Critical thinking about <Infinite exchange The social ontology of the photographic image>

CAIZESHA 18445970

On October，I finished the book < Infinite exchange The social ontology of the photographic image > which wrote by Peter Osborne  <Infinite exchange: The social ontology of the photographic image> 1In this book, author have a discussion about nowadays, the impact of digitalization on photography and photographers, in authors opinions, digitalization are now turning photos into a product which can be used for exchange and sale. As far as I am concerned, I completely agree author theory, during the same time, it is development of the internet, development of the social media, pictures lose values, and popularity of mobile phones, all those factors which contribute this situation.

In this kind of society, internet is everywhere, maybe during the time I am writing this essay, there are already millions of pictures have been taken and upload it to the internet. Whereas, first of all, it is essential to know what is definition of the internet, “The Internet refers to the huge network system that emerged between the computer network and the computer network at the end of the 20th century. These networks are connected by some standard network protocols. It is composed of millions of private, academic, corporate, and government networks ranging from local to global, and is connected through a wide range of technologies such as electronic, wireless, and fiber optic network technologies. The Internet carries a wide range of information resources and services, such as interconnected hypertext files, as well as World Wide Web (WWW) applications, e-mail, calls, and file sharing services.”2Just like what mentioned, internet now is becoming a place or platform which you can take photos then upload it and exchange photos in any times, due to the internet, photo circulate is becoming faster and faster. In the last century, if a photographer took a photo, and the only way to publish is to find a news agency and give your photo to them, the whole progress took a long time. But, with the internet, nowadays, everyone is photographer, massive photos spread on the Internet, which has led to photos that will inevitably become a commodity and can be exchangeable, just like what happen in social media like Facebook and Twitter. According to Israeli writer Yuval Harari, he has a book called <A brief history of the future>, in this book, writer consider data as money.

<A brief history of the future> By Yuval Harari

Nowadays, in this kind of generation, everyone of us is not the person who create the value, instead, we are the person who be created value for some giant technology companies like Facebook and YouTube.

Development of social media also contribute to this condition, due to the fast growing of social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Photo can be seen everywhere, more and more people upload their photos to the social media like Facebook and Twitter, in order to meet they vanity. Whereas, unknowingly, uploading travel photos has become a part of our lives, and these photos will unknowingly change our thinking and even change our actual actions, like chose where to travel. In a case study called < How Social Media Is Changing The Way We Travel >3, in this case study, Facebook analysis the data from Facebook user in Asia, after they analysis 2000 Facebook users travel photos, company made a conclusion: “67% of travelers use Instagram to find travel inspiration before booking a trip and once the trip is booked, they continue to use the platform to get themselves pumped for the upcoming adventure” that is what happen in our society, we go to travel and take photos, upload it to the social media, to let those photos become a sign, sign of fashion, sign of followers of trend. In a word, what we want is show off, from a essay called <All social media is show off> which wrote by Asad Christy4, in his essay, he declared that: “You’ll know that you’re better than the 1000+ “friends/followers” you have on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Quora, Medium, and you won’t hesitate to let them know with the bank of photos, videos and snaps you’ll be sending. It won’t matter if you are enjoying yourself or what’s happening in that EXACT moment because showing people what’s going on is much more important than being present in that moment.” During the same time, those photos then become a product which can be exchange. Beside, this situation is getting worse, due to the increasing use of social media like Facebook and YouTube, according to a article which name is <The Psychology Behind Why We Share on Social Media>5(By Rosalyn Ransaw1) has already shown this case : “Social media content is taking over the internet—literally. Twitter’s audience grew 29% year-over-year to a staggering 187 million users, sending out over 500 million tweets per day. On YouTube, users upload 400 hours of content every minute. Facebook boasts 2.8 billion monthly active users who spend nearly twenty hours per month on the site. In a short time, the internet has been transformed by social media, and social media has begun to transform society.”

Another factor during the same time is the most important factor which make this situation worse is due to the development of the mobile phone, especially the development of the mobile phone camera. In the last century, when the mobile phone first came out, the only function of it is to make a phone call, because first, in that time, internet still did not came out, which makes it does not have too much functions. Second, first generation mobile phone size is too huge, its size is comparable to that of the U.S. Army's individual infantry radio during World War II. Whereas, when it came to 21st century, development of materials, internet, electronic chips cause a revolution to the mobile phone construction, size of mobile phone become smaller and smaller, its functions was not limited to make a phone call any more, it can connect with the internet and download some applications like Facebook and YouTube. Most important is, with the development of technology, the size of the camera is getting smaller and smaller, and it can finally be installed on a mobile phone. Moreover, the definition of mobile phone cameras is getting higher and higher, and now it can rival the traditional single-lens reflex viewfinder camera. Resolution of mobile phone camera getting higher and higher, during the same period, internet makes photo flow become faster and faster, all those things cause a interest situation-everyone can become a photographer, and sometimes can even arrive at the scene of the incident faster than traditional photojournalists, take photos and upload them. The most obvious example of this situation is London tube explosion which happened in 2006. In this case, according to the Sina News: Photo: Witnesses of the London bombing took pictures of the scene with their mobile phones 2005)“The work "Witnesses to the London Bombings": A chain of subway and bus bombings occurred in London on July 7.6 Camera phones turned many bomb survivors into journalists. They used their camera phones to take pictures of the explosion scene.” The first photo

<Explosion picture taken by citizen> 2005

of explosion was not taken by journalist, but some people who were on the tube, beside, no more than 30 minutes after the explosion, the first pictures were already uploaded to the social media. In this kind of condition, clarity of mobile phone camera and development of internet make photo can be take, upload, and exchange in a extremely short time.

During the same time, picture are losing value is also another important reason why in this generation, photo can be exchange, is because people’s opinion toward pictures have been change. In the past, photography is just like the god eye to the life, we think photography can documentary the real life, documentary the truth. When it compared the oil painting, through oil painter own technique, the characters in the painting become more vivid and flexible. For example, for obese people, the painter can make them slimmer, while for people with short stature, the painter can make them taller. But all this becomes impossible for photography, because in the eyes of others, photography is a true reflection and recording of everything in life. Whereas, even the “god eye to the life” still can be cheated, in the photography history, cheating in the picture is not fresh. For example, William H. Mumler, a US photographer, who declare that he can catch the soul of people who have already passed away, and what he do was no more than double exposure the film that has been taken. Sometimes, in order to <Mrs. Tinkham> taken by William H. Mumler 1862-1875

achieve higher rating and influence, some news agency and photographer can even tamper with the actual content of the photo, just like in a news report called < Some photos of the Amazon forest fire are false >7, and a group of documentary photos called <Documentary works were exposed to fake photography and won 15 international photography awards> 8 , In those news report, there is one common point, which is all of those photographer were cheating in their works. If we can change the photo as long as we want, then we can also change it and exchange it to the others, no matter for what purpose, in the film period, if you want to cheat in your photos, at least, you need to know some basic knowledge of photography, like exposures, how to mix chemical elements in the dark room. Whereas, after we enter the 21st century, this situation has been completely changed, because we have applications like photoshop, and even you know nothing about photography, you can still find so much videos online to teach you how to cheat in your photos through photoshop.

Maybe we have talk about lots of points make nowadays situation looks terrible and hopeless, whereas, we still have hopes. Because no matter what happen, the value of the photography and the value of the photo will never change, just like when the photography first appeared, many artist declared that the photography will replace the painting, all the painter will lose their job, but as you can see, we still have oil painting artist, what they do is to change another painting form. No matter what, first, we have to admit a truth- digitizing and exchange speed of photos is unavoidable, this is the trend, this is not a trend which a single person or organization can stop it, we have to undertake it and accept it. There are several factors which can be proved that photography still have its value.

First factor which can be used to prove this theory is that- photographer is always needed, maybe nowadays, with the development of the mobile phone and internet and social media, everyone can become photographer, all of those looks like cause threat to professional photographer. But, one advantage is that photography enthusiasts will never be able to match professional photographers, and that is the training. Professional photographer always have best training, not only about the color in the picture, but also lots of various professional photography knowledge of frame, hue, saturation, white balance, depth of field, etc. During the same time, professional photographer have better equipment, when it compared to the photography enthusiasts, the most common photography equipment is the camera on their mobile phone. But to professional photographer, they have various styles, types of cameras and lenses, almost every model of camera and lens can meet their needs. In this kind of condition let us make a hypothesis, you are a news agency editor, you want send a photographer to the Afghanistan, then, you want send a professional photographer to the battle field or a photography enthusiasts?

Beside, no matter how the photo have been exchange and revise, some spirit like brave, courage, life and humanitarian spirit which contained in the photo will never be changed. According to a essay called < 8 reasons why photography is important> 9 : “One of the best reasons that photography is important is because it allows you to express yourself. It’s a great creative outlet where you can express how you feel, what you believe, think and love.” As far as I am concerned, the most obvious example is from Kevin Carter, his work < The vulture and the little girl >10, It was 1993, and Sudan was in the midst of war. The horror of the Great Famine loomed over Sudan, especially in southern Sudan, known as the "Hunger Triangle." As of January 1993, 40% of the children under 5 in the region were children. Undernourishment, 10-13 adults die of hunger every day in the Ayod region alone. During that period, thousands of people loose their home, their job and their family members. Just through one photo, then you can feel how terrible that situation is (because in this photo, it also contain photographer his own thought, his own feeling to this

< The vulture and the little girl > taken by Kevin Carter 1993

terrible thing which happened on Sudan people), and during the same time, thanks to this photo, this photo was later used on posters to raise funds for aid organizations. Newspapers and magazines all over the world published the publication, and the public immediately made donations to any humanitarian organization in Sudan. As a result, Sudan people finally can have some clean water and food. And thanks to this image, you can figure that value of the picture is still exist and will never loose.

Last reason, during the same period, the most important reason why photography still have its value is because we are afraid of losing control to the thing which we create. In 21st century, everything looks fast, no matter is our daily life speed or the speed of information change, this is same to the digitalization and the rapid development of the Internet and related applications. The reason why sometimes we think photo is losing its value in this century is because we, human, always have the desire to control everything, because this give us a feeling of safety. According to essay <Why do humans desire control?>11, in the article, author give us a theory that : "What I think is that we can create certainty in your own, and we can feel the same or similar results by creating repetitions, we can see the same or similar results many times. When we have orders We will create certainty; like a neat house or bedroom, neat email or clear calendar or timeline, or a ceremony for meditation or exercise every day. " That is why nowadays, in the digital era, there is always a thing which we talk about for a long time-block chain. What is block chain mean? Block chain is a data center, a data center which it can keep your data safely, and no one will steal you picture, why do we need that? Because we afraid of loosing control and unique. In the past, a picture or oil painting is a unique work of arts, it can not be copy, and even someone copy one of them, it still very easy to tell the difference between true products and fake. However, nowadays, in digital world, everyone can use and copy your photos without limited, the unique of our photo are losing, that is the reason why we always have the desire to control.

In conclusion, just like previously mentioned, in my opinion, I agree author theory that : “digitalization are now turning photos into a product which can be used for exchange and sale” Because, with the development of the digitalization, mobile phone camera, social media like Facebook and Twitter, and photography lose value, all those factors are causing this situation. Whereas, as far as I am concerned, we should not be fear of those things, because, digitalization is the trend, we can not stop it, and the reasons why we are afraid of is because we afraid of losing control of something we create. So, what should photographer like us do? Well, in my opinion, there is a solution to us-do not be fear but try to be familiar with it and use it. After all, digitalization and internet is such a excellent tool, it help us find more approaches to create works and help us spread our works, if we have such a tool, why not use it?

CAI ZESHA

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