Land invented the Polaroid camera in 1945. The first Polaroid camera capable of taking color photographs was produced in 1963 (Wikipedia.org, 2020). The main reason why Polaroid cameras, which made a great impression at the time, are once again attracted by both amateurs and professionals, is primarily due to their basic features, as in the past.

As it is known, unlike other areas of photography, polaroid image production develops many processes in a single moment. It is the main reason for the interest in polaroid in the period when the shooting, film development and printing stages take place in one go. As Buse (2010: 198) stated, in the photography of attractions, the representational value of the image is not entirely negligible, but it has receded in importance, giving way to what might be called its 'demonstration-value', where it is the process and not the product that takes precedence. It is appropriate that Polaroid image-making should have a theatrical setting in Land's and Warhol's use of it, because in their hands, photography functions above all as magic show: it is the spectacular display of the technology's workings which is most important; and attracting attention is the main aim of the operator.

In general, tech-nostalgia applications in photography ensure that the importance of hard copy continues. Jurgenson (2011) claimed that tangibility can ignite the desire to establish a relationship between the past and the present, and this will trigger tech-nostalgia.

Polaroid photography is the uniqueness of the image, that it provides no negative for further mechanical reproduction. Clearly this is a major difference from the digital image, which is infinitely and effortlessly reproducible in countless possible contexts (Buse, 2010: 20). It is impossible to reproduce the image. This leads us to Benjamin's view that the aura of the work of art, which was lost with the mechanical reproducibility feature of photography, is regained with polaroid.

Finally, another physical feature of the polaroid display is the built-in white frame with a wide bottom edge and writeable text on it. This frame loses its feature when the Polaroid image is scanned on a computer. Because this white frame is not a part of the image, it is a part of the object, it can only gain its own identity when it exists physically. In addition,

the fact that the image is visually in a frame serves to be perceived as valuable, as Küçükerdoğan (2005: 84) states – because of the people frame the photos they find valuable-. This increases the effect of the image.

Another element that distinguishes the polaroid productions, which is also the main feature of the works of photographer Maurizio Galimberti, is the exhibition value apart from the above features. Polaroid mosaics, Galimberti's basic style, are among the most successful applications of polaroid's display value. Polaroid mosaics created by combining many polaroid photos are actually photo-collages. Close-up, detail shots come together to create a meaning. The image represented by the photograph does not make sense on its own, they become objects that are part of a whole. Galimberti's polaroid mosaics can be shown as parallel examples of the pluralist and eclectic structure of postmodernism (See Figure-2).



**Figure 2.** Maurizio Galimberti, Casa del Bepi, Studio n.2, 2019.

In the polaroid mosaic photo-collage in Figure-2, Italian photographer Maurizio Galimberti includes the polaroid photographs he viewed at Casa del Bepi, Studio n.2 in Italy, which he chose as the venue. Although it is not possible to have information about the content of the photos because they are visually very small, the texture effect formed by the

similarity of these polaroid images to each other can be seen physically. Although the photographer's style is used by many different photographers, when the number, quality and continuity of the productions are examined, it is seen that Maurizio Galimberti stands out from all his other colleagues with his style, which is an example of tech-nostalgia.

#### **4. Lomography as an Example of the Tech-Nostalgia Concept in the Photography**

Another topic that needs to be addressed about technostalgia in photography is the lomography movement. Today, when digital cameras dominate the world of photography, analog cameras have not completely disappeared; The analog camera community Lomographic Society International, shortly Lomography (Lomography), has been evidence of the resurgence of analog photography, especially lo-fi and compact cameras (Caoduro, 2014: 72).

As far as photography is concerned, analogue cameras did not fade out of sight completely; the analogue camera community Lomographic Society International, in short Lomography, became a testament to the resurgence of analogue photography and particularly lo-fi and toy cameras. Founded in 1992 by a group of Austrian students, Lomography is both an art movement and a commercial enterprise, which sells analogue cameras (the Lomo LC-A camera produced by the Russian LOMO PLC) and various accessories, and promotes the distinctive and unique aesthetic qualities of analogue imaging though gallery exhibitions and magazines.

The ten golden rules of Lomography are as follows:

“Rule One: Take your camera wherever you go. You never know where you're going to meet. Rule Two: Use your camera around the clock, day and night. Because every moment has a different feeling. Rule Three: Your camera should not interfere with the flow of your life; must be a part of it. Just like eating, drinking, talking, walking, thinking... Rule Four: Keep your camera at different angles. You don't have to see what you're shooting while pressing the shutter button. Rule Five: With your camera in hand, don't be afraid to get close. Mark the object or person that creates the desire to take a photo in you as close as possible. Rule Six: Don't Think! Grab your camera, go outside and shoot whatever comes your way. Rule Seven: Be fast! Even a tenth of a second counts. Don't waste your time with settings. Eighth Rule: You don't have to know in advance what you're recording on film. Allow coincidences. Try to enjoy life. Rule Ninth: And then... “Oh! What's that? When did I shoot this? Where did I shoot it?” Do not occupy your mind with such questions. Tenth Rule: Don't worry about the rules. Forget the Ten Golden Rules. Do whatever you want (Wikipedia.org, 2020).”

When we look at the summary of the ten rules mentioned above, it can be said that spontaneity, experimentalism, randomness and irregularity are adopted within this understanding. It is seen that Lomography is an artistic approach rather than a commercial venture. The galleries where the works produced with this understanding are exhibited, the photography competitions organized and the magazine and articles where the lomography aesthetics are discussed are examples of this.



Fotoistanbul, one of the important photography events held in Turkey, realized a remarkable application in 2017: Lomowall, the wall consisting of photographs taken with Lomography, which was established for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Lomography. This practice is an example of the place Lomography has acquired in the art scene (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Fotoistanbul Photography Festival, Besiktas, Lomowall Corner, 2017.

Barthes (2000: 49) talked about the photographic shock effect, which aims to surprise the audience in his works. He claimed that there were five factors – surprise, in his own words – that provided this shock effect. Among them, the fourth surprise is what the photographer looks for in the acrobatics of techniques: overprints, anamorphoses, deliberate use of certain errors (blurring, deceptive perspectives, framing tricks). He mentioned that great photographers such as Germaine Krull, Kertész and William Klein use these surprises. Based on this determination of Barthes, it is seen that this understanding, which includes the production of experimental photography, uses exactly the surprises that provide this photographic shock effect.

Undoubtedly, the most important factor in Lomography, which prefers analog photography over digital, is the effect of being tactile and tangible. In today's world where everything is temporary in an incredible speed, perhaps the main reason for this interest in the tactile and tangible is that it is permanent and reliable. Today, where mechanical reproduction is replaced by digital reproduction, Lomography, which can be considered as an effort to break the artificiality of perfect productions made with virtual reality and artificial intelligence technologies with analog productions, can be said to be an effort to defend human nature and oppose mechanization by making use of mistakes and experimentation.

The individual is standardized by consuming in today's capitalist order, where technological developments have reached the peak. In the age of technology, this longing for the technologies and productions of the past is seen exactly as a resistance of the

individual against the assimilation.

The inaccessibility of the past, time that has passed from past to present and experiences are undoubtedly one of the most important reasons for the value given to the past. The famous writer Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar stated this in his book titled "Five Cities" (2011: 205) with the following sentences:

"To see Süleymaniye as a newly built mosque is to deprive the it we know and love of an entire reign that stretches back to us in time, just like those golden palaces built on water by the lights stretching out in the bays of the Bosphorus at night. We taste its beauty with the experience of four centuries and with our selves becoming sharper every day between two different worlds of value, enriched in a different way."

One of the main reasons for this trend towards analogue productions and analogue image aesthetics in lomography in photography is the sense of importance that Tanpınar mentions, which experiences have added to things over time. In fact, it is desired to add value to the present with simulations made with productions similar to the past. One of the best examples of this in photography is black and white image aesthetics. A sense of historicity is created with photographs produced using black and white films, and the photographs are given the attributes of importance and weight.

## Conclusion

The artworks have interrogated the artistic productions and schools that were made before them except for the fact that they have taken social facts as their subject and criticized them from the past. Joseph Alois Schumpeter argues that this situation, called "Creative Destructiveness", will cause new phenomena to wear out and destroy other phenomena (Harvey, 2006: 29-30). According to this understanding, to produce a new system, it is necessary to destroy the old system. Art, especially in modernist movements, followed this understanding until postmodernism. But with postmodernism, as Jameson (1985: 115) states, in a world where stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that remains is the imitation of dead styles.

First of all, according to the results obtained throughout the research, the most basic psychological reason for nostalgia is the link between nostalgia and childhood when viewed from a Freudian point of view. It is thought that this is the main reason underlying the nostalgia tendencies of adults that constantly feel for the past, which paves the way for the inaccessibility of childhood to become accessible.

Tech-nostalgia in photography is provided by the simulations of the "authentic" visual aesthetics of the past, produced with digital technology devices, as well as zombie media channels, which means the revival of media that are seen as dead today.

When looking at the reasons for the tech-nostalgia trend in photography, Benjamin's views should be recalled first. It is necessary to remember the nature of the photograph itself, which results in the loss of reproducibility and the loss of the original, parallel to the loss of the aura of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

When looking at polaroid productions as an example of tech-nostalgia in photography, the reasons for the interest in them today are that the image production takes on a theatrical performance and the act of taking photographs precedes the result. In addition, the interest in the hard copy and its physical presence and the possibility to touch it are among the other features that make the polaroid attractive. Another reason for the interest in Polaroids, as explained above - a single one, since it is impossible to reproduce-, is that polaroid productions regain the lost aura of photography, which is the source of the originality and uniqueness of Benjamin's work of art. Finally, it is thought that the contribution of the white frame image and its display value are among the main reasons for the interest in polaroid.

Another main topic that is considered as an example of tech-nostalgia in photography is the Lomography movement, which embraces spontaneity, experimentation, randomness and irregularity. The Lomography movement, which takes experimentalism as its starting point, creates a shock effect on the audience, as Barthes mentioned. In addition, the fact that the works are produced tangibly and permanently, unlike digital, with the analog technology used is another reason for the effect of Lomography. It can also be said that the flawed aesthetics created by the experimentation of Lomography are also an effort to underline being human in contrast to the production of technology devices in the digital world. It is thought that from the past to the present the tech-nostalgia trend is an effort to reflect the expression of experience, thus making today valuable through the resurrection of essentially dead means of production or analog simulations with digital.

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Figure 3. [https://www.lomography.com/magazine/334011-a-tribute-to-25-years-of-lomography-with-lomowall-istanbul?fbclid=IwAR09pAjQK-uIJOLX4tCVfC-FZfGQ-Vwlz8fXiqwXI8vp4ywCT\\_5gtsmVImQ](https://www.lomography.com/magazine/334011-a-tribute-to-25-years-of-lomography-with-lomowall-istanbul?fbclid=IwAR09pAjQK-uIJOLX4tCVfC-FZfGQ-Vwlz8fXiqwXI8vp4ywCT_5gtsmVImQ), Erişim Tarihi: 5 Haziran 2020.

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