

The political aesthetics of subversion in photography

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Modernity thrives on quantification. Machines, aka clocks, measure time in time units, value in monetary points (currency), and production and consumption in units produced, sold, or consumed. Once we quantify space and time, we perceive them as linear structures, and once we do that, the concept of limits arises. Limits that quantify and justify the notion of property, and limits that demarcate whole nations – boundaries – the Self and the Other, limits of time – timetables, schedules – and limits between who I am, whom I am not, and whom I want to be in a linear temporal progression. Identities in time and space are formed, which are boundaries where the Self ends and the Other begins. Statistics are coined that quantify and delineate entities, that in this way, they seem caught in time and space. Even movement, change, and alteration is captured, quantified, and restructured statistically. That is what we – in this study – refer to as the “Industrial Order.” The Industrial Order is an “immanence” that scaffolds society in a particular logic. Any deviation from it is considered an “Error” to be “fixed.” For example, this logic is reflected socioculturally in the technocrat economic policies that followed the Great Recession (Alexiadou, 2018). Thus, this matter is deeply political.

As we propose, that is also reflected in the aesthetics of digital photography. Even analog photography, as a medium, has already been declared a consequence of industrialism by Walter Benjamin. Photography produces molds of quantified space and time that they could potentially reproduce “analog(i)(e)s” of time and space ad infinitum. Digital photography is structured as a systematized arrangement of binary information that ensures the delimitation of representations formed as algorithms; it is a Grid that structures space as a fixed, quantified, demarcated, and delimited entity. Fluidity is replaced by measurement and structuration—quantified measurement of color in bits, light, pixels, specific algorithmic information. Within this Grid, a conceptualization of the “error” is also formed. An error is thus regarded as a fault in the system, a threat to the mode of quantification because it lies outside of the limits of the Industrial Order.

Our photographic work replaces and subverts the “industrial order” in regards to the medium itself, as well as within the photographic image. This subversion is a political act. In the first case, we use a subversive medium: a DIY pinhole camera made by instant coffee cans, a purely industrial product that is used outside of its original purpose; thus, in an erroneous manner. In the second case, we use glitches created through the subversion of the digital code of photographs. In the third case, we reference the paintings of M.C. Escher and Arnold Böcklin to restructure space paradoxically in landscape photography, thus subverting the notion of space linearity within the photographic image.

Bibliography

Alexiadou, D. (2018, 05). Technocratic Government and Economic Policy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, p. DOI. 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.614.

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