



A Poetic Allegory of Globalization in the Shift from the Machine Age to the Digital Age: Zoe Leonard's *Analogue*

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How to cite this paper: Peixuan Lyu. (2024) A Poetic Allegory of Globalization in the Shift from the Machine Age to the Digital Age: Zoe Leonard's *Analogue*. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 8(6), 1444-1448.
DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2024.06.024

Received: May 6, 2024
Accepted: June 4, 2024
Published: July 2, 2024

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Abstract

Traveling to Uganda in 2004 enabled Leonard to witness the city planning and the Kodak stores on the outskirts of Kampala. This article delves into the photo *Century Photo Center* in Zoe Leonard's project *Analogue*, as the lens to examine the transformative impacts of globalization from the Machine Age to the Digital Age. The first section analyzes from a technical and contextual perspective how this work concentrates on describing the process that something else is lost while something is gained in globalization. Through formal analysis, the second part argues that the project is produced with a calm and objective attitude toward the loss of global reality, rather than nostalgic or sentimental. The third part shows that in the era of rapid consumption of images dominated by technical revolution and globalization, *Analogue* goes deeper into the context of photography and exhibition. It rethinks the way of viewing. In short, it is the witness, recording, and reflection of globalization.

Keywords

Zoe Leonard, *Analogue*, *Century Photo Centre*, globalization

Introduction

Analogue (Figure 1) is a landmark project comprising 412 photographs conducted by Zoe Leonard (American, b. 1961) from 1998 to 2009, organized into 25 chapters. With chromogenic and gelatin silver printing techniques, it records the eclipsed texture of 20th-century urban life as seen in vanishing stores and the constant emergence of the global rag trade. The series depicts storefronts and objects on the brink of obsolescence due to the expansion of the global economy and the rapid technological progress that occurred at the turn of the century. In the photo *Century Photo Centre* (Figure 2), there is a front view of an old Kodak store, taken by Leonard in Uganda in 2004. It is the same size as other works in *Analogue*.

1. Context: Change as Exchange

Leonard claims that new technologies usually bring about improvement, but progress is an exchange, and something else is lost while something is gained. By embracing photography as a medium, *Analogue* documents this "exchange" and focuses on describing what was lost as the machine age is waning.

Regarding the technical aspect, a vintage 1940s medium-format Rolleiflex film camera specifically related to the medium's role in the change and construction of history. It is a nearly obsolete, predigital equipment. The film and paper used for printing the artwork have since been discontinued (Battaglia, 2015). In response to digitalization, the photo finds ways to highlight medium-specific. It makes the characteristics of Kodak, Fuji, and other traditional films

obvious by leaving the black frame about 6mm wide. Besides, the familiar square format of the prints recalls pictures taken by classic analog film cameras, like the old Rolleiflex Leonard in fact used. These also draw attention to an aspect of the medium within the image.



Figure 1. Zoe Leonard, *Analogue (Kodak section)*, 1998-2009, Chromogenic print and gelatin silver print on paper, Whole series contains 412 C-prints, each (28 x 28 cm). © Zoe Leonard.



Figure 2. Zoe Leonard, *Century Photo Center (Analogue)*, 2004, Kampala, Uganda, Chromogenic print and gelatin silver print on paper, Whole series contains 412 C-prints, 28 x 28 cm. © Zoe Leonard. Courtesy Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

In terms of the formal elements in the photo “Century Photo Centre”, the loss of history in the digital age is exquisitely captured in this empty scene. In the photo, while the dilapidated door of the Kodak store is locked, the street also presents a desolate scene with no signs of life as well. The blackened wires above and the crack in the wall is the implication that the store will close permanently when succumbing to urbanization. It is precisely that this full of damaged texture is compromised by the digitally “enhanced” technology of commercial digital photography. In the Digital Age, consumers are allowed to share and display images across different media through the internet. In this situation, the slogan “For All Your Photographic Materials” under “Kodak” seems powerless.

While the advantages of digitalization in terms of accessibility, dissemination, speed, and efficiency have been accepted widely, this artwork explores the loss of this great technological revolution from the technical and formal perspective. *Analogue* is a critical reflection on the history of documentary photography (Berrebi, 2010). As Leonard stated this creation is “left over from the mechanical age”.

2. Role: A Calm Bystander

Despite its representation of historical loss, this photo does not carry any tiresome nostalgia, instead, the artist records it objectively as a dispassionate spectator. This section will discuss the composition of “Century Photo Centre”, and then demonstrate from the display of the *Analogue* series that does not focus on creativity or imagination, but more on responding calmly to observation and reality.

The composition of “Century Photo Centre” is not dramatic at all. Instead, it is an extremely straightforward and calm composition. The symmetrical arrangement hides emotion and restrains an atmosphere of sadness about losing (Dungan, 2002). From the way of displaying the series, *Analogue* is usually installed in 25 groups depending on the specific conditions of the space. Each group has 4 to 48 photographs, which is presented in a series of grids. For example, it is also exhibited in the form of a classic and rigorous grid in 2015 at MoMA (Figure 3). The displaying approach employs modernity through repetition and seriality of the scene. Legibility is achieved within such a physical relationship of a grid or “chapters” or “albums”; each acts as a moment within the larger space and narrative continuity (Troeller, 2010). Furthermore, the “grids” exhibiting method of this artwork responds to the “white cube” of the contemporary art museum, which powerfully emphasizes the function feature of the rapid dissemination of information in the digital age.

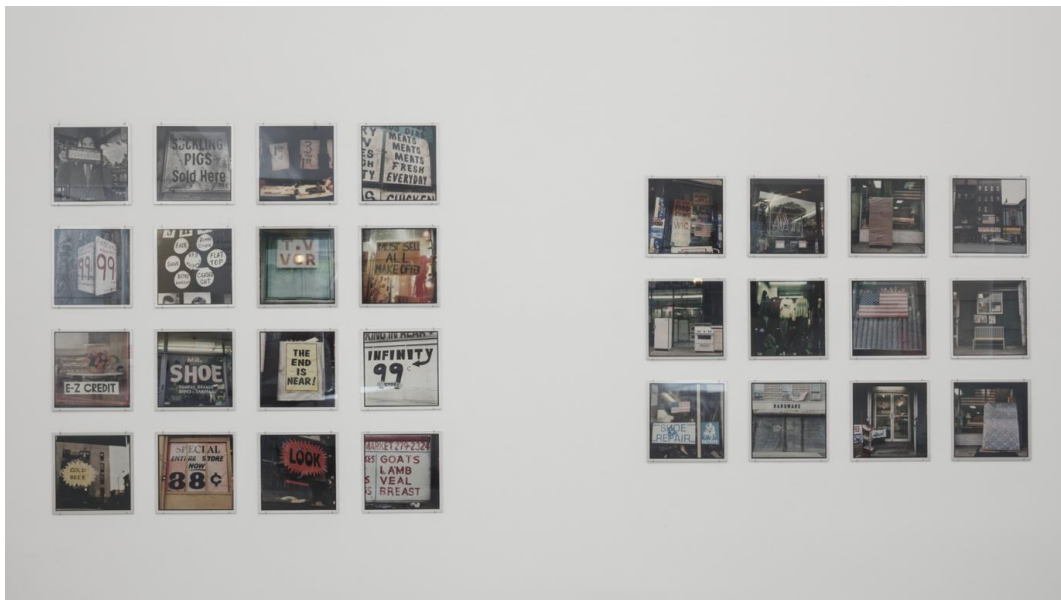


Figure 3. Installation view of the exhibition “Zoe Leonard: Analogue”. Photograph by John Wronn in 2015. © The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

To sum up, *Analogue* is a formally uniform boxes that collect the objects around the street when Leonard encounters on her walks. Johnson considers it a style that is not influenced by personal expression or aesthetic sensibilities (Johnson, 2015). In the process, such a calm observation and recording method enable the artist the role of a bystander.

3. Rethink: The Way of Viewing

In addition to witnessing the loss in the globalization process and recording calmly, *Analogue* also provides the viewer with rethinking the way of viewing by establishing an introspective intimacy with the image. Firstly, regarding photographic works, this work advocates a more eternal and lasting way of viewing. It criticizes the endangered situation of traditional photography in the digital age. Secondly, this work also constructs a special way of viewing that could cross the dimension of time in contemporary exhibitions.

In terms of photography context, why is *Analogue* keen to present “eternal viewing”? Relating to the meaning of the word “Analogue”, film-based photography systems are also known as “analog”. It describes the photography technique that uses chemical processes to capture images on film, paper, printing plates, etc. When the snapshot era comes which is led by the digital revolution, the cost of photography is dropped dramatically. Time photography, represented by analog photography, emphasizes the medium features that is suitable for objects, such as light sensitivity and indexicality (Iversen, 2012). By contrast, snapshots focus on capturing events. However, de Duve (1978) argues that the former’s stillness and chiaroscuro provide a necessity for extending the duration of viewing and reverie compared to the latter. By reminding the viewer of the materiality of celluloid film, the artwork *Analogue* stresses the poetic allegory of solidity and eternity. It poses a stark contrast with the momentary viewing habit in the digital age.

In the art institution space, *Analogue* also guides the audience to think about the attribute of viewing that spans the dimension of time. In 2015, Roxana Marcoci, curator of the exhibition ‘Zoe Leonard: *Analogue*’ at MoMA, argued that Leonard shared close observation through photography (Figure 4), which was as much about what is seen as it was about how. The contemporary exhibition space constantly tries to give the viewer a calm space to experience viewing. From 1998 to 2009, this work also constructs a special look at each other across the dimension of time.

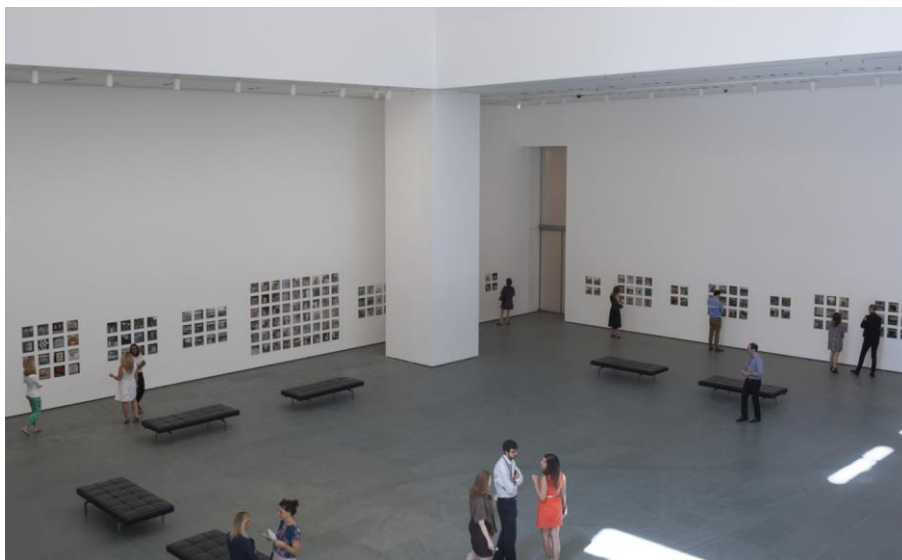


Figure 4. Installation view of the exhibition “Zoe Leonard: Analogue”, 2015, photograph by John Wronn. © The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

In short, in the era of mass consumption with the rapid process of digitalization and globalization, this work explores a more solid viewing method with a sense of responsibility. It also considers the context of contemporary exhibitions that *Analogue* could be a hint for the audience to be aware of the way of viewing, influence the larger perception of the digital world, and rethink the transformation.

4. Conclusion

Leonard’s project emerges as both a reflection on the past and a contemplation of the future in the face of globalization’s inexorable march. This article takes Leonard’s project *Analogue* as an example and intends to explain how to demonstrate the transformation brought about by globalization. The first section analyses technology and formal aspects, by discussing the camera equipment and the details of the scene in the photo “Century Photo Centre”, it

explains the historical loss behind the convenience and effectivity brought by digitalization, especially traditional photography. Therefore, global change is a process of exchange. In the second part, the paper focuses on the formal discussion in more detail, which is the composition. It shows the calm recording method. The daily occurrences are mirrored matter-of-factly (Calabrese, 2015), but also elegant and poetic with a unified art form, which is symmetry. She is more like a documentarian than an artist. The last part toward a special discourse, which is the context of photography and the context of exhibition display for analysis. It describes the meaning of the word “Analogue” in the history of photography. It inspires the audience to provide a unique way of thinking. From witnessing, and recording to viewing, *Analogue* integrates history, geography, and capitalist invasion under globalization in the form of an archive (Berrebi, 2010). The work is both an elegy and a paean. If it commemorates a bygone era, the vanishing places in photographs are themselves sites of memory.

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