

Responding to, and deconstructing the work of Larry Clark, in relation to the visualization of violence:

This essay is based on Larry Clark's work and deconstructing it in relation to the visualization of violence. I mainly want to focus on 1 image to begin with which is included in Larry Clark's book Tulsa, which depicts diverse forms of violence and explicit circumstances. The style of his photography has always really intrigued me and made me very curious about things such as "being at the right time and place" and how the photographer essentially decides where to be with the camera and the paths chosen to get to or fit into a certain demographic / group.

I know there are a lot of opinions on his work being unfiltered and controversial when it comes to the content of his work and some viewers could argue that using violence and things that show negative connotations are also an easy way to attract viewership and backlash.

I would like to also mention how his ability to capture illicit and unseen events all comes down to his involvement in having relationships with people who may be violent or addicted to drugs and being active in areas where illicit things happened allowed him to be in the situation where he can take photos and be of trust, which represents his commitment, diligence and awareness of the social and political impacts of his works.

Here is the image which I have chosen from his book "Tulsa"



To begin with, I picked this image out of all the others because I wanted to focus on violence as a concept and its effect within imagery and I feel like this is a good work to reference in this context.

To start with, I want to explore the technical elements of this image. What we see is a black and white print that was taken on film. I would also argue that the reasoning of the landscape shot and not just a portrait of the man lay down would reference his photographic ability to tell a narrative from his current perspective. It is very nicely framed and the space between subjects, objects and empty space are effective when it comes to initially understanding the image and translating the depiction of events. I also like the sense of irony behind this image as we see that the man in the frame has hurt himself with a gun that looks petit and small compared to his hand, the female appears to be upset and is facing away from him and the bed sheet perfectly covers all his legs except the gunshot wound leaving some depiction of the scene being angelically laid out across the frame. It almost appears to be perfect when it comes to just briefly understanding the chronology of

events and it works extremely well as almost a single photographic story tale, all whilst having a real-life cause and effect behind it.

Regarding violence within art and photography I think that things such as controversy and morality is important as it shows that the work is reaching out and getting people to talk about topics which can be good because sometimes people mis-place and mis-understand their own feelings about a topic or piece of art or information and this gets directed towards the artist or work rather than the intentions that are behind it.

One perspective on such works could be like Susan Sontag's in which she argues what "right" we have, to represent other people's pain. And This is something that could be used in relation to violent works and the moral conduct behind taking photos of people that are essentially suffering and in need of anything other than a photo of them being taken. However, with that point being made, others could also argue that the best photos consist of being taken in those irate moments of conflict and chaos.

There are also viewers who may not believe the depictions in photographs initially, due to some artists staging things such as death and drug use. Another argument made towards forms of some of his work could consist of the pornographic nature some of his images have that are depicting young adults however Clark's intent to produce such work and Films such as Kids and Ken Park was to reveal the true life of teenagers in the 60s and 70s in Tulsa.

An article that links to this work is "how we should respond to suffering in photography" by Sarah Sentilles. This article covers things such as how looking at photographs of suffering extends the suffering. And that is a good point to be made because essentially no one is going to feel good looking at such photos, but it makes people aware of things others are currently struggling with so people can decide to make a change or reflect on global / cultural occurrences.

Another article written by Vanity Teen regarding Larry's work and morals quoted: "Some have accused Clark of glamorizing these activities and presenting them in a positive light. Others argue that he simply presents an honest portrayal of youth culture, warts and all." In response to this quote, I don't think that Larry Glamorizes aspects of drug use and sex etc, but by showing those things in his

work it keeps it in discussion and relevant. I also saw another viewpoint in an article saying that because Larry's photography and directing in films has such an authentic filter it actually has a negative effect on viewers because people want to escape and feel relief in forms of art and media and its quite hard to bear and you feel like you have to just take his work to the chin and firm it.

What makes this type of violence within art and photography have an environmental and political impact all comes down to it being real and physical evidence in a way. People see over exaggerated violence and illicit behavior in films, games and the internet all the time but due to the fact it being heartfelt and authentic viewers allow themselves to reconcile more with the reality of violence existing and their exposure to its form in genres of art or photography.

Personally, I think Works like this such as Larry's are good examples and instances of photography where violence and the concealed help people understand the things that they can't initially differ between or have not been exposed to. However, I can also see how people may find some of his photography as being grotesque and out of touch with reality. This means that works like this could be considered obscure works to general audiences. which is correct as I know a lot of people don't want to see photos of people nude using harmful drugs or scenes of neglect and physical abuse.

When I see works that include certain perspectives on suffering and forms of pain, I also think of the exclusivity of time invested in such places, lifestyles and people that are sometimes unpleasant or negative to be associated with. I believe it is beneficial to reflect on the journey some artists and photographers go through to produce things, because in these spaces there can be challenges or risks being in a toxic or harmful environment. I also feel like some photographers avoid or shut off their conscious state when shooting in some instances that can be considered violent or harmful physically or mentally.

In Larry's work he might want to have as little involvement in the scene as possible, so no discrepancies are seen in capturing events that should be so real and candid. I can imagine a similar method being used by people who do war

photography for a living, having to cut yourself out of the picture and the situations at hand.

What I find interesting in some of Larry's images is he is not in the scene and that he is a spectator, observing and at a distance. While in others, there is a stronger sense of his presence and impact on the environment, such as images that correlate with the human perspectives. This translates to me as a more foreign and subconscious form of being involved with the things he is capturing and if it is a violent subject, it almost entices you to be contemplative.

I think another thing to mention is that in photography with graphic or violent natures behind them the photography never really shows any clear relation between the photographer and the subjects, it is something to consider again the morality behind because we don't get an assertive judgement on how close he is to the people he is taking images of. We cannot tell just from the photos if they are friends, family or just people he knows. We never get a clear understanding of his presence in his images which could alter his or the viewer's perspective on the photos.

In a conclusion I think that the visualization of violence within Larry's work and how it is utilized challenges the public and splits the viewer's judgement between being intrigued and morally challenged. His works have a diversity in violence or at least how obvious the violence and struggle is within the information in the photos. Larry spending his early life to be involved in taking photos of friends struggling with and amongst drug abuse, sex and violence affects the viewer's perception of societal decay and the human condition throughout time.

Citations:

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