Royal College of Art

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The Outsider's Advantage

by

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Declaration

This dissertation is submitted to the Critical & Historical Studies Department in partial fulfillment for the MA (RCA) in Photography. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted, and has not been previously submitted for this or any other awards.

Signed _____

Date _____

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List of Illustrations

Thomas Struth, *The Hirose Family, Hiroshima*, 1987.

Introduction

For the purpose of this dissertation, I wish to discuss the photographer's role as an outsider and to that end I shall explore the possibility that making images from the 'outside' comes with its advantages. At first sight, this seems to be a paradox as the outsider is generally thought of as disadvantaged. A major part of this paper however will argue that the status of the outsider allows for a sometimes-clearer perception. To go even further, extending through all genres, the outsider's position is often a catalyst for creative expression. His status therefore has a direct relationship with the creative practice of individuals who choose to work culturally, socially even emotionally from the 'outside'.

Practically speaking, there is a significant moment when one can experience the photographer as outsider. As I am a photographer myself, it has happened to me on several occasions that, when a family shot is to be taken someone in the group suggests: "Why not let the professional take the picture?" What seems banal at first actually raises a crucial point for the discussion of this topic. If the photographer in the family is the one who usually takes the picture – and therefore is usually outside the picture – is he in terms of visual representation of the family an outsider?

Moving away from the micro dynamics of the family, the question can be raised as to whether the photographer doesn't always constitute an outsider for two main reasons: the subject is at a certain distance to the camera, and rarely is the subject the photographer himself. Culturally, socially and economically speaking this distance usually constitutes of three worlds: the subject's, the photographer's and most certainly the viewer's. Despite a desire to remain on the outside of the subject's world, the photographer's influence on how the viewer perceives the subject should not be underestimated and will be discussed in this paper.

The personal motivation to discuss this particular topic originates from my past. Being generally quite afraid of physical activities as a child, I happily volunteered to act as referee in neighborhood football matches. Similarly, as a teenager, working as a Disc Jockey over a number of years, I was content with my position of supplying the venue with a decent atmosphere while my friends were busy socializing. Looking back, one can make out a subtle yet distinct pattern in behavior that lead me to be a photographer today.

The referee, DJ, and photographer have in common that they are individuals observing a scene, without participating in it. In spite of being a generally overlooked figure, these practitioners are instrumental in the way their environment is perceived. In that sense, they are not necessarily motivated by their own interest but by the interest of others: the players, the guests, the people photographed.

At first sight and superficially speaking these figures form outsiders to their immediate environment since they are non-participants. However in order to gain a better perspective, the mentioned observer types are physically, even emotionally surrounded by what they observe. Clearly, this implies inclusivity, not exclusivity. Does this apparent inclusion enable more objectivity in the act of observing? Certainly, in regards to the photographer, this question shall be discussed furthermore.

In that regard, the definition of outsider and insider is not as clear-cut as one might think, as even 'outside' and 'inside' in the above example is hard to classify. What is an outsider? – this is a question that under these circumstances is not easy to answer. The ideological manifestation of being 'outside', is however a vital starting point that induces a further definition.

Although the main focus of this paper is on photography, a concentrated discussion of this specific medium is established gradually revealing the impact of the outsider within other genres such as literature, science and art in general. Because of its close historical and theoretical connection to the photographic, particularly cinema and its relationship to the outsider figure will be discussed throughout the paper, whereas photography will be treated more exclusively towards the end. For the sake of convenience, I refer to the authors of such creative outlets in the masculine.

In addition to the shift in genres, the reader will also notice a shift in perspectives; albeit physical, environmental or contextual. In that sense, to use a photographic terminology, one *zooms* into the subject matter by getting closer to some of the core questions surrounding the discussion of the outsider and the outsider's advantage.

Chapter One

The Distanced Outsider

To be excluded from a group, organization or society requires ideological separation. A difference in opinion, belief or background is however also the motive for spatial division. Therefore, the very condition of *outsider-ness* is emotional and also physical distance.

The artist as well requires actual, that is, corporal distance: between subject and object. To him, distance is the key condition for a perception of the world that is aesthetic. Physical intimacy and closer understanding would be equally impossible without having contemplated the object of fascination from a distance. Proximity and remoteness are not mutually exclusive. This removal from the world should not be interpreted as an escape, but as part of a creative condition.

The artist's perception therefore embraces the notion of distance on mainly two levels: outside the reality of the culture / environment but also reinforced by physical distance. Willingly or not, the outsider as well, emphasizes his condition by psychological and physical manifestation. Is it therefore arguable that an artist is consequentially an outsider by the very definition of his chosen practice?

This notion is not only relevant on the visual level. The removal from the world is quite literally a long lasting desire amongst a number of creative practitioners. Literature, for example, aspires to the imagination with elevated views on our world and our cosmos suggesting that art takes outside ourselves and elevates us.

In Cicero's *Republic,* for example, describing Scipio's flight to the stars, the sheer beauty is described as following:

> When I beheld the whole universe from that point, everything seemed glorious and wonderful. There were stars which we have never seen from this earth of ours, each of a size which we have never imagined to exist. [i]

Apart from encountering beauty, Scipio is also fascinated by the discoveries of the unknown. His detachment from the world was on another, a third type of distance: the celestial. The associations between elevation, beauty and knowledge are tangible in this short excerpt.

This attraction to elevated views is still prevalent today, though on a more pragmatic level, as man continues to observe and explore the universe. A key component for the journeys into space has always been its visual documentation, to establish proof and reference points in an unimaginably vast cosmos. Nevertheless, the desire for images from space is not necessarily of scientific nature. Man is innately curious to see what surrounds him, determining what the limits are, to see what is farthest away.

A wholly different type of exploration can be currently discovered on the Internet with a software called *Google Earth* which enables "computer users, from the comfort of their desk tops, to visually fly to any place on the planet that they have designated,

with 3-D views along the way […] converting [them] into explorers." [ii] An enlarged satellite image (Figure 1.1) allows the viewer to see the world from only a few hundred meters altitude – close enough to make out specific buildings.

It almost seems ironic then that after decades invested into space programs, one of the side-effects is that the earth as well is much closer scrutinized. In that sense, the viewpoint has been reversed, as man is as curious about his own world as he is in others. Instead of looking up at the stars, the observer can now look down to see the familiar: the luscious green trees in Hyde Park, the street one lives on, a double-decker bus waiting at a red light. Indeed, it is often the objects that are closest to us, that are most fascinating to see from a distance.
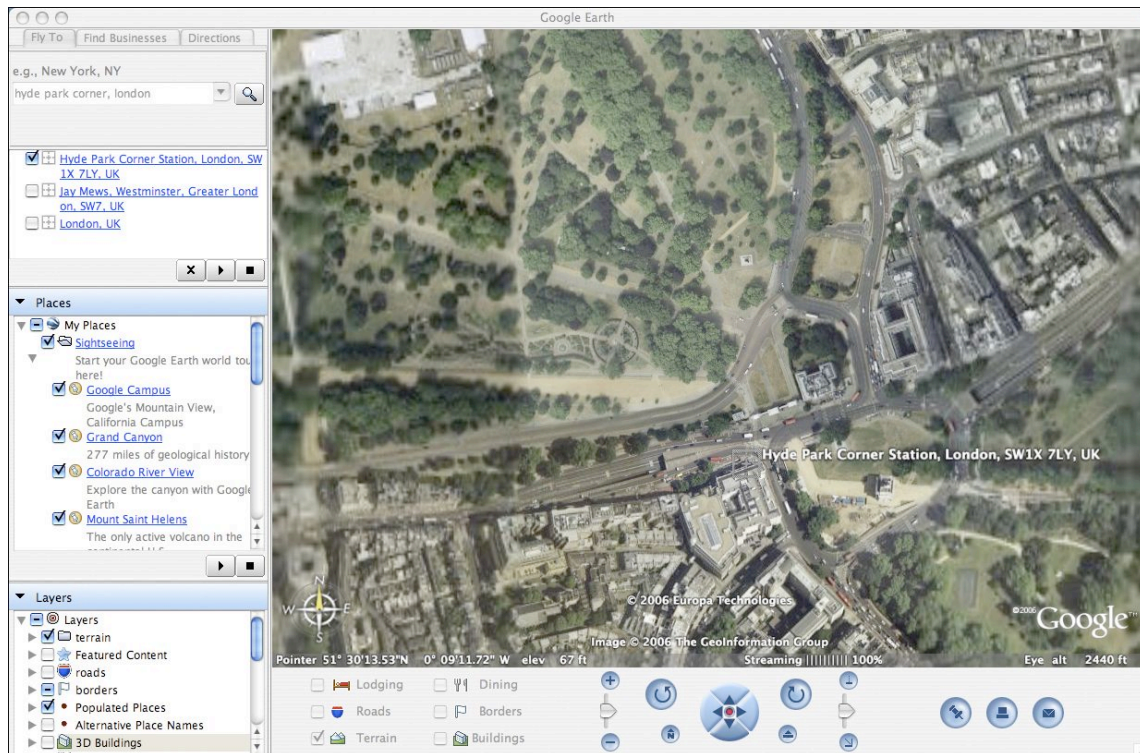
Figure 1.1: Screen shot from *Google Earth* depicting Hyde Park Corner in London.

The key constituent of this fascination is, apart from its distance, the elevated perspective the viewer is able to take up with *Google Earth*. The excitement gained from such sights is similarly evident in Michel de Certeau's account of visiting the top of the World Trade Center. In *Practices of Everyday Life* he writes:

> *When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors of spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.* [iii]

If the city is compared to a text, readable only when removed from it, every visible aspect of urban life therefore comprises a piece of this text: a paragraph, a line, even a single letter. De Certeau's godlike desire to decipher the words revealed below, suggests that only the one above, or outside, is able to read. The people on the street remain illiterate to their surroundings, as they are unable to read the whole text that surrounds them. De Certau continues:

> The exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. [iv]

The above reference to *Gnosticism* [v]– freeing the spirit from the material world – is intriguing and thought provoking. After all, de Certau writes from his experience from the top of a landmark that celebrated financial power. With the annihilation of the World Trade Center – and the many lives that were lost with it – one must then also think of a wholly different form of loss: literally, that of a point of view. Like pilgrims of the spectacle, thousands of tourists came to photograph on the few square meters on top of a building that once was (Figure 1.2). Like a great disco ball, whose rays are the camera flashes switched on AUTO, the observatory deck on the World Trade Center was a haven of contemplation, reflection and knowledge – not only a financial and architectural achievement.
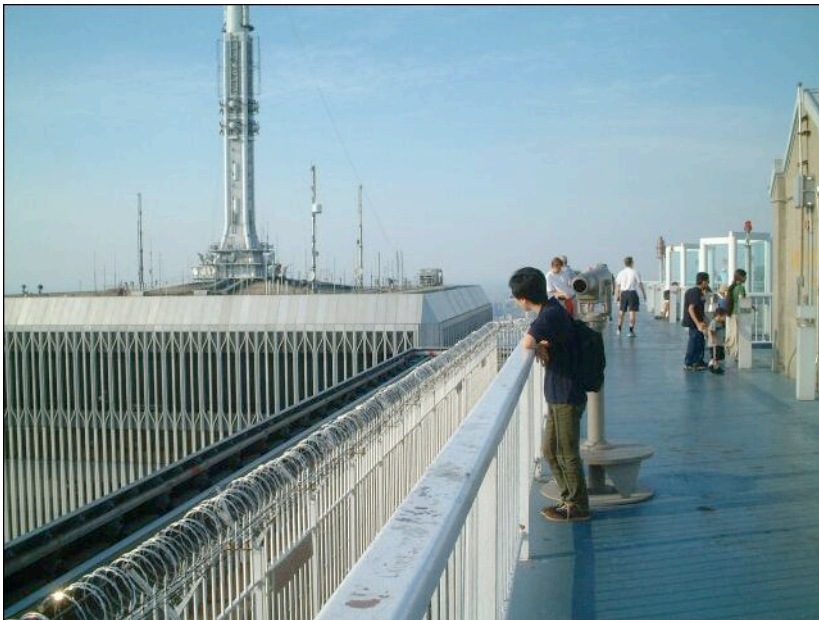
Figure 1.2: The Observation Deck on the top of New York's World Trade Center photographed by an anonymous Japanese tourist in 2000.

De Certeau's birdlike "lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" is embedded in the design of our cities and the futuristic dreams and aspirations that come with it. The wish to attain bird's eye, or god's eye, vision is equally reflected in visual culture, most notably in cinema. In the early Russian movies from the 1920's, the acclaimed director Dziga Vertov introduced the so-called *kino-eye* – a camera that could film

from any angle and any height. In 1924 Vertov writes that the *kino-eye* was "to record and organize the individual characteristics of life's phenomena into a whole, an essence, a conclusion." [vi]

Figure 1.3: Film still from Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929).

In *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), Vertov explores the potential of the *kino-eye* by sometimes filming from considerable heights. In a memorable scene, his cinematographer brother is shown climbing an industrial steel structure with a motion picture camera on his back (Figure 1.3). Throughout the movie, one is reminded of the power of the image as the camera continuously observes the observer.

The *kino-eye* was further improved by Mikhail Kalatozov, another Russian director who, like many in his era, was immensely inspired by Vertov's techniques. In the midst of Cuba's revolutionary movements in the early 1960's, Kalatozov filmed *Soy Cuba,* or *I am Cuba* (1964). Rarely can one experience a movie that is spoken in Spanish, dubbed in Russian and subtitled in English. It is however the visual language that exceeds all others, as Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian* comments on the work of acclaimed cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky:

> Later, in the epic funeral scene, his camera soars up past the Havana balconies, noses through a cigar factory and then appears to float over the rail looking down on the giant procession as if suspended from a cloud. [vii]

Here as well, the viewer converts into a god, capable of drifting in and out of people's homes, unnoticed by its inhabitants, where the camera assumes the position of "a viewpoint and nothing more." [viii] Such is the viewer's longing to follow the camera's flow that practical questions as to how its movements are achieved seem irrelevant. Quite simply, the filmmakers' removal from this world bypasses any technical limitations that were thought impossible for this time.

Although the notion of being "suspended from a cloud" also suggests another type of viewpoint – that of the soul leaving the body. The connection with the assumed viewpoint of the deceased and Urusevsky's rising camera filming a funeral scene is deliberate. In that sense, the *kino-eye* also encapsulates the desire to see the world from the point of view of the dead – a point of view 'outside' the body.

That this scenario transcends any religious insinuations of the afterlife is vividly illustrated in Albert Camus' existential novel *The Stranger* whose central character Meursault is an utter atheist. During his trial for murder Meursault foreshadows his own death by guillotine when it says:

> The business of climbing a scaffold, leaving the world below, so to speak,
> gave something for a man's imagination to get hold of. [ix]

In long passages in the book, more suitably released as *L'Etranger* in France, the reader becomes progressively more aware of Meursault's dissociation from his environment, almost as if he becomes another person. As the protagonist is a French man in the former colony Algeria, the disconnection with his environment can also be reasoned with cultural distance.

As a result of his complete emotional detachment the protagonist's visual perception of the real and imagined environment is distinctly lucid. Despite Mersault's increasing insanity, is his detachment towards his environment enabling him to see it objectively? This is a question that needs to be asked for the outsider in general, which shall be done at a later stage in this paper.

If it is from a satellite, skyscraper or scaffold, the viewer's gaze is directed to both: the earth below and objects furthest away in the distance. In addition to the viewer's position these are then orientation points for a so-called *triangulation*, [x] whereas everything stands in relation to these coordinates (Figure 1.4). Such elevated views give opportunity to determine one's position in the world – geographically, sociologically and culturally. In that sense, distance informs the viewer of the very foundation of his being allowing him to define his relation to others.

Figure 1.4: Jobst Buergi's triangulation instrument used to determine the distance of enemy troops, before firing cannon, published in Kassel/Germany, 1648.

Endnotes

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[i] Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *The Republic and the Laws*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 89.

[ii] Vise, David A., *The Google Story*, New York: Random House Bantam Dell, 2005, p. 218.

[iii] de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, London: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 91 - 93.

[iv] de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, London: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 91 - 93.

[v] A prominent heretical movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit. [Oxford American Dictionaries]

[vi] Vertov, Dziga, 'Artistic Drama and Kino-Eye', 1924, quoted in Manovich, Lev, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001, p. 308.

[vii] Bradshaw, Peter, 'I am Cuba (Soy Cuba)', *The Guardian,* 22.11.2002.

[viii] de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, London: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 91 - 93.

[ix] Camus, Albert, *The Stranger*, New York: Vintage Books, 2001, p. 70.

[x] The tracing and measurement of a series or network of triangles in order to determine the distances and relative positions of points spread over a territory or region, esp. by measuring the length of one side of each triangle and deducing its angles and the length of the other two sides by observation from this baseline. [Oxford American Dictionaries]

Chapter Two
The Cultural Outsider

In an increasingly globalized world, the likelihood of classifying an individual as a 'cultural outsider' has never been as great as it is today. The distances between countries are becoming seemingly shorter on numerous levels – geographically, culturally and also psychologically. With the advent of low-budget air carriers, a growing population can afford travel to countries formerly reserved for diplomats, journalists, researchers, entrepreneurs, or the wealthy.

In an essay on Contemporary Japanese Art, Mami Katoka confirms that "now that overseas travel has become commonplace and the Internet has provided a window onto the world, the psychological distance between East and West has been decreasing." [i] Issues surrounding creative practices in a non-native environment are therefore increasingly of relevance, where "seeing the world" has become comparatively so much easier. The connection between photography and travel are obvious – perhaps "travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs." [ii]

Rarely are the visual senses as heightened as they are in an entirely new environment. The camera is therefore not only a tool to record the newly seen but also an aid to "see" the new. Travelers have a cultural and visual knowledge of their "habitual environments," [iii] and anything that differs from that is likely to be noticed and often documented.

In a broader sense though one has to question how well foreign and different cultures can be understood through the lens of a camera. In this regard, the cultural theorist Joanne Martin raises two seemingly simple questions:

> Is culture an objective or subjective phenomenon?
>
> Can culture be understood from an outsider or etic point of view,
> or does an insider or emic viewpoint generate more insight? [iv]

Although it is possible to recount the many disadvantages a cultural outsider may encounter on his or her artistic mission, there are also some very significant benefits in perceiving cultures other than one's own. Curiously enough, in a study titled *Deaf Children in China,* the author writes about medical research that could easily be attributed to art practice:

> […] one can also argue that the position of a cultural outsider has
> certain advantages […] What the insider may take for granted, as
> natural or inevitable occurrences, can appear striking to the
> researcher who has experience of alternative cultural practices with
> which to contrast them. [v]

Yet another feature found in the world of imaging and worthy of mention is, the emphasis on contrasting and consequentially comparing. Thus, it is only by comparison that the image-maker, or researcher in the above situation, can see the difference – the contrast so to speak. In order to do so, cultural observers must be attentive to potentially new surroundings, but also to their native environment. The

dimension of the ability to observe, recognize, interpret and visually articulate cultural distinctions is therefore governed by a deep cultural understanding that can only be achieved through experience.

There is of course a long discourse on the outsider "through observation" and the insider "through participation" debate [vi]. From a sociological point of view, Peter I. Rose writes that both positions can assert authority, "the spectator position which claims the advantages of distance and detachment, and the participant position which claims that only through intimacy and involvement […] can one ever get to know the subtleties of rules and roles and social relationships." [vii]

One must ask however, are the two positions of "spectator" and "participant" and their correspondent characteristics mutually exclusive? Does distance and a sense of detachment actually prevent the observer from understanding his subject intimately? It might be relevant to exemplify this query on another sensual level. As a child, it always seemed remarkable to me that my friend's house had a delicate and often soothing scent. On returning home however, it was a constant disappointment to me that there was not a detectable scent in my own home. Did other children detect a scent, one had to wonder? If so, what did it smell like to them?

This ability to "smell" something in other people's homes, that their inhabitants are mostly completely unaware of, could demonstrate that the characteristics of the two standpoints are not exclusive. In fact, to go even further with this example, it shows that the characteristics are interchangeable. Intimacy – even something as intimate as the discovery of people's scent – is often reserved to the observer.

Again, when writing on the characteristic limits of spectator and participant Peter I. Rose suggests that one has to recognize the limits of such a division and, he in fact writes:

> Finally, recognizing the limits of both distance and intimacy, of detachment and involvement, accepting that there are and will always be competing claims to truth and insight, and being mindful of the very real political aspects of the whole debate, can we ever […] get inside someone else's world? [viii]

This of course, does not lead us to a straightforward answer but it does suggest that one's awareness of the above debate is imperative for the understanding of other cultures. The cultural outsider, observing his new environment from a variety of angles whether artist, scientist, tourist or otherwise, is therefore in a unique position to contribute to the above debate by more importantly exhibiting curiosity, respect, and appreciation towards other cultures.

Endnotes

[i] Katoka, Mami, 'The Unknown Power Hidden in Reality', in *Facts of Life: Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. Japan Foundation, London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2001, p. 18.

[ii] Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 9.

[iii] Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 9.

[iv] Martin, Joanne, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, London: Sage Publications, 2002, p. 206.

[v] Callaway, Alison, *Deaf Children in China*, Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002, p. 7.

[vi] Rose, Peter I., *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Some Reflections on the Insider-Outsider Debate*, Northampton: Smith College, 1978, p. 12.

[vii] Rose, Peter I., *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Some Reflections on the Insider-Outsider Debate*, Northampton: Smith College, 1978, p. 12.

[viii] Rose, Peter I., *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Some Reflections on the Insider-Outsider Debate*, Northampton: Smith College, 1978, p. 24.

Chapter Three
The Comparing Outsider

Man's instinctive need to constantly compare his life, his possessions, his values with those of his neighbors is probably also a way of explaining the unquenchable curiosity man has towards others. However, is it not the knowledge of our neighbors' values that is instrumental in forming your own? Never before has this question been more relevant on a global scale than it is today. It is therefore imperative to discuss the means of comparison applied by cultural outsiders.

Every year since 1986, the *The Economist* has published the *Big Mac Index* to give an overview on the iconic hamburger's monetary value in the countries in which it is sold. The Big Mac's price in the local currency is then converted into the US Dollar and marked on a chart (Figure 3.1). For example, a Big Mac costs roughly 15,000 Rupiah in Indonesia but, without knowing how much that is in a currency known to the reader, 15,000 symbolizes an abstract quantity that could be replaced with any other given number. However the *Big Mac Index* is only one way of looking at this commodity's value, the "real" value of the Hamburger is not established with the numbers listed in *The Economist*. In this way, the *Big Mac Index* is incredibly flawed and might even be misleading. In his book *Hyperreality, and Global Culture,* Nicholas Perry comments:

> If however, emphasis is placed upon a Big Mac as an indeterminate and complex sign rather than a perfect(ly) simple commodity, then it is not standardization and uniformity which assumes priority but variation and difference. From such a perspective the price of a Big Mac is merely one aspect of what it signifies; and what it signifies slides promiscuously along and across the disparate (geographical, cultural, social, and discursive) locations from which it is read. [ii]

A research conducted triennially by *Union Bank of Switzerland* is another attempt to further clarify the value of the Big Mac by comparing local purchasing power. In August 2006, the study concluded that in Jakarta 86 minutes of work buys a Big Mac – compared to 10 minutes in Tokyo [iii]. Nevertheless, this extensive economic examination is unable to express the sociological implications of a visit to McDonald's. Even within different parts of Asia, the perceived value of a *Big Mac* could range from a cheap and convenient meal to a sign of prosperity.

It might seem striking that both the Big Mac and culture itself cannot be perceived from any singular point of view. There is indeed no one objective way to grasp a commodity's worth just as there is no one way in which to look at culture. Consequently, the portrayal of culture will be endlessly varied, and the above comparison seems appropriate as fast food is such a clear byproduct of our culture – our globalized culture.
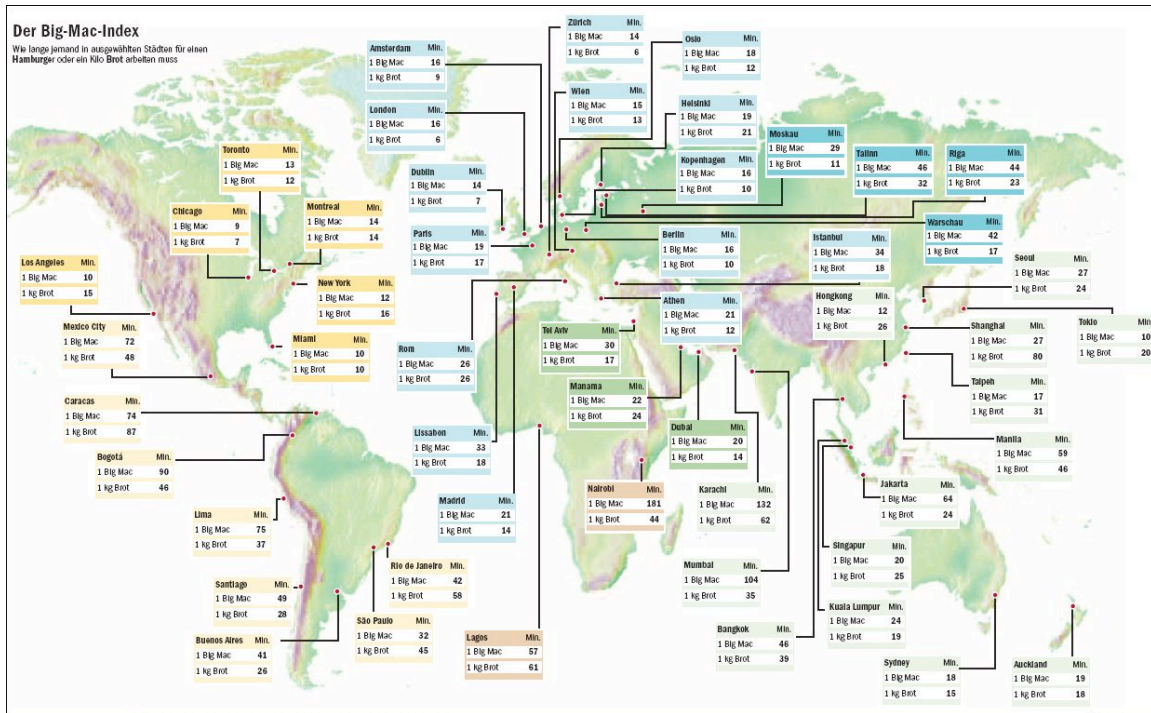
Figure 3.1: Example of the *Big Mac Index* published in the German newspaper *Die Welt* in 2005.

The attempt to perceive our world from an objective, neutral and unbiased point of view is particularly apparent in photography. No other form of art is as often utilized to observe and consequently portray culture as pragmatically as photography. However, can an objective perspective be achieved from only one point of view? Is there even such a thing as an "objective" point of view? Is this unbiased view within the reach of the photographer or those who view photographs?

In his essay *Reality Remade,* Nelson Goodman writes :

> The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers, heart and brain. It functions not as an instrument self-powered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, constructs. [iv]

As Goodman suggests, the notion of a neutral, unbiased and therefore innocent viewpoint is fallible, for image-makers and viewers alike. To return to the photographic realm, the very moment the shutter is pressed, one makes the choice of including but also excluding visual information from the photograph. The *whole* can never be seen, as a photograph is always only part of the whole. Banal factors such as weather conditions, print quality, choice of lens, film, and ultimately in what context the image is shown will have a huge effect on how an image is perceived. A photographic print by Eugene Atget, for example will have quite a different effect on the viewer depending whether it is seen in a museum or in a flea market (Figure 3.2).

Ironically, even though Atget's work was generally respected amongst artists, it was only after his death in 1927 that fellow photographer Berenice Abbott was able to elevate it to be recognized as art.

Figure 3.2: Eugene Atget, *Notre Dame* from 1925.

In Japanese, the *Kanji* [v] characters that are used for the word photography are derived from two words: "copy" and "truth" [vi], in recognition of the camera's capabilities to record. The Greek model *photos graphis* ("light" and "stylus") translates into "painting with light" and is much more a symbolic reflection of the necessities and tools involved. Apart from its ability to document, the latter is also a suggestion to utilize the medium artistically. Nevertheless, the pledge that photography "copies the truth" is as poetic as it is insincere. The truth according to the camera, is always someone else's truth from the photographer's particular point of view. The British philosopher and writer Julian Baggini writes on this subject, "On this view there is no one truth, rather truth is always relative to a society, individual or culture." [vii]

To return to earlier example, an object's value, and its perceived value, can therefore never be defined in a mere number or chart. Similarly, in photography, a window on our world that opens and closes in a split second is by no means a truthful representation of that world, therefore, charts and images alike should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, photographs can express more than sheer numbers. Reading and appreciating images consequently leads the viewer to appreciate the photographer's interest in his subject. By looking at images we grow to appreciate their content, their importance, their value – not only to the photographer, but ourselves as well.

Endnotes

[i] Minh-Ha, Trinh T., 'No Master Territories', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 218.

[ii] Perry, Nicholas, *Hyperreality and Global Culture,* London: Routledge, 1998, p. 154.

[iii] www.ubs.com (18 September 2006).

[iv] Goodman, Nelson, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976, pp. 7-8.

[v] A system of Japanese writing using Chinese characters. [Oxford American Dictionaries]

[vi] Photography in Japanese is called *Shashin* and it writes: 写真.

[vii] Baggini, Julian, *Making Sense: Philosophy Behind the Headlines,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 24.

Chapter Four

The Outsider Within

In very few forms of art has the notion of "outsider-dom" [i] and issues surrounding the outsider been discussed more than in cinema. Often the theme is that of "otherness" – to feed the viewer's primal need to acquaint himself with the unknown. This can be achieved through films set in foreign countries, exploring mysterious subcultures sometimes dating back to another period of time. Here the director explores his subject like a curious onlooker. Depending on the his cultural upbringing, this point of view can be taken from any number of angles. The filmmakers' background, referring not only to the director but to a whole team of people, is therefore subtly intertwined with the portrayal of a given subject.

In his seminal essay on aesthetics, *In Praise of Shadows* the Japanese novelist Junichiro Tanizaki writes on this subject:

> One need only compare American, French, and German films to see how greatly nuances of shading and coloration can vary in motion pictures. In the photographic image itself, to say nothing of the acting and the script, there somehow emerges differences in national character. [ii]

Surely the differences in national character would emerge no matter where the film was set. It is therefore quite remarkable when the director goes beyond cultural boundaries to assume another, to him foreign, point of view. A reversed observation comes into effect when the film depicts its maker's native milieu. Subjects that may seem ordinary and commonplace need to be perceived from a stranger's viewpoint – becoming the outsider within so to speak.

This phenomenon is eloquently portrayed in *Viaggio in Italia* (1953). Here, travelling to places well known to the director, Roberto Rossellini adapts the spectator's viewpoint of an American couple when "the world is seen through the eyes of the stranger, [the] cultural outsider." [iii] Rossellini's disengagement from any sentiment towards his native environment allows him to take up his subjects' curious and possibly even frightened vision. In America, the film was released as *Journey to Italy* and *Strangers*, further emphasizing the outsiders' overall uneasiness that lurks throughout the movie.

Another more contemporary example of a filmmaker taking up the etic viewpoint of a stranger within his own culture is Ang Lee in *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994). The movie is set in present day Taiwan and focuses on the complex relationship between a father and his three daughters, who could not be more different in character. Throughout the film the camera focuses in long close-ups on the father, a former master chef, preparing traditional dishes. It is in a similarly meticulous fashion that Lee depicts the daughters, as they cope with the unexpected fortunes and misfortunes of life (Figure 4.1). With clinical precision, Lee's detailed and fascinated gaze continues to assume the viewpoint of a curious stranger hungry for images, within and outside of his culture. In Rick Moody's adaptation *The Ice Storm* (1997), Lee also proves that his attention to emotional intricacies do not fail him in an environment

hardly known to him as he paints a chilling portrait of two upper class American families in the 70s (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.1 (left): Film still from Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman,* 1994.
Figure 4.2 (right): Film still from Ang Lee's *The Ice Storm*, 1997.

Thus the director's geographic and cultural distance does not prevent a clear understanding of the subject matter. In fact, it might even have been necessary as Janet Maslin remarks in the *New York Times*, as "the malaise is everywhere, and Mr. Lee understands it as only an outsider can." [iv]
With regard to yet another Lee film, *Sense and Sensibility (1995),* the Film Historian Andrew Higson goes even further when he writes on foreign directors' portrayal of British heritage. He states that many of those films thus seem:

> interrogative and critical, exploring the underside of the often nostalgic vision, is perhaps not surprising since so many of the films are made […] by directors and producers raised in other cultures. Inevitably, [they] approach their subject-matter from a less than reverential position, from that of the outsider rather than the insider. [v]

In this fashion, the Taiwanese director continuously places himself in unknown territories, most recently evident in *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) where Lee crossed hitherto another border: that of sex and sexual preference.

Indeed, one must wonder, how much longer Tanizaki's statement on the visibility of different national characteristics is valid in an ever-globalizing world. Quentin Tarantino's inspiration from Japanese Mangas [vi], Bollywood filming in the Swiss Alps to emulate the *Sound of Music,* [vii] and a Vietnamese production funded by French and German cultural institutions [viii] are only a few odd but factual patterns where national and cultural boundaries are crossed with great aplomb. The categorization of "foreign movie" therefore becomes increasingly more complex. The confusion leads to odd choices, such as listing the Native Canadian production *Atarnarjuat – The Fast Runner* (2001) as Foreign Movie at *Blockbuster* video rental stores across Canada.

Figure 4.3: Film still from Zacharias Kunuk's *Atarnajuat* (2001).

Simply put, as the Bulgarian philosopher Julia Kristeva points out, "we are all in the process of becoming foreigners in a universe that is being widened more than ever." [ix] Film is only one medium to express this trend. Globalization stands for trade agreements, unified currencies, and disappearing borders, but it has also created choices to millions of people that were never available before. Under these circumstances, the paradox is that a globalizing world has redefined both: what is "foreign" and constitutes "home".

Endnotes

[i] Osborne, Peter, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 80 – 90.

[ii] Tanizaki, Junichiro, *In Praise of Shadows*, London: Vintage, 2001, p. 16.

[iii] Restivo, Angelo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film,* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 97.

[iv] Maslin, Janet, 'Suburbanites Pure as Driven Slush', *New York Times*, 26 September 1997.

[v] Higson, Andrew, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 28-29.

[vi] Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History, with a Selective Guide to DVDs and Videos,* Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001, p. 220.

[vii] Agnew, Vijay, *Diaspora, Memory, And Identity: A Search for Home,* Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005, p. 33.

[viii] As it is the case in Tran Anh Hung's movie *Vertical Ray of the Sun* (2000).

[ix] Kristeva, Julia, 'Strangers to ourselves', 1991, quoted in Ly, Eleanor, 'Exotocism Repositioned: Old and New World Pleasures in Wang's *Joy Luck Club* and Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman*', *Changing Representations of Minorities East and West: Selected Essays*, ed. Larry E. Smith, John Rieder, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1996, p. 70.

Chapter Five

The Outsider in Solitude

I have made all sorts of acquaintances, but have as yet found no society. [i]

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe describing *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

The outsider in general but particularly the cultural outsider is a lonely figure. By definition, being an outsider constitutes some form of division from society. As most artists experience a condition of solitude, the comparison of the creative practitioner and the outsider seems more than appropriate. With regard to literary work and the work of art Maurice Blanchot writes:

> The work is solitary: this does not mean that it remains
> uncommunicable, that it has no reader. But whoever reads it enters
> into the affirmation of the work's solitude, just as he who writes it
> belongs to the risk of this solitude. [ii]

As the above comparison between artist and outsider already suggests, one might ask if the artist per se is an outsider. On a less universal level, discussing the artist as a photographer might resolve this question, if however only for this specific medium.

With the exception of commercial and studio work, photographers habitually practice their art form by themselves. Only rarely do photographic artists collaborate or work in teams, sometimes as husband and wife. Indeed, the very nature of photography is single-handedly, only one hand can trigger the shutter. In this way, like most art forms photography can be executed by one single person, from the initial capture of the image to the final presentation of the print.

The photographer's desire to execute his passion, unencumbered and undistracted is deeply embedded into the prehistory of photography, dating back to the invention and use of the *camera obscura* [iii] (Figure 5.1) in the late 1500s. [iv] As Jonathan Crary points out in *Techniques of the Observer*:

> First of all the camera obscura performs an operation of
> individuation; that is, it necessarily defines an observer as isolated,
> enclosed, and autonomous within its dark confines. It impels a
> kind of askesis, or withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate
> and purify one's relation the manifold contents of the now
> "exterior" world. [v]

Even though the observer is characterized as isolated and alone in his activity, suggestive of an outsider status, according to Crary the rest of the world is exterior and outside, whereas the observer is inside the *camera*. To view the world through the apparatus of a *camera obscura*, is to physically disenfranchise from it. Nevertheless, the outsider in this scenario becomes an insider as he is granted to view the world from this unique point of view.
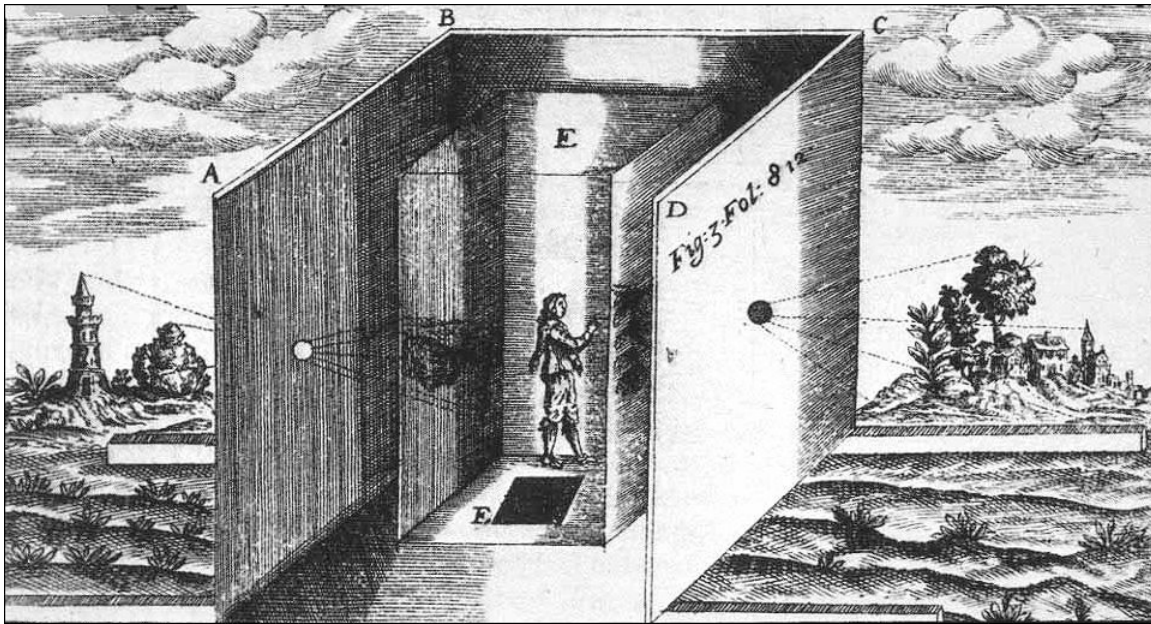
Figure 5.1: Sketch of a portable *Camera Obscura* from 1646.

The outsider observing the world in solitude is easily imaginable in above example and similarly applies to the use of today's photo camera. The links between photography, observation, and solitude are detectable in the medium's historic developments. With the increased mobility of the camera however, a prevalent mode amongst photographers is that of the flâneur. Here as well, the *modus operandi* is to act alone – to observe from an outsider's point of view.

The history attached to the flâneur reads surprisingly similar to that of photography seeing that "one of the most striking features of popular images of the flâneur that emerged in the 1830's and the 1840's was their close and insistent association with the public landscape of Paris." [vi] In fact, photography's date and place of birth closely matches those of one of the first literal descriptions of the flâneur in a book called *Physiologie du Flâneur* published in Paris in 1941 [vii] (Figure 5.2).

By contemporary standards, the flâneur is a promenading figure situated in the urban landscape who, apart from observing, also wishes to be seen. Nonetheless in the early years of his existence, "the flâneur remained invisible and unrecognizable even while other social types [were]." [viii] (Figure 5.3) With the lack of professional signifiers, wearing predominantly dark clothing, the flâneur is, historically speaking, a reclusive figure that does not wish to be identified.

In that sense, the historical and social status of the flâneur encapsulates popular desires amongst many photographers who wish to operate invisibly, unidentifiable and in solitude. Unsurprising therefore is that the image of the flâneur and photographer is closely linked and in some cases even interchangeable. Apart from the many similarities, there is however a distinct difference as Susan Sontag points out:

> The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker
> reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic
> stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous
> extremes. [ix]

Based on this notion, it is predictable that a solitary figure with a camera in a public space could often mistakenly be perceived as strange, weird, even perverted. By alluding to the voyeuristic potential of photography, Sontag touches upon a key issue surrounding this debate for two main reasons: a voyeur habitually acts alone and wishes to be unseen by those he watches.
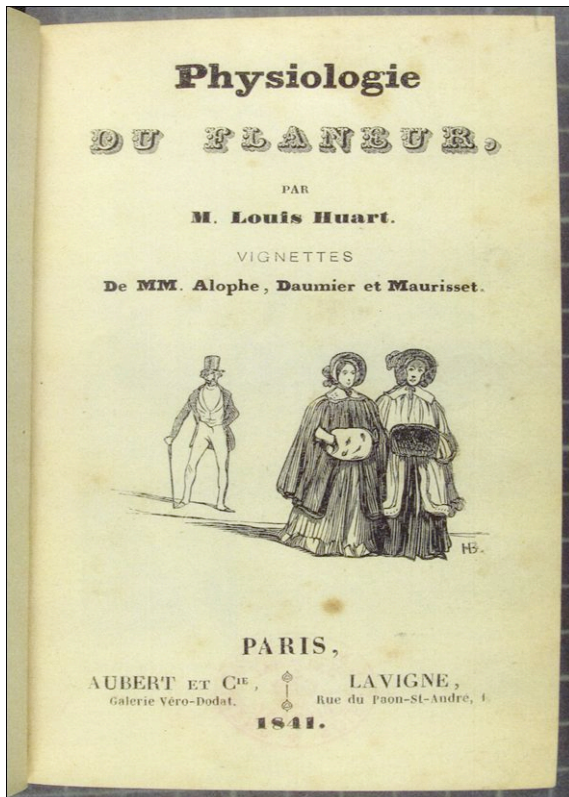

Figure 5.2 (left): Front page of *Physiologie du Flâneur* published in Paris in 1941.
Figure 5.3 (right): Sketch of a flâneur using binoculars in Louis Huart's *Physiologie du Flâneur*.
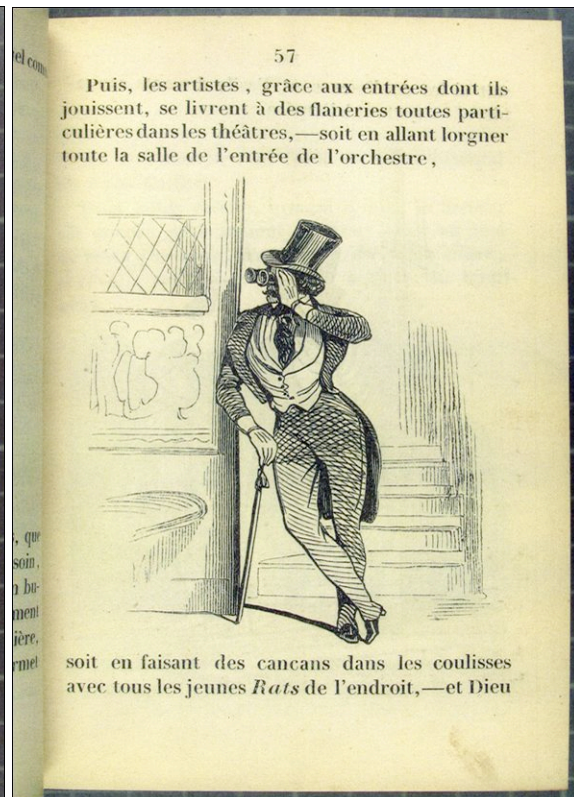
The *Peep Show* is a product of popular culture where such desires can be fulfilled. Here, the visitor to such an establishment can choose from small rooms that are aligned in a circle, with a sometimes-rotating stage in the middle. Small windows that are fitted with opaque glass separate the stage from the rooms. While an exotic dancer performs on stage, the visitor can see the show through the window, mostly unseen by other guests (Figure 5.4).

From a structural point of view, the *Peep Show* can be considered as a type of reversal from Jeremy Bentham's *panopticon;* [x] a prison building that enabled its guards to observe the cells from the center of the complex (Figure 5.5). The circle shaped outline of both structures is to maximize on the ability to observe:

outward and inward. The small cell the viewer temporarily inhabits further manifests his voluntary or involuntary isolation whereas the characteristic window that separates the viewer from the prisoner/performer is an indication for the lack of human interaction. While the "withdrawal from the world" functions on a wholly new level: the observed is the "world" only in relationship to the prison/peep show microcosm. The real world remains outside.
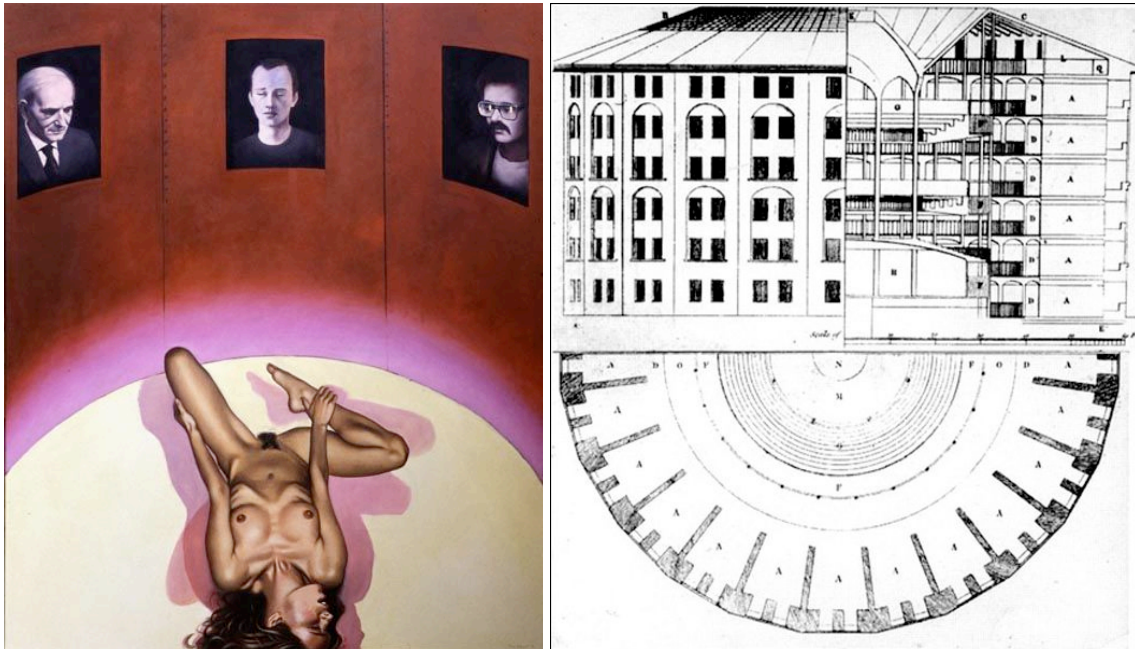
Figure 5.4 (left): *Peep Show*, Oil on canvas 72" by 60", by Paul Roberts, 1991.
Figure 5.5 (right): *Panopticon* blueprint by Jeremy Bentham, 1791.

May it is in the capacity of labor, leisure, desire or lust, the observer in the examples above is a solitary figure. In his mission to contemplate his environment he habitually seeks enclosed, small and dark spaces. Apart from enabling him with a unique point of view, this withdrawal also allows the observer to follow his passion sometimes unnoticed. This departure into darkness is however not an escape from the world as one might interpret it. The desire to view, record, interpret and understand his immediate environment, the observer's choice to view it from the outside shall be interpreted as active engagement.

Endnotes

[i] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Kila, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p.5.

[ii] Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature,* Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, p. 22.

[iii] The camera obscura (Lat. *dark room*) was an optical device used in drawing, and one of the ancestral threads leading to the invention of photography. Photographic devices today are still known as "cameras".

[iv] Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century,* Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1992, p 38.

[v] Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century,* Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1992, pp 38 – 39.

[vi] Gluck, Mary, 'The Flâneur and the Aesthetic Appropriation of Urban Culture in Mid-19th-century Paris' *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, issue 5, 2003, p. 55.

[vii] Huart, Louis M., *Physiologie du Flâneur,* Paris: Lavigne, 1841.

[viii] Gluck, Mary, 'The Flâneur and the Aesthetic Appropriation of Urban Culture in Mid-19th-century Paris' *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, issue 5, 2003, p. 66.

[ix] Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p 55.

[x] The Panopticon is a type of prison building designed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe (-*opticon*) all (*pan-*) prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell if they are being observed or not. [Oxford American Dictionaries]

Chapter Six

The Invisible Outsider

Vision can refer to what is seen but it can also refer to what is unseen or absent and therefore, the cultural outsider has the advantage of not only seeing the unusual but also the "invisible", seeing things that are culturally non-existent. Especially while travelling, people will commonly recount the items they were missing in addition to the ones they did not know existed thus suggesting that it seems to be a human trait to assume that one's own norm is also *the* norm. In this way, the foreigner has the advantage of observing his new environment through variations in cultural artifacts, language, even in natural phenomena, also in recognition that these elements have a clear influence on each other. The cultural outsider is however not only privileged by what he does not see, but also by what he is not meant to see. Following real life example should exemplify this point adequately.

In the ancient Japanese art form of the Kabuki theatre the phenomena of "not meant to see" can be observed in the so-called *Kuroku.* Literally translated the "black man" is dressed accordingly, constantly hunching over, averting his eyes from the audience and only comes into play when one of the all-male actors requires assistance in the performance while changing his props or clothing. In this capacity, the *Kuroku* is a helper whose only aim is to support the actors' movements. To the foreigner this figure clearly stands out and is easily mistaken as being part of the plot. In the European tradition of opera, ballet and theatre such an onstage-aide is unimaginable. The Japanese spectator however will overlook him – he is "invisible" – as he is an accepted part of the performance. And indeed, after some time, even the western eye will pay less attention to the *Kuroku* who, in the unveiling of the plot, loses significance and visibility (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: During a Kabuki in Nagoya, Japan these two anonymously taken photographs show how the *Kuroku* assists the actors in the background while the performance continues.

Interestingly, it is often the characteristics of the *Kuroku* cultural observers wish to assume, that is, to be unseen, or to be invisible, by those they observe. This desire could be attributed to following types: journalists, photojournalists, amateur and professional photographers, documentary filmmakers, scientists (anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists etc.) and to some extent tourists.

The professionals and non-professionals in these areas are usually individuals, attempting to record and document their environment. In order for this record to be accurate, however, the belief is that the one who records does not alter the scene or interact with the subjects in it. Especially in the field of documentary photography and photojournalism this notion is prevalent and typically exercised. Susan Sontag writes, "A disavowal of empathy, a disdain for message-mongering, a claim to be invisible – these are strategies endorsed by most professional photographers." [i]

Photographers working in a foreign environment often struggle with the fact that they stand out due to their different ethnic background, race, language and even style of clothing. Under these conditions, the photographer's desire to practice his passion unnoticed seems merely impossible. In fact, in a great twist of circumstances, the photographer who wishes to observe often becomes the observed for these reasons.

On the other hand, apart from characteristics that might hinder him from working freely the outsider can also profit from advantages under these circumstances. As he is most commonly a single individual, he is consequently inferior to a community that usually has strong and secure bonds. Of course the scenario is not always applicable, but in many ways the stranger in his lack – or ignorance – of local knowledge, resources and capacities projects a non-threatening demeanor and is potentially ignored.

According to Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1979), the following guideline then applies:

> The good manners of a camera culture dictate that one is supposed
> to pretend not to notice when one is being photographed by a
> stranger in a public space as long as the photographer stays as a
> discreet distance – that is, one is supposed neither to forbid the
> picture-taking nor to start posing. [ii] [iii]

This code of conduct could also lead the photographer to abuse his newfound freedom and the goodwill of the people he documents. The irony therefore is that indeed the most obvious outsider is granted the opportunity to work freely, without constraints, because he is not tightly bound to local rites and rules. In that sense, the stranger is able to photograph in areas that might be socially inaccessible to a local.

Paul Graham exemplifies this approach to image making in his book *Empty Heaven: Photographs from Japan 1989 - 1995.* Numerous images of women sitting in restaurants are taken from one to two meters distance with a powerful flash unit. Here, the subjects look at people they are in conversation with seemingly not noticing that they are being photographed (Figure 6.2).

These and several other images in the book (Figure 6.3) raise a number questions; Was the subject aware of the camera? Did the photographer introduce himself or conceal his intentions? Did the subject consent to having his/her image taken? The

latter is a huge predicament for photographers, especially for those who wish to work "invisibly".

One might assume that today's ease of access to images would consequently lead to a wider acceptance of being photographed. The complete opposite is however the case, as people generally fear having their image taken by a stranger. Here it always seems quite relevant for what purpose these photographs are used. One might consent being photographed if the images are for a 'good cause' such as publication in a newspaper or magazine. In Graham's case, the purpose is indefinite and difficult to comprehend. Are his photographs used for his personal collection, for a book, for an exhibition, all of these?

Figure 6.2 (left): Paul Graham*, Girl in Bar, Tokyo,* Photograph, 1995.
Figure 6.3 (right): Paul Graham*, Man #2, Kasumigaseki, Tokyo,* Photograph, 1995.

The uneasiness with regards to this dichotomy is noticeable in the interview that accompanies *Empty Heaven*. When asked if the fact that he was an outsider, a foreigner, troubled him, Graham gave this astonishing reply:

> It is a question I have no time for, I have had it before, on Ireland, then on my European work, and this time I will get it again, with the added spice of orientalism or exoticism thrown in. Do you know the Chinese proverb: "When a hand points at the moon, only a fool looks at the hand?" Well, I mean, look at the work, discuss its issues, its failings by all means, but really, do I have to cut my fingers off next time? [iv]

Despite being far from invisible in Japan, Graham's methodology was politely ignored. Hence his images are of unusual proximity and clarity. The proverbial finger he suggests cutting off adds suitable symbolism in this context as it is his finger that presses the shutter on a camera and it is his finger that points, in this case at his Japanese subjects. Possibly for this reason the images in *Empty Heaven* feel intrusive even violent in their approach.

One could argue that photographs always constitute some form of intrusion of privacy. The unsettling capacity of photography is even imbedded in the English language by saying, "taking a photograph". The implication is that being photographed is being taken from. The fact that photographs can be archived, copied, manipulated and printed into any size is fueling this apprehension towards the medium. Though *photophobia* refers to the fear of light, by 21st century standards it could describe the fear of the camera.

To avoid that the public notices such invasions of privacy, camera manufacturers have explored the notion of invisibility on a technological level. The legendary *Leica* – still a favourite camera amongst photojournalists and documentary photographers – is not only comparatively smaller but also its "click" is barely audible so that the photographer can work imperceptibly and acoustically unnoticed. This notion of the 'click' completely changed however, with the dawn of digital cameras, which usually operate in complete silence.

The rapid technical developments in digital imagery over the last few years have only added to the publics' fear of being photographed, even though it is accepted as a part of life such as the use of surveillance cameras, which operate "invisibly". This acceptance however, does not come in effect if an individual as oppose to an institution operates the camera. In the past, there were very few ways in which images could publicly circulate apart from print media, advertising and to some extent television. Today however, the Internet gives everyone a chance to present photographs to a much larger audience – and the intentions to do so aren't always for a 'good cause'. The general public gradually adjusts to these developments with a growing skepticism towards the medium photography.

In that sense, the notion of "camera culture" is shifting on more than one level: geographically and ideologically. With the naissance of new technologies such as the Internet, CCTV, mobile phone cameras, to name a few, the general public has also become more aware of the camera's presence and the image's potential. In that sense, people have become more 'image savvy' also by being consciously aware of their own image.

This notion of 'image awareness' is detectable in the work of British photographer Muzi Quawson. In her project *Pull Back the Shade* she documents the unconventional lifestyle of a young American family over a number of years. The omnipresent camera mainly focuses on the protagonist as she copes with the hardship of young motherhood and alienation (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Photograph from *Pull Back the Shade* by Muzi Quawson 2004-2006.

This body of work is generally shown as a slide projection and includes between 80 to 240 images. With the clicks of the projector, the viewer is slowly drawn into an environment that is usually reserved for members of the family or close friends only. Quawson's subjects, however, do not seem to mind or even notice the presence of the camera – one must wonder if they even know it exists. Here, in a recent interview Quawson herself confirms that she "was largely invisible". [v] This is possibly one of the most remarkable but equally questionable achievements of the project.

Quawson's apparent invisibility is deceptive and largely dependent on her subject's cooperation. As an up-and-coming musician in America, the central character Amanda Jo Williams has her own interests in the photographs and how they are seen. With that in mind, the subject accepts, even appreciates the camera and its capabilities. It is quite possible that the subjects in Quawson's work knew that their image would be projected in front of large audiences. If that is the case, the projection of their image functions as a type of extension of the stage, with the central characters performing a version of themselves, by for example averting their eyes from the camera and pretending its not there. On being photographed, Roland Barthes writes:

> Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing", I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself into an image. [vi]

In this fashion, Quawson's subjects portray themselves in the way they wish to be seen. The photographer's invisibility is thereby a calculated feature of these images. The protagonists' influence on the final outcome of the project is therefore not surprising when Quawson discloses that Williams "dictates all [her] edits to a certain point." [vii] Is it then not possible that some of the captured moments where consciously or subconsciously inaugurated specifically for the camera?

In some form or the other, the photographer always changes the dynamics of his environment by his presence. The notion of the "invisible outsider" – or the "fly on the wall" – therefore remains an unachievable desire, as it will ultimately encounter issues of consent, authenticity and truthfulness. It is hard to measure the effect photographers have on their subjects, but even subtleties such as 'ignoring the camera' leave an individual mark on the image. In that sense, the photographer's presence is involuntarily imbedded in the way he chose to observe, approach and depict his subjects.

Endnotes

[i] Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 77.

[ii] Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 171.

[iii] As Sontag's *On Photography* was written almost thirty years ago, one must reconsider what constitutes a "camera culture" as an increasing global accessibility, immediacy and necessity of images has redefined its boundaries.

[iv] Graham, Paul, *Empty Heaven: Photographs from Japan 1989 - 1995*, Zurich, Berlin, New York: Scalo, 1995, accompanying text pamphlet p. 6.

[v] Slyce, John, 'Pull Back the Shade', *Hot Shoe International*, Issue 143, August / September 2006, p. 20.

[vi] Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage, 1993, p. 10.

[vii] Slyce, John, 'Pull Back the Shade', *Hot Shoe International*, Issue 143, August / September 2006, p. 16.

Conclusion

Roland Barthes suggests that "a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see," [i] what we see is always something else: a landscape, an object, a person etc. Photography's dilemma is that one rarely looks at *it*. Part of this dilemma can be blamed on the fact that photography does not leave any visible traces of its process behind. If the brushstroke could be considered as a type of signature style in painting, photography's is reduced to the synthetic surface of a print. Due to the lack of human traces, the photographer is potentially overlooked as well. In the same way one does not see the actual photograph, one tends to forget that a person had to conceive it.

One could think of three worlds that are brought together in an image: the viewers', the subjects', and the photographers'. The photographer is proposing a meeting of these worlds by creating an image, though it is the viewers' engagement with an image that completes this progression. In the act of viewing photographs, a relationship begins to form between viewer and subject, whereas the photographer remains outside of this engagement as he is physically absent when it comes to showing his work. This notion coupled with the fact that photography can be regarded as a "traceless medium" implies that the photographer constitutes an outsider even in the final act of presenting his work.

In order to perceive his environment the photographer and the outsider in general benefits from certain attributes that are discussed throughout the paper such as distance to his subject, a distance to other cultures and his own, a method of comparing those, the desire to work in solitude and unnoticed. Here, one might associate the outsider with a type of *Zaungast*, a German term describing an individual who avoids payment to an event by watching it from behind its barriers. The "fence guest", as the word is literally translated, apart from being able to see the event also observes what surrounds it. In that sense he is able to see the "whole".

What separates the discussed outsider types from the *Zaungast*, flâneur, or voyeur, is that apart from observing their environment they wish to record it. To return to the realm of photography, the outsider's motivation to observe his environment is not for his own sake but for the sake of the image, whereas these aspirations are interconnected. While a "photograph always carries its referent within itself," [ii] it also carries its author's intentions, desires, concerns, and anxieties. Beneath the surface of the print, a photograph is not only what the photographer sees but also what he chose for the viewer to see. Hence, photography is not a completely traceless medium as photographs are always a relative extension of their authors. In this way, the image becomes a type of self-portrait of its maker, with or without his awareness to this phenomenon.

One could say, for the sake of argument, that the referent, or subject, in its original form is the truth and a photograph of it, is the truth according to the photographer. The viewer therefore can see both: the subject and its relationship to the photographer. While in his attempt to be unnoticed and outside of the image the photographer has a distinct affect on how his "truth" is perceived by others. Similarly, to reiterate Julian Baggini, "truth is always relative to [an] individual," [iii]

the viewer as well will establish a relationship to the subject that is based on personal experience and knowledge. The photographer's "truth" and the viewer's "truth" are bound to differ as "there is more to vision than meets the eye." [iv] The readings of an image are infinite.

As a result, the three worlds – the viewers', the subjects' and the photographer's – are not separate entities as one might think. In fact, they are clearly interconnected in the way an image is perceived. When I started to write this paper, I thought of these worlds as separate units with set coordinates forming a *triangle of forces*, [v] though now I see them creating a circle. In that sense, these elements are creating a shape that is less fixed and more fluid in nature, just as the interpretation of an image is not fixed either. The way one perceives photographs, films, literature, music even architecture, is endlessly diverse and dependent on "the preceding train of visual experience, together with information gathered from all sources." [vi]

The photographer is accordingly a part of the image – inside it so to speak – as the "circle" could not exist without him. No matter how hard the he wishes to remain outside of the image, literally and figuratively, the photographer's presence will invariably affect its outcome and the way it is perceived. The consequence is that apart from what he chooses to portray, a photographer shapes the way this portrayal is received by others going far beyond a mere record.

Conclusively, the photographer's desire to look at the world from the 'outside' and his actual position, as a key element in how one perceives the world is paradoxical. Thus, one could describe him as a non-participating participant, as he needs to be aware of both: his subject and an image of his subject. In that sense, the photographer constantly drifts in and out of different ways of perceiving his environment as Peter I. Rose writes, "It is as important to be as concerned with perceptions of reality as reality itself." [vii]

Endnotes

[i] Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage, 1993, p. 6.

[ii] Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage, 1993, p. 5.

[iii] Baggini, Julian, *Making Sense: Philosophy Behind the Headlines,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 24.

[iv] Goodman, Nelson, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976, p. 14.

[v] A triangle whose sides represent in magnitude and direction three forces in equilibrium. [Oxford American Dictionaries]

[vi] Goodman, Nelson, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976, p. 14.

[vii] Rose, Peter I., *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Some Reflections on the Insider-Outsider Debate*, Northampton: Smith College, 1978, p. 25.

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