The Innovation of Technology: An Introspection on Growth and Obsolescence

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The year was 2007. I had just bought my first cellphone with my own money. It was a prepaid phone with no internet connection, but I could still send and receive text messages and make phone calls. This was my first opportunity to experience the ownership of a life-changing device and I was only twelve years old. Little did I know, it would become a rapid adjustment to the world that we were used to. With more advancements in communication, introduction to social media, et cetera., the world was ever changing with the innovations made through technology. As much as these ideas and creations were shined upon, the more obsolete memories of simplicity became.

“On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic and many areas of North America (and across the world) began to close schools and businesses, among other measures intended to prevent the spread of the virus. At the same time, many regions declared states of emergency and implicated strict public health measures, effectively putting cities under lockdown...” During this period of quarantine, many individuals did not have access to physically seeing their family members for many months. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an inevitable surge in the use of digital technologies due to the social distancing norms and nationwide lockdowns. People and organizations all over the world had to adjust to new ways of work and life. This resulted in an overwhelming need for more effective forms of communication/technology. Due to this, I began experimenting with antiquated family memories which included photographs, letters, and conversations. These recordings brought discoveries of bittersweet moments to light and became the underlying basis of my work.


When I started creating these pieces, my first initial thought was, “How could I make these prints more universally nostalgic?” Although the premise of my pieces is displaying archaic and personal family photographs, various forms of technology serve as stand-ins for the subjects’ heads and correspond with the technology of each generation for the viewer to connect to their own recollections. Throughout the compositions of each piece, the various forms of technology include anything from 1920s radios to 1990s television sets and may prompt one’s longing to go back to an unstandardized world with a lack of social media and less potential triggers for social anxiety. The disarray we belong to (or find ourselves in) today is stressful. The inclusion of uncomplicated devices creates a more settling way for viewers to imagine capturing their own likeness to the print in terms of reminiscing on the technology of their youth. In lighter terms, the viewer can imagine themselves in the photo in a different time that was less fraught with incessant social media feeds and bombardment of messages/images.

When you begin to think about how advanced technology has become for us, what aspect of your life has changed? Discussing the years with my mother before the time that I was born, technology was introduced with the intention of becoming a social construct. It was a way for us as individuals to communicate that essentially became difficult in time even with effective forms
of communication. My mother explains that while she was anticipating going into labor as she was pregnant with me, she could only contact my father by the use of a beeper/pager.

After I was born and grew into my adolescence, cell phones were still not considered a necessity but more of a luxury, as most innovations were. There was a group of neighborhood kids that I grew up with and we would play outside for hours, riding our bikes, or playing on our swing sets. We had no concept of the hours in a day but knew that when the street lights came on, it was time to go home. Our parents were never concerned about our whereabouts and they always trusted the other adults in the neighborhood to keep a watchful eye. Nowadays, it is expected of us to send a text message or share our location to let others know we are on our way, when we make it home safely, et cetera. Technology is contradictory in a way that can make us as individuals feel safe but presents a unique opportunity for others to know more information than we intend to provide - whether it is in regard to our location or more personal insight.

The usage of technology has progressed over the years but also in ways has hindered our ability to form personal relationships and connections. Without these advancements and social media platforms, we were all living in the moment. Relationships were formed from meeting face to face, writing letters, et cetera. The effort contributed to forming these contacts was extraordinary. With the assistance of the telephone, it became easier to communicate with others,
however it was not a guarantee to ensure that connection was meaningful or would later become nonexistent. Ronell explains, “The ghostly contours of techné beckon us to approach. We drown on by the rumor of what has happened to dialogue. It has been assassinated and resurrected in technology’s vampire... Still, since so much echoes through the quiet chamber of the telephone receivers will have been understood as ghostly,” (175-176).

Understanding that the ringing of the telephone can be described as ‘ghostly’ because there is no confirmation of an answer.

Technology is not simply the telephone (whose determination as tool, object, implement, equipment, fantasy, superecogoical machine, etc., remains uncertain). Rather, technology, too, obeys the law of responding, waiting to answer a call at whose origin one encounters so much static when tracing. We cannot yet answer the question concerning technology except, a finite, singular outcome or end product. If answering the call were the answer, then the question would vanish by it. It would have disappeared, long ago taken over by The Answer. Answering a call does not mean you have the answer. This explains why we have to stay within the call that seeks to pull us in.³

Referring back to time spent with the neighborhood kids, because we were introduced to technology at a young age, our friendships dispersed. Time spent outside after school was now

time spent creating MySpace profiles on desktop computers. Turkle writes, “The computer had become a portal that enabled people to lead parallel lives in virtual worlds… we were no longer limited to handfuls of close friends and contacts… focus shifted from the one-on-one with a computer to the relationships of people formed with each other using the computer as an intermediary,” (xi). According to Chesbro and Bonsall, “It may be essential to redefine the meanings of such words as friendship and interpersonal communication as well as to reconsider the usefulness of the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication.” Becoming consumed in an online world made it easier to form connections instead of building up the relationships you already had because we feared the risks and disappointments of relationships insinuating that we expected more from technology and less from each other. At that moment, the shift in our childhoods had changed forever.

Discussing the relationship between interpersonal communication and technology creates a boundary between existent and non-existent entities. The method of incorporating archaic family photographs within my work and the importance of family members within these photos brings significance to the contrasting usage of technology standing in for each subject. The various forms of technology correlates to the birth years of the particular family members found

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within these prints. This takes away the formal identity of the person and makes it more relatable to the viewer. For instance, in the print, *The Day My Love Grew For You, 1997*, the composition of the piece included various forms of radios spanning from the years 1920, 1922 and 1995. The outdated 1920s models of these radios gradually became harder to find and eventually became extinct. The way this personally relates to the photographs is by the obsolescence of the relationship I no longer have with my great grandparents because of their passing. The representation of my great grandparents, in a sense, becomes outdated just like the forms of technology used in place of their identifying heads.

The process of creating these prints starts with the overabundance of nostalgia for a sense of a time that we once yearned for and had wished to go back to. Cultivating these memories produces momentum for the very beginnings of these pieces. The musing of selecting these photographs brought back such wonderful and warm feelings that I will always cherish with the individuals in these photos. The poses of the figures are unique and add to the sense of a loving and meaningful connection, which is often lost in today’s media driven world. Using a basis of Photoshop, the photograph is a foundation for color blocking of more simplistic shapes. The loss of detail serves to bring back the want and need for uncomplicated times and also provides an opportunity for the viewer to relate these pieces with less specific human figures. The integrity of
the figures in the piece stays intact, while the areas of focus shift to the complexity of diverse usage of technology. These pieces create a feeling of what once was, through the photographs and the electronic components, but with a more contemporary sensibility. Each composition changes based on the placement of technology to give a different perspective within the print.

I then take the Photoshop file and convert it to a bitmap, a collection of pixels composed by the values of the image, by the use of halftones in a CMYK color separation. Halftones are described as a collection of discrete dots creating the illusion of an image when blurred together. CMYK refers to the primary colors of pigment (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) and once layered on top of each other, a full color image is created. CMYK colors are considered subtractive because it subtracts the specific pigment from a photograph and when printed becomes gradually darker as the colors blend together. Once the layers are separated, I can print each individual layer onto transparent film or acetate and expose the sheets onto a photosensitive silkscreen. This creates the basis of one of the many forms of the printing process known as screen printing. As each layer is registered and then printed on top of one another through CMYK color separation, the image of the original Photoshop file becomes present.

As the CMYK colors begin to blend together, I like to think of the layers as once being a reflection of the image itself. Each layer represents a memory embedded into the photograph with the representation of the figures themselves producing an abundance of nostalgic memories.
As I produce these prints with that in mind, the process becomes a therapeutic way to reminisce on more simplistic times. Cultivating a bond with the process produces a sense of nostalgic behavior by wanting to continue the repetition of overlapping of the image. The overlay of layers produces the correct shade or hue of each color within the photograph with the use of the halftones. The halftones are also unique in a sense that create the angle of layered dots to become more of a pixelated form to reflect more of the technology aspect in the piece itself.

Although these pieces measure 11” x 14”, they hold intricacy and complexity. Like memories, the smaller and more meaningful ones take up the most room in our core memory. When looking at a photograph of something one remembers, the mind typically rushes back to that time and elicits effects of that memory. Sometimes it will open up something much bigger and unleash memories associated with the people in the photograph and that is where wistfulness sets in. When things, or often people, become obsolete, our mind encourages us to form those recollections that were once made. In the print, *Proud is an Understatement*, 1995, my maternal grandparents are pictured holding my first cousin and myself as infants. I may not be able to remember this particular day, however I can reminisce on times spent with my grandparents as I
grew older. Getting closer to the end of their lives, experiencing dementia and other comorbidities, their beings will become obsolete just like the technology produced within their birth year. When deciding on how to display these prints, I chose a dark cherry wood finish in a 16” x 19” frame to create a more intimate setting in order to establish a home-like ambiance. The placement of these prints within the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art’s Chandler Gallery invites the viewer to approach these works up close to admire the detail.

Thinking about the continuation of these pieces, I anticipate finding myself digging deeper into family history in the future. As the increase of artificial intelligence emerges, the more profound we become as individuals and adhere to an abundance of knowledge of what life was like before being permanently glued to a computer or phone screen. I intend for viewers to reminisce with the older generations of technological creations and think about the effects of the world to come, including the expanding obsolescence among us. No matter how much things change from generation to generation, we can find common ground in our memories.
Installed View: Nostalgic Obsolescence

Installed View: Nostalgic Obsolescence
Nostalgic Obsolescence
A Thesis Exhibition by Haley Noel
June 5th - June 13th 2021 • 11am - 5pm

Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art
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Bibliography


