

The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism, (Crimp, Douglas, (1993) On the Museum's Ruins.

Crimp discusses how institutions of Modernism (Museums, Art History, but also Photography) had to adjust to the changes in understanding - and producing - works of art in the era of Postmodernism and how what he calls the plurality of copies on the one hand and the transient nature of Performance Art gave rise to a different way art is viewed today.

Copies and copies of copies, the absence of an original, let Walter Benjamin's notion of aura appear to be a historical category. ...The museum, according to Crimp, tries to overcome the crisis these developments have produced by declaring photography to be an art that can be exhibited (and can be marketed like other works of art). Emerging connoisseurs, ie. art historians, take pains to confer an aura to photographs by creating a value with "vintage prints" or "limited editions" etc. of prints - by which they ensure the laws of the market can be extended to photography on the one hand, but also creating competition for other segments of the visual arts. Postmodernism, in the words of Douglas Crimp, "operates.... in complicity with these modes of photography-as-art, but it does so in order to subvert or exceed them." (Crimp, 1993b, p.117)

The idea that art is always a representation, "purloined confiscated, appropriated, stolen" - (ibid, p.118)

Having just visited an extensive Cindy Sherman exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich makes me think that Crimp is right in that museums have overcome their crisis (if there ever was one) by enveloping the protagonists of postmodernism into the museum fold, as it were, making the postmodern photographic artist - those who turn out to be successful at least - quite wealthy in the process.

Thoughts about appropriation remind me of my idea to rephotograph some Andrea Garbald images in Val Bregaglia. This part of my project might be quite modern at least....

I am becoming more aware of the concerns of postmodern art - which, I notice, makes me less judgmental of the parts I still cannot pretend to like: the exhibition of excrements, body fluids, puss, etc. - the "épater le bourgeois" attitude of some postmodern artists who seem to want to shock the viewer for the sake of shocking.

Another of Crimp's arguments dealing with the photographic activities of postmodernism I find worth remembering from this article. His quoting Roland Barthes that the tense of photography might be called as the "having been there" (Crimp, 1993b, p.119) Most of photography may indeed be exactly that: an image of some sort of presence (whatever the object of the photograph may be) that the photograph depicts but which is no longer there when we look at the photograph. This seems both to hold true with respect to landscape, documentary but also portrait/self portrait photography where the imaginary construct of the depicted object's reality is at best an ambiguous representation of what was actually there when we "took" the picture.

Exposing myself postmodern theory certainly has the effect that I have become more interested in and tolerant of art photography. I am amused that somebody has gone to the trouble of writing a book for "Dummies" on the subject - but at the moment feel that I do not have to read it myself....



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