

## The memory leaves you for photography — Katsumi Omori's *sounds and things 2*

Discourses on snapshots are irredeemably one-dimensional: “Snapshots capture moments of when the world reveals an unexpected expression,” “Through snapshots, trivial everyday life is suddenly restored to its true state, reclaiming its vibrant radiance” “Snapshots capture surreal sceneries that emerge amidst mundane reality...” etc. Extracting and juxtaposing such claims only highlight their absurdity (As Heidegger proclaimed, ‘The world worlds!’); however, everyone holds, at least to some extent, self-serving fantasies of being ‘taken by surprise’ by ‘the glimmer of the existential world, invisible to the human eye,’ or the ‘other,’ or the ‘outside.’

The camera reflects the world but does not necessarily ‘see’ it. Because of this, photography, as known by many, was believed to capture the world as it was, before it was perverted by man’s vision. Needless to say, the camera warps the world through selecting a particular frame and capturing a certain period of time by the opening and closing of the shutter; however, even this was considered a measure for restoring the world to its unadulterated state. In this way, photography continued to be an ideal medium for fulfilling our fantasies: photographers have configured their camera settings for the sole realization of fantasies, while viewers of photography have invariably been inclined towards photographs of the world ‘as they were’ that had given rise in the most distant of places in relation to ‘themselves.’

However, the other or the outside that exist outside the realm of all that is thinkable, by definition, are not the same as what ‘I’ can hardly imagine to be the other or the outside. Thus, the various ‘others’ or ‘outsides’ ‘in their true state’ that ‘I’ have pictured in my head are, for the real others and outsides, nothing other than a favorable, one-sided fantasy on my part.

Snapshots are sustained by this painful gap and the humor of humiliation that exudes from it. Painful because ‘I’ can only exist by demarcating boundaries between myself and others/the world, but as long as ‘I’ am the one drawing the lines, no real ‘other’ can exist beyond them. Humiliating because, as it turns out, the ‘world’ or the ‘other’ that I believed to have encountered, were not ‘as they were’ but, at best, mere traces of blindly imposing my existence on the world, like the untidy remnants of slumber.

The above discussion covers the fundamentals of photography from the vantage point of the individual ‘I’s. On the other hand, a photograph that ‘I’ take, believing it to be something ‘outside’ of myself, invokes—like reading a text written in free indirect discourse—a similar (but different) pain and humiliation in another ‘I’ who views it. This is not a form of empathy. Rather, the act of loosely superimposing oneself on another’s photographic ‘negative,’ gives rise to a situation in which the borders that ‘I’ drew dissipate, albeit

temporarily. As Garry Winogrand once remarked, “Photography is always out there; it’s a way to get out of yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

Photography has no definite meaning; however, it is not meaningless. What permeates great works of photography is nonsense as an antithesis of meaning and meaninglessness. One’s distinction between inside/outside is, to another, nonsense. However, it is because of this that ‘I’ and the other, unbeknownst to themselves, overlap. The claim “There are many things in this world that are not visible or captured by photography” (Katsumi Omori) points to the humor of the common existence of such ‘others.’ Rather than having the reflexes to capture an ‘off-guard decisive moment,’ a talented snap shooter entails having a fine sense of balance that can reject meaning and evade vacuity to maintain this rich nonsense. Those who encounter Omori’s new body of work will realize that this rich nonsense is, in fact, synonymous with the contemporary time-space.

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*sounds and things* is a series of snapshots of Japan and its people, faced with the catastrophe of 3.11/Fukushima that is still happening to this today. The recurring pattern of the liquefaction of Urayasu in 2011 depicted in the series *My neighborhood* as well as works from 2011 that captures areas near the ‘hypocenter’ of the nuclear meltdown, including *Hirono Town, Fukushima*, suggests that this exhibition is also indelibly marked by the aftermaths of 3/11.

However, in addition to this theme, Omori’s sense of balance enables him to incorporate, one after the other, various components into his work—different coordinates (two stone inscriptions: a Cuneiform script excavated in Khorsabad and the name of a certain bank that precipitated the economic recession of 2008), different locations (Cambodia, Paris, Taipei...), the history of photography (*on the road* and Robert Frank’s *The Americans*), literature (Richard Powers’ *The Time of Our Singing*), entertainment (*Rakugoka* [traditional comedy storyteller] Kyotaro Yanagiya), and cryptic captions (titles like *Hatenashi Settlement* and *here is not Memphis*)—, while pulling off a kind of balancing act of adding different meanings or senselessness into the image or controlling the visual effects and composition, lest the photograph be restricted to a particular meaning, or, conversely, imbuing an explicit meaning to the photograph, lest the viewers be immersed in a meaningless vacuum, tuning into and feeling a powerlessness towards the premonition that the ‘everlasting daily life’ of Japanese society is finally about to disintegrate, yet with no other choice but to continue flying, swimming in order to survive, Omori’s work inquires, *Can a bird and a fish fall in love?*

Minoru Shimizu

(translation: Nobuko Aiso)

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<sup>1</sup> Garry Winogrand, *Public Relations* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), p.12.