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2012

Rr, A. K. D. (2012). Theatre of the street : subverting otherness in photography. Final year project report, Nanyang Technological University.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/87875>

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HL 499: Graduation Essay

16 April 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Implicit in the notion of the ‘Other’ is the dialectic tension between the identity and non-identity or the subject and the objectified. The term itself has been extensively used across various fields of academic studies, ranging from definition in philosophy, to appropriation in gender studies and post-colonial theory. While the term may carry considerably different meanings across various disciplines, the general consensus refers the Other to “one pole of the relationship between a subject and a person or thing defined or constituted as a non-self that is different or the other” (Macey 285). The difference that exists between the subject and the Other is often antagonistic, with the subject wanting to impose its dominance and intention on the Other which Frantz Fanon referred to as the “alien and inferior, yet frightening and dangerous” (qtd. in Leitch et al 1437). The Other, therefore, represents a threat to the subject, whose existence and identity depends upon an otherness outside itself. The discrimination that follows is an act to counter the possibility of this Otherness dominating the existence of the subject.

In this essay, I will appropriate the notion of the Other to photography where the self refers to the photographer, with the photographed subject being the non-self. The paradigm for this relationship is the dialectic conceived when the photographer imposes his intentions to

the photographed subject, thus objectifying it and rendering it powerless under his photographic vision. If we were to appropriate Fanon's definition of the Other as one who presents a threat to the autonomy of the subject, we can say that through the act of photography, the photographer is controlling and owning an unfamiliar Otherness, thus reducing the threat that the latter is posing to its existence (qtd. in Leitch et al 1437). The medium of power, namely the camera, not only determines the boundary between the subject and the Other, but also allows the subject to have a piece of the unfamiliar that represents the feared difference between the self and the non-self.

This paper explores the dynamics between the street photographer and his photographed subjects or the objectified Other. In capturing subjects who are different from them, and subsequently presenting it to the viewers, these photographers are in fact, perpetuating their Otherness, thus promoting their inferior status. While their intentions may be to highlight the plight of the marginalised Other, implicit in the act of photography is placing the photographed subjects under the authorial directions of the photographer. The paradox is then clear: in placing light and bestowing visibility to these subjects through the photographic technique, the photographer is sustaining their invisibility precisely because they are stripped of their ability to assert their own identity in the face of the enigmatic lens.

I will be discussing the works of surrealist photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, as well as those from Jeff Wall and Philip-Lorca diCorcia to better understand how the photographed subjects can adopt the pose to subvert their Otherness when being photographed. In this discursive process, I will first explain how Cartier-Bresson defines the genre of street photography, where he coined the term the "decisive moment" – the opportune timing where all the elements within his vision form perfect geometry with each other. He co-founded Magnum Photos with four other visionary photographers of his time and through this photographic cooperative, they chronicled events and people from various parts of the world.

I will be focusing on Cartier-Bresson's photographs of the marginalised, namely a malnourished baby in India and two prostitutes in Mexico City.

These photographs will be compared to works by Jeff Wall and Philip-Lorca diCorcia, which not only deviate from the notion of the "decisive moment", but also thwart the conventions of street photography genre. Instead of waiting for the "decisive moment", Jeff Wall chooses to create his own "decisive moment" by re-constructing a reality that he has once experienced or witnessed. In an interview with Els Barents, Wall discusses his interest in creating photographs depicting subjects who are undergoing existentialist despair:

Photography tends to show the immediate surface of the world, and so people rightly dislike it as banal, mechanical, and abstract. It's not a medium in which the sense of the non-identity of a thing with itself can be naturally expressed; quite the opposite. A photo always shows something resting in its own identity in a mechanical way. (Wall 198-199)

The dialectic tension between the identity and non-identity is continuously explored in Wall's works, such as *Mimic* (1982), where he reconstructs a racially discriminatory scene in which a Western man is making an offensive gesture towards his Asian counterpart by pulling up his eyelid, mimicking the oriental eye. A crisis is taking place here, where the Western man is threatened by the presence of this non-identity which places his existence into question. Similarly, the dynamic between the self and the Other is also seen in Wall's attempts at photographing Literature. *Odradek*, a character from Franz Kafka's short story *The Cares of a Family Man* is the embodiment of the gap between the self and the non-self, as it is endowed with qualities of a human and an inanimate object. This work will be placed in contrast to Wall's portrayal of the protagonist in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, on the other hand, falls in between the two photographers – in his seminal body of works entitled *Heads* (2001), for example, he sticks to the convention of the genre by capturing his subjects while they were unaware. However, the photographic technique used contradicts the antitheatrical nature that the photographed subjects offer, for the employment of shadow and lighting visible in the photograph draws the attention of the viewer to the presence of the camera. His authorial control extends to his other photograph in this paper that is taken from the series entitled *Hustlers*, shot between 1990-1992. The controversial series portrays the lives of male prostitutes in Hollywood, with each of the photograph's title depicting the amount of money that diCorcia paid for the hustlers to pose for him.

Although under the imposition of the photographer, the Other is able to attest to his or her individuality by adopting the pose as the process blurs the boundary between the authentic identity of the photographed subject and the presented self prepared for the camera. Hence, the photograph that is owned by the photographer does not depict the real, authentic self of the photographed subject. In another sense, the pose circumvents the stigmatisation of the difference that exists between the subject and the Other, as well as the imposition of the dominant power, by putting forth a presented self which may not be real. This is therefore, a more effective way to counter the problem of objectification in this context.

ON HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON AND THE “DECISIVE MOMENT”

In the book *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*, Henri Cartier-Bresson is quoted as saying: “For me, the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which – in visual terms – questions and decides simultaneously” (Cartier-Bresson and Sand 16).

Implicit in the above-mentioned statement is a man who is obsessed with the process of seeing and witnessing; capturing the rare in the banal, the unknown in the familiar. The street is full of photographs that we have never seen and Cartier-Bresson wants to immortalise opportune moments where “undifferentiated time stops to look into itself to discover the momentous” (Scott 139). Known for his concept of the “decisive moment”, Henri Cartier-Bresson believes in capturing the essence of life with an intuitive awareness. In his book *Henri Cartier-Bresson: A Biography*, Pierre Assouline refers to this instant as “surprising life in *flagrante delicto*, anticipating a scene and then recording it forever in a snapshot” (63). Inherent in this process is the idea of capturing reality in its natural order, at an extremely precise timing where the elements of the scene go in accordance with a visual composition that Cartier-Bresson has in mind. The importance of capturing a perfect moment that disappears too quickly is emphasised in his book *The Decisive Moment* where he states:

“Of all the means of expression, photography is the only one that fixes for ever the precise and transitory instant. We photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth which can make them back again.” (Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* 44)

Implicit in the act of photographing is thus, the faculty to immortalise a slice of reality. Photographers are granted the capacity to reconcile the loss of the world by seizing a chosen moment out of time by using his medium of power – the camera – thus resisting reality’s

inherent notion of “continually vanishing” moments. Each of Cartier-Bresson’s photographs exhibits this careful obsession with geometry – it is almost as if the 35 mm Leica that he uses is an extension of his eye, a tool that he uses to confer a privileged position of a subject that is able to impose his authorial vision on his photographed Other.

Born in 1908, French artist Henri Cartier-Bresson was regarded as one of the pioneers of street photography and photojournalism, with a particular interest in surrealism. Under the tutelage of Cubist artist André Lhote, he received his first exposure in photography, which emphasised the importance of composition and universal harmony within a photograph (Chéroux and Wilson 16-17). His first encounter with a Leica in 1932 is another turning point in his photographic career, as it proves to be the ideal instrument for him to capture life’s essence in accordance to his geometrical vision of the world: “its viewfinder was rectangular, creating proportions that were ideal for his pursuit of a concept that had always been of a paramount importance: the golden section”, which is an echo of André Lhote’s obsession of finding symmetry and balance in life, thus capturing reality in perfect composition of lines, curves and surfaces (Assouline 62).

To achieve the decisive moment is similar to capturing a perfect timing in reality where every element that he sees through his viewfinder is in tune with one another. This insistence on achieving an immaculate sense of composition within the photograph makes his task more challenging, and his resulting photograph even more astounding. Figure 1 below shows a photograph that was taken in 1950 in India.



Figure 1: Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Tamil Nadu, Madura*, India, 1950.

Source: Cartier-Bresson, Henri, and Michael Brenson. *Henri Cartier-Bresson*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2006. Print.

The cultural implication in this photograph is poverty – a malnourished baby is carried in the arms of his similarly emaciated mother who is deliberately being left out of the photograph. The photograph is disconcerting, not so much because it depicts an impoverished part of society or what we would refer to as the *Other*, but due to the piercing look projected by the baby straight up towards the camera, as if challenging the vantage authorial viewpoint

of the photographer. The returned look conveys an instantaneousness and uncontrolled individual response that Cartier-Bresson strives for in searching for his “decisive moment”. Yet, at the same time, it presents a challenge: “It is as if the returned look momentarily comes out to meet the camera, to anticipate the camera’s enquiry, with something challenging about it, but equally something anxious or defensive” (Scott 137). This is because in possessing the medium of power, Cartier-Bresson is placing himself in a privileged position where he has the ability to individuate a look through appropriation of the shutter’s intervention.

The choice of cropping out the mother figure allows us to focus on the baby as the photographed subject, in fact, her skeletal hands holding the baby and protecting him from the glaring sun is sufficient to convey the hardship that they were going through, without revealing her face. The lines of her bony hands and veins jump at us, as they draw a heartbreaking parallel to the conspicuous ribs of her baby. The symmetry of lines is extended to her sari, which looks haggard and dirty, reflecting the family’s social status.

The lighting technique employed by Cartier-Bresson enhances the perturbing poverty depicted in the photograph as the light purposefully falls on two subjects, the underfed baby as well as the wheel of the cart that is seen on the right of the photograph. This technique asks the viewers to draw a parallel between the collective image of abjection and poverty on the left and compare it to the spokes of the wheel of the cart on the right. The lines that delineate the baby’s ribs and the mother’s skeletal hands are contrasted to the lines of the spokes of the wheel, which ironically depicts the Gandhian concept of *charkha*, also known as the spinning wheel, “a sign of how Indians could liberate themselves from economic exploitation” (Roy 511). In this sense, Cartier-Bresson captured his photographed subjects in a politically emblematic setting, placing two impoverished victims in the same scene as a symbol of the nation’s determination to free themselves from profiteering and exploitation. The “decisive moment” here is confounding – the use of light, shadows, lines and surfaces are perfectly

brought together in a precise timing, illuminating the socially marginalised in an unusual and riveting perspective.

In his seminal work *Camera Lucida*, Barthes refers to this as the ‘surprise’ where “the photographic ‘shock’... consists less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it” (32). The type of surprise that Cartier-Bresson is waiting for is the ‘*trouvaille*’ or the lucky find, where the lines of the baby’s ribs coincide with that of the spokes of the wheel forming “a ‘natural’ scene which the good reporter has had the genius, i.e. the luck, to catch.” (Barthes 33). By insisting on waiting for a geometrically perfect moment, Cartier-Bresson is imposing his artistic vision into existence. The purposeful employment of lighting and shadow invites the viewers to think outside the photograph and question the agenda behind the photographer: was it to satiate his desire of mastering a perfect moment, or was it to highlight the plight of the Other?

This interest in photographing humanity, manifests itself in 1947, where together with Robert Capa, David Seymour, George Rodger and William Vandivert, Cartier-Bresson formed Magnum Photos which aimed to chronicle the world as it is, including capturing events and people from different social strata, from the socially displaced to government and famous figures, with the manifesto of the agency being as such as stated in its official website: “Magnum is a community of thought, a shared human quality, a curiosity about what is going on in the world, a respect for what is going on and a desire to transcribe it visually,” (Cartier-Bresson). This “curiosity about what is going on in the world” serves as the drive for the truth-seeking, socially motivated Cartier-Bresson to travel across continents, capturing both the usual and unusual in a latent moment waiting to be exploited. Figure 1 shows us not only a victim of poverty; Cartier-Bresson places his subjects in a backdrop of political instability, revealing a shocking truth of a country struggling post-independence. It is tempting therefore, to attribute the immaculate composition of elements in his photograph to sheer luck and

chance – a hallmark of surrealism – and something that he attested to when he ran out of reasons to explain his perfectly shot photographs (Assouline 71).

However, the “decisive moment” questions the aim of the Magnum photographic cooperative. In his essay entitled *Magnum’s Postwar Paradox*, Andy Grundberg discusses the inherent paradox of imposing a “decisive moment” which entails a personalised aesthetics of the photographer onto a supposedly objective photograph (191). Grundberg continues to say that the “the tensions that divide these pictures – between powerful reportage and artistic license, between anecdote and artifice – account for much of the incoherence” that we see in Magnum photographs (194). The problem of East/West binary also emerged upon considering the fact that most photographers from the cooperative are from a privileged Western position thus their “efforts to describe the Third World can be criticized as a kind of visual imperialism” (Grundberg 194).

In another sense, while the photographers do chronicle and depict the plight of the marginalised to the rest of the world, the act of capturing the Third World Other involves the idea of placing them in a composition deemed satisfactory to the photographer. Thus, we can even say that the portrayals of the Other is driven by the selfish reason to satiate the authorial vision. In his book *The Mind’s Eye*, Cartier-Bresson mentions that capturing the decisive moment is “to hold one’s breath when all faculties converge in the face of fleeing reality. It is at that moment that mastering an image becomes a great physical and intellectual joy” (qtd. in Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson*, Introduction). Portraying the predicament of the Other is therefore, secondary to the personal satisfaction felt upon capturing the “decisive moment”, thus not only negating the “shared human quality” that Magnum Photos strives for, but also perpetuating the Otherness of the photographed subjects as they are turned into objects under the impositions and photographic vision of the photographer.

ON JEFF WALL AND THE STAGED “DECISIVE MOMENT”

In the work of Cartier-Bresson, the photographer transforms into what Baudelaire calls the *flâneur*, “an idler on the city streets, filled with curiosity but without goal or interest, made possible by the growth of modern commodity culture and display” (qtd. in Leitch et al. 679). The *flâneur* takes to the streets and alleyways like a bounty hunter, lying in wait for the arrival of the opportune moment where the documents within his composition achieves a universal balance. Calling this “the decisive moment”, Cartier-Bresson champions the search for a brilliant moment in reality where it allows the photographer to create an unusual perspective out of the seemingly banal.

However, in contemporary photography, we see an overt attempt at challenging and redefining the conventions of street photography. More contemporary street photography sees this shift towards creating what Jean Baudrillard refers to as the *simulacra*, a postmodernist characteristic, which essentially refers to something that “seem to have referents... but they are merely pretend representations that mark the absence, not the existence, of the objects they purport to represent” (qtd. in Leitch et al 1554). The *simulacra*, therefore, places the boundary between the real and artificial in crisis. Jeff Wall is one such artist who defines the movement for postmodernist photography through his body of works, which emphasises the divergence from the “decisive moment”. Born and raised in Canada, Wall evades the allure of the portable Leica, choosing in its stead the use of transparency on the light-box which is technically more challenging (Wall and Newman 161). This technique requires a large set up of camera and lightings, thus eschewing the mode of invisible camera that Cartier-Bresson adopted in his works. Nonetheless, similar to Cartier-Bresson, Wall is interested in portraying the Other in his photographs, such as the socially marginalised and those in existential

despair. In an interview with Els Barents, Wall discusses his interest in depicting the Other as an agent for the self undergoing changes, thus placing their existence into crisis:

“I’m trying to show this situation, this ‘liminal’, or threshold situation, in which a person is both himself and not himself at the same instant. This non-identity with oneself is the germ of all transformation and development. It can be represented in all sorts of ways, but in photography it’s especially difficult.” (Wall, *The Interiorized Academy* 198)



Figure 2: Wall, Jeff. *Mimic*, 1982, Transparency in Lightbox, 198 x 228.5 cm.

Source: Wall, Jeff, Hans De. Wolf, Joël Benzakin, and Jeff Wall. *Jeff Wall: The Crooked Path*. Brussels: Bozar, 2011. Print.

In 1982, Jeff Wall shot *Mimic* (Figure 2), one of his seminal pieces which redefines the conventions of street photography. Using a Vancouver sidewalk as the setting of the photograph, *Mimic* evokes the “decisive moment” that was captured instantaneously inherent in street photography that Cartier-Bresson talks about, with three of his subjects seemingly unaware of the presence of the camera. Constructing these formal qualities that mirror the conventions of street photography provide the idea as if the camera had caught the scene as a fleeting action, thus following the trajectory of the genre. *Mimic* is however, not a virtual slice of reality, but instead, a carefully reconstructed version of Wall’s experience of witnessing a seemingly similar incident:

“But there I was trying to rework street photography in new terms: I wanted to be able to deal with that essential encounter that happens in the street – the encounter with a stranger – but to do it on a larger scale, reconstructing it with performers, and being able to compose the picture,” (Wall, *Interview* 318)

Wall’s attempts to “rework street photography in new terms” involve the shift from the conventional “documentary” style to a more “cinematographic” approach. This means employing the use of actors and directing their gestures and expressions, on top of composing the setting and mise-en-scène that fall in line with his artistic vision. In this case, the photographer is more of an auteur or a director, where he has full control of the image that he is producing, as compared to Cartier-Bresson’s practice which may tend to rely on pure luck and chance. The photograph depicts a Caucasian, bearded man with long and unkempt dark hair, wearing a sleeveless denim jacket and pairing it with formal-looking pants and relatively grimy-looking shoes. He is seen holding the hand of a lady who cannot keep up with his pace, looking rather displeased, perhaps because of the glaring sun or because he is merely pulling her along. She herself is wearing a cropped top and a pair of red shorts with heels, certainly someone who is not afraid to express herself as seen from her relatively revealing choice of

clothes. However, the assertiveness that she conveys through her choice of clothes does not seem to extend to her relationship as seen from how she is being pulled along by her companion. It is also worth noting that she seems fully oblivious to the gesture that her companion is making to the well-dressed Asian man on his right. In an attempt to fully mimic the Asian man, the Caucasian takes a faster pace, leaving his lady companion slightly a step behind, so that he can be on a similar level to the Asian man. To further perpetuate this mimetic move, he raises his middle finger to his eye and makes a 'slant-eyed' gesture towards the Asian man, clearly conveying his hostility towards his race by mimicking a characteristic that seems to define most Asians. Faced with a discriminatory gesture, the victim does not return the look, choosing instead to glance towards the direction of his aggressor, a teasing gesture to show that he is aware of the offensive gesture but his refusal to look at him directly conveys his assertion of the refusal to be subjected to the stigmatizing gesture. His calm and easygoing demeanour (his hand is placed in his pocket, showing a relaxed composure) provides a jarring contrast to the Caucasian who clearly speaks hostility from his stiff body language, especially from the way he deliberately walks a step faster to be on par with his victim.

Therefore, in *Mimic*, the concept of the Other, and an attempt to possess it through the act of mimicry is palpable on so many levels. Saturated with meaning, Wall's photograph clearly conveys the apparent tension of the native and the immigrant. Social discourse is therefore, an issue that Wall wants to explore through *Mimic*. In an interview with Els Barents, Wall mentions:

When this particular type of man undergoes certain kinds of stress, stimulation, or provocation, this kind of thing emerges. I don't think it's accidental; it's determined by social totality, but it has to come out of an individual body. (Wall, *Typology, Luminescence, Freedom* 196)

If we were to appropriate Fanon's notion of the Other in this context, Wall is implying that the gesture of pulling his eyelid to mimic the Asian eye is in fact, a manifestation of a repressed dissension against his Asian counterpart who represents threat and competition to him. The dress code reveals that the Asian man seems to be in a better social status as shown by his clean-shaven face, neatly tucked in shirt into a pair of formal pants, and clean shoes. The social and political situation in the 1980s is therefore, simultaneously engaged in the dialectic of identity and non-identity that is apparent here. The subjects in the photograph are actors, and they are re-creating roles that are Other to them. In another sense, this image makes apparent that the more we try to mimic the Other, the more we are perpetuating our differences.

Wall may have been mocking Cartier Bresson's "decisive moment" through his constructed spontaneity. While it is indeed a representation of the reality, it is more of a reconstruction that is altered with the use of actors, artificial lighting and deliberate placement of *mise-en-scène*. This is succinctly delineated by Michael Fried in his book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, which discusses Wall's attempts to redefine the genre of street photography:

[...] Wall's exploitation of the look of street photography in *Mimic* amounted to a new conception of the genre, according to which the traditional strategy of capturing subjects who appear unaware of the camera is reasserted at the same time as the picture itself more or less openly proclaims its identity both as a deliberate artistic construction (on the level of depiction) and as an image intended to be hung on the wall and viewed by the beholders in a face-to-face relationship (on the level of artifactuality). (240)

Wall's photographs therefore, make an overt aesthetic reference to itself as a product of artistic interpretation. Unlike Cartier-Bresson who champions the invisible camera, Wall wants to draw the viewers' attention to the photographic technique being used. By using his own experience as a referent, he is mimicking his role as a witness by making his memory accessible to a larger audience by re-interpreting his experience through his photograph. In fact, in this sense, Wall can be seen as mimicking the genre of street photography – not fully complying with it, yet making it seem as if the scene is shot instantaneously. In *Mimic*, the 'decisive moment' was not caught by the photographer by sheer chance, instead, it is a result of a carefully composed directions in the most unspontaneous manner.

ON PHOTOGRAPHING LITERATURE AS THE OTHER



Figure 3: Jeff Wall, *Odradek, Táboritská 8, Prague, July 18, 1994*.

Source: Transparency in Lightbox. 229 x 289 cm. Wall, Jeff, Hans De. Wolf, Joël Benzakin, and Jeff Wall. *Jeff Wall: The Crooked Path*. Brussels: Bozar, 2011. Print.

The experience of reinterpreting and reproducing the Other is further extended in Wall's photographs *Odradek, Taboritska 8, Prague, July 18, 1984* and *After the "Invisible Man"* by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue, which are made based on literary texts. True to the style of the *flâneur*, Wall takes to the streets to find *Odradek*, a character from Kafka's short

story *The Cares of a Family Man*, and finds him at one of the old buildings in Prague (Wall, *At Home and Elsewhere* 292). Wall refers to this process as having a “therapeutic aspect” and in an interview with Jean-François Chevrier, he expounds further by stating that the notion of the Other that is embodied by *Odradek* “provides a kind of therapy in being able to have some reflective effect on our afflictions and troubles” (Wall, *At Home and Elsewhere* 292).

The irony lies in the fact that Wall is trying to visually depict something that the narrator of the story is struggling to define. Kafka refers to the limitations of language in his introduction stating his difficulty finding a language that accurately describes *Odradek*:

Some say the word *Odradek* is of Slavonic origin, and try to account for it on that basis. Others again believe it to be of German origin, only influenced by Slavonik. The uncertainty of both interpretations allows one to assume with justice that neither is accurate, especially as neither of them provides an intelligent meaning of the word. (428)

This is where the photography as visual language comes in: whereas the fiction has to describe, the photograph can show. More of an idea as opposed to a being, the narrator of Kafka’s short story finds it impossible to place a definition over *Odradek*. The narrator can only describe characteristics and behaviours that seem to suggest that *Odradek* is more of a thing rather than a person. Yet, it can speak when asked, bestowing upon itself a human quality which allows for communication. In the many befuddling antics of *Odradek*, Wall chooses to portray his omnipresent characteristic that while innocuous, provides a sense of uneasiness to the narrator of the story. Matthew Powell attributes this disconcerting tension between *Odradek* and the narrator to *Odradek*’s enigmatic and uncanny presence:

By playing off this tension between human and non-human, between what is “the self” and what is “not the self”, Kafka is able to explore the *ontology of otherness* that

clarifies the space between the self and other. This space is critical to maintaining notions of self and identity. (130)

By portraying *Odradek* as the space that reconciles the self and the Other, Kafka is challenging the boundary between the self and the non-self. Similarly, Wall explores *Odradek*'s otherness by suspending its very existence in his photograph with the casting of shadows in places where *Odradek* can be found. The dark lightings employed in the shooting of the photograph perpetuates *Odradek*'s mysterious and ludicrous nature, creating a threatening nature towards the girl descending the staircase, who seems plausibly unaware as shown by her expressionless face. This tension within the photograph reflects the fear of the narrator in the story, that this alien, seemingly-immortal creature, will stay in the house longer than the narrator ever will, even succeeding his children and grandchildren (Kafka 429). While he knows that *Odradek* "does no harm to anyone", he cannot help but fear this *Other* with such unpredictable nature, highlighting the existential condition of Otherness similar in *Mimic*.

In a way, Wall managed to defy what the narrator thought no one would be able to do – "in any case, closer scrutiny is impossible, since *Odradek* is extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid off" (Kafka 428). Not only does he manage to capture a half-thing half-being that has no fixed abode, he also allows the viewers to have a closer scrutiny of the photograph and re-evaluate their opinions of *Odradek* as told by the narrator in *The Cares of a Family Man*. While the story makes the readers aware of the narrator's wary attitude towards *Odradek*, the photograph makes the tension between the two even more palpable by casting dark shadows, suggesting that *Odradek* is found below the stairway, unseen by the girl who is descending the staircase. The artificial lightings employed by Wall swallow the familiarity of the domestic household thus creating an unmistakably ominous atmosphere, almost as if hinting that the girl in the photograph is in imminent danger. With *Odradek* not fully visible,

it only accentuates its Otherness and the threat that it represents to the narrator's family, while at the same time, staying true to the narrator's inability to fully describe *Odradek*. This way, Wall echoes what Stanley Corngold mentioned in his essay, in that "one of the marks of a good picture is that the unseen parts resonate inside it so that you imagine their unseen-ness" (77). Wall does not explicitly portray how *Odradek* looks like, but he does show how *Odradek* affects the people around it. Through the use of lighting and mise-en-scène of a desolate staircase and a seemingly neglected house, Wall portrays *Odradek* in relation to the girl in the photograph, highlighting the notion of the Other in relation to the self, thus granting visibility to the what was previously invisible.

This interest in bestowing light to the invisible to give it form and shape is something that we see in his other works. In fact, we may be tempted to associate his obsession with light to his photographic technique, which employs the use of large format images mounted on light boxes. Wall's interest in rendering visibility to the invisible is also seen in his adaptation of a scene taken from Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*, seen in figure 4:



Figure 4: Jeff Wall, *After "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue*, 1999-2001.

Transparency in Lightbox. 174 x 250.5 cm.

Source: Wall, Jeff, Hans De. Wolf, Joël Benzakin, and Jeff Wall. *Jeff Wall: The Crooked Path*. Brussels: Bozar, 2011. Print.

The photographed subject is a black man, who finds solitude and comfort in an abandoned basement of a large apartment building in New York City. Referring it to as a “hole”, it serves as a haven for the narrator to seek refuge from the discriminating world, which alienates him because of his skin colour. The forgotten basement is turned into a revenge tool against the capitalized, prejudiced city, as he taps illegally into the power supply company which is aptly named as “Monopolated Light & Power”, thus rendering visibility to his otherwise invisible and marginalised status:

My hole is warm and full of light. Yes, *full* of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State Building on a photographer's dream night ... I know; I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness. And I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form. (Ellison 6).

In the photograph we can clearly see the subject as he is illuminated by the lights surrounding him (the novel states it as 1, 369 light bulbs). He gives form to himself and allows himself to be seen by others. Therefore, similar to the protagonist in *The Invisible Man* who employs the use of light to affirm his existence and reality, Wall uses his lightbox transparency photographic technique to give life to his memories and experiences, thus echoing the narrator's sentiments: "Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well" (Ellison 7). Wall's memories will remain fleeting if he does not impose light on it and create a photograph to immortalise these memories. The photographs depict the preservation of his memory or experience onto paper, giving them form and visibility.

The unwashed dishes, abandoned furniture and the cramped area help to convey his predicament of living in a neglected basement, but he subverts his identity as the Other by monopolising the power supply that is generated by "Monopolated Light & Power" - the utilities company that supplies light to New York City, the city that discriminates him because of his skin colour. He uses the tapped power to light up a clearly exorbitant number of light bulbs in his room. However, in the photograph, Wall chooses to only light up selected light bulbs (assuming that there are even 1,369 light bulbs as stated in the novel). Whether it is a physical constraint or a deliberate choice by Wall, it strays from the novel's portrayal

which clearly depicts the narrator's impudence in managing to steal from the power supply company to light up his excessive amount of lightbulbs:

I sat on the chair's edge in a soaking sweat, as though each of my 1,369 bulbs had every one become a klieg light in an individual setting for a third degree with Ras and Rineheart in charge. (Ellison 13)

Sure, we see the subject sitting at the edge of his chair leaning forward, presumably reading what seemed like a manuscript of the novel, but he is not drenched in sweat unlike what the narrator in the novel proposes to have felt. And even when he is illuminated in light, Wall still chooses to preserve his enigma by shooting his back view. One may argue that this non-visual element of the photograph, while proving to be essential in rendering visibility and form to the subject, does not reduce the quality of the visual, but instead, this negation extend into the narrative of the story which emphasizes the invisible nature of the subject. In another sense, Wall is perpetuating the discrimination as the camera does not allow the viewers to look the subject in the eye, which parallels the protagonist's experience in the novel, where he is regarded as invisible by the prejudiced city that shuns him because of his skin colour. The invisibility here, is therefore, problematic, because it does not represent what we cannot see, but what we usually refuse to see.

ON PHILIP-LORCA diCORCIA'S ESCHEWAL OF THE "DECISIVE MOMENT"

Violating and perpetuating the Other in an attempt to eliminate the alienation faced by the socially marginalised is therefore, a paradox faced by these street photographers. Inherent in the act of being photographed is the willingness to be objectified, and it is precisely because of the loss of this choice to be objectified that Erno Nussenzweig filed a lawsuit against street photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia, claiming that in taking his photograph without his consent, diCorcia has violated his privacy rights. The Hasidic Nussenzweig was caught unaware when he was mantled by a spotlight that was employed by diCorcia in capturing his subjects. His photograph, along with those of other New Yorkers, is part of diCorcia's collection published in 2001 entitled "Heads", where they are described as "the true faces of our time" (Sante: Introduction).



Figure 5: Philip-Lorca diCorcia, *Head #13*.

Source: DiCorcia, Philip-Lorca, and Luc Sante. *Philip-Lorca DiCorcia: Heads*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2001. Print.

Directing a sudden spotlight on his selected subject, diCorcia is deliberately imposing his vision on his photographic subjects at their most objective state. In his introduction to diCorcia's series, Luc Sante mentions the varied results from the homogeneous nature of his photographic technique: "He has marked an X on the pavement, but no two of his subjects hit it quite the same way, so that no two are lit exactly the same way". Capturing familiar faces at their most vulnerable state, diCorcia dispels the confident and brash pose that we so often see in subjects that are willing to be photographed. Placing an artificial illumination on familiar faces allows "the light [to] interrupt it... it estranges accustomed things and distances the individual from his environment" (Gundlach 17). The individual in this case, is literally displaced – the use of lightings and shadow highlights the sense of alienation of the photographed subject in an ironically bustling environment of Times Square.

One can therefore, find reason behind the dissension expressed by Nussenzweig if we were to look at Bourdieu's theory that says:

"In this society which exalts the sense of honour, dignity and respectability, in this closed world where one feels at all times inescapably under the gaze of others, it is important to give others the most honourable, the most dignified image of oneself: the affected and rigid pose which tends towards the posture of standing at attention seems to be the expression of this unconscious intention." (Bourdieu 82)

To have one's photograph taken without his or her consent is therefore, to revoke one's control over the self. In this case, Nussenzweig feels violated because he is made into an object without his consent. The commercial distribution of his photographs perpetuates the objectification, as his image is being put up for sale and public viewership. It is doubly oppressive if we were to consider the basis behind his argument, which is that the photograph

compromised the teachings of his religion, which mentions the “prohibition against “graven images”” (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 21).

It is worth noting that Nussenzweig’s photograph is the only one in the series that shows a photographed subject looking straight in the camera, giving the impression that he is aware of the presence of the camera. His frontality is therefore, not similar to Bourdieu’s definition of the term, where “frontality is a means of effecting one’s own objectification: offering a regulated image of oneself in a way of imposing the rules of one’s own perception” (83). The line between the artificial pose (or Bourdieu’s frontality) and an authentic, unregulated self is blurred in the photograph of Nussenzweig as he is offering frontality but not doing so in a conscious manner. He was caught in the act, vulnerable under diCorcia’s spotlight.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1951, diCorcia’s most formative photographic years fall in an era that is not traditionally photographic. His first influences were “Ed Ruscha, Vito Acconci, William Wegman and Robert Cumming, all of whom approached photography as a system of cultural and commercial sights that could be manipulated, fictionalized, and used like found objects in unexpected assemblages” (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 13). Photography’s capacity to simulate and mimic reality, therefore, blurs the line between the authentic and artificial, as it continually oscillates between the two spheres, threatening the integrity of reality.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia’s time in Yale proves to be a turning point in his photographic career. It was there that he attained a more sophisticated theoretical training as well as a more “intense exposure to modernist documentary modes of *auteurs* like Evans, Harry Callahan and Winogrand” (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 16). These modernist photographers are inclined towards Cartier-Bresson’s idea of capturing the “decisive moment” as they place

emphasis on the invisible camera having the prowess to capture images of subjects on the street in their most 'natural' state. In other words, similar to photographs shot by Cartier-Bresson, the photographs of Gary Winogrand and Walker Evans show photographed subjects being unaware of their photographs being taken. In a similar vein, DiCorcia attempts this in a previously mentioned body of works entitled *Heads* (2001), where he acts like a bounty hunter in Times Square, as he lies in wait for his prey to walk into the set up that he had created, before shooting them.

However, DiCorcia's works are not homogenous for he applies different techniques to different body of works. In his essay "Photography is a Foreign Language", Peter Galassi explains the changes that affected diCorcia's practice:

"What is distinctive, and essential to grasping the originality of diCorcia's work, is the degree to which he showed sympathetic curiosity for two divergent understandings of photography. The one, taking the impersonal power of popular and commercial culture as a given, approached photography as a realm of fiction and duplicity. The other, devoted to the authenticity of individual perceptions, approached photography as a way of interpreting experience. In the 1980s, as that divergence evolved into open opposition, diCorcia was making art in the gap between the two." (qtd. in diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 16).

The "gap" that diCorcia was making is seen in his way of converging the traditional notions of street photography practiced by Cartier-Bresson such as the flaneur who goes out to the streets to uncover the unusual in the seemingly banal, as well as Jeff Wall's photographic technique which questions reality and re-emphasise the notion of the *Other*. DiCorcia's body of work, while echoing to Cartier-Bresson in terms of capturing the socially displaced as the photographic subjects, highlights much artifice and guile as compared to

Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' which emphasizes on capturing these social subjects in their most 'natural' state. His work is carefully pre-conceived and composed, closer to Wall's cinematic technique as compared to Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment". This way, he creates his own 'decisive moment', where he artfully set up his subjects and direct them to pose in a pre-arranged setting. His way of representing the marginalised is therefore problematic. Through the imposition of the authorial vision, he is presenting to the viewers a representation of the represented society, instead of an authentic representation of reality.

His series of works helped to establish the hallmarks of postmodernism: "that images are not equal to truth, that the truth of a photograph can be constructed, and that reality, however defined, is not independent of images but deeply contingent on them" (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 16). The possibility of recreating reality, is therefore, central to the diCorcia's body of works, where he continuously challenges the traditional notions of street photography established earlier by Cartier-Bresson, where "the decisive moment" is crucial in obtaining that essential moment where subject, lighting and setting merge in a perfect composition. Rather than waiting to finally capture the "decisive moment", diCorcia takes it upon himself to recreate that moment. In an interview with Lynne Tillman, he is quoted as saying:

"It's not an indecisive moment; it's more that there's no decision made... The flashes go off in a fraction of a second and certain camera mechanics alter the relationship of the flash to the ambient light. As much is going on in my peripheral vision as in the middle of the frame... I don't look through the camera." (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 94)

This deliberate choice of not being ‘unified’ with the camera clearly strays from Cartier-Bresson’s technique of using the viewfinder as a frame to carefully compose his subjects such that it goes in accordance with his authorial vision:

In order to “give a meaning” to the world, one has to feel oneself involved in what he frames through the viewfinder. This attitude requires concentration, a discipline of mind, sensitivity and a sense of geometry. It is by great economy of means that one arrives at simplicity of expression. One must always take photos with the greatest respect for the subject and for oneself. (Cartier-Bresson, *Henri Cartier-Bresson*, Introduction)

DiCorcia is not restricting his view with the viewfinder, instead, he puts himself at a third person perspective, almost similar to that of the future viewer of the photographer. While Cartier-Bresson is deeply “involved in what he frames through the viewfinder”, a process which requires “concentration, a discipline of mind, sensitivity and a sense of geometry”, diCorcia simply allows the camera to take photographs on its own, negating the kind of authorial vision that Cartier-Bresson imposes on its subjects upon using his Leica.

Nonetheless, similar to Cartier-Bresson, diCorcia is interested in representing the plight of the marginalised, the at-risk or the socially displaced. The *Hustlers* series, which was shot from 1990-1992, marks his rebellion towards the established governmental structures that not only prevent the provision of support, but also create fear and perpetuate bigotry in society towards homosexuality (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 17). He ironically used the fellowship that he won from the National Endowment for the Arts – essentially a government body - to create one of his most seminal body of works that portrays a series of photographs depicting male prostitutes in various parts of Hollywood. This is essentially a move against the prejudiced system of the Reagan administration which displayed clear

hostility towards the gay male community, producing a ‘culture war that produced only casualties’ – one of whom was diCorcia’s own brother Max, who died from AIDS (diCorcia, Simpson and Tillman 17).

The *Hustlers* series is therefore his attempt to reassert the position of the marginalised and to bring forth their situation to the society. In another sense, he is trying to find a common ground of affection in which society can view these hustlers in a lens or perspective that is less hostile. Seen in figure 6 is a photograph from the series, which depicts a young and blond male prostitute, dressed in a low-cut V-neck knitted top, seated in the backseat of a car. The fact that he is situated at the back of the car suggests a parallel to his life, where he can only follow the direction of the person driving the car or wielding the power, in this case his clients. DiCorcia is a client, and at the same time, a dominant subject, where he paid \$40 to photograph the male hustler named Brooks. His photographs are subsequently distributed via commercial means, so in another sense, Brooks is literally for sale.



Figure 6: Philip-Lorca diCorcia, *Todd M. Brooks*; 22 years old; Denver, Colorado; \$40, 1990-92.

Source: DiCorcia, Philip-Lorca, Bennett Simpson, and Lynne Tillman. *Philip-Lorca*

DiCorcia. Boston, MA: Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2007. 90-91. Print.

Similar to Nussenzweig in figure 5, Brooks provides a returned look to the camera. The difference lies in that Brooks is under the authorial direction of diCorcia, which essentially means that he is willing to be objectified by the camera. The constructed returned look within the pose is problematic:

But the subject's look is, in fact, a double or peculiarly divided look, because the subject for his or her part, does not look at the photographer (a spectator-substitute), but at the lens, the enigmatic eye. The person who poses is adopting the behaviour known as 'being photographed'. This is an unstable behaviour made up of submission and self-declaration, in varying mixes." (Scott 136)

The lens in this case, interrupts the impositions of the dominant self over the Other, where the photographed subject creates a persona that is acceptable for the lens. The pose, here, is an extension of this deliberate construction of someone other than the self. In this case, the Other is creating an Other to itself, thus circumventing the authorial directions that diCorcia is establishing over itself. The line between the authentic individual and the presented self is blurred in the depiction of the pose. In imposing his authorial vision onto Brooks, diCorcia is ironically granting him the power to subvert the tool that oppresses him and defines him as the Other. Through the pose, Brooks has the capability to present a self that is not authentic, thus rebelling against the dominant self by providing a constructed and artificial image of the Other.

The importance of the pose as a suggested solution to interrupt the imposition of the photographer on the photographed subject is extended to the following photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson shown in Figure 7. We can draw stark contrasts between diCorcia's photograph in Figure 6 and this photograph even though the intention of the photographers are the same, which is to capture the substratum of society and present it to the viewers.



Figure 7: Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Calle Cuauhtemocztin*, Mexico City, 1934.

Cartier-Bresson, Henri. *Henri Cartier Bresson, Photographer*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1992. Plate 23. Print.

The women portrayed in Cartier-Bresson's photograph share the same profession as Brooks in Figure 6, but while the setting and mise-en-scène of Brooks' photograph may be pre-conceived and arranged by the photographer, the two women in figure 7 are captured in their natural setting. Being in their own territory, they seem particularly at ease as compared

to Brooks' disconcerting posture of slightly leaning to the left in an attempt to be in line with the camera, with a submissive gesture of placing both hands on his lap. There is a natural ease as the woman on the right of the photograph returned the look, acknowledging the presence of a camera with a half-smile, or a smirk. Similar to Figure 1, this photograph is taken from an angle above eye level, yet the woman challenges the vantage imposition by looking directly into the camera in a defensive posture, hiding her body with her elbows placed upfront. The woman on the left exemplifies Bourdieu's term of "frontality" as mentioned earlier where in portraying frontality, the photographed subject is proposing a "regulated image of oneself", thus the possibility of an artificial Other (Bourdieu 83).

Many sitters try to please the lens, to produce an 'expected' photograph, to create the photogenic. But others look at the lens with a look that is disarmed, because there is nothing to *respond to* only to *look at*. This is what may indeed give the lens access to a truth not vouchsafed to a human counterpart. (Scott 136)

However, the pose that is seen in Figure 7 is closer to reality as compared to Brooks' regulated image of the camera shown in Figure 6. Fully aware of the photographer's artistic vision, Brooks presents a self that is "expected" or "photogenic", and this is a response to diCorcia's directions as he looks for a satisfying image of Brooks through the viewfinder. The women shown in figure 7 are not responding to any directions dictated by Cartier-Bresson, in fact, as the above-mentioned quote explains, there is "nothing to *respond to* only to *look at*." While both images are constructed, the pose adopted by Brooks proposes a more menacing and effective way to counter authorial impositions on the Other, precisely because it subverts the notion by presenting a self that is compatible with the photographer and its lens that may not be authentic. Therefore, in adopting the pose, the photographed subject is holding its authentic self at a distance, subverting the gap of difference that exists between

the subject and the Other. While still serving its function, the photographed subject is no longer an image, but proves that it can separate itself from the presented image.

CONCLUSION

By adopting the pose, the objectified Other can still assert a sense of individuality as s/he presents a self that is artificial to the camera. This subversion of power entails the Other to having a choice of constructing an image that is Other to itself, thus countering the impositions of the camera and the photographer. The ability to separate the authentic and the constructed grants power to the Other, therefore threatening the existence of the self as the dominant group.

The charm of street photography is overt: the everyday is stripped of its banality and a strangely peculiar yet similar new image is plastered on it. The street photograph replaces and displaces reality in its acts of self-inscription; “the photograph thrusts its elsewhere into the space in front of us, claims our attention, distracts us, reroutes our thought processes, is an agent of visual metamorphosis, opening up a field of unsuspected possibility in the everyday” (Scott 194). Herein lies the seduction inherent in street photography: it provides the photographer an opportunity to capture a part of reality and reinterpret it via his own vision, thus the paradox of the intention of the photographer: In attempting to highlight the predicament of the Other, he is in fact, subjecting them to more oppression by placing them under their directions. Andy Grundberg discusses the hypocrisy in the practice of Magnum Photos agency and essentially questions the photojournalistic intention of the photographer. The problem is extrapolated if we were to consider the fact that these photographers are the Western self to the Third World Other, thus suggesting a Western imperialism as mentioned earlier.

Therefore, in attempting to bring forth the predicament of the Other to a wider mass, these photographers are perpetuating the Otherness as they portray the photographed subjects as the objectified Other who are dispossessed and rendered powerless in front of the camera. Jeff Wall and diCorcia, however, alleviate the paradox inherent in Cartier-Bresson's works by abandoning the invisible camera and adopting photographic technique that is self-reflexive. Viewers of Wall's and diCorcia's photographs are aware of the presence of the camera, thus reducing the threat to the integrity of reality. Afterall, while the camera aims to capture an objective aspect of reality, its manifestation is still the result of an arbitrary selection which is carefully manipulated and arranged.

(9, 259 words)

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