Photography 2

The Self and the Other

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Before you start

Welcome to *Photography 2: Self and the Other*.

Your OCA Student Handbook should be able to answer most questions about the basics of this course and all other OCA courses so keep this to hand.

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course An Introduction to Studying in HE. This is available on the OCA student website. Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course as it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

Course aims and outcomes

Photography 2: Self and the Other aims to:
• provide the support for you to learn and develop creative visual and conceptual strategies in contemporary photography
• inform you of the wider contexts (social, philosophical, cultural, political, ethical and economic) that relate to contemporary photography and the representation of cultures and identity
• equip you with the necessary skills to produce visual material, synthesise ideas and effectively realise and resolve previously conceptualised ideas
• build upon your critical, analytical, evaluative and reflective skills
• help you explore your personal voice as an independent practitioner and develop your visual, oral and written communication skills.

On successful completion of the course you'll be able to:
• demonstrate detailed knowledge of visual and conceptual strategies in the representation of people and cultures and be able to explore your own critical photographic projects
• demonstrate an awareness of the wider social and cultural contexts that surround the representation of cultures and identity, and be able to discuss relevant ethical perspectives in relation to your own practice
• explore and realise a range of ideas and creative starting points, and exercise judgement in the production of visual material
• manage learning resources, conduct self-directed contextual and visual research, and be able to appraise your progress with increasing confidence
• increasing autonomy and a developing personal voice, and exercise your communication skills confidently and interact effectively within a learning group.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact for feedback relating to your progress through OCA courses. They will review your work at each assignment point and give you detailed feedback to help you improve your work or working methods in the next part of the course. Your tutor is supported by the Course Support Advisors, who can answer questions relating to course documentation or OCA processes in between assignments / feedback points.

If you haven't already done so, please send an introductory email to your tutor as soon as possible. Outline your experience of photography to date, what courses you've previously undertaken, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope to achieve from it. Also consider including background information about your other interests and experience to broaden your tutor's understanding of you as an individual.

For more information about the tuition system and the Course Support Advisors please refer to the Student Handbook. You can email Course Support here: coursesupport@oca.ac.uk.

Studying with OCA

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE' on the OCA student website. Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course; it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

Your learning log

Your learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course.
Use your learning log to record your progress through the course. Your learning log should contain:
* your thoughts on the work you produce for each exercise
* your ideas and observations as you work through the course
* your reflections on the reading you do and any research you carry out
* your tutor's reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

Even if you've used a hard-copy learning log in the past, for this course you should set up your learning log as an online blog. This blog will document your work for the exercises and assignments and provide links to research material. Setting up a blog is easy using the OCA Wordpress template which you'll find in the 'Resources' section of the OCA student site.

You'll also find study guides to keeping a learning log and setting up a learning blog.

You may want to keep an optional research folder to store things like material you pick up at exhibitions or galleries, cuttings from newspapers or magazines, etc.

Planning ahead

This Level 2 course represents 600 hours of learning time. The course should take about a year and a half to complete if you spend around 8 hours each week on it.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Thinking about assessment

Once you've completed and submitted your first assignment, you'll need to decide whether you want to go for formal accreditation at the end of the course, i.e. assessment. Your tutor is there to help you decide. There's a study guide to assessment and how to get qualified on the OCA student website, with more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit:

- all six assignments as submitted to your tutor plus any amended versions (i.e. amended in the light of tutor feedback)
- your tutor reports
- your blog url.

Please make your original assignments available to the assessors on your blog, exactly as they were submitted to your tutor.

Except for Assignment Four (work in progress), you should submit final, amended versions of your assignments in hard copy, as appropriate to your individual project.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Assessment criteria

Each assignment will be assessed against the assessment criteria listed below. If you intend to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you refer back to these criteria regularly to make sure you are confident that you meet every criterion and can articulate where and how you meet them.

At Level 2 your ability to identify strengths and areas for development in your work becomes even more important, so we highly recommend that you conduct a self-assessment at the end of each assignment. Take time to assess your work in relation to each criterion. In addition to identifying strengths and weaknesses, you could highlight areas you've been working particularly hard to improve as a result of previous feedback, discuss the nature of the improvement and decide whether these areas require further development.

We will draw attention to the assessment criteria as you progress through the course and your tutor will make reference to them in feedback on assignments.

Criterion
Demonstration of technical and visual skills: Materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills.
Quality of outcome: Content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas.
Demonstration of creativity: Imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.
Context: Reflection, research, critical thinking.

The criteria have different weights which are used to determine your overall assessment mark. Details of the current weightings can be found in the resource section of the student website: www.oca-student.com/resource-type/assessment-criteria/assessment-criteria-visual-arts-he5

Introduction

We all photograph each other, and have done since 1839. How we get those photographs and what we do with them matters. We are all different, photography unforgivingly highlights our differences, we need to become aware of how and when the medium differentiates.

Issues of representation, ethics, class, and the photographic exchange occur and reoccur throughout this course. The photographer's obligations to subjects reflect wider societal obligations to those categorized as in the minority. You will see that a single photograph can evoke multilayered debate. History weighs heavily upon the photographer. As photographs slip through time and shed their intended first use, they can be recontextualised and used in evidence on both sides of an argument. This is not meant to be off-putting to the student photographer, in fact it is hoped that this course opens up the student to the myriad of possibilities of expression when photographing people other than themselves. You will see that there is a sliding scale of perceived otherness – you may feel closer to some people than others - as well as a sliding scale of representation. You may find yourself feeling differently about photographs, photographers, critics, and even society as you move through this course. It is important to find an ethical position in photography, but equally it is important to remain open to criticism and self-reflection.

Course Overview

Part One
Part One seeks to define the Other. It looks at how this concept (alien to Victorians) was central to colonialism and systems of state control. It discusses the centrality of photography to both. It looks at how photography divides us, ideas of insiders and outsiders and introduces the ethical arguments inherent to representation.

Part Two
Part Two explores further how the use of photography can facilitate the subjugation of others, how its use in the mass media creates the world we know and how what is excluded can be as important as what is included. Through detailed examinations and experiments you will explore the power relationship between photographer and subject, and how the photographer's ethical position matters.

Part Three
Part Three introduces the post-modern idea of constructed self or identity. From this stems a discussion of the performances for the camera, initially by artists, but now by almost everyone engaged in the selfie phenomenon. It introduces the idea of the self portrait as a way to explore and heal oneself.

All three parts note the entanglement of self, other, ethics and representations.

Part Four
Part Four gives you five investigatory threads to choose from that will help contextualise your body of work.

Part Five
Part Five encourages you to photographically experiment and investigate further in your chosen area of Self/Other.

Part Six
Part Six is where you resolve your investigation, producing a finished submission.

Part one
Looking at Them: The Representation of the Other

Les Monaghan, *Untitled* from the commission *photobreightmet,* 2009 - 10

Use the table below to keep track of you progress though out Part One.

Exercise	Page	Complete
Preliminary Exercise The Clandestine Camera	14	
Exercise 1.1	18	
Exercise 1.2	22	
Exercise 1.3	28	
Exercise 1.4	30	
Reading point	**Page**	**Complete**
1.1	19	
Reading point Allan Sekula 'The body and the archive' 1.2	21	

Introduction

'I am not a liberal Englishman like you. **In the back of my head are things that can't be in the back of your head.** *That part of me comes from a plantation, when you owned me. I was brought up to understand you, I read your literature, I knew "Daffodils" off by heart before I knew the name of a Jamaican flower. You don't lose that, it becomes stronger.'*

He smiles. I smile. He doesn't blame me, he says, or anyone. But the least we can do is acknowledge our difference. Then we can start to talk.
Stuart Hall interviewed by Tim Adams in The Observer, 23 September 2007

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Preliminary Exercise The Clandestine Camera

Many of you will have encountered this exercise in the course Identity and Place. If so, repeating it now will get you ready for this course. If it is your first time, do not worry as this course is self-contained.

Look at the hidden camera work of Sophie Calle, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Natasha Caruana, Walker Evans and Humphrey Spender.

Shoot a series of five portraits of subjects who are unaware of the fact they are being photographed. There are many ways in which you can go about this, but we can't stress enough that the objective here is not to offend your subjects or deliberately invade anyone's privacy. If you don't have permission to shoot in a privately-owned space, then you should only attempt this work in a public space, where permission to shoot is not necessarily required.

This is a very interesting challenge, which some students will find incredibly difficult. Remember that the creative outcome of the practitioners discussed above has come about through a sustained approach, which is then heavily edited for presentation. You'll need to shoot many images in order to be able to present five final images that work together as a set.

Think everything through carefully before attempting this exercise as the responsibility for the outcome of the portraits rests entirely with you. If during the course of this exercise you are challenged in any way, be prepared to delete what you have shot. If you can see that you are annoying someone, or making them feel uncomfortable, stop shooting immediately. You'll be required to operate with a degree of common sense here and not take unnecessary risks. There are ways of completing this exercise without incurring risk, such as shooting the work at a party you've been invited to, where all the guests have been invited for a particular celebration.

The reflection about your methodology will be as important as the final five images, so be prepared to write about how you found the experience (around 500 words) and present your findings via your learning log.

Project 1 Definitions of Other

The Other is constructed in relation to the self… the Other is dissimilar to - the opposite of - and alien to, the self.

A simple definition could be, not you, or, people dissimilar to you.

Of course, in English 'you' (like 'we') can also be plural, so you might feel you belong to the bigger you of: local townspeople, or women, or teachers or semi-professional campaigning cyclists. The Other, could be people from another town (think about the long running Springfield/Shelbyville gag in The Simpsons), men, students or petrolheads.

If we think of this photographically using Stephen Bull's definition, 'those we can't identify with are defined as different and Other' it follows that most photography that involves the photographer going outside of their immediate circle of family, friends and colleagues can be classified as photography of the Other (Bull 2010: 106).

You may have identified with some of the people you photographed in the preliminary exercise. Did you feel uneasy photographing some rather than others? What could have prompted this unease?

Imagine a cruise ship leaving Southampton full of tourists who disembark in Casablanca and tumble out of their air-conditioned coach into the souks digital cameras at the ready. What are tourists doing through photographing? Does the camera bring them closer to the experience? In *On Photography* Susan Sontag talks of the tourist taking photographs 'to take possession of a place in which they feel insecure', what makes our imaginary tourists feel insecure in the souks? (Sontag 1977: 9) The Other. How do they cope? 'Most tourists feel compelled to put a camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter', asserts Sontag (Sontag 1977: 10). Yet somehow the camera often gives them the confidence to confront the Other, search 'souk' in flickr and note how many portraits there are.

In professional photography, travel work provides images intended for consumption by others, in what John Taylor calls 'armchair tourism' (Taylor 1994: 4). These photographs are made with an audience in mind, and are informed by marketization, cultural norms and prevailing archetypes – the mainstream (Wells (Sontag 1977: 9-10) 355).

Here are two images produced by travel photographer, James Tye. Here is a typical image that was printed as part of the commission for a travel guide.

Tye notes, 'you... have to involve them in the photo, at least say hello, make contact and smile, just to make them not feel mugged, it reflects badly on all of us when [photographers] shoot and go'. The reaction of one of the field workers in this image shows that the photographer has revealed himself to the subjects.

James Tye, *Nepal,* 2013 © James Tye

James Tye, *Nepal,* 2013 © James Tye

And here is what he chooses to show on his website. It is more a more nuanced interpretation of what you may actually find if you approached field workers in Asia. Tye says, 'this was more about me, me being there, it's a bit gonzo, a portrait of the two of us'. (The word 'gonzo' is believed to have been first used in 1970 to describe an article by Hunter S. Thompson. His writing style was termed, gonzo journalism, it was written without claims of objectivity, and often included the reporter as part of the story via a first-person narrative) Of the images used in the travel guide, Tye says tellingly, 'they don't have me in them'.

Exercise 1.1

Produce a series of five portraits of strangers from a variety of backgrounds. These people must differ from you in some significant respect, e.g. age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, social class etc. Remember you are looking for the 'other'.

You may be able to work close to your own home. Do give yourself a geographical limit, but you will be surprised at how you can achieve this task by knocking on doors, asking friends of friends or advertising for sitters.

You will need to photograph more than five people and make an edit. As a rule of thumb you should expect to get five successful images from around fifteen portrait shoots. It is important to see this iterative process (shoot, reflect, repeat, go back if necessary) as part of the process all artists go through – the finished work is always the tip of the iceberg. Don't forget to evidence your editing decisions in your learning log. This will demonstrate your developing critical and analytical skills. Your learning log should also record your experience of this exercise. How easy was it to meet and photograph 'others'? How comfortable were you with this task?

Please keep notes of contact details of your subjects as we would like you to 're-visit' them in a later exercise.

Here are just a few practitioners who have worked with a similar approach. Spend some time looking at their work to help you generate some ideas. Document your research and your initial ideas in your learning log.

Diane Arbus	Katy Grannan	Alec Soth
Richard Avedon	Daniel Meadows	Joel Sternfeld
Rineke Dijkstra	August Sander	Shizuka Yokomizo

Reading point 1.1

We will return to look at some of these practitioners later, but for now it is pertinent to read Susan Sontag's criticism of Diane Arbus, pages 32-48 of On Photography. Now look again at the Arbus work you have seen. Sontag's rhetoric is powerful, it is hard to not accept this as a definitive reading of Arbus' oeuvre. Now read Gerry Badger's essay found at

www.americansuburbx.com/2012/07/diane-arbus-notes-from-margin-of.html

His essay gives us another view; more sympathetic, grounded in evidence and sceptical of Sontag's method and motives.

Now write a short 250-500 word synopsis of how you feel about Arbus's work, quote from Sontag, Badger and related arguments.

Project 2 The Other in the history of photography

The Victorians used photography to classify bodies according to physical appearance. They took this classification further by grading appearances, types emerged, and hierarchies were reinforced. In the UK from the 1880s Francis Galton used composite layered photographs to create a 'Jewish type', 'ideal types', 'the healthy' and 'criminal types'. Galton was a British polymath with diverse research interests, he created a linkage between photography, race, classification, statistics and eugenics – the term invented by him to discuss the improvement of a race. As we know eugenics was used to justify all manner of horrors in the Twentieth Century to which photography was intrinsic. At the same time as Galton was using photography to study racial and social characteristics,, Alphonse Bertillon systemized the police identity photograph in France, combining standardized photography with other records to create archives. This system is the foundation of much of the policing we see today, and indeed is at the centre of any state's control of its citizens.

'The physiognomic 'evidence' provided by [Galton and Bertillon's] photographs was used to legitimate the hereditary 'superiority' of certain groups of people, such as the emerging middle-classes, and even the potential elimination of their 'inferiors'. (Bull, 2010: 103) When the Victorians of Europe and America colonised the rest of the world they took their cameras and ideas of the standardised archive with them. Once more hierarchies based in technology and translated through photography became embedded. The colonised were itemised and categorised, Western superiority was emphasised. Colonial photographic 'investigation was built on a hierarchical vision, because in each case the person with the camera had the social authority, or money, to arrange and pose others for scrutiny' (Edwards, 2006: 22) – how does this relate to our tourists in the souk, or the current interactions between nations?

Tying identity to outward appearance becomes endemic in the photographic age and persists today.

The state is part of a continuing process of 'othering' through its constant gathering of identity photographs, it could be argued that the media operates as an extension of the state in its proliferating of 'criminal' identity photographs. Context is everything; if a contemporary art portrait looks like a police ID photograph then the labels underneath disseminated images become vital.

Reading point Allan Sekula 'The body and the archive' 1.2
http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/magic/sekula.pdf
Photographic archives, according to Sekula are traditionally used to exercise power over people. Through the scrutiny of 'types', identity can be assessed as outward appearance. For Sekula the photographic archive is used to label and assign social positions to people. Similarly, John Tagg, (1988) identifies how photographs can be used to discipline people using a Foucauldian framework of surveillance, identification, classification, labelling, analysis and correction. As Liz Well's states, '[t]he construction of archives is crucial to the everyday ways in which disciplinary power is exercised (Wells, 2005: 166).

Despite the apparent singular use and meaning of the ID-style photographic format – focused, well-lit head and shoulders, facing the camera – it is described by Peter Hamilton as still being 'the dominant metaphor for identity in the 21st century' (Hamilton, 2001: 106). How many of the images from your exercises looked like mug shots? Did you default to a head and shoulders framing?

Look at this summary of Thomas Ruff's 'Portraits' series here - www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ruff-portrait-1986-stoya-p78091/text-summary

Stephen Bull notes,
'Ruff made a series of portraits where the head and shoulders of each sitter were framed as if for a passport photograph. Presented on a large scale on gallery walls, a great deal of physical detail can be discerned in the images, but nothing of the subjects' personalities appears to be expressed, going against the conventional idea of portraiture.'
(Bull, 1999: 142 citing Cotton, 2004: 105-106)).

In creating work such as this, is Ruff asking us to question who dictates our identity?

Creating identities through photography is something we will look at later.

Exercise 1.2

Research and create your own model release form. It is vital that you use some form of contract to professionalise your work. They are important because most competitions, and publishers require evidence that subjects have agreed to pose. They help you as you have a record of names and contact details. This is a legal document and by signing the subjects agree to your ethical framework to make the work. The Association of Photographers (AOP) have a download, which you should look at to help guide you when designing your own release form.

www.the-aop.org/download/14109

Rather than using this form as standard, we recommend that you tailor your form for each exercise and assignment that you undertake. Be clear about your project aims and intentions.

Project 3 Class difference and Othering

The withering glance of the camera has always emphasised class difference in photographic history. Cameras were wielded by those with disposable income and pointed at those without. Susan Sontag said that, '[f]rom the very beginning, professional photography meant the broader kind of class tourism' (Sontag, 1977: 57). Victorians with cameras did not have to travel far geographically to encounter subjects of a different class. The other half were often on their doorsteps, and this proximity, particularly in crowded Britain, has meant that to the present day it is easy for the privileged to photograph the less privileged. John Taylor writes, 'Like Orwell', the Mass Observation movement of the 1930s, 'realized that to find exotic strangers to study [t]he[y] needed to travel no further than a few miles east of central London, or north to 'the wilds' of Lancashire'' (Taylor, 1994: 156). Mass Observation began in 1937 with the aim of creating an 'anthropology of ourselves', a counter to media representations and descriptions that purported to capture the mood of the nation. They commissioned photographer, Humphrey Spender, to document Bolton in Northern England. Bolton was given the name 'Worktown', symbolically representing a wider section of British life. In common with much of Britain at that time, Bolton could easily have been called 'Out-of-Work Town'. Spender was keen to cultivate a sense of invisibility when working and tended to photograph with a concealed camera. He was convinced by Tom Harrisson that being unobserved led him to capture natural and truthful images (for a short critique of this see page 37 of On Photography). He was aware that he 'was constantly being faced with – the class distinction, the fact that I was someone from another planet, intruding on another kind of life' (Spender, 1982: 16). Being unobserved meant not speaking as that 'would have dislodged his anonymity, invited suspicion,' and crucially, 'changed the social chemistry of the scene before his subjects fell into unselfconscious revelation' (Taylor 1994 p158). Class difference placed Spender on the outside of the story.

Humphrey Spender, *Conversation on a Tram,* © bolton council. From the Collection of Bolton Library and Museum Services

Did shooting covertly in the preliminary exercise allow you do something that overtly you may not have been comfortable with? Would revealing the camera have 'changed the social chemistry of the scene'?

John Roberts saw Mass-Observation 'as conceived by middle-class intellectuals and activists as an anthropological survey of working-class life' resulting in 'a moral dissection of working-class mores', and with similar potential to the Victorian usage in confirming superiority. (Roberts, 1998: 58-60). Once again a dividing line was drawn and photography was used, perhaps unknowingly, to confirm superiority.

At *The Narrator's Gaze* conference (2010) on documentary photography at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, Hereford born and Oxbridge educated photographer John Bulmer likened venturing to the North of England (thirty years after Spender) for commissions as 'going somewhere exotic' on a 'colonial expedition'. That there could be such dramatic differences between the populations of the same country is central to George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* and the interest of Mass Observation's researchers.

The problem is not confined to the makers. Audiences may experience the feelings Spender and Bulmer had on encountering their photographs.

Richard Billingham,
Untitled, 1995
Colour photograph
mounted on aluminum
120 x 80 cm
Edition of 5 + 2 AP
Copyright the artist,
courtesy Anthony Reynolds
Gallery, London.

Is it inevitable that viewers will always attempt to find distinctions between themselves and subjects that may seem less than ideal? Mark Durden wrote of Richard Billingham's *Ray's A Laugh*,

'Billingham's pictures rely on the tensions and contradictions between an essentially abject and counter-idealising vision and a pictorial richness. Much of their aesthetic effect is caught up in a class collision of taste, where spectacle of kitsch ornamentation – legible to middle-class viewers as working class 'bad taste' – both maintains a cultural and class difference – keeps their subjects in their place, apart, separate, and yet gives these pictures their aesthetic distinction, raises them beyond 'mere' documentary: the optical play of the patterns in these photos of crammed interiors provides a beautiful foil to the expansive spaces of both galleries and wealthy collectors' homes.'
(Durden, 2000: 31)

Billingham was undoubtedly on the inside – this was his family home – but his photographs give the viewers the opportunity to see the subjects as Other. Once again, class, this time usually in the eye of the beholder, raises a dividing line.

Recently interviewed in The Daily Telegraph, Martin Parr defends the photographer's right to document, leaving commentary to the viewer. Discussing an image from Parr's *Signs of the Times* (1992) Alaistair Sooke writes,

'One typical picture shows a light switch surrounded by ornamental plastic like a fancy picture frame. It appears to invite mockery of whoever was pretentious enough to decorate their house in such a kitsch fashion. Yet, says Parr, "if there is snobbery to be found there, it must be in the viewer, and all I've done is echo that. Are you saying everything should be anaesthetised?"'

Take the photograph. Analyse it later. An extreme example of this can be found in the practice of Yaakov Israel. He will often leave images for up to a year before beginning to work with, and edit, them.

http://petapixel.com/2013/12/07/interview-yaakov-israel-quest-man-white-donkey/

Whilst it is important to 'capture the moment', having an awareness of that moment's potential meanings is also important.

Sliding scales of responsibility to subjects are reflected in sliding scales of methodology – Israel works very slowly, sometimes taking only a few frames per day, and has been criticised for not reflecting the immensely charged environment (Israel/Palestine) in which he works.

As a commissioned artist working in a documentary style in early 2010 I experienced a moment that came to sum up my difficulties in representing others. I could perhaps be accused by Parr of self-anaesthetising. Following in Humphrey Spender's footsteps I was working in Bolton, England. Here's how I wrote of my experience at the time -

A front garden of a semi detached house on an estate east of Bolton on a hillside. Early February. Four girls masquerade as "America's Next Top Model". A Staffy runs loose. A photographer takes their picture. They arrange themselves, he does not direct them. He shoots more or less continuously. The elements coalesce. Previously he worked for newspapers. He was taught to photograph quickly. At one point he arrests his finger on the shutter release. If he'd taken that moment the image would have been different to this next moment. He resumes shooting. He thinks about the image that only his eye saw. An image that was not recorded. What that image would have said about the girls. About their upbringing. About him. About people who may have looked at the image later on a wall far away from Bolton.

Whilst I felt passionately about documenting all that I encountered in that six month commission there was something about the unrecorded image that I felt could later be used to glibly categorise, and I felt misrepresent, the girls. I felt a connection with the people of the estate and sensed a class-based difference between them and the potential audience of the work. So I negated that possibility by letting the moment pass. This, like the Sontag's criticism of Arbus, is a reminder that issues surrounding the Self are never very far from the Other.

Les Monaghan, *Infantryman|Superstar* from *aspirations,* 2010

Monaghan's six month commission in Bolton catalysed his existing concerns around the 'fair' representation of others. He reconciled this at the end of the commission through *aspirations* a body of work that includes words spoken by subjects, see: www.aspirationsdoncaster.blogspot. co.uk for more detail

When analysing work, it is important to understand the background of the creator but there is a danger that knowledge of the auteur can colour readings of a photographer's work. As we have seen, audiences, bring their themselves to viewed work. Roland Barthes even proposes that the *punctum*, that which pricks or wounds the viewer, is hardly ever the intention of the photographer, it is for a future viewer to feel the tear.

Class difference is, as Badger points out, just one of the major boundaries in society and it is also slippery and fluid. In some situations you may feel wholly comfortable in an overtly middle-class or working class situation, but change just a couple of things about that situation (food, etiquette, political discussion, the ethics of photographing a stranger) and you could suddenly feel lost. Positioning yourself on this scale as a photographer is important because it allows you to understand whether you are making work informed by yourself and your background, driven purely by curiosity or motivated by a sense of empathy.

In Britain (and much of the rest of the world) the widening gap between rich and poor means that these differences – that have visible as well as invisible elements – are there to be represented.

Exercise 1.3

Gerry Badger pointed out that, '[t]here are divisions in society other than those of class, ideology, race, or gender – smaller divisions which cut across the larger in many ways... those whose lifestyles, for differing reasons, do not concur with the dominant consensus.'

Using this as a framework, make five portraits of people with whom you feel you have an affinity, where you could conceivably argue that you are on the 'inside'. Write a short piece evaluating the work. Think about whether the group of five are representative of a 'class' and whether this matches with the 'class' to which you feel you belong. If you feel class is not important or apparent discuss what 'sub-division' you feel the group may belong to.

Project 4 Getting close to the Other

Criticising Arbus, Susan Sontag claimed that, the photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear, the photographer's view is from the 'outside'. Sontag places Arbus firmly on the outside of her subjects. Class difference had placed Humphrey Spender on the outside of the *Worktown* story. As we are starting to appreciate, some photographers may be further from their subjects than others but what if the photographer is inarguably from the 'inside'?

Does the issue of (mis)representing the Other occur if you are photographing fellow travellers on a similar path in life? In her series, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, Nan Goldin claims that the camera was an extension of her. She lived with the people that she portrayed, their lives were her life, drugs and sex featured prominently. Drag queens were commonly portrayed. Her unflinching snapshot aesthetic undoubtedly influenced fashion and style photography. Her work was 'cool'. Through the widespread dissemination of work such as this, could it be said that those who at first, appear to be the Other become commonplace (and accepted)? Have welcome societal changes brought the Other closer to the mass?

Alternately, is there a case that some subjects will always be resistant to being absorbed into a mainstream consensus? Despite being created by an insider the audience for Richard Billingham's *Ray's a Laugh* (first his art tutors, then the Saatchi *Sensations* and the Turner Prize crowds) undoubtedly viewed, and continue to view, his portrayed family as Other.

For photographers and their audience there is an inherent problem to this mode of working. Abigail Solomon-Godeau wrote in *Inside/Out* that we perceive truth as existing inside and objectivity (the classic documentary standpoint) as existing on the outside. She notes,

'Inside or out, one remains confronted with the ethical and political issues posed by Sontag and [Martha] Rosler, where it is a question of the representation of the other, where the analysis depends on notions of voyeurism and objectification, tourism or imperialism.'
(Solomon-Godeau, 1995: 58)

Is there another way?

My way of making pictures differs from the customary method, where a photographer uses a camera to make a picture of a subject. Typically, what I do is distribute cameras to groups of children or adults and work collaboratively with them for a few months or longer. I've worked this way for some 40 years. Very early on, I came to believe that because local people, especially children, know their own lives more intimately than any photographer from the outside possibly could, they often make pictures of uncanny openness and depth. For me, when trying visually to describe cultural situations, the important thing is the pictures, not necessarily who takes them and certainly not the professional status of the picture-makers.

Wendy Ewald writing in the FT magazine, January, 2015

As the photographs are made by family and friends they are initially not of the Other. This method would seem to answer criticisms based on, 'objectification, tourism or imperialism', leaving perhaps the charge of voyeurism to be levelled at viewers but not photographer. And after all, photographs are made to be looked at. As we have seen, once photographs are disseminated, audiences decide individually or collectively whether they identify with the subjects. A key question is, does Ewald's methodology give the resulting images more integrity? Another is, what about the quality of the photography? And who edits?

Exercise 1.4

Ask one of your subjects from the Exercise 1.1 to produce a photographic 'hour of their life' using their camera or phone. Allow them to edit and present the finished work as they wish. How does their 'view' differ from your 'view' of them? Now make an edit of their work. Then make an edit of the two combined. How do the four 'views' compare? Do any tell a complete story?

For a subtler illustration of difference repeat the exercise with one of your subjects from Exercise 1.3.

Assignment one

Create a short series (6 – 10) of environmental portraits of people in places that provide the context for us to understand them. Pose and details are important, look again at examples from the history of photography as well as the contemporary practitioners listed below. Think carefully about whether you want to photograph people close to you or subjects who are distinctly 'other' to you.

Please ensure you gain consent from your sitters, send digital versions of these consent forms to your tutor along with your assignment. Upload the finished images to your learning log together with a short reflection (500–1,000 words) on your motivations, references and methods.

For inspiration and context. Please look at the following:

Tina Barney	Sally Mann	Martin Parr
Larry Clark	Susan Meiselas	Graham Smith
Karen Knorr	Zed Nelson	Larry Sultan
Melanie Manchot		

Reflection

Before you send your work to your tutor, check it against the assessment criteria listed in the introduction to this course and make sure that it meets all the criteria.

Your tutor may take a while to get back to you so carry on with the course while you're waiting.

Reworking your assignment

Following feedback from your tutor, you may wish to rework some of your assignment, especially if you plan to submit your work for assessment. If you do this, make sure you reflect on what you've done and why in your learning log.