Chapter 7
Photography as Writing of the Self

Panayotis Papadimitropoulos

 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1262-6986

University of Ioannina, Greece

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to re-examine the issue of subjectivity in photographic practices. The first part focuses on photographers who introduce autobiographical texts in their work extending the subject of autobiography in photography to existential issues. New concepts in the field of autobiographical photography are introduced, such as the "photographer-as-subject" and "a photographic know thyself." In the second part, the author's project "In and Out @ Ioannina.gr," based on the layout of the polyptych, being an experimental attempt to holistically capture the city, is set under scrutiny. Details of everyday life, thoughts, rough notes, readings from book pages and images from the TV screen are photographed in order to reveal traits of the "photographer-as-human." The photographic continuum of the city is scanned, depicting a complex and significantly subjective portrait of the city, of the photographer, and of the medium of photography itself. The aesthetics of the abundance of images is applied in this project.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that the human being can have the "I" in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. (Kant, 1798/2006, p. 15).

In the present text I examine the artistic aspect of photography: not so much when the photograph functions as a record, as a window upon the world, but rather when it functions as a mirror of the practitioner, delving deeper into the relationships that photography has with subjectivity. I attempt to relate the core of photographic practice with the photographer's identity, mainly considering the part that the author's humanity plays in constructing their imagery. Moreover, drawing examples from the genre of documentary street photography, I survey the boundaries between autobiography and subjectivity from

dual vantage points: that of the photographer as an onlooker of the works of their peers, and that of the photographer as a practitioner.

Background

The distinction between "photography as a mirror" and "photography as a window" owes its origin to John Szarkowski (1978) and it seems that this dipole remains effective to date. He suggests that art photographers usually deal with the first function of the medium. Specifically, as he writes in his book, Szarkowski considers Alfred Stieglitz as a leading figure in the "photography as a mirror" function, and Eugène Atget as a leading figure in the "photography as a window" function:

In terms of the best photography of a half-century ago, one might say that Alfred Stieglitz is the patron of the first half of this book and Eugène Atget of the second […]. The distance between them is to be measured not in terms of the relative force or originality of their work, but in terms of their conceptions of what a photograph is: is it a mirror, reflecting a portrait of the artist who made it, or a window, through which one might better know the world? (Szarkowski, 1978, p. 3)

Through the theoretical separation that the mirror/window bipolarity produces, and the questions that arise regarding the ways in which a work can be a mirror of the photographer, a problem emerges concerning the relationship of the self with the mirror: how to conceive of the relationship between what *is seen* of the self and what *the self is in its totality*, as well as between the "Ego" and the "I take a photograph". This major question can be tackled through some related ones, such as those concerning the concepts of the "truth of the photographer" (to what extent does the person who photographs enters some synchronous -to their personality- qualities, beliefs and preferences in the image) and of the "truth of photography" (what constitutes a photographic image?). These fields of interrogation can allow us to penetrate the bonds that have developed between philosophy and photography, since the notion of truth has been one of the objects examined by the former. Moreover, the "truth of the photographer", alludes to what I will call the "photographic know thyself", a concept that allows us to establish a dialogue, a means of communication, with Socratic philosophy and with questions regarding the seeming versions of knowing oneself—that is, how and whether photographers and artists in general, can produce visual/virtual equivalents of the truth of the self.

Let me note here what Kandinsky has stated:

Consciously or unconsciously, they [the artists] obey the word of Socrates: "Know Thyself. Whether consciously or not, the artists gradually turn to their material to test the balance of each separate element's innermost value, out of which they derive their artistic creations". (Kandinsky, 1911/1946, p. 34)

I will also remind the reader of Philippe Dubois (1990, p. 39, my translation) mentioning a conversation between Gustav Janouch and Franz Kafka, in which the former supports the view that the photographic portrait is an "automatic self knowledge", while the latter supports the view that it is an "automatic self-deception".

Taking as our starting point the categories of portrait and self-portrait, where the issue of the identity of the person photographed is clearly raised, I widen the scope to include other genres of photographic practice too. The main question posed here—apart from those concerning the truth of the photograph-

Related Content

Tools for the Process: Technology to Support Creativity and Innovation

Rachel Heinen, Salvatore A. Leone, Joshua Fairchild, Lily Cushenberyand Samuel T. Hunter (2015). *Handbook of Research on Digital Media and Creative Technologies (pp. 374-403).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/tools-for-the-process/129321

Efficient Hair Rendering with a GPU Cone Tracing Approach

Jorge R. Martins, Vasco S. Costaand João M. Pereira (2017). *International Journal of Creative Interfaces and Computer Graphics (pp. 1-19).*

www.irma-international.org/article/efficient-hair-rendering-with-a-gpu-cone-tracing-approach/196218

A Historical Review of Creative Technologies

Andy M. Connor (2016). *Creative Technologies for Multidisciplinary Applications (pp. 1-24).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-historical-review-of-creative-technologies/148562

Conversation China: Serendipity on a Plate

Michael Johansson (2014). *International Journal of Art, Culture and Design Technologies (pp. 17-31).*

www.irma-international.org/article/conversation-china/147397

Accelerating Occlusion Rendering on a GPU via Ray Classification

Vasco Costa, João Madeiras Pereiraand Joaquim A. Jorge (2015). *International Journal of Creative Interfaces and Computer Graphics (pp. 1-17).*

www.irma-international.org/article/accelerating-occlusion-rendering-on-a-gpu-via-ray-classification/147169