

A Study on the "Participatory Observation Method" as the Creative Method of Self-Photography

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Abstract

As a significant aspect of photography, artists and photographers use it as a creative tool, yet existing image styles often remain too limited and predominantly rely on the body as a medium, lacking a systematic approach. In response, we aim to explore and organize the stylistic elements and creative processes involved in selfie photography. By examining these through an interdisciplinary lens, we identify and apply the 'participatory observation method' as a systematic approach to selfie photography creation. In this paper, we analyze the connection between participatory observation and selfie photography, investigating how this method shapes selfie imagery and its pioneering role in cultural research. Our approach positions selfie photography as a cultural research tool, serving as both a medium and a methodology that integrates observational techniques with creative expression. Through this interdisciplinary blend of observation and selfie photography, we aim to establish a more systematic methodology that can deepen the study of cultural representation and self-expression.

Keywords: *Selfie Photography, Participatory Observation Method, Image Style, Cultural Research.*

1. INTRODUCTION

"Since the invention of photography, photographers have been avidly watching with the camera, taking time from time to time and turning to themselves, throwing themselves into the world while occasionally committing themselves to the camera lens. As a result, photography has developed a form of expression called selfie photography." [1] The selfie photography mentioned in this article is different from the "hands-on" and "visitor photo" nature of selfies in social groups, but it is self-portrait photography in the field of art. But from the existing self-portrait photography image style, they mostly use the body as a medium for capturing, and the artist alone. We has also been committed to the creation of selfie photography for a long time, from the long-term practice encountered the following problems: 1. In addition to capturing the self, how to form a relationship with others or link 2. How far is the boundary between self and others in self-portrait photography? This article will find the "participatory observation method" commonly used in anthropology, from the relationship between the participatory observation method and selfie photography to the application of the case analysis. In Qian Chenqun's "Taofeng Tai-lady Appearances to Chen Tai-jun" (7000 Words), his mother's painting is only a few words, mainly to record her virtues, namely, "Taofeng Tai-lady's desire pi poverty, Fang

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Fan-yi's behavior is worthy of the female sect.[2] Chinese historical figures are often based on virtue, the Tang Dynasty painter Han Huang in the Old Tang Book has more than 2,000 words of biography, mentioning that his paintings are also seven words "You Gongshu, good Danqing." In the early Qing Dynasty, Chen Zhong was first a woman with a good wife and a good mother, and secondly a well-known female painter.

2. PRODUCTION RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION" AND "SELF-PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY"

As an important part of photography, artists often take selfies, artists Cindy Sherman and Morimura Taichang use the technique of character interpretation to realize a thousand faces. They don't just shape their appearance, they convey ideas and creative ways that go beyond photography, infiltrate public spaces, focus on gender awareness, and build identity, so selfie photography is also a vehicle for cultural research. Nowadays, self-portrait photography is often used in dress-up, real recording, body media, and behavior, but it only distinguishes between the forms of self-portrait photography [3]. Participatory observation is a method of anthropology that aims to create a close and intimate familiarity with a particular population (e.g., religion, occupation, subculture or a particular community) and its behavior. It is suitable for studying the socio-cultural background embodied in life, the process of occurrence of events, the relationship between people and events, the coherence and pattern of combinations. Therefore, participatory observation is a culture-specific research method and is applied to different disciplines.

Participatory observation as a method of cultural research, selfie photography as a carrier of cultural research, so you can find a fusion intersection - participatory observation as a creative method of selfie photography. In the existing self-portrait photography cases, there are often artists who create with the "insider's perspective" in the "participatory observation methodology", but there is no interdisciplinary summary methodology. The author tries to use the "participating observation method" to create selfie photography, and returns to the existing case of "fieldwork" to experience [4], recognize, understand and explain selfie photography in various ways. Taking self-portrait photography with anthropological "participatory observation" method, this paper carries on interdisciplinary research and practice, and tries to use "participatory observation method" to create self-portrait photography. Participating in the interdisciplinary combination of observation and selfie photography will help to develop a systematic methodology and enrich the image style of selfie photography.

3. APPLICATION OF "PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION METHOD" IN "SELF-PHOTOGRAPHY"

Participatory observation requires the researcher to participate directly as a member of people's daily life, and the participant's role enables him to approach and observe people's daily life from the perspective of an insider. Human meaning and interaction can be obtained through compassionate reflection, engrossed understanding, human connection, or empathy reconstruction. Participatory observation is a special strategy and method, through which researchers learn about the human world and observe and experience the meaning of people's interactions as insiders.

In the use of participatory observation in selfie photography, we should pay attention to the following three points: (1) Insider observation, from the perspective of the insider to see the world of daily life is the basic reality of participatory observation. Only by fully understanding its concepts and reasons can we grasp the original ideas of the insiders about their world. (2) Daily life is the object of participation in the observational law, it is the ordinary, ordinary, typical and natural human programmed living environment. Participants were

asked to participate in observation in their daily lives, while researchers were asked to reduce encroachment on the research environment as outsiders. (3) The researchers involved in observation can play multiple roles in the research process, both participants and observers, while maintaining harmony with the environment and the scene, and even establishing close relationships. There are often cases of "participation in observation" in selfie photography, but the "participation in observation" in selfie photography is more subjective, and the following combing is carried out [5].

Korean artist Nikki S. Lee's art projects Projects: Punk Project (1997), Lesbian Project (1997), Project for the Elderly (1999), Project for Exotic Dancers (2000), Project Skateboard (2000), Project for Female Students (2000), etc. Nikki S. Lee has intervened herself among members of the social and racial groups with whom she photographed, titles based on the names of her chosen members. From schoolgirls to seniors, punk to yuppies, rural white Americans to urban Hispanics, Nikki S. Lee's role spans age, lifestyle and culture. Half a sociologist and half a performance artist, she integrates into groups by engaging in observation, Nikki S. Lee was so convincingly involved with these groups that it was difficult to distinguish her from the crowd in her personal photos (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Hip Hop Project by Nikki S. Lee

For each new project, Nikki S. Lee first observes group members, pays attention to how they present themselves, studies the language, behavior and culture of the team members, imitates them, then visits and spends some time with them. Nikki S. Lee's method of creation and participatory observation are similar, and only by fully understanding the culture and language of a group of people expressing their ideas can they grasp the original idea of their world [6].

When involved in groups, she introduces herself as an artist and spends weeks with each group, making passers-by or new friends in groups during daily activities, helping to film with members. An ordinary fast camera recorded Nikki S. Lee's moment with the members, the electronic date in the lower right corner, makes the picture more authentic and convincing the audience that the plot exists in the photo, and this use of snapshot aesthetics leads us to believe that she belongs to this group. Among these photographic images, photographic techniques and techniques have taken a back seat, so the focus is more on participating in the observation itself and the extension of culture. Nikki S. Lee's project raises questions about identity and social behavior, how we consciously choose our social groups, how we are identified by others, and is it possible for our identities to flow across cultures? The series reveals racism, sexism, and classism inherent in the cultural and social boundaries of American identity(Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Sleeping Man, Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle is a French writer and photographer whose works often depict human vulnerability and examine identity and intimacy. In Sophie Calle's *The Sleeping Man* (1979), Sophie Calle enters strangers' lives in a spirit of collaboration, inviting friends and strangers for eight nights—each spending eight hours in her bed while filming and documenting the strangers. Prior to filming, she offered participants basic hospitality, clean sheets and food, showing sincerity in cooperation. While filming, Sophie Calle used a common recording technique used in participatory observations to record whether the strangers snored, dreamed, and conveyed extreme intimacy in her photographs. We can see naked hips and pale knees sticking out from under the quilt, but her handwritten caption comes from a record of participating in the observation: "At 6:45 p.m., he sleeps deeply," and "He always lifts the quilt." These photographs are filled with tension and intimacy, while at the same time they are directly documented observations [7].



Figure 3. Alex Vonfurstenberg and Hillary Clinton signed, David Henry Brown Jr

In Sophie Calle's other project, *Hotel* (1981), she was hired as a waitress at a Venetian hotel where she was able to explore the writings and objects of hotel guests. Sophie Calle spent a year searching for the hotel, three months participating and observing, taking photographs and recording text, and a day deciding on the size and frame of the work before it was finished. Sophie Calle pokes into people's privacy and explores the boundaries between people by engaging in observation is shown in Figure 3.

In 1999 and 2000, American artist David Henry Brown Jr. used "Alex" and a cheap \$20 vintage suit to get involved in hundreds of high-profile celebrity VIP parties in New York at night, named after the son of fashion designer Diane vonfurstenberg.

David Henry Brown Jr. gathered star information from public sources, met dozens of celebrities, including Bluff Daddy, Ivana Trump, and even then President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton. The difference is that David Henry Brown Jr. treats being a celebrity as a form of self-examination, with the ultimate goal of exposing his disguise by participating in the observed self [8].

It is Nikki S. Lee, Sophie calle, or David Henry Brown Jr., we can all see the shadow of "participatory observation", but the self-portrait under observation is the artist's active choice, such as choosing the time to take a picture, the person with the camera.

4. THE EFFECT OF "PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION" ON "SELF-PHOTOGRAPHY"

In selfie photography, there are often cases of "insiders" taking selfies. When creating, you may encounter problems such as how to choose a crowd, how to play and build your own role in observation, and there are few theories in the field of photography. Through interdisciplinary learning and combing of participatory observation methods, creators can take project ideas to sort out the problems they carry out, such as common problems: how to choose a crowd, we can integrate interdisciplinary reference. For example, in the field of sociology, Ferraro's research on wife abuse comes from his own experience of abuse. She uses participatory observation methods and studies abused women and asylum actions in conjunction with her own autobiography, and tries to intervene in this social problem and conduct sociological discussions. As well as how to deal with self-concept, relationship-building strategies, role-playing strategies, ways to sort out data, and more cultural research cases, you can refer to books on participatory observational research. At the same time, there is a key issue: the principle of boundaries when participating in observation, and a clear boundary is proposed in the creative process, including how to participate in the process: for example, set boundaries [9].

Traditional selfie photography has two main trends: one is "the writer's body as the medium, the other is based on the body of the "dress", the use of participation in observation can enrich the image style. Take Nikki S. for example. Lee is not just a single person, but also adds a group concept, Asians, punk, dancers, showing different ethnic and cultural figures. In David Henry Brown Jr., in addition to himself, there is a "rich" shadow. Not limited to a single body, participating in observational data collection methods, oral history, audio recording, text recording, encoding and recording also enriched the form of the picture. In selfie photography, the artist is both an observer and a participant, creating a collision between different cultural backgrounds [10]. The goal of participatory observation is to discover, approach and reveal people's understanding of the meaning of daily life; selfie photography is also the product of the artist's personal subjective, subjective experience and experience. As a member of society, the artist is connected with his natural environment, historical time, social context, ethical values, etc [11]. In his work, he has made different cultural collisions and expanded the cultural field of selfie photography. Nikki S. Lee lets passers-by or new friends in the group help with the shooting, and the snapshot-style shooting allows selfie photography to also begin to exist as a medium in these projects, focusing more on the immediacy of the image and the bearing of participating in observation. As mentioned above, David Henry Brown Jr. used comic parodies to satirize the emptiness and unease of the celebrity world, and to criticize today's social phenomenon of name-calling [12].

Self-timer photography combined with participatory observation has methodological guidance from the creative point of view, which helps the creation to proceed more completely, while there are more cases for reference. From the perspective of image style, the participatory observation method enriches the image style of selfie photography not only limited to a single body as a medium, but also builds relationships in the picture. As the technology retreated, selfie photography focused more on participating in the observation itself and the extension of culture.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the 'participatory observation' method in cultural research can be effectively applied to selfie photography, although it has yet to form a fully developed theoretical framework. This interdisciplinary integration is significant for both the systematic approach to creative methods and the comprehensive presentation of the final image. By using participatory observation in group settings for selfie photography creation, we can blur the boundaries between self and other, reinterpreting the other as an extension of the self. In terms of photographic style, applying participatory observation breaks the limitations of conventional single-subject photography or the sole use of the body as a medium. This approach, which involves daily, insider observation, expands the field of cultural research in selfie photography, particularly by exploring the dynamic interaction between insiders and creators. However, from a methodological perspective, artists and creators working within groups must remain mindful of ethical standards. Observing these ethical guidelines ensures that participatory observation can be used effectively to enhance the creative process in selfie photography.

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