The Event of Art

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Chat Me Up: This Moment Already Always Recording
From selfie, self narration, to real time seeing, “being” with each other, negotiating the other, presenting oneself, one to one, open society, network photography, cinema as live recording, an encounter, intimacy of being there and not there, one’s narrative, the erotics of being seen, of presentation, representation, the performative, the global, the camera, what the network up till now has not given humanity, Brecht and the promise of radio, being one to one and not one to many, the now, not art in the age of mechanical reproduction but the performative now, seeing, being seen at the same time, the event of seeing and being seen, dressing up, bodily and not bodily, anonymity and disclosure.

In today’s networked and social media the performers and the audience are the same people. Representations become self representations, they become actions, they become the ever articulation of a “this moment.” Social media has turned what were once very private actions—sitting in front of a computer, writing and journaling—into actions that are immediately public. As such they produce and constitute both a new public, and a reconsideration of our media, our cities and spaces, our archives, of how we use, read and see representation—which is no doubt today always and already performative.

(Neshant Shah)

the project

To investigate Chatroulette as a social medium, as a formal medium, to performatively come to it and reflect upon it.

the rules

To ‘meet’ 1500 people.

Never to blink anyone, that is, I never click the ‘partner’ off or channel switch them first.

To engage in dialogue, to meet the other. no matter.

To record my honest reactions photographically while recording them.

In posting the work, never to tag it Chatroulette to keep the anonymity of the persons photographed anonymous, as much as I can (this is a difficult one).

To write about the experience and create conversation about it to understand its current social reading and its possible reading.
the work

The photographs.
Which put forward not a screen grab but a new photographic practice.

Certain thoughts come to mind both about performance, cinema and photographic practice in the realm of our networked condition.

Filmmakers and photographers have given us access, insight and images from places and peoples we had not seen (scene). They brought to us worlds only they could access, often very intimate worlds. They narrativized both these worlds and at times self-critically their own intervention of recording.

These include subcultures of cities and suburbs, all kinds of groups, peoples and places from all over the world and with them stories and situations where brought to us through photography and film.

In the one to one, to anyone, video recording of Chatroulette one is put into any number of stories or encounters with people we may have seen in a Todd Solondz film, a Nan Goldin, Larry Clark, or Alex Soth photograph, the Harold and Kumar films, the Sacha Baron Cohen films, these being road trip, documentary and performative films. These works are pre-recorded events, linear events whose narratives may be open, but whose events are “closed.”

The always on camera, both as an event to present oneself, and to encounter any possible image or representation of others, in the Chatroulette network is open. It takes us to this place of always already recorded, always to be recorded—and so what is it to makes an image, still or moving, when one always is or has a camera. If we live within cinema and cinema does not stand outside us, what is it to always be recorded. Of course cinema and photography is not simply recording, but intent and arrangement of recordings and the recording event.

But if cinema once gave us narrative closure and photography remove and intimacy of and from a distant, an event, the always on, both to see and be seen, networked video gives us this realm in which we are always on in cinema and within photography. These are prosthetic and prosaic ways of seeing and performing ourselves. But not just seeing but encountering, discovering and always, while seeing, being seen.

The photographs document this encounter, this new way to image and be seen
A way to perform to perform the self.
Perhaps all media today is social and is the long played out and realized desire conceptualized by Nicolas Bourriaud in his idea of relational aesthetics, “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”

Social media not only presents us with a new kind of public space, it presents what was once a spectacle, where the dividing line between performers and the audience was very clear, with new modes of going, new modes of discourse, of writing and image making, where traditional representations are contested, becoming an intertwining of roles of acts being performed and the consumption of that performance.

Going forward, these actions, this performative, which in this first phase had been ends to themselves, now demand and question, to what end—in other words putting on the now, putting on the media, putting on the institution, situating it, making it visible, even for a moment asks something else of us. In these and following works using social media as a context and medium such questions are put forward. As artworks they address questions as to the act of photography, what is and where is performance space, public space, institutional space. It presents portraiture photography as imaging the photographer and the subject at the same time. Performance as relational performance.