

Dialogues with Franca Lopez Barbera & Pok Yin Lam

by Chinhwa Ho

1.

The Starting Point

With the devotion to publication works, graphic designers inevitably have a consensus about how important narration is from image layout, especially in photobooks. The designer thinks about how to convey the information through every flip, how to connect each flip through the form of the image, the metaphorical meaning, etc. — in other words, creating a path for the audience to have a linear storyline in their heads, with different pairing, the visual feeling could be varied, the meaning could be varied.

By juxtaposing related or unrelated images, the human brain starts to form a narration by extracting the form, the symbols, and the information. The non-verbal message seems to be conveyed to people with different backgrounds. But as Susan Sontag said, it's hard to create our narration among the random images that are vaguely referred to unless our cultural or knowledge experience shares the intersection with those images.

The first question raised: Does the narration of pairing the images worth talking about?

The fundamental of image pairing is to extract symbols and create understanding. As long as there is communication, there will be a twist, deviation, or vacancy. Regarding communication efficiency, Franca mentioned a synonymous word game she has made before, and the word's meaning won't be the same between the origin and the outcome. Pok Yin gave another example that Meme is also a medium to prove that symbols could be enhanced or transformed into a different use; depending on the creators' and receivers' backgrounds, there will be either a common understanding or deviated communication. These two examples are dedicated to creating a specific format and inviting people to engage, and the aims are archiving data to be critics. The essential twists could be seen by analysing the trace, and those things in the middle could tell in this journey — That's the moment when some things are added or missed.

2.

Mechanism/Algorithm involved

I wanted to see how others see the same image. Instead of inviting another person, I tried to put the picture I took into the image search engine to see the result. This is what Franca underlines changing the prompts or elements will allow you to have different points of view. Here the direction branched to the electronic aspect.

Living in the digital era, when talking about communication, there is communication between humans, human and machine, machine and machine, through images, words, sounds, and data. The internet, as the extension of the human brain, was built based on existing information. Therefore, bias exists within the algorithm. As you might see, how machines guess the gender of people in images based on their dress, the colour of the dress, gestures and even the ratio of exposed skin, the different engines might have other answers due to how smart they are or how much effort they put into the ethical aspect. The video How Do I Go Back to China was intended to reveal the stereotype of the participant toward a specific place and the bias of the search engines. Using images only was trying to limit the prompt and to see how the two species treat symbols. It is cooperative work between humans and non-humans.

The second question raised: Why does a machine have to be involved in this symbol understanding journey?

Pok Yin is the artist who opted to uncover the power mechanism behind the intersection of technology, media, and human beings. He gave an interesting opinion about the video: I wasn't going back virtually to China because I was still in the western internet ecosystem. The barrier between different internet ecosystems is like a voile, set up by IP address and being led to the destination due to profit driving or censorship. The information surrounding us created a cocoon, living in the post-truth era, what you believe could be manipulated by capital and authority.

The third and more question raised: How many ways can you go in the cyber journey? Are we going there on purpose, or is the machine sending you there? Can we escape the algorithm?

For the next step, to be specific:

Where is the destination? How many participants do I need? Human or nonhuman?

What is the sign of actually landing at that place?

To collect data, in what way, and what kinds of data?

Reference List:

Sontag, S. (2002). *On Photography*. Penguin.