

The promise of a photograph – Rediscovering the photograph in a world of vanishing photography _ Dongjin Seo

"Then I decided that this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a discomfort I had always suffered, from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; [...] but that, by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me (however naive it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system."¹

1.

Recently, a photograph can be compared to a feather-light gesture that archives sociability or sociality, rather than a record. It is a light greeting on the so called social media targeting those who call themselves 'friends', to pass over the photos of cats poking their heads out of window screens, a 'Selfie' photo in front of a palm tree or a pier reflected under the yellow and red light of a sunset. I talk through my photos and my friends answer to me. 'Like', '♥' and 'Comment' replace the 'reading' or 'viewing' of the photograph by shared feelings or interaction. Therefore, many people point out that a photo has turned into a 'speak-image'. Somebody has said, that photography is experiencing a change which gets defined busily by things like photographs are now becoming images or replaced by 'the photographic'.

The comments of such critics are not wrong. Photographs became communication. Today most photographs are displayed and consumed at Internet places like 'social network' or 'social media'. And the photos of these places are to this extent 'social'. In recent years photo theorist and critics have referred to these photos as 'social photo' or 'communal photo' depending on their designation, and they ask and answer how these new photographs are changing today. However, photographs placed amid these so called 'social' or 'sociable' communications, no longer allow interrelations such as looking at photographs in an album as an individual would read a novel by themselves. Roland Barthes may be the last great viewer of photographs who praised the person that escaped from social nature and is individually looking and reading photographs. The person who deals with the photo's so called object matter/material object was finally reduced to something that could not be anything else but the individual, so that he could write "So I make myself the measure of photographic 'knowledge' "².

Collecting and arranging printed photographs is now being replaced by 'posting' or 'sharing'. Posting is a completely different act than the usual task of adding photos to an album or putting a framed one on the wall or table or using it between the pages of a book. It is not sure, if the criticism of the past

¹ Roland Barthes (1981): *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, p.8

² Barthes, p. 9

became a thing of more or less impossibility, as the meaning of 'seeing a photograph' is inscribed in the things like a gesture that recovers things 'at that time there' till the 'now and here' and was kept in my stored away memories, or accordingly seeing the absent and disappeared things, or even facing death. Extracting images from data, transporting randomly shot images (although rather than calling them photographs, they are more a data computation) into an image stream, makes the photographs more subjective. Photographs are not only object matter or an object that embrace the reality of oneself, but they become a gesture that notices ones momentary emotions or better the existence of oneself in the endlessly connected flow of images. I believe you call it a photograph, when a special moment is captured like a miracle and is locked up and sealed on the surface of the photographic paper. Therefore, the built distance when you experience a photograph as an object and when you react to a photograph that's not a photograph as a stream or flow of images, seems to an absurd amount rather very far.

2.

Because of this background, the exhibition <Love Has No Name> has an interesting and special approach. What we see in this exhibition is obviously photographs (that still dictate the physical nature of one's properties). It refuses to become a streamed image file and asserts itself as an object. It doesn't provide an emoticon which conveys an already prepared response, but mostly, it prays strongly to find the gap of the differently unsettled 'nuance' and today's photographs which became the emoticon itself. Emoticons are toxic and brazen in the point, that they externalize and schematize emotions. They summarize my inner emotions into a few, small emoticons and drive them into sorted forms of 'like', 'anger', 'sadness' and the like. In today's emotional economy, or immersive economy, which accuses photographs to be gradually subordinated, experiencing joyful, happy, cheerful emotions is changing to consumption. The brilliant American critic Frederic Jameson pointed out in his classic book "*Postmodernism, or The cultural logic of late capitalism*", that the top characteristic of postmodernism is the so called 'waning affect'.³ In other words, after the difference between the inside and outside disappears, we cannot experience the images of our inner 'expressions' anymore. Feelings are already provided and offered outside and are conveyed, amplified and suspended by me as per a connection box. However, as one would expect, the downfall of feelings does not mean the disappearance of emotion, as one is surrounded by images, sounds and space that induce endless emotional responses. The affections decline, but the emotions for sales use increase sharply and those standardized emotions are more accurately designed and poured through the algorithm. I don't feel emotions, emotions rush up to me.

³ Frederic Jameson (1991): *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 9 – 15. Jameson says in his book, instead of the decline of emotions, intensity (the term referred to by Deleuze) came into place. Moreover he said, that in recent years this expression was corrected, as emotions took the place of feelings and in the place of intensity feelings were put, and therefore emotions consist of the change of feelings.

However, Ok Hyun Ahn closes her eyes to this reality and hence goes against the general trend. Her photographs and video work hard to testify the (exhausted) ability of photography, which struggles to express emotions. In the series <Wandering Between This And That Nuance> our awareness of the artworks is on the artist's hard work to find the capability of photography. The photograph series' title shows the photographer's subject which tries to testify the capability of photographs to express emotions, to stand out more than the taken object on the photograph. The artist does not just take pictures, she wanders searchingly between them. Therefore, when she created the photographs displayed in the exhibition, she worked hard to find photographs that express a compensated subjective expression and can survive in between today's photography. Even if it is not a figure but an object, the object will readily become the subject through carrying the emotions. Just like Walter Benjamin, who tried to discover the utopian potential in the broken pieces of the past, the artist wants to find the remains of emotions in broken photographs. This is not a search for the inherent effect in the objective record, but to cover the modern point of view of persistent photography in capturing the subjective truth.

But what could it be, that wanders between this nuance and that nuance? We can't help to come up with a stereotypical word and strongly turning our back onto the 'nuance'. This kind of thinking is expressed by the word tag or tagging. The tag sorts the streamed images and brings them together under a few words and arranges them accordingly. In this respect the tag gets integrated into the part of the photograph text. And at this time the nuance got completely deprived from the photographs. In this sense, the nuance tries to preserve each of the photographs particular individual truth while at the same time takes over the place that the 'title' of the photographs has captured as opposite to the tag. <Wandering Between This And That Nuance> as the 'title' softly implies, resists to the action of the tag while at the same time it is fighting with the photograph which has been titled and the title is named after the integrated tag. But above all else, the ability of the subjective expression, that these photographs convey, anchors in the promised impossibility of an absolute individual act called 'love'.

We don't love someone who is restricted on a specific social background and specific profile. We love someone who doesn't get recognized by any other person. No one can share the reason why I love him/her. Whether I am projecting things onto him/her who doesn't have it or if I am determined to change myself in order to give to him/her the things, Love is an 'incident' which cannot be understood by anybody else but the two lovers. And photographs took on the testimony of such an incident before. (It is sad, but I write this in the past tense) At that time, it seems the truth of the photograph was the truth of the emotion. And the truth of the emotion lost through the historically changing photography (digital photography or poster-photography or others) could only be the photograph's legacy. It is touching to see the stroking of photographs and which don't let go of such a legacy. That is why we reach a hand to the artist who is working hard taking on the independent existence of the photographs. ■