

## ***Here and There***

### Symposium Introduction

'Photography is an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then.' Roland Barthes

Barthes is talking here about the connection between instantaneous photography and memories of the past, a not uncommon preoccupation amongst the pioneers of critical photographic discourse. Barthes, a writer of his time, identifies the unique element of photography as its stillness and the manner in which looking at a photograph can force the viewer into another time and place through a connection to and a suggestion of lived experience. Photographs may still operate as records of moments not to be repeated, although the speed of contemporary communication has rendered these moments less decisive. They certainly do however represent our experience of the world in geographical terms and the distance between us. Barthes' *here* and *there* are the locations of the consumption and capture of an image. The closer these two sites of meaning come together, the more intimate the encounter tends to be. The further apart they are, the more exotic or strange the picture strikes us. We might, for example, empathise with the plight of others in far-flung parts of the world, but it is unusual to be able to relate to them in the way we can to representations of our own back yard. Earlier this year Jon Tonks discussed his recent book *Empire*, in which he found Britishness in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The results are familiar and strange at the same time and were inspirational to his audience.

Without wishing to force a too distinct dichotomy on the selection of subject, the most important choice a photographic artist makes, it appears there is a difference in the motivations of the artist akin to introversion and extroversion. Often this seems more significant than established genre divisions. A picture of a Molotov cocktail in Maidan Square and an image of a coffee pot made in a studio might both be described as a 'still life' but the connection between them is arbitrary. The motivation and process of a photographer are ultimately the significant factors in determining the outcome and the appeal of the work.

Photographers are obsessive individuals and can spend many years on the *projects* that have now become the yardstick by which the photographic artist is measured. Critics of photography, most notably the practitioners themselves, will allow their fellow artists a great deal of latitude in subject matter, but they are still mindful of when home turf is too indulgent or when the overseas document tips into visual tourism or cultural theft. The integrity with which such a project is carried out is vitally important, whether this is close to home or on the other side of the world. If the project has political gravity, this must be matched by the ethical stance of the photographer. An overseas project however does not necessarily have to be charged with a documentary tension, nor a hometown project be presented in an intimate fashion.

Josef Koudelka was once described as a 'solitary nomad, a man who haunts precarious places and whose destination is uncertain ... picking up the questions he has held in the palm of his hand ever since he was a child and translating

them one by one into images by carefully dissecting the disorder of the world.' Koudelka, the perpetual exile, represents the condition of the photographer as outsider – even when dealing with familiar ground. Taking obsessions and making them visual, there is no difference between his subject and process, the one insists on the other. I am reminded of Shklovsky's ideas of 'making strange'. The camera is acting as a tool of defamiliarization, editing life in a slow contemplation of the foreign or familiar. As Catherine Duncan said of Paul Strand's work, 'photographs impose reflection, like a sudden stillness when everything stands on the edge of discovery'.

### Morning - *Here*

There must be something in the air out West since David Drake and co. have just curated a show at the Ffotogallery in Cardiff called *At Home He's a Tourist*, which I think chimes with the theme we're looking at here. In short what are the motivations of photographers who choose to turn their camera towards home or abroad and what are the processes by which they achieve often-remarkable results? We've divided the day into a somewhat false dichotomy and of course the people who we've invited are not one-trick ponies in the sense of sticking to home or away. For the purposes of this morning's home session however, we've invited John Spinks to talk about his Arley project and Lydia Goldblatt to discuss *Still Waiting*. With free reign to be as comparative as they like with other work.

John is not very fond of public praise so I'm not going to list his accolades, although some of you have heard me talk about his astonishing ability to make and read photographs. Today he's largely going to be talking about a project that he's been working on for a lot of years in his home territory in the midlands.

Lydia Goldblatt is a rising star, she's been widely published in photographic journals and broadsheets over the last couple of years and has exhibited at Arles, Daylight and Hereford. She's picked up awards too numerous to mention and today is going to be talking about her renowned project *Still Here*.

### Afternoon - *There*

This afternoon we're inviting 2 guests to consider their motivations when making work away from home. We could, in an old-fashioned way, think about this as a documentary urge, but as we know it's not that simple and doesn't really address the creative process that we're interested in investigating today. As with this morning our guests have carte blanche to be as comparative as they like with projects made closer to home, since the dichotomy we're offering is obviously somewhat divisive.

Anastasia Taylor-Lind is a documentary photographer and a member of the esteemed Vii photo agency. Her clients include UK broadsheet magazines like Guardian Weekend and The Telegraph, Marie Clare, Elle France, Time and the New York Times. Her work has been exhibited in the forums such as the NPG and Saatchi gallery, the Frontline Club, Fovea in New York and at the Lodz festival in

Poland. She has picked up awards too numerous to mention and holds degrees from Newport and the LCC.

Toby Glanville's work is marked by its subtlety and sensitivity. His pictures are not forced or spectacular, even when dealing with subject matter that is not necessarily close to home. He has an abiding interest in history and seeks to map a sense of integrity and connection with the past through his contemporary work. Toby's work has been exhibited all over the world and published extensively in book form.