

# The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*

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The *National Geographic* magazine is of tremendous potential cultural importance. Its photographs have voraciously focused on Third World scenes, its over 10 million subscriber households make it as popular a source of images as any in American mass mediated culture, and its lavish production capabilities and cultural legitimacy as a scientific institution make it an ideological practice that powerfully relates to the history and structure of the society in which it has developed. As part of a larger project to consider the magazine's photographs as cultural artifacts from a changing 20th century American scene, we have been struck by the story told in the photos via a variety of looks and looking relations. Some of the issues raised in this article are particular to this specific genre of photography while many others illuminate photographic interpretation more generally.<sup>1</sup>

The *National Geographic* photograph of the 'non-Westerner' can be seen not simply as a captured view of the other, but as a dynamic site at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect. This intersection creates a complex and multi-dimensional object; it allows viewers of the photo to negotiate a number of different identities both for themselves and for those pictured; and it is one route by which the photograph threatens to break frame and reveal its social context. We aim here to explore the significance of "gaze" for intercultural relations in the photograph, and to present a typology of seven kinds of gaze that can be found in the photograph and its social context. These include (1) the photographer's gaze (the actual look through the viewfinder), (2) the institutional, magazine gaze (evident in cropping, picture choice, captioning, etc.), (3) the readers' gaze, (4) the non-Western subjects' gaze, (5) the explicit looking

done by Westerners who are often framed together with locals in the picture, (6) the gaze returned or refracted by the mirrors or cameras that are shown, in a surprising number of photographs, in local hands, and (7) our own, academic gaze.

## The gaze and its significance

The photograph and the non-Western person share two fundamental attributes in the culturally tutored experience of most Americans; they are objects at which we *look*. The photograph has this quality because it is usually intended as a thing of either beautiful attraction or documentary interest and surveillance. Non-Westerners draw a look (rather than inattention or unremarkable and relatively inattentive interaction) to the extent that their difference or foreignness from the self defines them as notable yet distant. A look is necessary to cross the span created by the perception of difference (a perception which initially, of course, also involves looking). When people from outside the Western world are photographed, an accentuation of the importance of the look therefore occurs.<sup>2</sup>

A number of different traditions of analysis have dealt with "the gaze," looking or spectating as they occur in photography and art. The interethnic looking that gets done in *National Geographic* photos can be conceptualized by drawing on a number of the insights of these analyses. Many of them have tended to see the gaze as "an act of mastery" (Williams 1987) or control. Feminist film theory, for example, beginning with the influential essay by Laura Mulvey entitled, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,"

has focused on the ways in which looking in patriarchal society is, in her words "split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly." The position of spectator, in this view, belongs to the male and allows for the construction of femininity.

John Berger (1972) has also treated the gaze as masculine in his book *Ways of Seeing*. There he points out that contemporary gender ideologies envisage men as active doers and define women as passive presence, men by what they do to others, women by their attitudes towards themselves. This has led to women's focus on how they appear before others and so to a fragmentation of themselves into two parts—"the surveyor and the surveyed...one might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at...[and] the surveyor of woman in herself is male" (1972:46,47; see also Burgin 1986).

Mulvey and Berger alert us to the ways in which the position of spectator has the potential to enhance or articulate the power of the observer over the observed. This power emerges particularly in the practice of art, photography, and science. Representations produced by the artist, photographer, and the scientist have permanent, tangible qualities and are culturally defined as sacred. Both theorists also note that it is the social context of patriarchy, rather than a universal essential quality of the image, which gives the gaze a masculine character.

Recent critiques of these views of the gaze take issue with the simple equation of the gaze with the masculine, with the psychoanalytic emphasis of this work and its concomitant tendency to universalize its claims and to ignore broader issues of social and historical context, as well as its neglect of race and class as key factors determining looking relations (e.g., de Lauretis 1987, Gaines 1988, Green 1989, Jameson 1983, Tagg 1988, Williams 1987). These critiques make a number of proposals useful for our examination of *National Geographic* photographs. They suggest, first, that the magazine viewer operates within a racial system in which there are taboos on certain kinds of looking, for example, of black men at white women. Gaines (1988) forcefully suggests that we need to rethink ideas about looking "along more materialist lines, considering, for instance, how some groups have historically had the license to 'look' openly while other groups have looked illicitly." (1988:24-25) She also argues that those who have used psychoanalytic theory claim to treat looking positions (viewer/viewed) as distinct from actual social groups (male/

female) even while they are identified with gender and in so doing, they "keep the levels of the social ensemble [social experience, representational systems, etc.] hopelessly separate."

In other criticism, the unique vision of the female spectator is explored, and seen as multiple because it can move between identification with the object and with the spectator. The feminine gaze may be equated to an oppositional gaze insofar as it "disrupt[s] the authority and closure of dominant representations" (Williams 1987:11). This gaze need not be seen simply as controlling; Jameson argues that there may be legitimate pleasures in looking at others which are not predicated on the desire to control, denigrate, or distance oneself from the other. More broadly, we can say that there is no single masculine spectator position for viewing the ethnic representations in *National Geographic*. While the image producers at *National Geographic* are overwhelmingly white and male, the magazine's readers come from a wide range of social positions within American society. One objective of our research has been to test the universal claims of those who have looked at gaze within images by looking at actual cases of photographs being taken, edited, and read by individuals in real historical time and cultural space.

Several critiques have centered on the program advocated by a deconstructionist approach to the viewer. From this latter perspective, the goal is to de-center the viewing subject and subvert the attempt to find a coherent object at the end of the gaze. But as de Lauretis points out, "the Western bourgeois spectator-subject [no more than] the spectator addressed by radical (non-feminist) avant-garde film practices, and the deluded, divided, or diffuse subject of poststructuralist and anti-humanist discourse" are understood "as simply human, that is to say, male and white" (1987:123) and, we can add, Western. Similarly, Julien and Mercer (1988) note that the announcement of the "end of representation" has not been accompanied by consideration of the possibility of the "end of ethnocentrism."

Much feminist analysis of the power of gaze has drawn on the psychoanalytic theorizing of Lacan. While it does carry the dangers, as noted above, of a universalizing and narrow focus on the family origins of sexual difference, Lacan's view of the gaze can be helpful as a model for the *potential* effects of looking. Lacan speaks of gaze as something distinct from the eye of the beholder and as distinct from simple vision. For him, the gaze is that "something [which] slips...and is always to some degree eluded in it [vision];" (1981:73) it is "the lack." The

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gaze comes from the other who constitutes the self in that looking, but the gaze the self encounters “is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (1981:84). Ultimately, however, the look that the self receives is “profoundly unsatisfying” because the other does not look at the self in the way that the self imagines it ought to be looked at. The photograph of the non-Westerner can be seen as at least partially the outcome of a set of psychoculturally informed choices made by photographers, editors, and caption writers who pay attention at some level to their own and the other’s gaze. Their choices may be made in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of the kind of disappointment of which Lacan speaks. What can be done in the photograph is to (unconsciously) manipulate the gaze of the other (via such processes as photo selection) so that it allows us to see ourselves reflected in their eyes in ways which are comfortable, familiar and pleasurable. Photographs might be seen as functioning in the way Lacan says a painting can, which is by “pacifying” the viewer. What is pacified is the gaze, or rather the anxiety that accompanies the gap between our ideal identity and the real. This “taming” of the gaze occurs when we move and realize that the picture does not change as our gaze changes. In Lacan’s view, we are desperate for and because of the gaze and the power of the pictorial representation is that it can ease that anxiety. Photos of the ethnic other help relieve the anxiety that the ideal of the other’s gaze and estimation of us provoke.<sup>3</sup>

Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, argues not only that the gaze is crucial to colonial regimes, but that a tremendous ambivalence and unsettling effect must accompany colonial looking relations because the mirror which these images of the other hold up to the colonial self is “problematic, for the subject finds or recognizes itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational...there is always the threatened return of the look” (1983:29). In Bhabha’s terms, the look at the racial other places the viewer in the uncomfortable position of both recognizing him or herself in the other and denying that recognition. The latter leaves “always the trace of loss, absence. To put it succinctly, the recognition and disavowal of ‘difference’ is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction” (1983:33). From this perspective, which borrows as well from Lacan and Freud, colonial social relations are enacted, in important part, through a “regime of visibility” in which the look is crucial both for identifying the other and for the problem it raises of how racist discourse can enclose the mirrored self as well as the other within itself. The photograph and all its intersections of gaze, then, is a site at which this identification and the conflict of maintaining a stereotyped view of difference occurs.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault’s analysis of the rise of surveillance in modern society is also very relevant to the understanding of the gaze in photography, and a number of recent analyses (e.g., Green

1984; Tagg 1988) have sharply delineated the ways in which photography of the other operates at the nexus of knowledge and power that Foucault identified. Foucault pointed to psychiatry, medicine, and legal institutions as some of the primary sites in which control over populations was achieved, and his novel contribution was to see these institutions as exercising power not only by coercive control of the body but also by creating knowledge of the body and thereby forcing the body “to emit signs” or to conform physically and representationally to the knowledge produced by these powerful institutions. This knowledge was produced through close, constant observation of the subject. The crucial role of photography in the exercise of power lies in its ability to allow for close study of the other, and to promote what Foucault called the “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (1977:25).

In the second half of the 19th century, photography began to be used to identify prisoners, mental patients, and racial or ethnic types. As Tagg notes, its efficacy lies not so much in its actual facilitation of social control of those photographed but in its representation of these others to an audience of non-deviants who thereby acquire a language for understanding themselves and the limits they must live within to avoid categorization with ‘the outside’. The gaze of the *Geographic* can be seen as part of the ‘capillary system’ of international power relations as Foucault’s analysis might suggest, allowing for the surveillance, if not the control, of non-Western people. The magazine’s gaze at the Third World operates to represent it to an American audience in ways which can (but do not always) shore up a Western cultural identity or sense of self as modern, civilized, etc. The gaze is not, however, as singular or monolithic as Foucault might suggest, as we will see in a moment. In itself, we might say, the gaze is meaningless, but it does open up certain possibilities for reader interpretation of a photograph, with these centering around issues of intimacy, pleasure, scrutiny, confrontation, and power.

### A multitude of gazes

Many gazes can be found in any photograph in the *National Geographic*. This is true whether the picture shows an empty landscape devoid of people, a single person looking straight at the camera, a large group of people each of them looking in a different direction but none at the camera, or a person in the distance with tiny and/or out of focus eyes. Thus, the gaze is not simply the looking of a photographed subject. The gazes include the following seven types, including those of the photographer, the magazine editors, the readers, the non-Western subject, the Westerner who is sometimes in the frame, and the gaze refracted through frequently photographed cameras

and mirrors, and that of the viewing anthropologist.<sup>5</sup>

### The photographer's gaze

This is represented by the camera's eye and leaves its clear mark on the structure and content of the photograph. The photographer positions him/herself on a rooftop overlooking Khartoum or inside a Ulithian menstrual hut or in front of a funeral parade in Vietnam, although the photographer's positioning may be accomplished through the actions of people in the society being photographed, by their invitations and exclusions of the photographer (Geary 1988). Photo subject matter, composition, vantage point (angle or point of view), sharpness and depth of focus, color balance, framing and other elements of style are partly the result of the viewing choices made by the photographer.

"As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure" (Sontag 1977:9). The photographer responds to what is sometimes a profound alienation from the people being photographed, and may "feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter" (1977:10). This act of insecurity, whether from a fear of not controlling Third World spaces, or the more primordial (per Lacan) insecurity of the gaze itself, reverberates not only through the photographer's choices but through the magazine gaze and reader gaze to be examined below. Each type of look constructs and prefers a photographic relationship with the South, the limited relationship that the camera person first sets up "by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir" (Sontag 1977:9).

Under most circumstances, the photographer's gaze and the viewer's gaze overlap to a significant degree. The camera eye is often treated as simply a conduit for the magazine reader's look, or the "searchlight" (Metz 1985) of his/her vision. While we will in a moment talk about the many ways in which these two looks can be disentangled, the technology and conventions of photography force us in many important ways to follow the camera's eye and see the world from its position.<sup>6</sup> The implications of this can be illustrated with an example of the photo from August 1976 that shows a Venezuelan miner selling the diamonds he has just prospected to a middleman. To take his picture, the photographer has stood inside the broker's place of business, and shot out over his back and shoulder to capture the face and hands of the miner as he exchanges his diamonds for cash. The viewer is strongly encouraged to share the photographer's interest in the miner, rather than the broker (whose absent gaze may be more available for substitution with the viewer's than is the miner's), and to in fact identify with the broker from whose relative position the shot has been taken and

received. The broker, like the North American reader, stands outside the frontier mining world. Alternative readings of this photograph are possible, of course; the visibility of the miner's gaze may make identification with him and his precarious position more likely. Ultimately what is important here is the question of how a diverse set of readers respond to such points-of-view in a photograph.<sup>7</sup>

### The magazine's gaze

This includes the whole institutional process by which some portion of the photographer's gaze is chosen for use and emphasis. It thus includes primarily (1) the editors' decisions to commission articles on particular locations or issues; (2) the editors' choice of a small number of pictures from the large number of views the photographer has taken (on an average assignment, the *National Geographic* photographer shoots 250-350 rolls of 36 exposure film or about 11,000 pictures; from these 30 to 40 will be chosen for publication in the article (Abramson 1987)); and, (3) the editors' and layout designers' decisions to crop the picture in a certain way (perhaps eliminating one "irrelevant" or "discordant" element and emphasizing another), to arrange it with other photos on the page in ways that alter its meaning (for example, the issue of April 1953 whose article on New Guinea intersperses photos of Papuans in elaborate, sometimes feathered dress, with photos of local birds thereby constructing the people as natural creatures), to reproduce the picture in a certain size format (with larger pictures suggesting a topic which is more important or dramatic), or even to directly alter the picture, as when a naked young Vietnamese girl's genitals were airbrushed in one photo (November 1962) or colors are enhanced or touched up. Most elements of these last two choices cannot be distinguished from the photographers' by the reader. The magazine's gaze is most evident and accessible to the *National Geographic* reader in (4) the caption writer's verbal fixing of a vantage on the picture's meaning.

### The magazine readers' gazes

As Barthes has pointed out, the "photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs" (1977:19; emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup> Independently of what the photographer or the caption writer may intend as the message(s) of the photo, the reader can imagine something else or in addition. The reader, in other words, is "invited to dream in the ideological space of the photograph" (Tagg 1988:183). This fact distinguishes the reader's gaze from that of the magazine and led us to investigate the former directly by asking a number of people to look at and interpret the pictures. Certain elements of photographic composition or content may make it



more likely that the photographic gaze (and its ideological messages or potentials) will be resisted by the reader. In particular, these include anything which draws the reader's attention to the fact that a camera (rather than the reader's eye alone) has been at work—jarring, unnatural colors, off center angles, and obvious photo retouching among others.

What *National Geographic* subscribers see is not simply what they each get (the physical object, the photograph), but what they imagine the world is about before the magazine arrives, what imagining the picture provokes, and what they remember afterwards (and transfer to other domains) of the story they make the picture tell or allow it to tell. The reader's gaze, then, has a history and a future, and it is structured by the mental work of inference and imagination; the picture's inherent ambiguity (Is that woman smiling or smirking? What are those people in the background doing?) and its tunnel vision (What is going on outside the picture frame? What is it, outside the picture, that she looks at?) require and promote this thinking. Beyond that, the photo permits fantasy ("Those two are in love, in love like I am with Bruce, but they're bored there on that bench, bored like I have been in love, etc." or "That child. What beautiful plumpness. She should be mine to hold and feed.")

The reader's gaze is structured by a large number of cultural elements or models, many more than simply those used to reason about racial or cultural difference. For example, learned cultural models help us interpret gestures such as the thrown back shoulders of an Argentinean cowboy as indicative of character traits or personality, in this case confidence, strength and bravery. Models of gender lead towards a reading of a picture of a mother with a child as a "natural" scenario, and of the pictured relationship as one of loving, relaxed nurturance; alternatively, the scene might have been read as underlain with tensions and emotional distance, an interpretation that research suggests might be common in high infant mortality societies. There is, however, not one reader's gaze; each individual looks with a somewhat unique personal, cultural, and political background or set of interests. It has been possible for people to speak of "the [singular] reader" only so long as "the text" is treated as an entity with a single determinate meaning, which is simply consumed (Radway 1984) and only so long as the agency, encultured nature, and diversity of experience of readers are denied.

The gaze of the *National Geographic* reader is also structured by photography's technological form, including a central paradox. On the one hand, photographs allow participation in the non-Western scene through vicarious viewing. On the other, they can also alienate the reader via the fact that, first, they create or require a passive viewer and, second, they frame out much of what an actual viewer of the scene would see, smell, and hear, and thereby atomize and impoverish experience (Sontag 1977). From another perspective, the photograph has

been said (Metz 1985) to necessarily distance the viewer by changing the person photographed into an object—we know our gaze falls on a two dimensional object—and promoting fantasy. But the presumed consent of the other to be photographed can give the viewer the illusion of having some relationship with the other.

A concept useful for thinking about the way photographs of non-Westerners engage *National Geographic*'s readers is that of the "suture" as discussed by Burgin (1982). In a brief but suggestive section in his essay "Photography, Phantasy, Function", he speaks of the way the viewer is "sutured" into the photograph. This metaphor is meant to suggest how the viewer is attached and gains entrance to the photo. S/he does not enter it at a freely chosen spot (walking round the back for example) but is forced (the violent edge to the metaphor of "suturing" is no doubt intended) to follow the camera's eye.<sup>9</sup>

The primary way the individual is sutured into the photograph is via this necessary identification between the viewer and the camera position, a look which can "shift between the poles of voyeurism and narcissism: in the former...subjecting the other-as-object to an inquisitive and controlling surveillance in which seeing is dissociated from being seen; and in the latter effecting a dual identification with both the camera and the individual depicted" (1982:189). The voyeuristic look requires and promotes distance between the reader and the subject, while narcissistic identification promotes at least the illusion that the photo is a mirror. Analysis of actual readers' responses to the magazine can help determine the degree to which either of these two types of looking is engaged in, and how particular photograph types increase or decrease the likelihood of more or less distanced or identificatory gazes.

Finally, this gaze is also structured by the context of reading. Does the reader give the magazine a quick browsing, viewing the photos on pages bent by a quick thumbing through, or are they read slowly and closely? Is it read in a dentist's office (where it is commonly found) or at home with a child? In a less literal sense, the context of reading includes cultural notions about the magazine itself, notions which our interviews show are very detailed and emphatically held. Amongst popular magazines, the *National Geographic* sits near the top of a socially constructed hierarchy of magazine types (e.g., high brow, low brow) which runs parallel to a hierarchy of taste in cultural products more generally (Bourdieu 1984, Levine 1988) and also correlates with the class structure itself (cf. fig. 1). The magazine's culturally constructed high-brow position is attained by its self-definition as a scientific journal, presenting facts about the world, and as a journal with beautiful (and in many readers' eyes, artistic) rather than merely prosaic photos. The reader's view of what the photograph says about the other must then have something to do with the elevated class position a reader can assume his/her reading of *National Geographic*.

indexes. If I the reader am educated and high brow in contrast to the reader of *People* magazine or the daily newspaper, my gaze may take on the seriousness and appreciative stance a high-class cultural product requires.

### The non-Western subject's gaze

There is perhaps no more significant gaze in the photograph than that of its explicit subject. It is variation in how and

thus far and it includes nearly a quarter of the total number of photos which have at least some non-Western locals.<sup>10</sup> What does the look into the camera's eye suggest to readers about the photographic subject? A number of possibilities suggest themselves.

The look into the camera in all cases must suggest the acknowledgement of the photographer and the reader. Visual theorists have disagreed about what this look does, some arguing that it short-circuits the voyeurism identified as an

important component of most photography; there can be no peeping where the other meets our gaze. The gaze can be confrontational for this same reason; it can say, "I see you looking at me, so you cannot steal that look." Others, however, have argued that this look, while acknowledging the viewer, involves a simply more open voyeurism: the return gaze does not contest the right of the viewer to look and may in fact be read as the subject's assent to being surveyed.

This disagreement hinges, however, on ignoring how the look is returned, and on discounting the effects of context inside the frame and in the reader's historically and culturally variable interpretive work. Facial expression is obviously crucial—the local person looks back with a number of different faces, including friendly smiling, hostile glaring, a vacant or indifferent glance, curiosity, or ambiguous looking. Some of these looks, from some kinds of ethnic others, are unsettling, disorganizing, and perhaps avoided. The return look is, however, usually not a confrontational or challenging one. The smile, for example, plays an important role in muting the potentially disruptive, confrontational role of this return gaze. If the other looks back at the camera and smiles, the combination can be read by viewers as the subject's assent to being surveyed.<sup>11</sup> In 38% of the pictures of locals where facial expressions are visible ( $N=436$ ), someone is smiling (although not all of these smilers are looking into the camera), and 55% of all pictures in which someone looks back at the camera include one or more smiling figures.

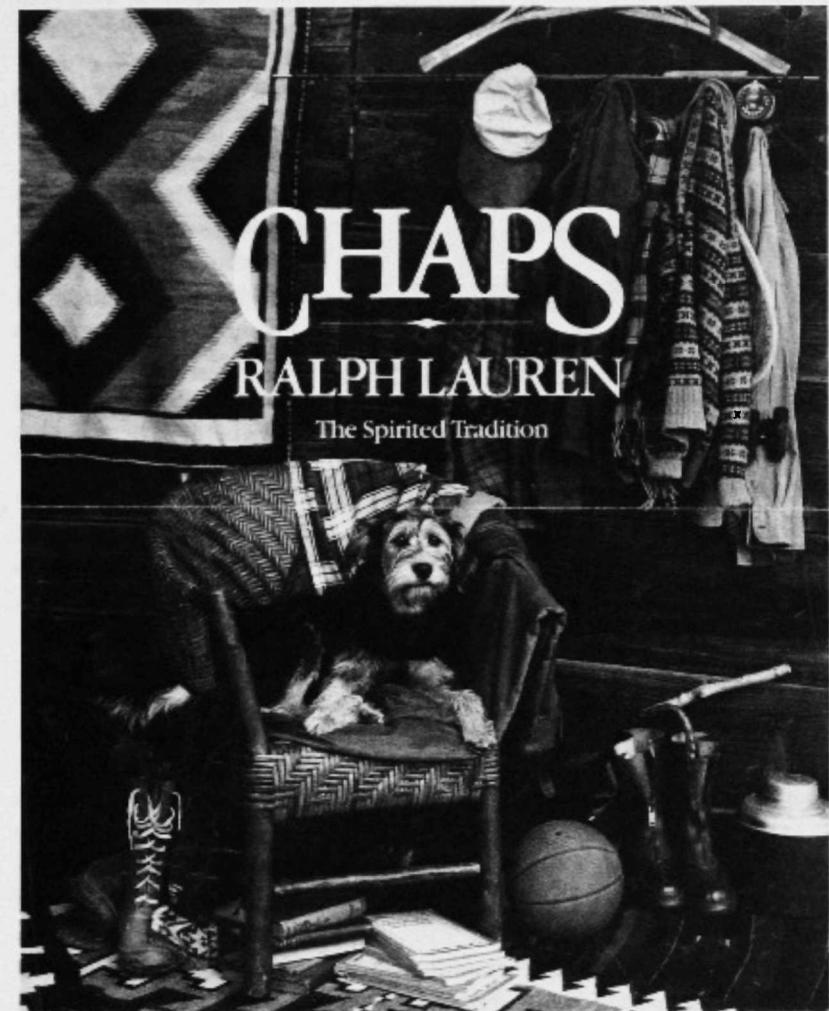


Fig. 1. An advertisement for Ralph Lauren, inside front cover of the New York Times Magazine, October 28, 1990. Photo: Bruce Weber.

where the other looks that most determines the differences in the message a photograph can give about intercultural relations. The gaze of the other found in *National Geographic* can be classified into at least four types; s/he can confront the camera, look at something or someone within the picture frame, look off into the distance, or a gaze can be absent altogether.

The first type, in which the gaze confronts the camera and the reader, is one which we have spent the most time looking at

The camera gaze can also set up at least the illusion of intimacy and communication. To the extent that *National Geographic* presents itself as bringing the corners of the world into contact with each other, the portrait and camera gaze are important routes to those ends. The other is not distanced, but characterized as approachable; the reader can imagine the other is about to speak to him or her. *National Geographic* photographers commonly view the frontal shot as a device for cutting across language barriers and allowing for

intercultural communication. The portrait is, in one photographer's words, "a collaboration between subject and photographer" (National Geographic Society 1981:22). This is, of course, despite the fact that the other is still "subjected to an unreturnable gaze" (Tagg 1988:64), and is in an unspeakable position.

The magazine's goal of creating intimacy between subject and reader is, however, in some contradiction with its other more explicitly stated and official goal of presenting an unmanipulated, truthful slice of life from another country. Virtually all of the photographers and picture editors we spoke with at the *National Geographic* saw the return gaze as problematic and believed that such pictures ought to be used sparingly as they clearly have photographer-created qualities. They are, in other words, not candid, not "free" of observer effects. They might also be "almost faking intimacy", in one editor's words. Another mentioned that the use of direct gaze is also a question of style, suggesting more commercial and less "gritty" values. The photographer can achieve both the goals of intimacy and invisibility by taking portraits which are not directly frontal, but rather where the gaze angles off to the side of the camera.<sup>12</sup>

To face the camera is also to permit close examination of the photographic subject, including scrutiny of the face and eyes which are in common sense, cultural parlance the seat of soul or character. The other's face is presented the better for us to examine his/her feelings, personality, or racial character. Frontality is a central technique of a "documentary rhetoric" in photography (Tagg 1988:189); it sets the stage for either critique or celebration—but in either case evaluation—of the other as a person or type. Editors at the magazine talked about the search for and value of the "compelling face."

Racial, age, and gender differences in how often and how exactly the gaze is returned lend substance to each of these perspectives on the camera gaze, and give us important insight into the kinds of difference that may be most amenable to such

kinds of treatment and conversely on those types of difference which, being more threatening to a Western sense of self, are most avoided.

To a statistically significant degree, children and older people more often look into the camera than other adults, those who appear poor more than those who appear wealthy or of moderate means, those whose skin is very dark more than those who are bronze, and those who are bronze more than those whose skin is white, and those in native dress more than those in Western garb. There is also an important trend for women to gaze out at the reader more than men and for those without any tools to look at us more than those who are around or using machinery. Those who are actually or culturally defined as weak—women, children, people of color, the poor, the tribal rather than the modern, those without technology—are more likely to face the camera.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the more powerful members of the societies depicted are more likely to be represented looking elsewhere. There is also an intriguing (but not statistically significant) trend towards higher rates of looking at the camera to occur in pictures taken in countries or areas which, at the time the pictures were taken, generally were perceived as "friendly" towards the United States.<sup>14</sup>

To look out at the viewer, then, would appear to represent not a confrontation between the West and the rest, but a symbol-

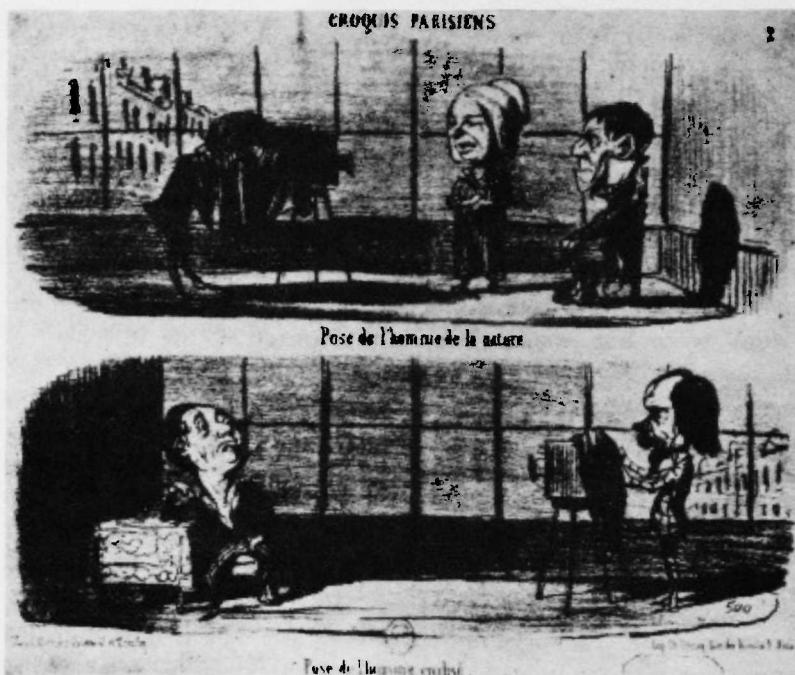


Fig. 2. Honoré Daumier, *Pose de l'homme de la nature* and *Pose de l'homme civilisé*. From *Croquis Parisiens*, 1853.

ization of the accessibility of the other. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, historically, the frontal portrait has been associated with the 'rougher' classes, as the Daumier print (fig. 2) points out. Tagg (1988), in a social history of photography, argues that this earlier class-based styling was passed on from portraiture to the emerging use of photography for the documentation and surveillance of the criminal and the insane. Camera gaze is often (though not always) associated with full frontal posture in the *National Geographic*; as such, it is also part of frontality's work as a "code of social inferiority" (Tagg 1988:37). The 'civilized' classes, at least since the nineteenth century, have traditionally been depicted in Western art turning away from the camera and so symbolize themselves as less

available.<sup>15</sup> The higher status person also may be thus characterized as too absorbed in other weighty matters to attend to the photographer and his/her agenda. Facing the camera, in Tagg's terms, "signified the bluntness and 'naturalness' of a culturally unsophisticated class [and had a history which predated photography]" (1988:36).

These class coded styles of approach and gaze before the camera in gestures have perhaps continued to have force and utility in *National Geographic* renderings of the ethnic other. The twist here is that the more 'civilized' quality which may be imparted to the male, lighter skinned, Western dressed, and adult exotics who turn away from the camera is a relative quality. True, full civilization still belongs, ideologically, to the Euroamerican.

These findings ought not to be interpreted as describing differences in the likelihood with which any of these categories of people have actually looked at the camera. Such a process might occur in the field, with children, for example, approaching the photographer more readily or openly. However, this does not simply reflect on lack of familiarity and hence curiosity about the camera on the part of each of these groups of people. If the latter were happening, one would expect rural people to look at the camera more than urban people, and this is not the case (there is a non-significant trend for more gaze at the camera to occur in urban pictures). One might also expect some change over time, as cameras became more common everywhere, but there is no difference in gaze rate when the 1950-70 period is compared with the later period. The heavy editorial hand at the *Geographic* argues that what is at work is a set of unarticulated perceptions about the kinds of non-Westerners who make comfortable and interesting subjects for the magazine. *National Geographic* editors select from a vast array of possible pictures on the basis of some at least implicit notion about what the social/power relations are between the reader and the particular ethnic subject being photographed. These are aesthetic choices which are outside explicit politics but encode politics nonetheless. A "good picture" is a picture which makes sense in terms of prevailing ideas about the other, including ideas about both accessibility and difference.

A second form of gaze by the photographed subject is one in which the non-Westerner looks at someone or something evident within the frame. The ideas which readers get about who the other is are often read off of this gaze which is taken as an index of interest, attention, or goals. An example is provided by the Venezuelan prospector mentioned above who looks at the diamonds as they are weighed by the buyer. He is interested in selling, in making money rather than in the Western viewer or other compatriots. The caption amplifies this aspect of the miner's goals by telling us that "the hard-won money usually flies fast in gambling and merry-making at primitive diamond camps, where riches-to-rags tales abound." A picture of the

Marcos' in a 1966 article on the Philippines shows both Ferdinand and Imelda happily staring at their children, the audience thereby assured of their family-oriented character.

One of the potential points of interest in many photographs is a Western traveler (see below). In 10% of these latter pictures, at least one local looks into the camera. Yet in 22% of the pictures in which only locals appear, someone looks into the camera. To a statistically significant degree, then, the Westerner in the frame draws a look away from those Westerners beyond the camera, suggesting both that these two kinds of Westerners might stand in for each other, as well as indexing the interest they are believed to have for locals.

Third, the other's gaze can run off into the distance beyond the frame. This behavior can suggest radically different things about the character of the subject. In combination with other photographic elements, it might portray a dreamy, vacant, absent-minded person or a forward looking, future-oriented, and determined individual. Compare the October, 1980 photo of three Argentinean gauchos as they dress for a rodeo with the November, 1980 shot of a group of six Australian Aborigines as they stand and sit in a road to block a government mining survey team. Two of the gauchos look out the window of the room they are in; they look together at a point in the far distance, and come across to the viewer as thoughtful, pensive, and sharply focused on the heroic tasks in front of them. The Aboriginal group includes six gazes, each of which heads off into a different direction and only one of which is clearly focused on something within the frame, giving the group a disconnected and unfocused look. It becomes harder to imagine this group as engaged now or in the future in coordinated or successful action; that coordination would require mutual planning and, as a corollary, at least some mutual gaze during planful discussions.<sup>16</sup> Character connotations aside, the out-of-frame look may also have implications for viewer identification with the subject, in some sense connecting with the reader outside the frame (Metz 1985:795).

Finally, in a large number of pictures, no gaze at all is visible, either because the individuals in them are tiny figures lost in a landscape or in a sea of others, or because the scene is dark or the person's face is covered by a mask or veil. This kind of picture forms a significant percentage (14%) of the whole sample, and suggests that we might read the pictures in which this occurs as being about the landscape or activity rather than the people or as communicating a sense of the people in the photo as nameless others or group members rather than individuals. While these pictures do not increase in number over time, there has been a rather sudden spate of cover pictures in recent years in which the face or eyes of the person photographed are hidden. Pictures of this type appear on November 1979, October 1985, August 1987, October 1987, and July 1988 covers and all are of African (particularly North African) scenes. In three of the five, the veil covers a woman's face.

Stylistically, *National Geographic* photographers may now have license to interrupt the classical portrait with its full face view, but the absence of any shots of this type before 1979 can also be read as a sign of a changing cultural attitude (within the magazine at least) towards the possibilities of cross cultural communication. The face covered can tell a story of a boundary erected, contact broken.

### An explicit Western gaze

Throughout the years that *National Geographic* has been publishing articles on the non-Western world, it has frequently included photographs which show a Western traveler, scientist, or explorer—usually but not always the author of the article—in the local setting being covered in the piece. In articles over the post-war period, these Western travelers have included adventurers, mountain climbers, and explorers; scientists such as anthropologists, geographers, botanists, and archaeologists; U.S. military personnel; tourists engaged in sightseeing or other leisure activities; and government officials or functionaries from the U.S. and Europe from Prince Philip and Dwight Eisenhower to members of the Peace Corps. These photographs show the Westerners engaged in a variety of activities; they view the local landscape from atop a hill, hold and closely study an artifact, show a local tribal person some wonder of Western technology, such as a photograph, mirror or the camera itself, or interact with a native, in conversation, work or play. In some cases, the Westerner stands alone or with others of his/her kind in the local setting, while in a larger number s/he is framed together with one or more locals.

These pictures form a fascinating set as they represent more explicitly and directly than do the others the kinds of intercultural relations it is thought or hoped obtain between the West and its global neighbors. The effects of this type of photograph on readers are potentially important and complex, both in representing and teaching the *National Geographic* audience about that relationship and in perhaps allowing for a kind of identification with the Westerner in the photo and through that allowing for more intensive interaction with, or imaginary participation in, the photo. Before exploring these possibilities, however, we can first speculate on some of the functions these photographs serve in the magazine.

The pictures of Westerners, first, can serve a validating function by proving that the author was there. The reader can be convinced that the account is a first-hand one, brought from the field rather than library or photographic archives. In this way *National Geographic* articles resemble traditional ethnographic accounts, which are written predominantly in the third person but often include at least one story which portrays the anthropologist in the field in the first person (Marcus and Cushman 1982). For this purpose, it does not much matter

whether the Westerner stands alone in the picture or together with locals as long as it is clear that s/he is somewhere different.

To serve a second function, however—that of dramatizing intercultural relations—a local person in the frame is helpful. The Westerner and the other can then be directly positioned vis-a-vis each other, and the viewer can read their relationship, relative stature and natures from a large number of features of the individuals; they can be directly compared. These features include a group which Goffman (1979) has already identified in his study of advertising photography's representation of women and men. There he demonstrated that indexing the relative status and capacities of men and women were such things as their relative height, the leading and guyng behaviors found more often in pictured males, the greater emotional expressiveness of the women and the like. We can also examine contrasts and similarities in what the two types of people—here Westerners and non-Westerners—are doing, the relative vantage points from which they are photographed, their respective genders, ages, facial expressions, and other cues to their moral and social characters.

The mutuality or non-mutuality of the gaze of the two parties can also tell us as much as anything else about this relationship. It comments on who has the right and/or need to look at whom. When the reader looks out at the world through this proxy Westerner, does the other look back? Here we can look at the February 1960 issue showing two female travelers looking at a "Pygmy" man in central Africa. Standing in the upper left hand corner, the two women smile down at the native figure in the lower right foreground. He looks towards the ground in front of them, an ambiguous expression on his face. Their gazes cross but do not meet, and, in part because of this lack of reciprocity, the women's smiles appear bemused and patronizing. Their smiles are neither returned, friendly greetings nor can we discern any reason for their smiles in the man's behavior. The gaze, in its lack of reciprocity, is distinctly colonial. The Westerners do not seek a relationship but are content, even happy, to view the other as an ethnic object. In addition, the composition of the picture is structured by an oblique line running from the women on the left down to the man on the right. Not only do the Westerners loom hierarchically over the African, but this slope itself can suggest, as Maquet (1986) has pointed out is true for other visual forms, the idea of descent or decline from the one (the Western women) to the other.

A related but separable function of this photo type lies in the way it potentially prompts the viewer to become aware of him or herself, not just in relation to others, but as a viewer, as one who looks or surveys. In her analysis of the role of the gaze in cinema, Mulvey (1985) argues that it takes three forms in the camera, the audience, and the characters in the film as they look at each other or out at the audience. She states that the first two

forms have to be invisible or obscured if the film is to follow realist conventions and work to bestow on itself the qualities of “reality, obviousness, and truth” (1985:816). If the viewer becomes aware of his or her own eye or that of the camera, s/he will develop what Mulvey calls a “distancing awareness” rather than an immediate unconscious involvement. Transferring this insight to the *National Geographic* photograph, Mulvey might argue that the insertion of the Western eye into the frame promotes distancing rather than immersion in the frame. Alvarado (1979/80) has also argued that the photographer’s (or other westerner’s) entrance into the frame can bring out contradictions in the social relations of the West and the rest that are otherwise less visible, undermining the authority of the photographer by showing the photo being produced, showing it to be an artifact rather than an unmediated fact.<sup>17</sup>

The difference between photographs in which Westerners appear and those in which they do not is that, in the former, we can potentially be more reflexively aware (because we are distanced in the way that Mulvey argues) of ourselves as actors in the world. In both types of pictures, we are there and in both it is vicariously, but in pictures which include a Westerner, we can also potentially see ourselves being viewed by the other (this is of course also true of pictures in which the other gazes directly at the viewer through the camera lens) and become aware of ourselves as actors in the world. This latter phenomena—the act of seeing the self being seen—is antithetical to the voyeurism which many art critics have identified as intrinsic to most photography and film (Alloula 1986, Burgin 1982, Metz 1985).

This factor might best account for the finding that Westerners retreat from the photographs after 1969 (see fig. 3). People we spoke with in the Photography Department said that those pictures which include the article’s author came to be seen as “outdated” at a certain point and a conscious decision was made to eliminate them. The photographer and writer were no longer to be the “stars” of the story, we were told, although writing continued to be first person. As more and more readers had traveled to the exotic locales of their articles, the *Geographic* staff saw that the picture of the intrepid traveler no longer looked so intrepid and so had less interest.<sup>18</sup> While the rise in international tourism may have had this effect, another important factor must have involved other social changes of the late 1960s. 1968 is commonly acknowledged to be the year in which popular American protest of our participation in the Vietnam War reached a critical point. Massive anti-war demonstrations, the police riot at the Democratic Convention, and especially the Tet Offensive convinced many that the American role in Vietnam and, by extension, the Third World, would have to be radically reconceptualized. Our withdrawal/retreat came to be seen as a necessity, even as there were many more years of conflict over how, when and why. In the eyes of many,

American power came into question for the first time since the end of World War II. Moreover, the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and the fire of revolt in urban ghettos gave many white people a related sense of changing and more threatening relations (even if through white projection of threat) with the people of color within the boundaries of the United States.

In a related vein, most of the (non-*Geographic*) photos which are now considered the iconic representations of the Vietnam War do not include American soldiers or civilians. The girl who, napalmed, runs down a road towards the camera; the Saigon police chief executing a Viet Cong soldier; the Buddhist monk in process of self-immolation—each of these “popular,” frequently reproduced photographs erases American involvement.

The withdrawal of Americans and other Westerners from the photographs of *National Geographic* may involve an historically similar process. The decolonization process accelerated in 1968 and led Americans (including, one must assume, the editors of *National Geographic*) to see the Third World as a more dangerous place, a place where they were no longer welcome to walk, survey, and dictate as they pleased. The increasing invisibility of Westerners can be seen as at once a retreat from a Third World seen as a less valuable site for Western achievement and as a place more difficult of access and control. The decolonization process was and is received as a threat to an American view of itself. In Lacan’s terms, the other’s look could threaten an American sense of self-coherence and so in this historical moment the Westerner—whose presence in the picture makes it possible for us to see ourselves being seen by that other—withdraws to look at a safer distance, behind the camera.

#### **The refracted gaze of the other: to see themselves as others see them**

In a small but nonetheless striking number of *National Geographic* photographs, a native is shown with a camera, mirror or mirror equivalent in his or her hands. Take the photograph from November, 1956 in which two Aivilik men (northern Canada) sit on a rock in animal skin parkas, one smiling and the other pointing a camera out at the landscape. Or the picture that shows two Indian women dancing as they watch their image in a large wall mirror. Or the picture from March of 1968 that shows Governor Brown of California on Tonga showing a group of children Polaroid snapshots he has just taken of them.

The mirror and the camera each are tools of self-reflection and surveillance. Each creates a double of the self, a second figure who can be examined more closely than the original (this double can also be alienated from the self, taken away as a

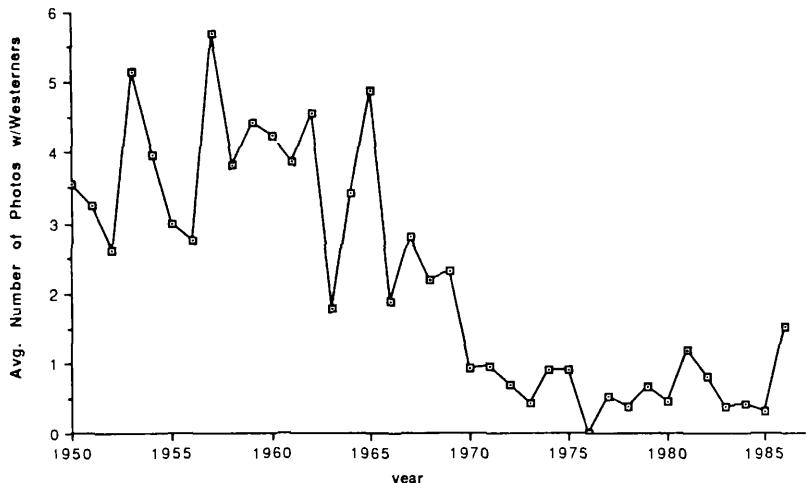


Fig. 3. Average Number of Photos per Article Containing Westerners, 1950-86.

photograph can be to another place). Psychoanalytic theory notes that the infant's look into the mirror is a significant step in ego formation because it permits the child to see him/herself for the first time as an other. The central role of these two tools in American culture (e.g., its millions of bathrooms all have mirrors as fixtures no less important than their toilets) stems at least in part from their self-reflective capacities; for many Americans, self-knowledge is a central life goal; the injunction to "know thyself" is taken seriously.

The mirror most directly suggests the possibility of self-awareness, and Western folktales and literature provide many examples of characters (often animals, e.g. Bambi, or wild children, e.g. Kipling's Mowgli) who come upon the mirrored surface of a lake or stream and see themselves for the first time in a kind of epiphany of newly acquired self-knowledge. The mirror's placement in non-Western hands makes an "interesting" picture for Western viewers because this theme can interact with the common perception that the non-Western native remains at least somewhat child-like and cognitively immature. His/her lack of self-awareness includes a lack of history (Wolf 1982); s/he is not without consciousness but is relatively without self-consciousness. The myth is that history and change are primarily characteristic of the West and that historical self-awareness was brought to the rest of the world with "discovery" and colonization.<sup>19</sup>

In the article "Into the Heart of Africa" (August, 1956), a magazine staff member on expedition is shown sitting in his land rover holding open a *National Geographic* magazine to a native woman, showing her a photograph of a woman of her tribe from a previous issue. Here the magazine serves the role of reflecting glass, as the caption tells us: "Platter-lipped woman peers at her look-alike in the mirror of *National Geographic*." The *Geographic* artist smiles as he watches the

woman's face closely for signs of self-recognition; the fascination evident in this man's gaze is in the response of the woman, perhaps the question of how she "likes" her image, her self. An early version of this type of photo from a 1923 issue shows an explorer in pith helmet who with triumphant smile, holds up a mirror to a taller, native man. He dips his head down to peer into it and we, the viewers, see not his expression but the caption which makes the photo's unmistakable message redundant; it reads, "His first mirror: Porter's boy seeing himself as others see him."<sup>20</sup> The explorer's gaze is not at the African but out towards the camera (unlike the 1956 photo), indicating more interest in the camera's reception of this "humorous" scene than in searching the man's face for his response or clues to his thought. In a not unrelated photo, in the issue of May 1955, a Westerner in safari clothes holds a mirror up to a baboon. Here as well, the mirror game takes its sense from the marginal status of this creature between nature and culture; its response to the mirror can only seem humorously inadequate when engaged in the ultimately human and most adult of activities, self-reflection.

The mirror is sometimes quite explicitly used in photographs as a device to tell a story about the process of national identity formation. National self-reflection is presumed naturally to accompany development, with the latter term suggesting a process that is both technological and psychosocial. The caption to a 1980 picture of a Tunisian woman looking into a mirror plays with this confusion between the individual and the nation, between the developing self awareness of mature adults and historically emergent national identity. It says: "A moment for reflection: Mahbouba Sassi glances in the mirror to tie her headband. A wife and mother in the village of Takrouna, she wears garb still typical of rural women in the region. Step by step, Tunisia has, by any standards, quietly but steadily brought herself into the front rank of developing nations."<sup>21</sup>

Cameras break into the frame of many *National Geographic* photographs. This group of pictures is of several distinct types. In some, a Westerner holds the camera and shows a local group the photograph s/he has just taken of them. Here the camera, like the mirror, shows the native to him- or herself. In several cases, the picture is shown to a large group of children who crowd in an attracted and happy mass around the Western cameraman (May 1955; March 1968). Historically it was first the mirror and then the camera which were the technologies thought to prove the superiority of the Westerner who invented and controls them (Adas 1989). In many of these pictures of natives holding a mirror or camera, the magazine plays, in the 20th century, with what McGrane identifies with the 19th century European mind, that is, the notion "of a low threshold of the miraculous [in the non-Western native], of a

seemingly childish lack of restraint, lack of strength regarding the credulous [which was] an indispensable tool for locating the ‘primitive’” (1989:50).

In others, the native holds the camera itself. In one sense, this violates the prerogative of the Western surveyor to control the camera as well as other means of knowledge production. From an early point in the history of photography, its users recognized that the camera was a form of power. In an analysis of photographs of Middle Eastern women, Graham-Brown (1988) provides evidence that colonial photographers were motivated to keep local subjects “at the lens-end of the camera” (61), and quotes one who, in 1890, complained that “It was a mistake for the first photographer in the Pathan [Afghanistan] country to allow the natives to look at the ground glass screen of the camera. He forgot that a little learning is a dangerous thing” (61). The camera could then be given to native subjects only at risk of giving away that power.

The pictures in *National Geographic* which place the camera in other hands, however, suggest little peril. Either the caption or other features of the picture suggest that the native’s use of the camera is amusing or quaint. A broad smile graces the face of the Eskimo man above who uses the camera lens to view the landscape with a companion (November 1956). At least one caption explicitly suggests that, although the subject goes behind the camera, what s/he looks out at is the imagined self at whom the Western photographer has just been looking moments before. A photo of a young African boy looking through the viewfinder (March 1952) says, in close echo to the mirror picture described above, “Young Lemba sees others as the photographer sees him.”<sup>22</sup>

These pictures appear to be more common in the 1950’s, and we can also detect a change, as decolonization proceeded, in the simple terms with which the problem is depicted in an amazing photograph from August 1982. It sits on the right hand side of the page in an article entitled “Paraguay, Paradox of South America.” The frame is nearly filled with three figures—on the left, an Amerindian woman whose breasts are included just before the picture bottom edge occurs; in the middle a white, female tourist in a bright blue dress; and on the right, a taller Indian man who, like the woman, is in native clothing. The three stand close together in a line, the tourist smiling with her arm on the shoulder of the straight-faced native woman. The tourist and the man, also unsmiling, face off slightly towards the left where a second camera (in addition to the one snapping the photo that appears in the magazine) takes their picture. The poses and the caption tell us another camera is there and asks us to look at them as photographic subjects; it reads “Portraits for pay: A tourist poses with members of the Macá Indian tribe on Colonia Juan Belaieff Island in the Paraguay River near Asunción. The Indians charge 80 cents a person each time they pose in a photograph...”

This rare photograph invites us into a contradictory, am-

biguous but, in any case, highly charged scene. It is not a pleasant picture, in contrast with more typical *Geographic* style, because it depicts the act of looking at unwilling subjects, suggesting two things in the process. The first is the voyeurism of the photograph of the exotic. The camera gaze is *doubled* in this picture, not the native subject as in the photos above where the camera enters the frame in some explicit sense, and this doubling underlines that Western gaze. The picture’s ambiguity lies in its telling us that (1) we are seeing a candid shot of a posed shot, and (2) we are looking at the other look at us while the Indian gaze is in fact diverted 20 degrees from ours. In addition, this unusual structure of gaze draws attention to the commodified nature of the looker-lookee relationship. The Indians look unhappy, even coerced; the tourist satisfied, presumably with her “catch.” Here too an apparent contradiction—the gaze structure suggests that the *National Geographic* photographer took this picture without paying, unlike the tourists; the caption suggests otherwise.

The photograph’s potentially disturbing message for *National Geographic* readers is muted when one considers that the camera has not succeeded so much in representing an indigenous looking back as it has in taking the distance between Western viewer and non-Western subject one step further, and drawing attention to the photographer (and the artifice) between them. A symptom of alienation from the act of looking even while attention is drawn to it, this photo may exemplify a principle which Sontag says operates in all photography. She writes 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 is always trying to colonize new experiences, to find new ways to look at familiar subjects—to fight against boredom. For boredom is just the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation, and one leads to the other” (1977:42). Success in avoiding boredom is key to retaining readers’ interest and membership as well.

Ultimately the magazine itself is a mirror for the historical, cultural, and political economic contexts of its production and use. That context is found in the magazine’s images themselves, but not in a simple reflective way, either as the objectivist myth of the nature of cameras and mirrors or as the Althusserian notion of a specular, or mirror-like ideology in which the subject simply recognizes him or herself would have it. It is perhaps more in the form of a rippled lake whose many intersecting lines present a constantly changing and emergent image.

#### The academic spectator

In one sense, this gaze is simply a sub-type of the reader’s gaze. It emerges out of the same American middle class experiential matrix with its family of other cultural representations, its formal and informal schooling in techniques for

interpreting both photograph and cultural difference, and social relations. It also comes with the same individual history of family subscription to the magazine common to most readers. We read the *National Geographic* with a sense of astonishment, absorption, and wonder, both as children and, in a way that is different only some of the time, as adults. Like several anthropologists and others who have described the effect of their early reading of the magazine to us, we may have received the magazine as an invitation to travel "out there," a desire which only later found its form for us in fieldwork.

All of the looks embedded in the pictures are ultimately being filtered for you the reader through this, our own gaze. At times quite literally during the course of this research, we have looked at an American magazine reader looking at a photographer's looking at a Western explorer looking at a Polynesian child looking at the explorer's photographed gaze at/snapshot of herself moments earlier. While this framing of the seventh look might suggest that it is simply a more convoluted but ultimately very distanced voyeurism, it can be distinguished from other kinds of readers' gazes including the voyeuristic and the hierarchic by both its distinctive intent and the sociological position (white, middle class, female, academic) from which it comes. Its intent is not aesthetic appreciation or formal description, but oriented towards critique of the images, both in spite of, because of, and in terms of their pleasures. We aim to make the pictures tell a different story than they were originally meant to tell, one about their makers and readers rather than their subjects.<sup>23</sup> The critique arises out of a desire "to anthropologize the West", as Rabinow (1986) suggests we might, and to denaturalize the images of difference in the magazine in part because those images and the institution which has produced them have historically articulated too easily with the shifting interests and positions of the state. This seventh kind of looking is guided by the idea that an alternative gaze is possible, one which is less dominating, more reciprocal, more oriented toward seeing how a scene and/or its viewer might be changed than toward its imagined essential, unchanging and satisfactory form. The strong impact of the magazine on popular attitudes suggests that anthropological teaching or writing purveys images which, even if intended as oppositional (certainly not always the case), may simply be subsumed or bypassed by the *National Geographic* view of the world.

In addition, a suspicion of the power of the image is here, playing as it does in a field more populated with advertising photography than anything else. The image is experienced on a daily basis as a sales technique or as a trace of the commodity. That experience is, at least for us, and perhaps for other readers, transferred to some degree to the experience of seeing *National Geographic* images. As we are "invited to dream" in the photograph, we are also invited to forget and to be lost in it.

Our reading of theory has also tutored our gaze at the photographs in distinctive ways, told us how to understand the

techniques by which they work, how to find our way to something other than an aesthetic or literal reading, suggesting that we view them as cultural artifacts. It also suggested that we avoid immersion in the many pleasures of the richly colored and exotically peopled photographs, as in Alloula's reading of Algerian colonial period postcards. He notes his analytic need to resist the "aestheticizing temptation" (1986:116) to see beauty in those cards, a position predicated in part on a highly deterministic view of their hegemonic effect.<sup>24</sup> Alternative more positive views of the political implications of visual pleasure exist, a view which Jameson (1983) and others argue is achieved in part by unlinking a prevalent disdain for popular culture output from the issue of pleasure. Validating both seemingly contradictory views, however, would seem to be the fact that the seductiveness of the pictures both captures and instructs us. We are captured by the temptation to view the photographs as more real than the world or at least as a comfortable substitute for it—to at some level imagine a world of basically happy, classless, even noble, others in conflict neither with themselves or with "us". These and other illusions of the images we have found in part through our own vulnerability to them. The pleasures are also instructive, however. They come from being given views, without having to make our own efforts to get them, of a world different, however slightly, from the American middle class norm. The considerable beauty with which those lives are portrayed can potentially challenge the latter, as well.

### Concluding remarks

The many looking relations represented in all photographs are at the very foundation of the kinds of meaning that can be found or made in them. The multiplicity of looks in and around any photo is at the root of its ambiguity, each gaze potentially suggesting a different way of viewing the scene. Moreover, a visual "illiteracy" leaves most of us with few resources for understanding or integrating the diverse messages these looks can produce. Multiple gaze is also the source of many of the photograph's contradictions, highlighting the gaps (as when some gazes are literally interrupted) and multiple perspectives of each person involved in the complex scene in and around the photo. Finally, it is the root of much of the photograph's dynamism as a cultural object, and the place where the analyst can perhaps most productively begin to trace its connections to the wider social world of which it is a part. Through attention to the dynamic nature of these intersecting gazes, the photograph becomes less vulnerable to the charge or illusion that it masks or stuffs and mounts the world, freezes the life out of a scene, or violently slices into time. While the gaze of the subject of the photograph might be fairly lost in the heavy crisscrossing traffic of the often more privileged producers' and consumers' gazes, very contemporary stories of contestable power are told there nonetheless.

## Notes.

1. This paper is drawn from a book manuscript in progress that examines the production and consumption of *National Geographic* photographs of the 'non-Western' world in the post World War II period (specifically 1950-86). It is based on an analysis of 600 photographs from that period; on several visits to the Washington headquarters where the magazine is produced and interviews conducted there with a number of photographers, picture editors, caption writers, layout and design people, and others; and on interviews with 55 individuals from upstate New York and Hawaii who "read" a set of *Geographic* photographs for us. The present chapter benefits extensively from the coding and analytic help of Tammy Bennington, and from the stimulating comments on earlier drafts by Lila Abu-Lughod, Tamara Bray, Phoebe Ellsworth, William Kelley, John Kirkpatrick, Daniel Rosenberg, Michael Schechter, Lucien Taylor and anonymous reviewers for this journal.

The term 'non-Western' which bounds the project is awkward but represents our focus on the world outside the boundaries of the United States and Europe and our interest in how these powerful world areas (which include almost all of the magazine's readers) have constructed and construed other peoples. Our analysis here and elsewhere suggests that, despite some important distinctions which these readers can and do make within the category of the 'non-Western', there is a fundamental process of identity formation at work in which all 'exotics' play the primary role of being not Western, not a white, middle class reader.

2. The same of course can be said for other categories of people who share a marked quality with the non-Westerner, including physical deviants (Diane Arbus' pictures, for example), the criminal (Tagg 1988), and, most commonly, women (e.g., Goffman 1979).

3. The differences between painting and photography are also important. The gaze cannot be altered at will or completely to taste, and so the looks that are exchanged in *National Geographic* photographs can be seen as more disappointing and less pacifying than are, for example, Gauguin's pictures of Polynesian women.

4. This analysis resembles the less psychoanalytically freighted work of Sider on the stereotype in Indian-white relations. Sider frames the problem as one of "the basic contradiction of this form of domination—that it cannot both create and incorporate the other as an other—thus opening a space for continuing resistance and distancing" (1987:22).

5. An early typology of the gaze from a colonial and racist perspective is found in Sir Richard Burton's accounts of his African expeditions, during which he felt himself to be the victim of "an ecstasy of curiosity". One can imagine a similarly hostile categorization of white Westerners staring at "exotics" over the past centuries. Wrote Burton: "At last my experience

in staring enabled me to categorize the infliction as follows. Firstly is the stare furtive, when the starer would peep and peer under the tent, and its reverse, the open stare. Thirdly is the stare curious or intelligent, which generally was accompanied with irreverent laughter regarding our appearance. Fourthly is the stare stupid, which denoted the hebete incurious savage. The stare discreet is that of Sultans and great men; the stare indiscreet at unusual seasons is affected by women and children. Sixthly is the stare flattering—it was exceedingly rare, and equally so was the stare contemptuous. Eighthly is the stare greedy; it was denoted by the eyes restlessly bounding from one object to another, never tired, never satisfied. Ninthly is the stare peremptory and pertinacious, peculiar to crabbed age. The dozen concludes with the stare drunken, the stare fierce or pugnacious, and finally the stare cannibal, which apparently considered us as articles of diet." (Burton in Moorehead 1960:33).

6. Some contemporary photographers are experimenting with these conventions (in point of view and of framing) in an effort to undermine this equation. Victor Burgin, for example, intentionally attempts to break this down by making photographs that are "'occasions for interpretation' rather than... 'objects of consumption'" and that thereby require a gaze which more actively produces itself rather than simply accepting the photographer's gaze as its own. While one can question whether any *National Geographic* photograph is ever purely an object of consumption, this distinction is an important one and alerts us to the possibility that the photographer can encourage or discourage, through technique, the relative independence of the viewer's gaze.

7. Elsewhere, we have begun to examine reader response to the magazine's photographs (Lutz and Collins 1990).

8. The attempt to distinguish the production of culture from its reception has been carried on in a number of areas; Radway (1984), for example, finds many of the readers of romance novels taking a feminist lesson from their reading of literature which is produced with less than progressive intentions.

9. This method of suturing distinguishes photography from other art forms; in writing, for example, the reader can be addressed directly ("you, dear reader") or invited to identify with the narrator rather than narrated about characters.

10. This figure is based on 468 photographs coded in this way, 24% of which had a subject looking at the camera.

11. Metz says that the filmed (and, by extension, photographed) person's mere presence in the image implies his/her consent to be watched (1985:800-1).

12. Even with this strategy, however, the portrait itself can remain somewhat problematic insofar as it takes space away from more informational shots, at least in some editors' views.

13. Discussing these findings in the Photography Department, we were told by one person that children generally are more fearless in approaching photographers, while men often seem

more wary of the camera than women, especially when it is wielded by a male photographer.

14. In the sample of pictures from Asia in which gaze is ascertainable ( $N=179$ ), "friendly" countries (including the PRC after 1975, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines) had higher rates of smiling than "unfriendly" or neutral countries ( $\chi^2=2.101$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.147$ ). Excluding Japan, which may have had a more ambiguous status in American eyes, the relationship between gaze and "friendliness" reaches significance ( $\chi^2=4.14$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.042$ ).

15. Tagg interestingly notes that the pose was initially the pragmatic outcome of the technique of the Physionotrace, a popular mechanism used to trace a person's profile from shadow onto a copper plate. When photography took the place of the Physionotrace, no longer requiring profiles, the conventions of associating class with non-frontality continued to have force.

16. Other elements of the photograph which add to this impression include their more casual posture (three of them lean on a truck behind them) in comparison with the gaucho picture in which each person stands with a rigid vertical back. In addition, as we will discuss in a moment, the gaze of each of the seven Aborigines is not entirely clear, with gaze having to be read off of head direction. This fuzzy gaze is also a significant textual device for reading off character, alienation, or availability.

17. The documentary filmmaker Dennis O'Rourke, whose films *Cannibal Tours* and *Half Life: A Parable for the Nuclear Age* explore Third World settings, develops this argument for the role of reflexivity for the (white Western) imagemaker in a related way (Lutkehaus 1989). He consistently includes himself in the scene (which he does in a variety of ways, only one of which is to show his physical presence), but argues a distinction between simple self-revelation on the part of the filmmaker and a more complex rendering of the social relations between him and his subjects. He argues that the gaze of the filmed subject can be captured in such a way as to show his or her "complicity" with the filmmaker. This technique does more than simply make the filmmakers' presence evident. It also suggests that O'Rourke views the reader's gaze more deterministically (e.g., as 'naturally' seeing the complicity in a subject's gaze) than do the theorists considered above.

18. An "On Assignment" page was added to the magazine in the 1980's. It focuses on the photographer and writer at work, often showing them alone at their work, encountering technical problems, or simply posing.

19. Compare the pictures of natives looking into a mirror with that of an American woman looking into the shiny surface of the airplane she is riveting in the August 1944 issue. It is captioned, "No time to primp [primp] in the mirror-like tail assembly of a Liberator." The issue raised by this caption is not self-knowledge (Western women have this), but female vanity, or rather its transcendence by a woman who, man-like, works in heavy

industry during the male labor shortage period of World War II.

20. Like Prince Charles standing on his box for the official portrait with Princess Diana, this photo also demonstrates the importance of manipulating relative height between races. In a not unrelated photo, in the issue of May 1955, a Westerner in safari clothes holds a mirror up to a baboon. Here as well, the mirror game takes its sense from the marginal status of this creature between nature and culture; its response to the mirror can only seem humorously inadequate when engaged in the ultimately human and most adult of activities, self-reflection.

21. This photograph, and many others with mirrors, feature women. They thereby evoke ideas about gender, vanity and narcissism as well as a tradition of painting in Western art in which Venus or other figures gaze into a mirror in a moment of self-absorption. Both operate "within the convention that justifies male voyeuristic desire by aligning it with female narcissistic self-involvement" (Snow 1989:38).

22. A mirror and a camera are both also placed to important and intentional effect in the hands of Koko the signing gorilla in another issue of *National Geographic*, a move which Haraway (1989) has brilliantly linked to an attempt to give the gorilla self-awareness and hence culture, and to thereby build a bridge across the divide between nature and culture.

23. Our interviews with readers show that they do not always ignore the frame, but also often see the photograph as an object produced by someone in a concrete social context.

24. Alloula also seems not to broach the possibility of alternative kinds of pleasure (or, more broadly, positive effects or readings) in the viewing because the photos are seen to have singular ends and because of his fear of "intoxication, a loss of oneself in the other through sight" (1986:49).

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