

## I ARTIST: THE TRANSCENDENT AMATEUR

The post-photographic era is a period characterised by the profusion of imagery, as well as its online circulation and availability. Digital image technologies not only expose photography to ontological breakdowns, but they also deeply affect its social and functional values. Post-photographic visual culture has been shaken, because the idea of authorship has been aggressively questioned on the one hand, and on the other, the practice of appropriation has been legitimised. This new context makes one ponder on the nature of creation and the conditions of being an artist.

Beside the models of the Romantic artist and the Modern producer we now have the figure of the amateur appearing on stage. The term '*amateur*' seems to raise opposite values. An '*amateur*' is someone who does not meet the demands nor has the resources of a '*professional*', one who lacks the highest skills and is therefore apparently not capable of ensuring the same level of quality. In that sense the amateur has been stigmatized as someone who does an activity with neither competence nor thoroughness. On the other hand, however, an amateur is someone who acts for purely personal satisfaction and not for economic gains or utilitarian motivations, guided only by the noblest aspirations. Therefore we could say that we are all amateurs in a particular field nowadays. The ease of access to digital tools makes us amateurs in the field of activities that barely a few decades ago required specialized knowledge.

In photography we should separate simple users (those who take pictures occasionally) from amateurs (those who take photos according to set criteria and manage their distribution e.g. by using image sharing websites). Consequently, amateurs generate the broadest and richest magma of the photographic vernacular; this magma provides the viewers not only with new gestures and behaviours in photography practice but also extensive iconic repertoires. Those repertoires appear to contemporary creators not only as mere representations of the world but as tangible elements of that world and thus eligible to become new work materials to deal with.

As Godard said, "A picture does not belong to he who makes it but to he who uses it" and the current iconic environment indeed fosters recycling and remixing. Artistic action often consists of an

exercise in organizing photos, i.e. selecting and sorting them by visual affinity operative. This would mean that the act of creation would be based on establishing patterns upon visual similarities related to specific concepts. In short, art projects are based on critical actions of choice (and therefore rather than "appropriation" we should speak of "adoption" – from Latin, ad optare: to choose). Adopting images means giving them a new meaning, giving them a new life.

Walter Benjamin believed that a modern artist was a sort of a scavenger who collected and selected garbage to give it new forms and meanings. Many artists apply this search instinct to repertoires produced by amateurs. The amateurs expect the reward of personal satisfaction, or the pleasure of discovery, or entertainment, or narcissistic ecstasy... Instead, artistic action transcends those purposes under the imperative of prescribing meaning. An artist shall be guided by a sense of discourse, by the awareness of a critical project, by the strength of conceptual and ideological strategies articulating the project itself, by the contexts of legibility.

Transcending amateur production, the artist establishes configurations which unveil new paths of thought between the images. The drive to collect segments of the world reveals both its diversity and its analogies, and it also projects classification criteria onto the diversity of an "archive" imposing order and memory. Thus it becomes a hallmark of intentional artistic nature.

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