

Photontology

In the 1960's, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes *Photography, A Middle-brow Art*. He utilizes the entire introduction with complex arguments to justify the use of photographic material as a source for sociological research. He there makes a point that it is not photography as such that it is worth investigating but rather the network of relationships it establishes. It is not until reading the first part of the book that the reader can grasp what Bourdieu is up to. At first, the introduction appears to provide the reader only with the academic context in which Bourdieu was dealing with, a presumably traditional and conventional context from which the French sociologist intends to depart with a new paradigm, drawing perhaps partly inspiration from ethnologists, inheriting from anthropology and being here aware of their limitation and set of lays necessary in order to force through an pre-assumed truth.

As mentioned above, it is not until part one of the book, that the middle-brow reader can more specifically understand the operation adopted Bourdieu, his research methodology and the object of study. Here Bourdieu looks at workers who have more or less the hobby of taking pictures. The interviews and the ethnographic research conducted is not at all central but it seems rather a compendium that the French sociologist used to sustain his argument. Rather than to look at the grand maison, he looks at the petit maison, the worker who can barely afford a decent camera and who complains of this fact: "if only I had a better camera". Yet the worker goes also around it and he is aware that some tweaking of the ready made apparatus will provide him with a decent result. Bourdieu here also introduces the subject workers, but more particularly rural people photograph or decide to have photographed. Those are rather important ceremonies like wedding, where adults are at the center of attention, thus not the kids as it is maybe now. He here underlines the fact that such ritual of photographing, enforces the identity and unity of the rural family which is not to display the photographs anywhere and to anyone but in a drawing room and the more intimate ones, secured in boxes.

At this point, Bourdieu brings forward an interesting distinction again with the grand maison, where there is, on the contrary an ostentatious amount of photographic material, thus not only pertinent to solemn ceremonies but also of outdoor hikes and so forth. This is again due to the economic capabilities of these richer families where, though, the very unity is fragmented by the societal interest of success, bringing the very family apart as narrated by Thomas Mann in the *Buddenbrooks* and has highlighted by Theodor Adorno in his "Culture Industry" essay, where modern man leaves rather a

split between his private life and his profession. In these terms, while Bourdieu's reflections seem rather enlightening and pertinent, thinking at the dead grandmother's country house, it seems also rather obsolete in a today scenario which again could have been predicted back in the 1960's as done by film-makers like Ermanno Olmi. The identity to be recuperated then through the photographic ritual is no longer that of the family, to whatever entity the family might still exist in a society where the individual can be completely autonomous. It is the individual himself who ought to recuperate, through the photographic ritual, his or her identity.

Moreover, with the advent of digital photography, there is no longer such limitation as type of camera or a wasted film. In a time in which anyone can take high quality and infinite amount of pictures, it becomes more of a question of style and selection. Two thirds and probably even 99,9999% of photographers are still focusing on the solemn ceremony, on the out of the ordinary (a trip etc.) yet a poetic of the everyday life has also emerged from the petit. A sort of *arte povera*, amateurs collecting, as small stones on a boulevard, pictures from the every day, like the Polish workers in the 1970s during their after-work. They become masters in the Chinese sense, being able to master their art on an every day basis without any willing of becoming famous but rather as a practice to survive the everyday, as a garden to cultivate in an industrial town without gardens, as a wish of dedicating themselves, putting their love onto something. The mundane and vernacular pictures logged on a social media site like Facebook, would then not suit the intimacy of their work, like these farmers not willing to share the poetry of their fragile and poor and yet natural and solar existences, much aware of the seasoning of the world, the cycle from life to death and to life again.