

Self-portrait evidence inner exploration of photographer Photography between objectivity and subjectivity

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Abstract: During the history of photography, there is an existing controversy: should we believe in photographs? Commonsense suggests there is a relation between photographic images and truth. In Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977), the viewpoint "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it." Demonstrates the superficial objectivity of photographs. And also, she described "A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given things happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exist, which is like what's in the picture." We do not need to trust the alleged images; the experience with snapshot or subjective is enough to convince us that photography is not representing the "general fact". Whatever reality of cameras and the subjects in the pictures, photography is a personal behaviour of a photographer. Camera be controlled by photographer, subjects be chosen by photographer, we can aware the extremely personal style of some of the photographic virtuosos like Araki Nobuyoshi and Cindy Sherman. That kind of personal style is the obvious evidence of subjectively of photographs.

Keywords: photography, Self-portrait

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of photography

I am always ask myself, who I am, where I am, why I take pictures. Common answer is that the initial idea of photography is aggression. Photography is part of the evolution of the human desire to capture and express life; the question of photography's ultimate purpose is in many ways a deeply philosophical question, though the easy response can be seen in the ways people use cameras and what they choose as their subjects. *Cameras are fantasy-machines whose use is additive* (Susan Sontag, 1977). Since cameras became widely available in the 1900s, people have been capturing still images of their lives by photographing their families, the places they visit, the things that are important to them and even themselves. This means when we are photographing something, we desired the view what we have seeing. Photography can be consider as a possessive motivation. For example, tourists shooting themselves with the space in which they are insecure. Photographs can be trophies of their tourism. *Generally, photography, in the first place, must begin with what you love. You should persist in shooting, and as you keep shooting the things you love, you will be able to integrate your feelings gradually into the pictures. Photography also captures the photographer's state of mind in the pictures that are taken and exposes the photographers to others* (Araki Nobuyoshi, 1985). We shoot we love, wo Thus: possession, and display can be considered as two general-purposes of photography. Possession means grab a subject with shooting to achieve psychological comfort with emotional self-deception. Display is to use the picture as a trophy to show off to the cognition. From this, photography can be considered as a naughty thing.



Figure 1: Araki Nobuyoshi, Sentimental Journey (self portrait) 1971.



Figure 2: Araki Nobuyoshi, Tokyo still life 1989.



Figure 3: Cindy Sherman, Film stills 1980.



Figure 4: Cindy Sherman, Film stills 1978.

2. Way of expression

Before forming the photographic awareness, the photographers will use different techniques to shoot, and seek to find something they want to shoot with their subjective consciousness. Photographers are not creators, but selectors. In this continuously expanding world, faced with many things that are happening, photographers make choices for “reasons that they do not know why”. Then they examine and define their works. This process of search and examination also becomes a part of photography, which proves that photography is a very personalized behaviour. Photography is seen by some photographers as the deconstruction of the world, a kind of behaviour to “cut off” time, rather than to “present” the world. The thing that manifests the photographers’ personal view of the world is the useless tool of camera. The interesting thing is, the product of photography is picture, which shows objective things, but photography itself is subjective. The content that pictures reflect is seen as things that exist objectively but are defined subjectively.

In the geometric space of the crisscrossing substances, the unidirectional point of view is not very effective. Only the fracture between the jolty viewpoint and the personal viewpoint provides the way to understand the connection that links the changing environment and the soul(Takanashi Yutaka,1966). Therefore, when we choose to shoot group of self-portrait photos, to use two completely opposite entities to enter the photos: one is self-portrait (“Self” that is conscious with soul but cannot be seen through the viewfinder of camera). One is documentary the trace of human (the things that exist objectively in the space and can be seen by the eyes). “My Self” in the pictures indicates the dual identities of the photographer as a participant, who makes self-analyse both inside and outside the picture, a kind of “personalized manifestation”. Trace, as the documentary influence, which is seemingly objective, reflects the photographic awareness. Through examining the picture of “My Self”, we find out its commonalities with trace, and explore how the pictures interpret the photographers’ inner world.

Self-portrait is generally considered an act of introspection, a search for the truth of the self. It can be viewed in three dimensions: the self in reality and in work and the talk between the self and the real world. Self-portrait is never just the self-appreciation and self-consolation, but rather reflects the personal circumstances and mental state of people in the modern generation. Each portrait tells a story, since self-portrait is a way of expressing one’s emotion. In self-portrait, the camera, as the photographer’s freed soul, stands in the material world to examine the spiritual self, which is endowed with double meanings of photographic and expressive consciousnesses.

After dismissing all provisions of the aesthetic rules, photography seems to become pure. But why people’s pictures are not all the same? On this hand, subconscious values can be reflected by photography. In fact, like self-portrait, shooting also captures your mind. This also explains why Diane Arbus shoots his naked self and the nudists and freaks. Photographing, in fact, is shooting photographers-selves.

3. Photographs as percept

When we watching us through the mirror, we saw the flesh and body. While we watching us through the photograph, what can we see? Memory? Death? Time? Or nothing? We see Arbus in the mirror, she look at herself, but also look at viewers. At this moment, this Self-Portrait is the link between viewers and her soul. Similarly, when I saw the portrait of myself, I considered "she" is a strange person. The difficulty is that I should believe in the photographer or believe in the people in the image. Some photographers looking for themselves in their works, this is an overlooked but remarkable significance of photography. It helps us understand ourselves. *I have found it helpful at any given moment to know whom I am, not to speak of where I am geographically, historically, botanically, geologically* (Jim Harrison).

After the review of pervious work, we do know how could we express ourselves while photographing self-portrait. It is like a circular process: we photographing something, then we review the images, finding out something which reflected our status, help us understand ourselves and desires, and continue to shoot. From the pictures of desire, we definitely know how can we express ourselves through self-portraits.

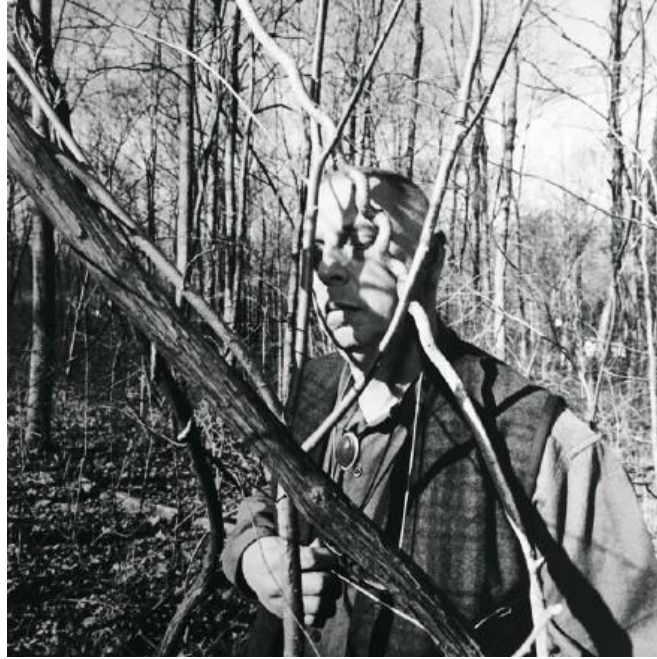


Figure 5: Lee Friedlander, New city, 1994.

4. Conclusions

The lens, like guns, kill the moments of time with provides us the world in a past perspective. It also provides a possibility of conversation over space-time. Self-portrait helps us redefine the identity in world by looking through the past. Values can be seen-in the images. In general, Self-portrait focuses on the relationship between “self” in the past and the identity as photographer in the society. It can also explore the relationship between the viewers and viewed. We can read our inner world by viewing the portraits of us. Similarly, like the Writer expresses their understanding of the world with writing, while the photographer use the camera to explore the world and express understanding. *If we are to understand the coming changes, we must try harder to understand the present and evolving complexity of the way we look at, use and “believe: photographs now*(David Levi Strauss 2005). When feel something unreal in of surroundings, calm down look at us, take a portrait.

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