

ANALOGUE PHOTO BOOTHS IN BERLIN

A STAGE, A TRAP, A CONDENSER

AND FOUR SHOTS FOR KISSING THE PERSON YOU LOVE



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Figure 1 You know you're in Berlin when...
Photoautomat is a must, Anna Mossolova
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Dead media cosmologies

Why do analogue photos still fascinate young people? Why, for some purposes, might vintage technologies be considered more authentic than newer ones? And what is the contribution of old-school photo booths to Berlin as a city? To explore these questions in depth, I dedicated several months to observing people around analogue photo booths. My purpose was not to elaborate a ‘thick’ description of the uses of these machines, but rather to think about the reasons new generations are still attracted by these seemingly obsolete machines, and to ask what kind of input old-school booths make in the production of Berlin’s atmosphere and charm. As I saw during my fieldwork, hundreds of people use them every day, for the purpose of recording key moments in their lives, and to materialize relationships and events, using, paradoxically, an analogue machine that had disappeared from the cityscape, being considered obsolete, only twenty years ago.

This essay emphasizes how past media is localized in the present by arguing that the transformations brought about by social media in its sharing and consumption are as important for contemporary photography as the transition from analogue to digital (see Favero 2013; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). Moreover, this research draws on the assumption that digital and analogue photographic devices are interdependent, and not in opposition, mutually changing the conceptualizations of media producers and consumers (Boyer 2012; Maguadda 2011; Miller 2015).

Indeed, this was confirmed during my fieldwork, when two friends of mine posted scanned pictures on Facebook that were taken in analogue photo booths in Berlin. The first, Anna, added, ‘You know you’re in Berlin when... *Photoautomat* is a must.’ (March 2017); while



Figure 2 Just found in a box, Laura Lucchini 2017.

Laura, the second, added, ‘Just found in a box.’ (August 2017). Another friend, Elisa (25), who came with me to observe the *Photoautomat* a couple of times, sent me a scanned copy of a strip made the night she left Berlin, including a red ‘Adieu’ written on it. Asked about her opinion on the analogue booths, she told me:

I like it as an aesthetic and social object. In Paris, I took photos in a normal machine and got sixteen copies that I’ve been using for the last four years. So, to take a photo in this old-school photo booth is like opposing the arrow of time. You cannot get many, nor use the same photo for several years; rather, these photos work as a landmark... they are not static... and you can tell a story with them, just by changing your gestures.

(fieldnotes, August 2013)

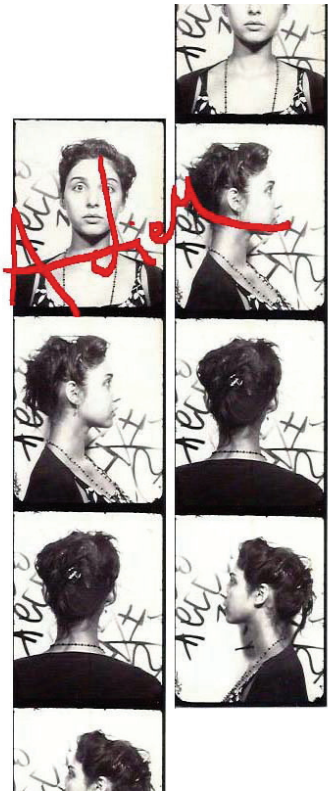


Figure 3 Farewell, Elisa August 2013.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the revitalization of so-called dead media and their cosmologies. For instance, Dominik Schrey (2014) argues that analogue media has become a signifier of authenticity in an increasingly digital world. Also, Jussi Parikka (2012) describes a 'zombie quality' that underlines the non-linear development of technological advancement. In addition, Simon Reynolds (2011) noted that the beginning of the twenty-first century has been culturally dominated by the 're-' prefix (revivals, remakes, re-enactments etc.). Lastly, Charlie Gere (2005) has suggested that digital technologies have generated a fear of the annihilation of physical distance and the dissolution of material reality.

Every day, Christian (41) works to maintain the material reality of the old-school booths by

cleaning them and changing the chemicals. In his view, 'the magic of the *Photoautomat* is that it becomes a little living room with a surprising outcome that you can touch – a tangible piece of reality that serves to celebrate special moments or share experiences with friends'. Christian has been in charge of the maintenance of these old-school booths for a decade, and shows himself confident and quick when servicing the machines. Asked about the difference from a digital booth, Christian stated that 'in the end, the difference is not that big; the quality of the pictures, the memories, the feeling of surprise... perhaps also the duration, in the sense that analogue photos do not expire and the machines last longer' (fieldnotes, July 2017). As Christian explains,

The Photoautomat is a place. It does not simply provide a photo but also an occasion and a roof, an occasion to kiss the person you love, and a space for playing that is your own. For me, and I guess for the people of my generation, it brings back memories of childhood. At the time, I was in Italy and took pictures in the booth following the style of the Red Brigade,¹ as if I was kidnapped by them, demanding a ransom from my parents.

As engines of the imaginary, old technologies have influence on the next ones in such a way that 'each epoch dreams the one to follow' (Benjamin 1999:4).² In this sense, Huhtamo and Parikka (2011), Parikka (2012) and Ernst (2012) proposed the term 'media archaeology' for the study of the ontological specificity of various media machines

¹ An Italian terrorist group active between 1970 and 1988.

² In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin presented the panorama as visual manifestations of nineteenth-century culture, a device that shows how people looked at the world at that time.



Figure 4 Christian working in the maintenance of the photoautomat, the author July 2017.

and the conditions of possibility they brought. As the authors explain, the material infrastructures and aesthetics of obsolete machines are central to understanding the non-linear evolution of technologies, as well as the coexistence of old and new devices (mobilizing complementary forms of temporality and perception). Originally designed for ID photographs,³ analogue photo booths have nowadays been revalorized and

³ The prototype photo booth was invented by Anatol Josephowitz (later Josepho), a Jewish Russian born in Siberia, who migrated to United States in the early twentieth century. Josepho opened his first photo booth in 1925 on Broadway in New York City. As documented by Kneen (1928) and Goranin (2008), 2,000 people a day lined up at the machine, yet the popularity of photo booths skyrocketed further in the Second World War, when soldiers took portraits for their girlfriends before departure.

reimagined, and yet there remain connections between them and the way identities are forged. For instance, Clément Chéroux, curator of the exhibition 'Derrière le rideau' (2012) at the Centre Pompidou, argues that the use of these machines generates alternative identity models that are capable of influencing more mainstream behaviours. Similar to Polaroid photography, part of the return of old media and their resignification could be understood as a reflexive step back – a retro-resistance manifested in the search for a new way of seeing through an old cosmology, recovering a sense of slow time that seems to be missing from everyday life (Martínez 2015).

The trap

Intrigued by all this, I decided to talk to users, and investigate the motivations behind the



Figure 5 The author taking his own strip, January 2014.

increasing popularity of the analogue photo booths, which contrasted with the ubiquity of digital devices, ‘smart’ technologies and virtual networks. I carried out sixty informal interviews near the *Photoautomats* located in Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg and Neukölln, asking people why they decided to take a photo there instead of using their mobile phone. I conducted the interviews on working days as well as during the weekend.

Overall, more women took photos than men, and most of the users were aged between 21 and 30. Additionally, I noted that few people took the photos alone, though those that did always came in the daytime and were more silent. *Photoautomats*, as they are called in Berlin, print four black-and-white photos on one physical strip of photo paper, which can be passed from hand to hand, collected or crafted, generating a complex archiving and sharing activity. Besides the interviews, and following a method that falls into what is known as material-culture studies, I also focused on the social, aesthetic and cultural implications of the material experience that the *Photoautomat* provides, examining people’s engagement with analogue booths and their capacity for performance, fantasy and escape.

Among the sixty testimonies, I selected a few of them to illustrate this case study. For instance, Jacqueline (27), who is pregnant, often goes with Sebastian (25) to take a photo in the *Photoautomat* to see how her baby (belly) is growing; she wants to keep a physical document of this natural process. In another testimony, Julia (30), Kali (36), Franzí (28) and René (38) stated that they came to get a group photo to offer as a gift to a friend who is moving to another country. These photographs are not simply representations; rather, they are compressed performances embedded in social practices (Pinney 2005), reactualizing their significance in the specific moments of use. Dorothea (40) typically uses the *Photoautomat* machines with her niece Mina (4), and explains:

I grew up with these machines, surrounded by them, getting old together... Tonight my niece is sleeping over, and I wanted to take a photo and split it into two parts, so we both keep the memory. Of course, we always take the two in which we look better (laughs). I like that it is a real thing, that



Figure 6 Neukölln, Alex Bieth July 2017.

you can touch it; also that you cannot delete it, you cannot pretend it didn't happen.

In another group testimony, Nathan, Vegard and Andreas (38–40) stated that they often go for drinks together, and beforehand, they like to have a photo strip made in the booth. As they explain, '...because it is fun, nostalgic, you can frame it and then there are just four shots, no more, no less, and you don't know when the flash comes'. The recovered fascination corresponds also to a growing value placed on traces that recapitulate personal trajectories, as well as the experience of producing authenticity – via photography, which acquires a dual function, producing not only leisure images, but also images for identification and remembrance (Strassler 2010). As Arthur (25) and Safae (23) comment, 'It is a tangible memory of the moment. We like the intimacy of the space and that we cannot repeat or erase the photo. So, each strip is kind of exceptional and becomes something of your own, romantic, fun...' In addition, Stefani (25) says, 'You get something tangible that cannot be erased. It is how it is. I go to take a photo with



Figure 7 Neukölln, Alex Bieth July 2017.



Figure 8 Photoautomat scene in Friedrichshain, the author July 2013.

everybody who visits me in Berlin. I already have a whole collection in six weeks! So it works as an overview.' Cornelia (22), Marianne (22) and Karola (22) highlight the 'singularity' of these photos, 'We want to document our evening. Just for fun. The photos done with the phone look too good. These are old-school pictures. Just for us, not to be posted on Facebook.'

This 'singularity' of both the document and the experience is also important for Kezia (23) and Gemma (23), who assert that 'the analogue machines are better than the digital ones because you cannot improve the photo. Also, it comes as a souvenir and you get fun for two euros.' A sense of modernity also belongs to the fascination of the analogue booths: automatic, chemical, inventive, in danger of extinction: qualities that are absent in digital materiality. There is also a feeling of surprise associated with the analogue booths, as users do not know exactly when the machine will take the photo, and are hence never fully ready for it. Then, each machine prints

photos with a different quality and even in a different size, which adds yet another layer of surprise and unpredictability.

The association of these photos with Berlin is also important, connecting public and personal sentiment and memories with the city's identity, binding individual experiences with urban narratives. For Daniel (19), 'these photos are special... I guess it is the style – black and white... old school, like Berlin'. Fiona (19) and Rebekka (20) say that they do it because they want 'to capture a nice moment of their holidays in Berlin. We like the novelty of having it in our hands, physically.' When I ask Marie (31) and Antje (30), they scream: 'It is classic, it is crazy, it is Berlin! We wanna be hipsters in Kreuzberg!' Emely (40) and Per (39) visited Berlin for the first time and they felt that they had to take a photo in the booth to fully enjoy the experience and to have something physical to put on the fridge.



Figure 9 Scene in Friedrichshain, the author July 2013.

The photo booth, with its curtain on the street, has evolved as an urban corner, whereby exhibitionism and voyeurism are not just intensified but also publicly allowed. These machines function as a cultural condenser, providing accessible artistic experiences and merging the personal and the public spheres (separating yet displaying intimate relationships and activities).⁴

⁴ This idea of cultural condenser is inspired by Michał Murawski's research (2017) on the electrifying capacity of certain constructivist buildings to crystallize material forms enabling alternative visions and practices of a new society and culture.

As if they were semi-public studios, photo booths are shared, actively used for communicative practices, performance and the production of images, generating situated landmarks in turn. Hence, it is not simply the narrative potential of photography that is attractive (Favero 2017), but the location and temporality of the experience also become instigators of stories by furnishing complex forms of participation in the city. We can even talk of a chosen trap; a space-time technology that provides a chance to explore a different urban fantasy and sensuous disposition. In all cases, the analogue photo booths were specifically chosen by my informants as both a stage and

an entrapment, where one can play with the aesthetic constraints of the old technology and slow down thought and action. In today's instant world, to wait 300 seconds for a photo – as users of these old-school devices do – can seem like forever. Nothing happens quickly in the analogue photo booths, which present several inflexible constraints such as the uncorrectable four shots that come out in a vertical strip, the uniform seating area and the fixed focal length, aperture, and shutter speed. Tim Garret, photo-booth artist and co-founder of www.photobooth.net, posits that these constraints are an invitation to play, and entail a particular precision and potential for narration.⁵ As he concludes:

*The tiny precious images, beautifully lit and exposed; the instant gratification; the cramped space of the seating area that inspires intimate photos; the anticipation as you wait for the strip to pop out, unsure exactly how they will look; the pungent smell of the chemicals and the low whirr of the machine...*⁶

Exploring Garret's website, we discover that analogue photo booths have been prolific in popular culture, as seen in cinema – in 150 movies, from *Lonesome* (1928), to *Superman III* (1983) or *Amelie* (2001); in music – video clips by Depeche Mode (1982) or MGMT (2010); in hundreds of TV series – from the Simpsons to Mr. Bean; in dozens of commercials for example, Barclays, Honda, American Express, Pepsi, Nivea, McDonalds etc.; in art – André

5 For more on the topic, see photoboothart.com/artiststatement.php.

6 See Burt, Kate 2010. 'Camera obscurer: Meet the enthusiasts that are determined to keep photo booths alive'. *The Independent* (24 October): www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/camera-obscurer-meet-the-enthusiasts-that-are-determined-to-keep-photo-booths-alive-2112048.html

Breton's *Je ne vois pas la femme cachée dans la forêt* (1929), Andy Warhol's portraits (1963–1969), and Fionna Banner's 'Portrait of an Alphabet' (2010); in fashion – Mixmag special on hats (January 2010); and as possessions of celebrities – Quentin Tarantino, Jack White and Paris Hilton each reportedly own one.

To summarize, there are four basic reasons people use the *Photoautomats*: 1) to commemorate an anniversary or a visit; 2) as a sensual experience of the city, Berliner, wild, queer, modern, sexy etc. 3) to materialize an event with friends, doing something together that leaves a physical print; and 4) attraction to the unique material culture implied in the document.

Rare object

As with vinyl records, analogue photos seem to have simultaneously become both a medium and a message; that is, something that rivets our attention, makes any content look artistic and generates a cultural frame of use and appreciation (Bartmanski and Woodward 2015). Analogue photo booths capture these moments in the same cheap, easy and accessible way as their digital counterparts; yet, these photos have something of an aura, or a distinct 'skin'; they can be touched, smelled, seen, heard and even kissed. Indeed, it feels different to receive a picture by email or Instagram, as opposed to a printed, framed, or black-and-white strip; perhaps it is a different sense of rootedness that says something about the relationship of the people involved in the exchange (Drazin and Frohlich 2007).

Photographs are not simply images, they are also objects that exist materially in time and space, demanding embodied responses and indexing our social experiences (Edwards 2012; Edwards and Hart 2004). They are rare objects indeed, capable of materializing events,



Figure 10 An old strip of Ksenia.

memories, friendships and identities, and of becoming 'compressed performances', which contain their own context, and onto which meaning is projected (Strathern 1990). In our case study, analogue photos do not simply unfold social relations and micro-histories; they are also part of the process of the materialization of relationships and events (Bell and Geismar 2009), in the way they are passed, touched, waited for, erased and painted, gathering bodies around them, and participating in sensory formations and embodied apprehensions.

In 2009, next to the Kaiser's supermarket on Warschauer Strasse, I took my last strip with Ksenia, after dozens of similar photos that we had taken together during our relationship. In a way, this last photo was taken as a proof that we were still together, and as a (failed) impulse to save the relationship and get back to the good



Figure 11 A photo with the ghost of Ksenia.

old days. Unlike the previous strips, these photos were neither shared, nor preciously archived in a box. This last strip laid on the coffee table for some weeks until I moved out and took it with me to my new flat. To this day, I am still surprised the strip did not get lost. To prepare this article, I revisited some of the forgotten photos, and, to my surprise, I discovered that Ksenia had faded from one of them. I did not remember when we made that very strip, but her erasure from the photo seemed to symbolize the ending of the relationship, piercing an uncanny hole. I felt as if the photo had acquired a pensive quality; haunting me, disturbing me, opening a wound and exceeding the image's power of representation (Barthes 1981).

Timing, wasting, fading and indexing are the intrinsic and organic qualities of analogue photos that relate to their volume, opacity, tactility and



Figure 12 James with his love banners, Neukölln, the author July 2017.

physical presence in the world (Batchen 1997; Pinney 2005). Photos are objects to which things happen, traditionally being made to have social biographies (Edwards 2012; Edwards and Hart 2004), put to work through their material substance and activating social dynamics through their use (Belting 2011). Physical and chemical properties not only help to understand the distinction between image and picture,⁷ but also the depth and supposed authenticity of analogue photos, which exist as 'something to grasp and hold onto, rather than an ethereal sequence of binary code (Were 2013:220). The

7 'The picture is the image with a medium.' (Belting 2011:10).

material culture around the analogue photos was indeed acknowledged as central by several informants. Strips can be written on, exchanged, displayed or destroyed, while they can also be posted, hung on the fridge or placed in albums, wallets or frames, stuck on walls, or hidden in shoes (Edwards 2012).

James (27) came well prepared to the Photoautomat with four banners stating 'I-miss-you-♥'. It reminded me of Bob Dylan's clip for 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', where he drops cards on the sidewalk. Yet, James wants to use the strip as a romantic gift for his girlfriend, who had decided to stay in Australia. After two attempts, and as the signs on the cards fail to appear on the black-and-white photo, he decided to hand write 'I-miss-you-♥' on the photos, and then post them by traditional mail.

(fieldnotes, July 2017)

Abby (38) likes to take strips because the result is irreversible yet also allows handcrafting. She is an artist from California who stayed a few more days after touring with her band in Europe. During her time in Berlin, Abby decided to produce a fanzine of the journey, using strips from different photo booths that she later paints over. She notes that the chemicals sometimes react awkwardly. For Abby, analogue photos are a distinct medium; each frame shows a different light, exposure and visual quality and correlates with a particular experience of finding the booth, waiting and looking at others – 'You cannot touch virtual reality, but in this case you have a product in your hand to be used creatively.'

(fieldnotes, July 2017)

An equivalent to the Photoautomat machines in Berlin would be the Japanese Purikura ('print club'), in which individuals or small groups can



Figure 13 Abby with her crafted strips in Neukölln, the author July 2017.

take their photos with a variety of frames and motifs, printed out on the spot onto sticker paper and ready for immediate sharing among those photographed. The first booths were deployed in 1995, and by 1997 there were 45,000 of these machines installed throughout the country. Originally, they were a feature of teenage popular culture, as an answer to the digital flow of sharing; however, their relevance grew due to the machines' ability to transmit the images to handheld devices (Okabe *et al.* 2006).

The stage and the fun factor

People keep coming to the old-school booths – even on rainy days – some of them drunk and



Figure 14 Neukölln, Alex Bieth July 2017.

others totally sober. The machines are familiar for most users, and only a couple of my informants were taking an analogue photo in the booth for the first time. The memories associated with the booths are generally positive, despite an isolated case of a person having his phone stolen while being in the cabin. People often show curiosity about what there is behind the curtains, and look into the cabin, just to check what is going on there, as if it were a theatre scene. The *Photoautomats* stand as an open door, beckoning as a space of fantasy. I observed how five people tried to enter together and were hardly able to find enough



Figure 15 Neukölln, Alex Bieth July 2017.

room in the booth. They tried and tried, and they laughed and laughed. However, those waiting in the queue did not protest, but naturally watched the voluntary performance of the group, thus turning the experience into a reciprocal one, in which 'one comes to view as being seen seeing' (Blum 2003:172).

The old-school photo booths assemble people, capturing and displaying their relationships and providing a place where people can relax and enjoy an opportunity of eccentricity and carnivalesque or artistic expression. Maja (32), for instance, recounts that when she was living in Leipzig, she used to dress up with friends just to go to the *Photoautomat* and have fun. A liminal effect occurs once the curtain is drawn, generating an intense sense of communality, intimacy and removal from the rest of the world.⁸ This opportunity

⁸ Victor Turner described liminal experiences as pertaining to a threshold and as 'cunicular', like being in a tunnel between the entrance and the exit (Turner 1974:231).

to be private in public can be also understood in terms of theatre, play, festivity, interaction, stage and performance, in which the borders between the different conditions (euphoria and sadness, shyness and shamelessness, privacy and publicity) are easily transgressed, losing a sense of territoriality (Bakhtin 1993; Blum 2003; Goffman 1959; Pachenkov and Voronkova 2014).

As in the case of flea-markets discussed by Pachenkov and Voronkova (2014), the relationship between Berlin and analogue photo booths is reciprocal – the more it takes from the city, the more it gives back, thus making a significant input in the production of its atmosphere by reducing the gap between the observers and participants, or in other words, the boundary between exterior and interior. Old-school photo booths have become a platform for bodily encounters that both enable and reproduce locally articulated processes and forms. These devices allow privacy within the dense urban fabric; nonetheless, the act of posing together in



Figure 16 Photoautomat in Mitte, Alex Bieth July 2017.

public and the subsequent sharing of the photo is not simply a celebration of friendship, but also an act of reciprocity (Mathys and Timby 2012) between people, as well as between the devices and the city of Berlin.

It is 10:30 am on a rainy Sunday morning, and behind the curtain of the Photoautomat on Hermanstrasse, I hear people screaming, 'He won't believe it! He won't believe it!' Karen, Ian and Tony, nearly thirty years old, have been partying all night long and wanted proof to tease a friend who stayed home. They could have taken a picture with their mobile phones, but in their view, the effect would not be the same – but what exactly is that effect? What generates that supposed charm or



Figure 14 Scene in Neukölln, the author July 2017.

aura? The next morning, I returned to the same place, at the same time, and yet what I found was caca – a big piece of shit – probably from someone in a rush last night and who knew the location of the booth, nowadays an inherent part of the street furniture.

(fieldnote, July 2017)

Because of its recent history and idiosyncrasy, Berlin is probably the best possible city for these shared vernacular studios: a hedonistic symbol of the modern industrial and technological utopia, displaying multiple traces of the past, self-doubtful, nocturnal and combining a relatively slow pace and low cost of living with an intense street life. As Christiane Reiter points out in the Taschen book *Berlin Style*: 'Berlin doesn't stipulate any style and sets no limits. It offers an endless amount of space and makes everything possible.' (2004:7). It might be that these old-school devices have come to reflect the spirit of the German capital, precisely because of their capacity for re-signification and making things happen, sharing 'ambiguity', 'fluidity' and 'elusiveness', the trio of words that best encapsulate both the analogue photo booths and the 'cityness' of Berlin (Weszkalnys 2010).

The recovery of old technologies in a different context entails a unique social experiment, favoured in Berlin by the open spaces available, by tourism, the artistic vibe, cultural effervescence and a sense of controlled experimentation. Doenst and Kretschmann opened their first photo booth on Rosenthaler Platz; however, in 2012, they had to relocate the machine in order to make room for the construction of a hotel. According to their website, they run over 30 machines located in Berlin and have extended the business to Hamburg, Cologne, Vienna, Florence, Leipzig and London. In recent years, they have also received



Figure 15 Interior of the booth with caca, Neukölln, the author July 2017.

letters from people who have started similar businesses in Peru, Russia and Australia etc.

The photo booths produce pictures of an excellent quality and we saw the potential of the photo cabin as a creative space. There is an antique charm that you can't find in digital technology today. The photo booths also give people a special social experience. It's a moment of going together into the booth and being spontaneously creative together. The photo strip is a unique representation of that moment that can't be reproduced... Once, in KaterHolzig, the booth broke down and 70 per cent of the strips were of people kissing, being close to each other... we added some more romance to the city.

(Kretschmann 2013)

In Berlin, most of the machines are very accessible: some of them are on the street, while some others are in nightclubs. All of the photo booths belong to a company called *Photoautomat*, established in Prenzlauer Berg in 2004 by Asger Doenst (42, born in Bremen)

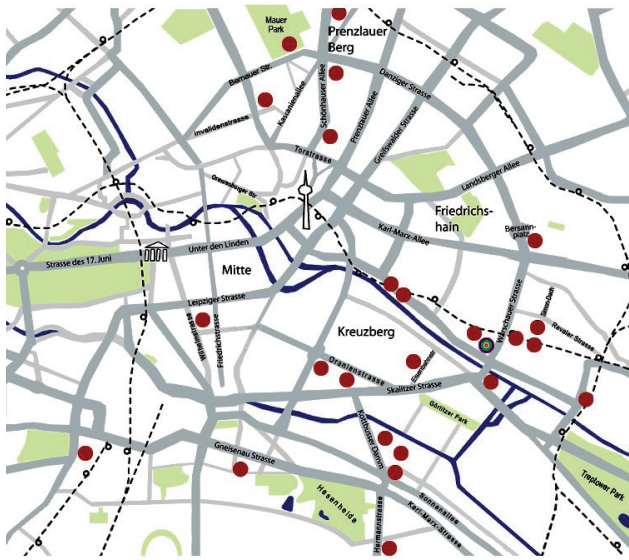


Figure 16 Map of photoautomats in Berlin, courtesy of Photoautomat.de.

and Ole Kretschmann (41, born in Hamburg). For them, the company has grown from a hobby to a full-time job, employing five workers and even teaching workshops. In 2003, the founders went to Zurich to see an art performance and came across an old-school booth. They found it just in time – in 2003 there were around 150 photo booths in Switzerland, but *Schnellphoto*, the company that ran them, collapsed in 2005. They got in contact with the owners of *Schnellphoto*, Martin and Christoph Blake, who taught them how to repair and maintain the booths.⁹ According to the duo, it was the open spaces and possibilities available in Berlin that allowed their project to grow ‘supernaturally’:

⁹ Doenst claims: ‘It is a lot of work actually to keep them running, to repair all the stuff that sometimes gets broken and also to keep it clean... especially in Berlin where there is a lot of graffiti and lot of vandalism’. See Interview published in *Deutsche Welle* (6 August 2011), ‘Entrepreneurs expose Berlin to old technology’: www.photoautomat.de/presse/presse-deutschewelle2011.html.

We thought people would think it was stupid... We needed more booths to cover the cost of the paper and the maintenance, so we started scouring Europe. We found a few in Spain that companies wanted to throw away – one had birds nesting in it... The amazing thing is that they’re built to last 100 years. They’ve been around for the last 40 and almost died out – we want to keep them going for another 40.

(Asger Doenst)¹⁰

Concluding considerations

This essay has discussed the experience and relevance of analogue technologies in a digitalized present by investigating the materiality and practices associated with old-school photo booths in Berlin. Ethnographically, it has looked at the way analogue photos and the scene generated around the old-school machines provide a chance to explore a different fantasy, as well as an opportunity to be private in public, contributing to the German capital as a cultural condenser with a relation of reciprocity with the city. In the analogue photo booths, we can make instantaneous memories, experience Berlin, perform a slower tempo and materialize relationships and events. Thus, analogue devices do not appear as ‘photosaurious’ belonging to the past and in danger of extinction, but are instead an actual form of art, socialization and urbanity that offer their users particular qualities. In this light, the case study suggests a non-linear way of understanding technological change not as a clear-cut succession of devices, but rather as a complex coexistence, which includes analogue technologies as part of the digital world and the

¹⁰ See ‘Old photo booths find new fans’ (29 October 2012), *deutschland.de*: www.photoautomat.de/presse/presse-deutschlandde2012.html.

array of virtual interactions enabled by a variety of smart technologies.

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