Allan Sekula and the ‘Fish Story’

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Part 1. Middle Passage. Panorama. Mid-Atlantic. November 1993 ‘seems like it is trying to convey a mood alternating between the feeling of freedom given by being on the road and passion of power and control found in capitalism.

Some works influence you immediately at first sight and stay imprinted on your memory, you cannot forget about them. Taking the recent abundance of images into account, we can reckon the images leaving an indelible imprint on memories as successful ones in terms of content and/or aesthetics. In my opinion, Allan Sekula’s work “Dismal Science: Part 1. Middle Passage. Panorama. Mid-Atlantic. November 1993” is such a work for me. The work and survey titled “Fish Story” conducted by the artist between 1986 and 1994 in the industrial harbors of cities such as New York, New Jersey, Rotterdam, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Seoul, Barcelona, Gdansk, Glasgow, London, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Pusan, San Diego, Ulsan, Veracruz, Vigo and Warnaw aims discovering the historical, socio-political, aesthetic and literary connections among these cities on a global scale.

This photo which has been involved in the big exhibition as part of the work has considerably took my attention. I assume that there are two reasons behind this. One of them is the exhibition of mine titled “Road”, held at Istanbul Modern in 2010 (I am going to include a citation from the conceptual text of the exhibition towards the end of this article), and the other one is my exhibition titled “Industry as an icon: Industrial aesthetics” held at Garanti Galery, which does not exist any more. In 2005, I went into the harbor in Haremi for this exhibition, took photos; I liked the city appearance created by the bulks of containers and the aisles left for the ease of loading. While planning to display those photos as soon as possible, I haven’t been able to turn them into a work yet. Yet, whenever I encounter a container somewhere, my enthusiasm towards this subject world is triggered. This must have been one of the reasons why I feel excited when I see this work of Sekula and make it imprinted on my mind.
I'm looking at the photo once more: A boat cruising in the open sea and the containers are not looking "settled and sturdy" as they looked on the land at all; instead, they look rather "escrowed". The clouds we see beyond are seemingly messengers of a powerful storm and there is tension in the air caused by the upcoming storm. There is a feeling of uncanny caused by the questions such as "If the boat runs into extreme waves, will the containers fall or which is worse, will the boat sink down?" At this stage, it would be beneficial to make an effort to understand what kind of a conceptual framework Sekula constructs through this work. In the scope of the global exchange and movement of various goods, money, knowledge and power, Sekula recorded panoramic sea views, close shots of marine devices and vessels, cargo containers, warehouses, salleen and dockers. While looking at this photo which was taken during ongoing cruises in the geography of developed capitalist world, a critical question such as "Will capitalism also sink down when the boat sinks down?" comes to my mind from afar.
bir yönlenme, bu yüzden sanatçı beyanının belir bir bölümüne bu tavr
olmuştur. Olaya göre olaylar, onun Alessandris’min Ağır dışı
yeni bir ideali önermek bu tavranın merkezine oturuyor. Buradan tekrar
endüstriye ait bazı gereksinimlerin de fotoğraf üzerinde olumlu ve anonsın
bir boyut taşıyan kendi has makine estetikinin de Sekula’nın ikişini
çekişine düşündürüyor. Ancak mevcutda döşenmiş konstrüktivist antlaşmaya
bağlı ise Lawrence Sheriff çok isabetli bir şekilde kurtarıyor: “Hem şahsî,
Hem de tematik olarak Sekula’nın işinde; Sergey Eisenstein’in, Rus
Devrimi esnasında beşhizlerde ayaklanmayı konu edindiği 1925 tarihli
kлас çalışmalarını Potemkin Zırhasa filminden öyküsü ve şiirsel görsellik
yaranmasının önemini gösterir.”

Sanatçının kendisi ise işlerine dair şu sözlere sarf ediyor: “... Gilles Deleuze;
Amerikalı yazar Herman Melville’in Moby Dick adlı romanında taşvır ettiği
anlarda bir ‘görmeye’ dans ve dünenciliğin, kontrol ve kaosun buluşma
noktası olduğu bu süreçte sırıp.” Sistemleri olarak bakıldığında, geri
biri dene, beraberliği ise Suriyeli bir labirent,

1970’lardan bu yana Sekula, belgesel fotoğraflarının herhangi bir ideoloji
öldürülmemiştir. Söyle dile getirilmiştir. Post-estructuralist ve post-modernist
tecrübenin etkisini göz ardı etmeyen fotoğraflar, belgesel fotoğrafların
mucizeyi gerçekçilik vahşi, “nâif gerçekçilik” olarak adlandırıldı. Fotoğraftan
özündeki anlamanın ancak çeşitli
surum ve kullanım belgeleri çerçevesinde değerlendirilmesi
ön sürdü. Gerçekçiliği geçen bir yakalam olarak görüldü.

On the other hand, it could be inferred that Sekula aimed at praising “the
ordinary”. While these journeys are daily incidents considered routine
within the proceeding process of the global economy; the way that the
artist conveys this to us, the context, and his personal witnessing turns it
into a special, unique incident. Praising the ordinary is a tendency in which
I’m personally quite interested; that’s why a particular part of my artistic
manifestation is made up of this attitude. Offering a new comprehension by
focusing on the ordinary and changing its usual perception is at the centre
of this attitude. If it is necessary to jump to industry again, I think Sekula is
interested in the partially anonymous and sui generis machine aesthetics
that we can find in the industrial structures. Lawrence Sheriff quite
incisively links it to the constructive understanding which wander around
similar media: “In Sekula’s works, it’s possible to see both stylistically and
thematically the reflection of narrative and poetic visuality found in the 1925
production classic movie “Battleship Potemkin” by Sergey Eisenstein,
which tells the story of the rise in the navy during the Russian Revolution.”

The artist mentions his works as follows: “... Gilles Deleuze puts forward
that a “boat” in the sense described by American author Herman Melville
in Moby Dick is a meeting point of order and disorder, control and chaos.
Examining systematically, boat is a sample of order, a container. However,
considering phenomenologically, boat is a labyrinth, a creepy reason for
amok, claustrophobia, blindness and drowning. Former imagination is the
one of the captain, the later is the one of the crew. However, the captain
is also a human being and while he tends to be dragged into the chaos,
the crew might also be in a predispersion towards rising up to a finely
autonomous structure by staging a revolt. This being the case, the boat
is both a hetertypical space without location, retired into its own shell and
a competitive means of power, a war machine which surrendered in to
the infinity of the sea.”

Sekula has been one of the people who opposed to the claims that
documentary photography reflects reality without any ideological

Still from The Forgotten Space, 2010
A film essay by Allan Sekula & Noel Storch

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

Yo! Bize bulmuşlar mış an? Bu da biçimlere sandığımızdan kutlulabilir mi?... Yolda çok arkadaşa bulma, kurtulma şansımızı daha az olur; hayattın devri, yeniden başlamamızı, ancak, bu yolculuğun bir sonucu, yolda bulduğumuz bir çok arkadaş, onu gerçekleştirebilecek amağın, bu yüzden de, yolda bulduğumuz, olgun hizcheidiniz çikar yolu keşfetmenin yollarından biriyle; çok mıdır...

Kaynaklar:

Attribution. Not ignoring the influence of the post-structuralist and post-modernist theories, the photographer remained the miraculous promise of reality by the documentarist photography as “naive conventionalism”. He suggested that the essential meaning of the photography can only be evaluated within the frameworks of various presentation and utilization contexts. He considered realism an invalid approach.

Who can be considered one of the benchmarks of contemporary photography, Allan Sekula’s work titled “Dismal Science: Part 1. Middle Passage. Panorama. Mid-Atlantic. November 1993” does not provide evidence for a touristic journey, undoubtedly. It seems like it is trying to convey a mood alternating between the feeling of freedom given by being on the road and passion of power and control found in capitalism. While ending my article, I would like to carry the process into a more positive status by quoting a passage from the conceptual text of the show: “Road”: “One of the issues that has most disturbed me in my life so far is people’s always using their status, life style, political opinion and the various groups they belong to as a means of position and domination. I’ve often seen that even the ones in the position of minor, gaining power after a rightful struggle, long for being majority instead of settling for the power in their hands and preferring to stay as independent minorities... I’ve been disappointed upon seeing that the reason behind people’s wish to demolish the system is to build up their own system. I’ve experienced that people preferring to stay independent have been accused of being rebellious, ill-tempered and stubborn. Being on the road sets me free from this burden, boredom, pressure, classification; being on the road is the most active, exciting, jolly, dynamic way of feeling independent...

The road teaches us either to find or to get rid of the ones we think we have found. We have a slighter chance of finding or getting rid of unless we take the road; we come across coincidences that will change our lives only on the road. The plans we make before taking the road can change upon the ones we find on the road; that’s why the road comes into being while we’re walking on it. One of the ways of discovering the “way out” you’ve been waiting for is taking the road...

References: