

The Collaborative Image

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Consider the notion of “Authorship”

Discourse on the photographic author mirrors popular mythology around the figure of the artist in Western culture – since the concept of the isolated genius emerged in the Renaissance and the conception of the photograph as a self-contained work of art.

But is Photography a social rather than solitary act?

3. Enduring Myth of Lone Photographer

Media representations of the artist as genius have proved remarkably durable, the figure of the lone photographer is an enduring myth.

The figure of the intrepid, typically male, photojournalist is tied up with narcissistic fantasies about the photographer as lone-adventurer.

Mechanical apparatus is one of the reasons for the solitary reputation of photography.

What happens when we start to question: **When is a photograph made?**

3.

Questions notions of intention, authorship and value (Batchen 2000).

“Histories of photography invariably privilege the moment of taking over that of making, the private moment over the public, the origin over the journey, the aesthetic decisions over the social” Batchen

The authorship of individual photographs is ‘often a collective enterprise stretched over a considerable time period.’

However,

Historically, authorship within photographic studios was often exceedingly complex. Many people were involved in developing, printing etc at all stages of the process

4.

In 1888 – Kodak effectively introduced outsourcing – “You press the button, we do the rest” with the Kodak #1 camera

Women and children were depicted in Kodak advertising – even they could do it!

So there were many serious amateur photographers who were rattled by the notion of photography being accessible to everyone. They formed specific organisations of their own to promote photography as a fine art (see Western Renaissance / artist as genius)

Pictorialist movement emerged partly as a response to the industrialisation of photography and the growing ease of snapshot photography enabled by Kodak.

The Pictorialists campaigned for photography as a fine art, and produced highly worked prints as a way to distinguish their work from mass produced images.

They rejected the point-and-shoot approach to photography and embraced labour-intensive processes such as gum bichromate printing, or they made platinum prints.

Such photographs emphasized the role of the photographer as craftsman and countered the argument that photography was an entirely mechanical medium

5.

Notions that the artist developed negatives perpetuated – they had full control.

This led for example to Lee Miller / Man Ray – collaborative discovery of the solarization process

Robert Rauschenberg and his wife Susan Weil made their entire apartment into a darkroom and made cyanotype prints of nude model with sun lamp.

Now more and more developing of negatives outsourced – emergence of colour photography meant that colour prints were nearly almost always printed by specialist labs.

1960s period when photography and contemporary art merged significantly in which collaboration became a relatively common strategy within artistic practice. While the art world still valorises individual authorship as the normative position, conceptual artists in the 1960s and 70s regularly worked in teams. Gilbert & George, Abramovic and Ulay, Christo and Jeanne Claude.

1990s

Interest returned in the 1990s around the time when Nicolas Bourriaud influentially declared the importance of “meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals and places of conviviality in a world all manner of encounter and relational invention” to contemporary art.

Out of this a relatively advanced discussion of collaboration in contemporary art has emerged over the last two decades – in which is it recognised there is an interrogation into conventional notions of authorship and aesthetic autonomy.

Collaboration challenges the cherished notion of the artist as solitary creator or lone genius. Collaborative practice calls into question the romantic notion of the isolated individual artist.

(Dada and Surrealists collaborative working – Photomontage.)

Collaborative Art in a Global Context

Socially engaged art, community based projects in the context of neoliberalism.

There has been a shift between something being created and *placed before the viewer*, to the concept of art as a process of reciprocal creative labour. Following this, there has been

Proliferation of collaboration and collective practice to the movement towards participatory experiences in art.

Azoulay: photographs are relational – they “bear the traces of the meeting between photographed persons and the photographer”. A photograph is the product of an encounter and the start of a conversation.

Crucially, Azoulay’s attention to the interrelation between photographers, subjects, and spectators provides an expanded model of authorial agency that enables us to consider collaboration as extending beyond the literal co-authoring between photographers themselves.

The most effective examples of photography made in the name of community simultaneously explore the ethics of social documentary while also questioning the rhetoric of community itself.

Examples for further research:

Broomberg & Chanarin journeyed through 12 “ghettos” across the globe, asking the same questions. But who was in control?

Assisted Self Portraits – Anthony Luvera website – talks about ethics

Sophie Calle The Shadow

Joachim Schmid – Photogenetic Drafts

2021 – Array Collective wins Turner Prize