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Photography, Art, Viewing and Comparisons

Visual arts as a field has become broader and rather has evolved over the years with web series, animation, 3D filming along with more traditional forms of media like Photography and Fine Arts being included under its ambit. And whilst viewing or rather "more clinically examining"(Sonntag 92) arts like Photography, it is quintessential I believe to look at the concept of art as a whole. While John Berger in "Understanding a photograph" might categorize photography to be "no closer to works of art than cardiograms"(1) and simply as something that is "worth recording" (2), in my perspective, I look at photography as something more than just a record but rather a piece of art, along with which the aesthetics come to play. In the theory of the Voluntarism of Parker, the true definition of art is described as "…the provision of satisfaction through the imagination, social significance, and harmony." (Wietz 29). And photography has all these elements put forth into it.

If we look at the photographs provided in this case study to us, which I shall refer to as the 1970 piece and the Coronavirus migration piece both have all these characteristics put into it- there is the imagination. On articulately observing the pictures, the photographer's imagination and the audience's imagination come together to add meaning to the picture, which we shall explore in greater detail later in this paper. Secondly, the pictures are essentially a record of social reality- as Sonntag would put it- "nominalist view of social

reality (22), and there is a sense of harmony in the pictures. Harmony not only in the subject of the images i.e. the people but also a sense of harmony of colours, patterns, and other characteristics. This is what makes photography as not merely a record but also an art form.

To further add to the above argument of photography as an art form, it can also be evaluated as to what makes art broadly different from science as a concept, which further reiterates the argument of photography is more than science, while also indirectly increasing its acceptability into the art world. In order to deal with this, I would like to add Art philosopher Dewitt H. Parker's words in *The Principles of Aesthetics* that differentiate men of science from the men of poetry. He denotes "men poets rather than men of science is precisely that they never limit themselves to the mere clear statement of the concept, but always express its human significance as well".

"Human significance" is something which is strongly reflected in the works of photography as much as it is in the works of art, which we shall see in the pieces of photography shared with us for further examination. It is an essential concept in the exploration of imagery. When we look at the photographs shared with us for this evaluation, there is an important similarity between the two pictures- both have human beings as the subject.

This is important because human beings, their problems, and sufferings are something which we can associate to and if not associate due to the lack of similar experiences as the subject, but in the minimum, the viewer can feel for the subject.

For instance, in both the 1970 picture and the coronavirus photograph, as the viewer, I could feel a sort of stress, anxiety, and ambiguity. There is a rush. There is movement. And there is something which is yet to be revealed. This is an important feature of arts like Photography. On the purpose of photography, there are often questions raised as to what looking at pictures does to the viewer- It could make us feel bad, appall, sadden, mourn and at times also teach us something (Sonntag 92). And the photographs put forward before us have such capabilities. The second photograph in particular as part of a Quint article is a representation of distress. And the darkness of the colour scheme creates a sort of unease in the viewer- almost horror-like as though the end of the world is near. But the important teaching in the photograph is to keep moving on, just as shown by the people walking forward. It could also be surprising but despite the images being still, there is movement in both the images which creates an added effect of urgency and haze in the viewer which I shall further explore in the next section. Another important observation is the use of reflection in the Coronavirus piece.

Reflection in art and photography acts as a method to show the illusion between vision and reality. The reflection appears as though the people are closer to the clouds- the vision of a darker future. Moreover, it is as though the world is turning upside down and is undergoing a dark metamorphosis. It is also interesting to note the contrast in the colour. While the background setting is dark and mundane, the people are wearing yellow, red and other colours- as though an unintentional but intuitial attempt to show the people's urge to remain positive and bright in these hard times. This can be related to something which Schopenhauer has commented on art "Art reaches its goal at once by intuition and presentation"(Durant 337); and intuition and presentation are strong tools in both the images shared with us.

While critics and photography theorists would argue that "the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly" (Barthes 44) and that drawing and art is different from photography. I agree that photography and art might be different at the core but it also must be realized that the human element in photography is strong. The photographer's intention is strong and the intuition of the final image is equally concrete and firm, is what makes the final image what it is. If not so, then why is this particular picture taken by a certain photographer and why didn't anyone else think of taking such a picture? The photographer, I believe imagines just as an artist imagines and thus, takes the picture the way it is. In the movie, Ship of Theseus directed by Anand Gandhi, the blind photographer Aaliya Kamal (in the movie) was able to click more impactful images than when she was unblinded is a reflection of the capability of "seeing without seeing" (Ship of Theseus).

However, as the viewer, it also must be realized that we observe and analyse an image also depends on our past encounters and knowledge that we have on the subject. American philosopher Goodman has often argued following Ernst Gombrich(1960) on the concept of "there is no innocent eye", and that "the way we see and the way we depict depends upon and varies with experience, practice, interests, and attitudes" (Goodman 10). Thus, experimentally, if there was a control group setup who let's say had no knowledge of coronavirus struggle or about Mumbai as a city. Their view of both the pieces of photography would be very different. They might not be able to understand the photographic message completely.

Thus to understand the photographic message completely, as discussed in the Barthes' image-music-text, "the image yields a first message whose substance is linguistic; its

supports are the caption" – this refers that when the viewer is unknown to the context of the image, the caption is at times required to add context. Again this depends on the background, experiences (often influenced by memories) and knowledge of the viewer.

THE 1970 IMAGE

This photograph like the coronavirus piece is also a social reflection of societal operations. Sontag often argues "photographs necessarily tend to express a disjointed anecdotal view of the world" (Todd 1). Both the photographs – the 1970s and the Coronavirus work as anecdotes of different time periods. The coronavirus image is an anecdote of the current day struggle, while the 1970s image is of the rainy day struggles in Mumbai. Thus, as Sonntag refers photographs "build our sense of the present and the immediate past" (85) and in turn builds a sort of "collective memory" (86). The individual memory might die with the individual but photographic stories are often carried forward with time. This is what is happening with the 1970 photograph. As Sonntag would put it, the pictures have the capability of "locking a story in our minds" (86) and this is the case with the 1970 image. As the viewer, I am unfamiliar with that time but I have been made familiar to 1970 through the image.

Another important physical aspect of the image to note is the colour in the image. The black and white add a layer of the past. If the same image was reproduced in colour, its quality and meaning would depreciate. The black and white colour scheme is what distances the viewer from the photograph. But at the same time, this is what makes the image more sovereign as it gives us an image of the "normal appearance" of the past, which I cannot experience otherwise.

HAZE AND BLUR- MOVEMENT IN PHOTOGRAPHY

To come back to the idea of movement in Photography discussed in the introduction, the movement is of significant value and concept in both the pictures.- The movement of people. And along with movement comes blurring and haze. This blurring can be observed around the people moving in the 1970s image (in particular around the legs of the man- who in many ways plays the protagonist/prime subject of the image) and around the legs of the migrants in the Coronavirus picture. It is also interesting to observe how the legs overlap in the Coronavirus image, which shows the collectiveness of the people - They all have a single motive. This blur resulting from movement and to be mechanically precise from the shutter speed is of significant importance. The blur "effectively lengthens the duration of the present- the instant- to make it accessibility to representation"(Helle 114). And upon observing the two images- both the images are capable of having a long-lasting effect on the viewer.

COMPARISONS – PHOTOGRAPHY FOR A PUBLIC MESSAGE VS. PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PUBLICITY

In conclusion, experimentally I would also like to look at the sets of photographs provided in comparison to photographs used in publicity or advertising. This is to show and reiterate how the context and the setting of the photograph could change the meaning of the photograph in itself- again referring to Sonntag's purpose of photography. The images provided to us – the 1970s and the Corona have the purpose of sending out some sort of public message. A broader social underlining in it. However, in contrast, images in publicity magazines such as photographs 239 and 240 below taken from a modern publicity 1983 booklet are also forms of photography. But the purpose is different. The purpose is to sell and advertise while using techniques of behavioural irrationality to impact consumer behaviour.
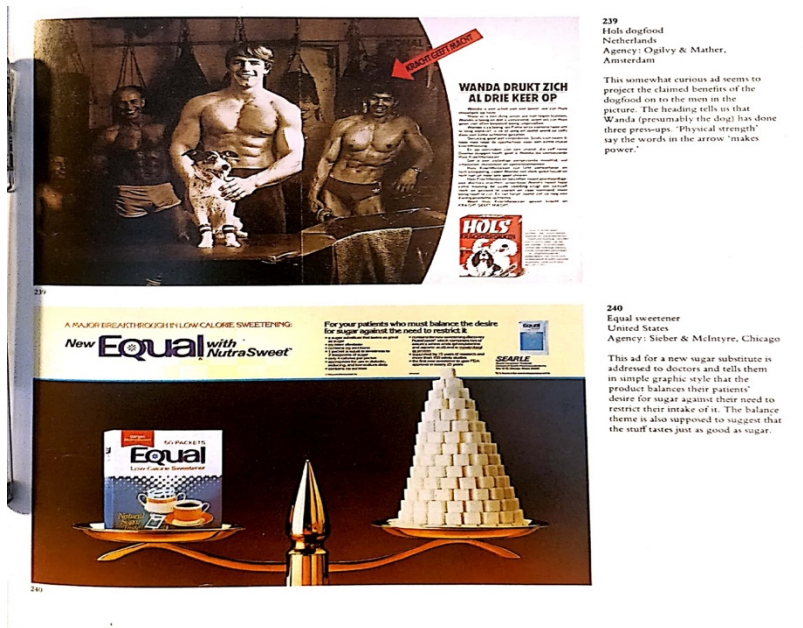
Fig 1. "Holo Dogfood" and "Equal Sweetener", *Modern publicity 1983 volume 52*, p.240.

Fig. 2-3(Right). "A rainy day in the Bombay 1970" and Coronavirus migration(The Quint), *Prof. Srivastav Mail (Dated 31st March 2020)*

Thus, in conclusion, photography, in essence, is extremely powerful. Its meaning could change in different contexts, has the capability of recording the past(the 1970s), the present (coronavirus) and in turn psychologically "influence our emotions, mood, perspective, and the soul" (Kim).

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