

Digital Non-photograph and Street Practices in Egypt: The Aesthetic of Chance

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Abstract

Photography is considered a medium that reflects reality according to the point of view of the shooter, and constructs it through representation. Shooters of photograph attempt to follow rules that make a good picture. However, this paper claims that use of camera phone has led to the rise of new mode of picturing; principally digital non-photography. The paper proposes that digital non-photographs, which are posted on a Facebook account, are paradigmatic reflections of street practices, and imitations of what any spectator would see in the streets of Egypt everyday. Paradoxically, although non-photographs of streets in Egypt are accidental, and echo discursive and fragment visual replications of rituals and practices, they reflect aesthetic values, and unwittingly signify an aesthetic of chance.

Keywords: camera phone, non-photograph, semiotics, design, aesthetic, street.

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The rapid expansion of Wireless and Internet technologies in Egypt has intensified Egyptians' reliability on mobile-phones, and virtual social networks. Of total number of population,⁽¹⁾ The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in Egypt (2010) reported that Egypt registered 58.97 million subscribers of mobile-phones and 19.65 million Internet users in June 2010. Users of mobile-phones users in Egypt tend to utilize their camera phones to hyper-screen street practices and rituals.

Recalling Marshall McLuhan's laws of Media, camera phone seems to extend our vision (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967: p.26). Camera phones are often used in social environments, where pictures document social moments. In addition to registering social networks' visual experiences, users employ their camera phones to picture scenes they like, or to provide visual testimonies for situations they consider strange. The latter type of visual testimony has recently penetrated the Facebook, onto which 1164 pictures that describe odd situations and practices in streets of Egypt have been posted to an account entitled, 'Observing the Strangeness of Egyptian Streets: Only in Egypt'.

This paper looks into the images captured of streets of Egypt in order to explore how camera phones contribute to the rise of a new mode of visual culture in Egypt, principally the

(1) According to the recent statistics of population in Egypt, prepared by the Ministry of Health and Population in Egypt, the number of population in Egypt scored 76.824 million inhabitants by the second half of 2009. For more statistics about population in Egypt, please visit the website of the Ministry of Health and Population at:
<http://www.mohip.gov.eg/Sec/Statistics/statistics1.asp?x=1>

street non-photograph. The paper will discuss how non-photography has been a sight for practices and rituals in Egyptian Streets. Since shooters of street's pictures aim to register what they think odd, this paper looks at the surface and in-depth meanings that could be generated from street digital non-photographs, and the aesthetic stimuli that provoked non-photographers and grasped their attention.

Defining the digital non-photograph(er)

Camera phone benefits from the advantages that digital technology has brought to photography. Digital technology not only reduces the time-cycle of photograph capturing and allows high-resolution photograph, but also gives the shooter supremacy over image quality (Anderson, 2003: p.11). However, the convergence between wireless telephony and digital technology reproduces a new form of imaging, and ushering new mode of controlling. Whereas professional and amateur photographers aim to produce digital photographs that reflect their understanding and perfection of principles and rules of photography, the users of camera phone seem to liberate themselves of photography doctrines. The primacy that camera phone has led to is the emergence of a non-photographic mode of production, which can be termed as the digital non-photograph.

The term 'the digital non-photograph' evokes preliminary inquiries. Questions such as - what ushers the need for a new term? What makes the term, 'non-photograph', different than the term 'photograph'? – are prerequisite inquiries. The arrival of digital photography, particularly camera phone, motivates the

need for a new term to reconsider elements, such as conventions of photograph, context of picturing, the characteristic of the shooter, and the type of the medium. These elements intersect with time and place where the photograph is taken.

Digital non-photograph infringes the rules of photograph. The non-photograph ushers “an unrestrained thought by freeing the individual from any external measures” (Nista, 2000) necessary for a conventional photograph. It does not necessarily signify the correct composition, the perfect position, nor the angle and distance from the subject that is being pictured. It is not bound to follow the ratio of shapes, brightness, contrast, shades, and colors. Photographic rules that a digital non-photograph is not prone to obey also include the amount of light, the depth of focusing, the length of the lens, the photographer’s perspective, the placement of other objects in the frame, and balance in the scene. The scene of the non-photograph could be too busy, and/or without background. The subject that is being photographed could be leaving the frame, or too far or even missing from the scene (Nista, 2000).

From more aesthetic perspective, street digital non-photograph does not have what Rudolf Arnheim called the ‘visual peculiarities’. According to Arnheim, a photograph must instill its “visual peculiarities”, in which “shapes are selected, partially transformed by the picture taker” (Snyder and Walsh, 1975: p. 147). Using high camera angle, for example, shrinks the size of shapes; therefore they appear smaller than they actually are. On the contrary, in a street digital non-photograph, shapes are not selected nor transformed or treated by the shooter, simply

because the digital non-photographer does not propose to alter the shapes she/he is facing, but rather she/he intends to document the scene before it is left out.

The character of the shooter of a non-photograph is a defining factor as well. The digital non-photographer is not an amateur photographer, nor a snap-shooter. Amateur photographer and snap-shooter do not snap randomly, but rather select people, objects, places, and scenes they want to photograph. The snap-shooter, particularly, engages a degree of affection in the pictures she/he takes (Cobley and Haeffner, 2009: pp. 126-127). Douglas R. Nickel (1995) argues that the snapshot “is, by design, an object of sentiment”, in which the snap-shooter wraps the subject in the photograph with an emotional response (Cobley and Haeffner, 2009: pp. 126). Unlike the snap-shooter, the non-photographer is emotionally detached from the subjects appear in the scene. Her/his dissidence against the scene does not involve sentimental response, because subjects are anonymous.

The digital non-photographer is a casual shooter of pictures with her/his camera phone. The non-photographer does not roam visually, nor practice what Howard Dearstyne (1955: p. 245) calls “the act of selection”, in which the photographer “chooses some particular configuration of things” (Dearstyne, 1955: p. 245). The non-photographer captures what Harvey May and Greg Hearn calls “the fleeting and unexpected” (May and Hearn, 2005: p. 205). Coincidentally, it happens for the non-photographer to be present, with her/his camera phone in a street, when scene or a practice grasps her/his attention. The casual

presence of the non-photographer and the physical status of the subject/object, which could be passing by the shooter, suggest that the non-photographer does not take her/his pictures on the basis of the visual specification of the scene. Furthermore, the digital non-photographer abandons the rules of photography; they are unnecessary for the non-photographer, not merely because she/he wants to remain independent from rules and guidelines of good-quality photography, but more importantly because he is not aware of them. By disregarding the quality of the digital image she/he snaps, the digital non-photographer focuses more on documenting the objects/subject facing her/him.

Understanding what distinguishes the non-photographer from the photographer is scholarly compelling. Scholars such as Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin do not distinguish between the photographer and the non-photographer when describing the relationships between photography, photographer, and reality. “For Barthes, the photograph is able to present us with social and material world through its power to convince us that, whatever else the image evokes, there is a simple correspondence to a reality in the past” (Dant and Gilloch, 2002: p. 6).

A deconstructive understanding of Barthes explains that he refers to professional photographer, armature photographer, or at least a snap shooter. If the photograph has a ‘power to convince us’, undoubtedly, it is the photographer that boosts its primacy. In other words, if the shooter is unaware of the rules of photography, attempting to document what exists in front of the lens of her phone camera, how can she make her picture powerful and convincing?

The power of non-photograph does not lie on the shooter, but rather on, what Walter Benjamin terms the ‘aura’. Benjamin writes (2005: p. 3):

We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch.

Following Benjamin’s premise, the non-photograph of street’s scene is the ‘aura’ of that scene; it is an authentic copy of objects in the scene. The non-photographer does not attempt to alter it or destroy the scene’s aura. At the moment of capturing the scene, the non-photograph is customized according to the specification of the camera phone.

The context of picturing: Streets in Egypt

Streets are usually awash with objects that draw people’s attention. Some streets become photogenic and made the names of their cities; other streets are rather poor but still eminent for many photographs’ shooters. The Egypt Human Development Report 2010⁽¹⁾ explicates what makes streets in Egypt appealing for users of camera phones. The poor, complex, and even chaotic

(1) The Egypt Human Development Report 2010 is conducted by The Institute of National Planning (INP) with the cooperation of The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

conditions of streets in Egypt have led to paradoxes, practices, and rituals, which captivate the attention of the digital non-photographer. According to The Egypt Human Development Report 2010, most Egyptian streets are unplanned and surrounded with random constructions (The Institute of National Planning, 2010: pp. 84-85). The haphazard conditions of urban planning create narrow streets lacking sufficient infrastructure, impoverished roads, high degree of crowdedness, and insecure public and private transportation (INP, 2010: p. 85). Urban transportation, the report argues, remains one of the major critical issues in Egyptian Streets (INP, 2010: p. 201). The public transport system is very poor, and the railway system is the main means for people to move between cities, even though the system is overloaded with a constant excess of passengers (INP, 2010: p. 201). In a similar vein, the INP's report (2010: p. 202) indicates that public buses are either poorly maintained or out of service. Other types of transportation, such a private buses and trucks, do not comply with rules of capacity, loads and weights, and always seem to lack basic safety measures. The INP's report (2010: p. 160) also shows that street vendors and drivers of motor vehicles have become iconic signs, considering their work among the fastest growing occupations in Egypt between 2000 and 2007.

With the rapid spreading out of the camera phones in Egypt, street non-photography has become a social practice occurring anytime and at any place. It is always a mere coincidence that a shooter of non-photograph is present in the right time and place, when a subject/object/incident attracts

her/his attention. The place, where the non-photographer takes pictures, could be a moving vehicle, a standing point in the street, or a spot in a balcony or a roof of building. At the moment of shooting, the shooter of non-photograph could be alone or in company. If a digital non-photographer is shooting from a stable street point, it is complicated to ascertain then whether she is alone or not. If the digital non-photographer is shooting from a moving vehicle, it is very likely then that she is with company, simply because it is impractical for the digital non-photographer to shoot his picture while driving a vehicle. The context of shooting becomes more problematic in this case if the decision of shooting a picture is taken by the driver, not the shooter per se. In this case, the shooter of a non-photograph acts as an agent and mediator between of the desire of vehicle's driver to document the scene and the object being photographed. This point, particularly, re-confirms the claim of this paper that the digital non-photographer is just a casual shooter of a digital image.

Characterizing street digital non-photograph

Delineating street digital non-photograph as a coincidental shot, taken by a casual shooter, resonates with its communication attributes. Street digital non-photograph would reflect a sort of 'presentational communication' (Cobley and Haeffner, 2009: p. 128). The 'presentational communication' represents a practice or an object "in a 'realistic' way, eschewing the kind of 'trick effects'" (Cobley and Haeffner, 2009: p. 132).

Characteristics of street digital non-photograph are driven from its domain as a 'document'. It is perceived as a document,

since it has strong connection to reality. In being so, the street digital non-photograph “rests on the ingenuous faith that a photograph talks by itself, and that pure documentary is already in itself a vehicle, replete if not overflowing, with explicit meanings” (Ferrarotti, 1993: p. 80).

Although street digital non-photograph will decidedly overlook details outside its frame, the faith - that object/subject inside the frame is an accurate replication of appearance without a vantage point – is legitimate reason to support the street non-photograph’s bond with reality (Sayedoff, 1997: p. 202). The street digital non-photograph embraces mutual characteristics, it can be perceived as (1) ‘naturalistic’, (2) ‘reflections of socio-cultural strata’, (3) ‘ironic’, (4) ‘paradigmatic’, and (5) ‘aesthetic of chance’. It is *naturalistic*, because streets look real. By naturalistic Peter Henry Emerson means that “a scene in such a way as to be, as much as possible, identical with the visual impression an observer would get at the actual spot” (Snyder and Walsh, 1975: p. 144).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Hence, a seated observer in a moving vehicle would produce a non-photograph that provides the same visual impression as someone who looks at the object from a moving vehicle. The

causality in the shooting context and randomness that surround the frame of the digital non-photograph makes it natural.

If the street digital non-photograph is naturalistic, it will reflect the social and cultural strata of objects/subjects depicted. The non-photographs show what people are doing, and often reveal social relations among people depicted and their *socio-economic status* (Marcus, 2001, p. 15). Figures 1 & 2 & 3 that respectively show students packed into a truck, a family squeezed on a Vespa, and people standing on the sides of train engine are taken in their realistic contexts, and suggest that those people are economically poor; otherwise they would have not taken the risk to use those vehicles unsafely.

Most street digital non-photographs are *ironic*. Irony in the street digital non-photograph refers to the reason upon which the shooter decides to picture the object/subject. It results from paradoxes, disharmony, and strangeness of object/subject. In this sense, a street non-photograph represents practice whose “condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was” (Hutchens, 1960: p. 352).

But, whereas an ironic street photograph could encompass deceit or at least tricks, based on the contradiction between what appears in the photograph and truth, non-photograph rests on the reality of street practices (Hutchens, 1960: p. 353). Therefore, in a street digital non-photograph, contradiction between how people behave in a street and how they should behave remains imagined by the shooter. Imagined contradictions generated from a street digital non-photograph represent realist-idealist relation. That is to say, while practices appear in street digital non-

photographs are realistic, imagined contradictions are idealistic. In this sense, the street digital non-photograph is seen as “condemnatory” (Scott, 2004: p. 32), because the shooter imaginatively rejects what appears in front of the lens of his/her camera phone.

Street digital non-photographs invoke *paradigmatic* relations, because they belong to the same category, are pictured in the same context, and share similar functions (Chandler, 2002). In the case of the digital non-photographs of Egyptian streets, it is obvious that non-photographs are taken by accidental shooters, lack professional standards of digital photography, and document objects and practices that exist or are taken place in streets. Paradigmatically, street digital non-photographs are not units linked into horizontal chain to generate intact meaning that is based on their placement in the chain, but rather they are vertical units, separated substitutions, wherein each digital non-photograph creates its own meaning.

Despite the accidental character allocated to it, many of the street digital non-photographs, especially with the case of Egyptian Streets, can be seen as *an aesthetic of chance*. Non-photographers seem to respond unwittingly to aesthetic stimuli. The analysis of the digital non-photographs of streets in Egypt shows attentiveness to rules of composition, and design principles, such as balance, proportion, contrast, and harmony. Yet, shooters of non-photographs do not create an aesthetic value, but they come across it when seeing the object/subject in street (Wind, 1925: p. 351). In doing so, the non-photographer “cannot infer an aesthetic value” (Wind, 1925, p. 351), but gives

the object once it appears an immediate aesthetic value (Wind, 1925: p. 351). Therefore, the aesthetic value is “necessarily an individual value one” (Wind, 1925: p. 352), however, it is still an unintentional value based on vigorous stimulus of the street object/subject. In a different given context, it is an absolute chance that the non-photographer would make the same aesthetic judgment again.

Theoretical approaches: Visual cultural studies and hyper-screening of reality

The case of the street digital non-photograph in Egypt evokes three theoretical and overlapping areas: culture studies, visual culture, and mediation and/or immediation of reality. To start off, cultural studies is a deconstructive approach that breaks through mass culture, shifting the attention toward the forms and practices of culture in everyday life. It examines how culture is produced, regulated, consumed, by and through social group(s) or institutions, and the power relations between those groups or institutions (Lister and Wells, 2001: p. 61).

The culture of everyday life is not merely visual, but as Nicholas Mirzoeff wrote, “is now more visual and visualized than ever before” (Poster, 2002: p. 67). Mark Poster (2002: pp. 67, 68) believes that people are not using their eyes more excessively than before, but rather they are surrounded with different visual regimes. Scholars are not talking about a culture that is visual, but rather a ‘visual culture’. Walker, J. A and Chaplin, S. (2006: p. 22) define ‘visual culture’ as:

those material artifacts, buildings and images, and plus time-based media and performances, produced by human labour and imagination, which serve aesthetic, symbolic, ritualistic or ideological-political ends, and/or practical functions, and which address the sense of sight to a significant extent.

Visual culture is not only concerned with the production of images, but with the consumption of “information, meaning or pleasure sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology” (Mirzoeff, 2006: p. 120).

Camera phone is one of those new technological regimes, which enables people to look at streets through the lens of multi usages device. From a visual cultural perspective, shooting pictures with camera phone becomes a tendency to visualize existence (Mirzoeff, 2006: p. 123). Although people use mobile phones for primer functions, such as making calls and texting, taking a picture by camera phone is still natural, because people carry their camera phone most of the time. As taking picture is not a primer usage for a mobile-phone user, all necessary factors to produce a good quality ‘photograph’ become less important and may vanish.

Correspondingly, in the case of the street digital non-photograph, the role of the shooter is diminished. Whereas the identity of mediator and her social status are key factors in the

production of any content, the digital non-photographers of streets in Egypt are anonymous. Therefore more primacy is given to the practices in streets, and the context of production of those practices than to the identity and values of the shooter of picture. In other words, cultural studies is employed in this study to recognize the social process of ‘looking’ visually at specific practices where they take place (Lister and Wells, 2001: p. 64). Reciprocally, the digital non-photographs of streets in Egypt become a social practice, an occurrence of everyday life, and a social product that communicates ‘culture as practice’ (Long, 1997: p. 7). One might consider the digital non-photograph as a discursive ‘visual method’ of cultural studies that examines culture of middle and low classes in Egypt in relation to social and economic relations and practices signified in images (Rose, 2001: p. 17). Hence, digital non-photograph of streets of Egypt show social practices, such as the use of public and private transportation, economic practices, which can be seen in the announcements and billboard of stores, and communication messages through writings on walls and vehicles, logos, and advertisements.

Yet, the act of ‘showing’ does not classify the digital non-photograph as a ‘visual medium’, but rather as ‘visual space’ of culture. The camera phone does not mediate the scene being captured. Visualizing culture, according to Nicholas Mirzoeff, enable seeing of pictures “not as representations, artificial constructs seeking to imitate an object, but as being closely related, or even identical, to that object” (Mirzoeff, 2006: p. 123). Likewise, the non-photographer does not attempt to alter

what she/he sees in a street. Unlike photography - which Joel Snyder has called ‘Picturing the Invisible’, showing what cannot be seen with the ‘naked eye’ (Mitchell, 2005: p. 260) - the digital non-photograph would reflect what viewers would see with their eyes. While photography translates the unseen “into something that looks like a picture of something that we could never see” (Mitchell, 2005: p. 260), a “performative version of the real mediated by the medium” (Stiegler, 2008: p. 194), the non-photograph enables unproblematic reading of the seen.

If the digital non-photograph is repudiated as a ‘visual medium’, would it ‘immediate’ reality then? The digital non-photograph allows hyper-screening of reality, a hyper-reality, in which the non-photographer looks, through the camera of the mobile phone, at subject/object in the street (Marcus, 2001: p. 10). Repurposing what Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999: p. 110) wrote about photography, the non-photograph is “an expression of the desire for immediacy”. Jean Baudrillard (2002: p. 521) describes the hyperreal as a generated model of the real without reality, a simulation of reality. The street digital non-photograph is, therefore, a hyperspace without the real atmosphere of the street (Baudrillard, 2002: p. 522). In the street digital non-photograph, reality is subordinated to the screen, leading to a hyperspace, while removing the real context, time, and place where the non-photograph was taken.

Methodology: semiotic and aesthetic analyses

This paper adopts two operational methodologies: semiotic and aesthetic analyses. While the former looks into the

referential sign, the external relations, the meanings that can be found in the textual messages, un-coded and coded visual images - thereby investigating surface and innate meanings in the non-photographs - the latter, the aesthetic analysis, explores how non-photographers were engaged un/consciously with internal relation of the scene, or with principles of composition of objects (Jamieson, 2007: pp. 76-77).

In *Social Semiotics*, Hodge and Kress (1988, p.1) note that “semiotics offers the promises of systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of communications phenomena as a whole, not just in some instances of it”. Semiotics is widely concerned with the organization and interpretation of meaning. An examination of the semiotic perspective reveals that meaning is not “transmitted to us, rather we create it through a complex interplay of codes and conventions, of semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign; it refers to anything which we are normally unaware” (Chandler, 2002: p.14).

The model of semiotic analysis adopted herein is based on Ronald Barthes’ article, *Rhetoric of Image*, and Charles Peirce’s trichotomy (*icon, index, symbol*). According to Barthes (1985: p. 196), an image may include linguistic messages, non-coded iconic messages (the denoted image), and coded iconic messages (the connoted image). The linguistic message could add fresh information to the image; the image could also be perceived as duplication of messages given in the text (Barthes, 1985: p. 196). The denoted image may have “at least one meaning at the level of identification of the scene presented” (Barthes, 1985: p. 199). This meaning is “constituted by what is left in the image when

the signs of connotation are mentally deleted” (Barthes, 1985: p. 199). In the case of the street digital non photograph, the denoted meaning reinforces the myth of photographic naturalness’, especially because the minimal intervention of the non-photographer, which increases the sense that the scene is captured mechanically (Barthes, 1985: p. 200).

Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic model, entailing: (1) the representamen, which refers to the form that the sign takes, (2) an interpretant, which does not point to the interpreter, but rather the sense of the sign, and (3) the object which the sign refers to (Chandler, 2002: p.32). Although both representamen and interpretant in Peirce’s model are similar to the signifier and the signified in Ferdinand de Saussure’s model, Peirce noted that a sign creates an equivalent sign in the mind of somebody, or perhaps, a more developed sign (Chandler, 2002: p.33). The Peirce’s model adopted for analysis in this paper looks at the relationship of the sign and its object. The sign that resembles its object is called an *icon*, and the sign that has physical relationship to its objects is called an *index* (Skidmore, 1981: p. 45). According to Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), “an indexical sign designates what it directs attention to” (Noth, 1995: p. 54). An index looks at the ‘inherent’ relationship between the signifier and signified, which is usually associative (Rose, 2001: p. 78). If the relationship between the sign and its object is conventional, this sign is called a *symbol* (Skidmore, 1981: p. 45).

Aesthetic analysis is the second methodology adopted herein. Aesthetics is used as synonymous to ‘beauty’, and the

sphere of aesthetics is occupied by the works of art (Sesemann, 2007: p. 1). But aesthetics, as a concept I employ in this paper, refers to how objects and things look, sound, and appear (Koren, 2010: p. 18). Aesthetics can be driven by senses, emotions preferences, desires, behavior, will, intellect, conscious/subconscious, sociological and cultural institutions, training, (Chan, 2009: p. 16). That is to say that this study does not gauge the aesthetic values of non-photographers, but rather looks into the internal form or composition of the scene that triggers the attention of non-photographers; it is, therefore, not a place of argument; “it is a place of the immediate and of intuition” (Jamieson, 2007: pp. 77-78).

As the street digital non-photographs show strange, often ugly and rarely beautiful, objects, practices and rituals, aesthetic analysis aims to examine the aesthetic attitude of non-photographers, the internal form and composition of objects that captivate their attention. Stolnitz, Jerome (1998: p. 80) defines the aesthetic attitude as “disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone”. What makes the non-photographers aesthetically ‘disinterested’ is that they look at the object(s) in streets for their own sake, and they do not attempt to study or manipulate them. That is to say that there is no aesthetic purpose governing the experience of the non-photographers except the purpose of unintentionally taking pictures of objects/subject streets (Stolintz, 1998: p. 80).

The aesthetic analysis is based on two components of the aesthetic experience: A) the objects that captured the attention of

the non-photographers. The aesthetic analysis of objects will show the design elements, and design principles that trigger the non-photographer's attention. Among the design elements and principles that the analysis will consider: color, size, space, capacity, balance, contrast, rhythm, harmony, and proportion. B) The context of the experience; the streets in Egypt. The analysis of non-photographs will explain how features of streets in Egypt reveal aesthetic positions.

Analysis of street digital non-photographs

To conduct the analysis of street digital non-photograph, 302 un-copy righted images are looked at and stored from the Facebook account, entitled 'Observing the Strangeness of Egyptian



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Streets: Only in Egypt'. Of the 302 images, 20 non-photographs are selected as sample of the street digital non-photographs. Semiotic analysis will be used to look at un-coded visual images to describe the surface meaning and iconic signs, and coded visual images to examine the connotative meanings in relation to their symbolic and indexical signs. The second part of the analysis will look into the aesthetic experiences of non-photographers.

Un-coded and coded images of street digital non-photograph

All non-photographs have surface meanings, scenes to show, practices to tell about. But surface meaning of some non-photographs floats than others. Some of those non-photographs describe scenes, which show contradiction between societal value and social behavior. Figures 4 & 5 strikingly show three different places in Cairo, wherein garbage is scattered, despite the signs posted for 'The International Day for Environment' in Figure 4, and the General Association of Cleanness and Beauty in Giza in Figure 5. Those non-photographs represent how people dirty streets of Cairo, and violate a vital societal value for

a healthy environment. Beyond the surface meaning of those non-photographs is the lack of the government in Egypt to cope with garbage's collect from streets.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Non-photographs reveal further infringement of trademark. Figures 6 & 7 show two stores using 'Google' trademark for their stores' names. This indicates that 'Google' has become iconic among Egyptian youths, therefore one of the two stores' owners used it for fast food restaurant (Figure 6), wherein the second owner utilized the logo for an Internet café and computer gaming and maintenance (Figure 7). Those non-photographs additionally demonstrate that stores that borrowed the trademark of 'Google' are located in poor areas, where stores operate without licenses, and municipal accountability is lacking. Of the iconic objects that scattered in poor streets of Egypt is the auto rickshaw or what is known with the 'tuk-tuk'. The prevalence of

the ‘tuk-tuk’ - which is shown in Figure 8 - in poor areas was a response to the people demand for small vehicle that can sneak in narrow streets.

A common practice that non-photographers captured includes the designations food vendors give to their business. As shown in Figures 9 & 10 food vendors tend to describe themselves as ‘specialist’, ‘pharmacist’, or ‘medical doctor’. For example, Figure 9, the shows a street food vendor, who offers a popular meal in Egypt (Kushri), calling himself the ‘pharmacist’. Likewise, in Figure 10 the street food vendor considers himself a ‘doctor’, a ‘specialist’ of Dumpling, and a ‘consultant’ of Mussel Sham. The association between academic and medical terms and food connotes how academic and medical terms are symbols of professionalism, and how vendors associate those iconic terms to appeal to customers. The employment of academic and medical designations explains how those terms are culturally commodified, simply because medical doctors tend to hang posts about their expertise over their clinic’s door, or clinic’s balcony. In the mind of street vendors, their food expertise can be marketed the same way.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

From symbolic and indexical perspectives, street digital non-photographs signify the socio-economic status of subjects. The ‘tuk-tuk’ has become a sign of poor streets, especially in suburbs, where people can get speedy rides. It also runs in areas, where public transportation is lacking among districts of new cities. The ‘tuk-tuk’ passengers are mostly poor people who can not afford other types of transportation. The indexical signs of street digital non-photographs would direct its viewer to meanings related to what appears in the digital non-photograph. For example, Figures 2 & 3 & 4, and 11 indicate the lack of basic understanding to safety measures when using transportation, which may lead to different types of accidents. Figure 11, particularly shows a bus, whose route is set as ‘happy trip’; while ironically connote the menace of climbing the front of a bus.

In a different vein, garbage scattered in streets, shown in Figures 4 & 5, implies that throwing garbage in street has become a regular practice, and reflects governmental malfunction and absence of disciplinary measures to keep streets clean. The failure to maintain clean streets lead to pollution and food contamination, especially if people walk in streets while exposing their food to air (Figure 8).

The Aesthetics judgments of ugly scenes and strange practices in the streets of Egypt.

The street digital non-photographs do not show the beauty of streets in Egypt. Rather, they are centered on ugly scenes or unacceptable practices. In other words, if one were to borrow Benedict Anderson's conception of 'imagined communities', non-photographers seem to picture undesirable practices in poor streets even though they never met each other (Anderson, 1983, p.6). When documenting, non-photographers show streets as narrow, unplanned, or crowded with people, cars and street vendors. Figure 12 presents a pattern of streets in a poor district, showing how narrow a street looks in poor and unplanned urban areas. Narrow streets could facilitate social interaction among people; however they are vulnerable for incidents, such as fire or earthquakes, thereby making it difficult for rescue efforts.

Analysis of ugly scenes or strange practices that intrigue non-photographers shows that non-photographers are attracted by design principles' stimuli. Those stimuli further suggest two levels of aesthetic judgments of the non-photographers: micro-aesthetic judgment, and macro-aesthetic judgment. Micro-

aesthetic judgment encompasses stimuli based on obvious design principles, such as, balance, proportion, rhythm and repetition. To start off, balance is an identifiable principle, since it is obvious in the non-photograph. Figure 13 describes that balance the subjects manage to achieve is the main denominator that attracts the non-photographers' attention. Proportion also seems to be appealing design principle to non-photographers. Many of the non-photographs captured are centered on the lack of proportion between capacity and weight. As shown in Figure 14 the capacity of the trucks and the weight of the products loaded are not congruent. Non-photographers also document instances in figure 15.



Figure 13



Figure 14

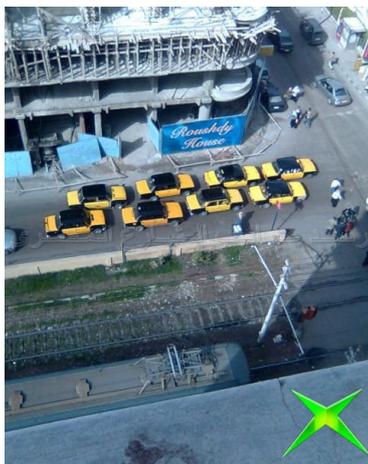


Figure 15

Macro-aesthetic judgment includes more delicate design principles, such as contrast, and harmony. Contrast reflects the irony behind the non-photograph; an imagined disagreement of the non-photographer with what appears in the scene. Paradoxically, if the scene appears in the non-photograph had been idealistic; it is very probable that the non-photographer would have not documented it. This principle, contrast, appears in most digital non-photographs of streets in Egypt. Harmony is more associated with the level of taste the non-photographer naturally develops. Figure 16 shows that unharmonious colors of the building seemed to be an issue for the non-photographer, while the fluctuation of buildings' height, shown in Figure 17, reflects the lack of architecture synchronization.



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

Few non-photographs are found to include embedded aesthetic sense that is based on the composition of the elements in the scene, and not merely a principle of design. Figure 18 suggests that the non-photographer was not fascinated by the composition occurred because of cars and buses' overlap in a street intersection but rather by how chaotic the scene is. The shoddy resolution of figure 18, the form of the vehicles in the scene, and the accidental angle the non-photographer used created an artistic form. More examples of unintentional aesthetic generated from non-photographs can be observed in the figures 19 & 20. As shown in Figure 19, the non-photographer attempted to focus on the undesirable act of the driver of a horse cart, who was stirring the beans pot in a street. Nonetheless, the form the shiny beans' pots takes and the position of the horse cart in contrast to a modern but dark vehicle on top of the non-photograph created a tableau. The wheel trace that appears in the picture seems to separates between two eras, modern pretentious

signified by the black automobile and pre-modern natural horse cart man, who cooks beans in the middle of the street. Figure 20 expresses the frustration of the non-photographer as she/he documented two unrelated objects; old water pottery and modern back bag clinched to a tree fence. From aesthetic point of view, the water pottery and tree evoke naturalism, while the siege surrounding the tree, the black back-bag hanging on it, and snack bag on the ground, are modern objects attempt to infringe the natural scene. The yellowish grey color of the wall at the back of sieged tree adds more artistic impact on the whole scene.



Figure 19



Figure 20

Conclusion

Non-photographs pictured an image of poor streets and roads in Egypt, showing chaotic scenes and undesirable

practices. People throw garbage anywhere, pedestrians, vehicles' drivers and passengers do not necessarily follow safety measurements, and business owners seem to violate trademarks. Buildings' walls are spaces of communication to deliver messages to people living in the same neighborhood, and messages on vehicles are form of self-expression. Going beyond the surface meanings, the non-photographs of streets of Egypt provoke the dilemma of the lack of sense of belonging among people, which is resulted by the "government's shoddy performance and its poor record that most Egyptians have become passive citizens" (Heggy, 2007). This state of passive nationalism requires people to shift toward what Tarek Heggy, an Egyptian writer, called 'positive nationalism', "which can transform[s] them from being interested solely in rights and benefits to being mindful of their duties to society and to the nation" (Heggy, 2007).

From communication perspective, non-photograph is a form of expression of reality, a hyper-mediation of a scene without a persistent viewpoint. The non-photographer rapidly perceives the scene she/he pictures, but his cognition does not infringe her/his usage of the camera phone, as she/he merely attempts to document what the camera is facing. Despite the non-photographer's resentment of the scene, she/he does not attempt to worsen the scene. As a result, the non-photograph has become a space to mirror cultural practices and the status quo. Having said that, the non-photograph can be seen as a communication product that attempts to reflect or document reality instead of altering it, yet because reality is still absent,

non-photograph has become a space of hyper screening of reality. The unintentional and accidental presence of the non-photographer at the place of the scene blurs a significant process of mediation; the selection of content being represented.

Aesthetically speaking, street digital non-photographs echoes various design principles, which reflect implicit aesthetic judgments that non-photographers cognitively and unconsciously make. Those judgments could be based on the intuition of non-photographers, or the aesthetic taste they develop naturally. Simple design principles, such as balance, proportion, and rhythm can be observed and naturally learned from situations in daily life. Some of those non-photographs trigger accidental aesthetic, because non-photographers are unaware that some of their shots are artistic.

Nonetheless, non-photographs can not be deemed aleatoric art, because their shooters do not attempt to produce any work of art, but they resonate with the argument of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck on randomness and probability as fundamental preconditions and conditions of modernity (Kelsey, 2008: p. 15). Non-photographs are random pictures taken by wanders holding mobile phones, the chance that any of them turns to be a work of art, or include some aesthetic principles, could be im/probable.

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