

Neither Here Nor There: An Investigation Into The Role Of The Photographer's

Subjective View in Landscape Photography.

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the role of a landscape photographer's subjective view in the construction of a photographic image by considering the significance of their photographic intent, visual relationship to the physical world and personal relationship to place. I will deconstruct my series *Neither Here Nor There*, examining the significance of investing my own history of experience and memory into the photograph in order to explore my relationship to the landscapes I have lived in. The paper will examine the roles of the photographer and the viewer when reading a photograph, using Susan Sontag's ideas of authority within the photograph from *On Photography*, Roland Barthes' concept of the 'punctum' from *Camera Lucida*, and Robert Adams' essay *Truth and Landscape*, to investigate how a photographer forms intent within his photographs. Drawing on Kaja Silverman's *World Spectators*, the paper will go on to explore an individual's visual relationship with the physical world whilst maintaining the core idea of exploring the photographer's intentionality within a photograph by using the practice of Thomas Joshua Cooper as an example of a photographer who claims authority over his images. The thesis then analyses how concepts of place influence this conversation by using Yi Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* to investigate an individual's relationship with the physical world. Taking Italo Calvino's *Mr Palomar* and Rinko Kawauchi's photographic series *The Eyes, The Ears* as examples, the paper looks at the representation of an individual's relationship to the physical world through their internal solipsistic view. The essay concludes with an explanation of how my photographic series *Neither Here Nor There*, tackles the issue of the representation of the photographer's intent and subjective vision, by offering an autobiographical reaction to my own sense of place.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the importance of a landscape photographer's subjective view in the construction of a photographic image. In relation to my own practice, particularly my series *Neither Here Nor There*, I will investigate the significance of investing my own history of experience and memory into the photograph to explore my relationship to the landscapes I have lived in.

I grew up in the North East of England. The landscape of this region has always affected me emotionally and physically. I would go so far as to say the landscape influenced who I am and how I see the world. Industry has scarred this land into its current appearance; traces of settlements and industry litter even the remotest areas. These extinct industries have shifted populations, created towns and forced others to be abandoned. All these events were caused by the discovery and resultant exploitation or abandonment of natural resources.

On walks up on the Fells and Moors I would often discover small mementos, insignificant signifiers of past industry in the emptiest of places; abandoned buildings used by sheep to shelter from the winter weather, small remnants of machinery slowly rusting away, former pipe lines and chimneys left to crumble into the ground, paths originally laid for now vanished rail lines, forgotten rusted nails and screws just lying amongst the grasses and heather. All of these found objects show the traces of past lives lived out within the confines of this place.

Through family excursions into the countryside I became acutely aware of this ambiguous presence called “the landscape” from a young age. As I have travelled further a field, and experienced new and alien landscapes, there has always been a sense of nostalgia for this place that I had left behind. It affects how I have viewed new places, and informs my subsequent experiences. I have returned repeatedly to the North East to photograph specific places, basing several photographic projects within this landscape in order to consider and evaluate my relationship to the region.

Robert Adams, in his essay *Truth and Landscape* writes, “There is always a subjective aspect in landscape art, something in the picture that tells us as much about who is behind the camera as about what is in front of it.” (15). He concludes the essay by stating that landscape art, “...is a rediscovery and revaluation of where we find ourselves.” (20). His statement directly addresses important concerns within my own practice. Set within the confines of my own subjective experiences and memories, my photographic practice is a method by which I examine my relationship to the places I inhabit.

My photographic project *Neither Here Nor There*¹ demonstrates the inseparability of the photographer’s subjective experience of a landscape from his photographs of that same landscape. The project is an examination of my relationship with both the landscape that I grew up in, as well as the landscape of my present - Vancouver and its immediate surroundings. The project examines each place through the specific lens of my own

¹ A full description of *Neither Here Nor There* is given in the final chapter.

personal, and deeply subjective, experience and represents an extension of the analysis of the role subjectivity plays within the photographer's construction of the photograph. This work insists that a photographer's subjective experience of a landscape is inseparable from the images he makes, allowing the photographs to communicate more than a mere representation, and to show directly how the photographer experienced the landscape.

Chapter 1 - Examining A Photographer's Intent Within The Photograph

This chapter will explore and outline ideas that discuss how a landscape photographer constructs a photograph through their subjective intent, as well as examining the role the viewer plays in the interpretation of the image. Susan Sontag succinctly describes the subjective nature of photography and the photographer's significant presence within the photograph in *On Photography*. She writes:

The earliest photographers talked as if the camera were a copying machine; as if, while people operate cameras, it is the camera that sees. [...] The photographer was thought to be an acute but non-interfering observer – a scribe, not a poet. But as people quickly discovered that nobody takes the same picture of the same thing, the supposition that cameras furnish an impersonal, objective image yielded to the fact that photographs are evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world. (87-88)

Sontag is suggesting that the photograph becomes the product of the photographer's presence and vision, and that the photographer is engaged with every aspect of the image, including the initial impetus to make the photograph. By stressing that the image is, "not just a record but an evaluation", she questions the scope of what a photograph can communicate. The photograph is then elevated from an objective viewpoint to a description of the photographer's subjective experience of the world.

Solipsism - the idea that we live through our own histories and approach each new experience through the filter of our previous experiences - insists that we can only ever

know ourselves'. The photograph can be seen as evidence that the photographer was present at a specific moment in time, one in which the viewer most likely was not present. Yet through the photograph, the photographer is attempting to convey a sense of personal experience to other individuals, so challenging solipsism's claims. Within contemporary society there is a compulsion, through the widespread availability of image making technology, to record every facet of our contemporary lives, no matter how mundane or extraordinary. This compulsion has meant that the subjective reactions of multiple individuals to an occurrence are made available, in particular via digital media, to a large and immediate audience. Examples of this in practice lie in the prevalence of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter; where an individual can display a photograph to others across the globe at almost the moment it is taken, as well as websites such as Flickr or Blipfoto; whose sole purpose is to offer a platform to share photographs.

This perspective raises a number of provocative questions that apply beyond the realm of photography and into other artistic mediums but that remain pertinent: If we are all unique individuals, arriving at the present moment in time through our own particular path of experience, and so inevitably subjective in our being, how can we, as viewers, be affected by seeing a photograph made by someone else? Is it coincidence when we are able to empathise with the subject matter? Or specifically with regard to photography, is something else happening within the photograph? This last question relates closely to Roland Barthes' concept of the punctum as described in his seminal text *Camera Lucida*. Michael Fried examines Barthes' idea of the punctum in great detail in *Why Photography*

Matters As Art As Never Before (95 – 114), regarding how it relates to his own ideas of theatricality within constructed art forms. Citing Barthes he states, “A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”

Adding his own interpretation Fried continues, “The *punctum*, one might say, is seen by Barthes but not because it has been shown to him by the photographer, for whom literally it does not exist; as Barthes recognizes, ‘it occurs [only] in the field of the photographed thing,’ which is to say that it is a pure artefact of the photographic event.” (100)². As a physical object one could state that the photograph is a deliberate, edited view of the world, that the photograph can only show definitively what is in its physical frame, and cannot show what is excluded from it. The frame is the cut-off point, beyond which something else existed but which the photographer chose not to include, instead concentrating only on what he permits to be visible. However, Barthes insists that the *punctum* transcends these parameters as the viewer will always bring their own histories of experience to the photograph, projecting their remembrances of experience onto the image regardless of the photographer’s own intent. Barthes goes on to state:

Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I

² Barthes describes the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida* in relation to the *studium*. Michael Fried describes the *studium* as “endow[ing] the photograph ‘with functions, which are, for the Photographer, so many alibis. These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire. And I, the *Spectator*, I recognize them with more or less pleasure: I invest them with my *studium* (which is never my delight or my pain).’” (97). The *studium* becomes an expression for the topography of the photograph, a description of what the photograph describes.

am looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect, the *punctum*. (53)

This expansion of the punctum conveys its intangibility. The photographer is unaware of the punctum, only the viewer may conceive of its presence, and even further, that it may not be conceived until away from the photograph's presence and immediacy, appearing within the memory of experiencing the photograph and as such transcending vision. This issues significance to the viewer and their interpretation of the image. The punctum in this capacity carries a resemblance to Barthes' ideas in text *Death of the Author*, in which he claims the author intends their writing to be read. Barthes insists the author's history should be irrelevant as to how one reads or interprets his works as importance lies with the viewer and their interpretation, which should not be influenced by the life of the author. The significance in Barthes' idea is that he claims the reader, or, if we consider this idea in a photographic context, the viewer, is the intended recipient and so it is ultimately their interpretation rather than the creators intent that is important.

Robert Adams offers an opposing opinion in his essay *Truth and Landscape*, in which he sets out what he calls the three verities of landscape photography; geography, autobiography and metaphor (14)³. This concept can be applied to many forms of photography, not just landscape, as the three verities imbue a photograph with consideration and meaning. The importance in Adams' essay is that he is claiming that

³ Adams insists a balance between the three must be achieved to create a landscape image that is both valuable and engaging, stating "Geography is, if taken alone, sometimes boring, autobiography is frequently trivial, and metaphor can be dubious. But taken together [...] the three kinds of information strengthen each other." (14)

the photographer is intending to describe to the viewer what they should see within the photograph, how they should see it and why.

While photography's ability to represent the world is often questioned, even undermined with particular regard to digital technologies, (though manipulation of the image has occurred since photography's earliest days), through its indexical nature, photography still has the ability to factually show a physical location; to show a field as a field, and a tree as a tree. However, photography is more than just a recording tool to simply state "this existed". This attaches to each photograph an implicit sense of autobiography, as the photograph is changed from being just a recording device, to depicting a subjective viewpoint, reflecting photography's hybrid nature, and causing the image to now become the product of an individual's subjective position. Autobiography within the image is the appearance of the subjective vision of the photographer. Adams states that "Without the photographer in the photograph the view is no more compelling than the product of some anonymous record camera, a machine perhaps capable of happy accident but not of response to form." (15). He sums up the importance of autobiography within the image by reaffirming that the photograph can *only* be produced by the photographer. Thus the resultant image can only ever be the photographer's individual construction.

Adams goes on to state, "We rely, I think, on landscape photography to make intelligible to us what we already know. It is the fitness of landscape to one's experience of life's condition and possibilities that finally makes a scene important." (16). In effect Adams is saying that the pinch one feels comes not from an attraction to form or to an intangible

presence, but from our own personal histories of experience. What the viewer feels, or doesn't feel, is a reaction to the photographer's intent through the filter of the viewer's own experiences. The photograph can now be said to occupy a dual role: to project the photographer's representation to the viewer whilst allowing the viewer to project their interpretation onto the photograph. The issue now is where importance lies: in the making of the image, or in its interpretation? In this paper I will continue by investigating the significance of the photographer's role as the creator of the image.

Chapter 2 - Investigating Visual Intent

As stated in the previous chapter, Barthes' punctum questions the concept of the photographer's intention by challenging how the photograph is perceived. Claiming the punctum as a force of attraction, Barthes' ideas tie in with phenomenological ideas on the relationship between seeing and being seen. Film theorist and art historian Kaja Silverman, in her book *World Spectators* (2000), explores this relationship. She asserts that everything intends to be seen as much as the eye intends to see. She writes,

Something must give itself to be seen, and a spectator must see within it the miraculous reincarnation of the what-has-been. It is, moreover, not the perceiving subject, but rather the perceptual object which plays the initiating role in this scopic transaction. The world "intends" toward being seen; it aspires or moves toward appearance. (129)

Silverman claims that we see because the subject intends to be seen. She follows in a line of theorists who have made similar claims including Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan and Hannah Arendt (Silverman 129). By stating that the source of this attraction is the intention to be seen, there is a similarity with Barthes' idea of the punctum. Silverman believes the world is intending to be seen, it attracts the eye and draws attention to a detail. Barthes is insisting that potentially, within a fragment of a photograph, exists an attraction to the viewer. However this is not solely a visual attraction as Silverman's claims are, but more complex, the punctum can exist in the present, whilst viewing the photograph, or within memory, appearing through recollection. Yet despite this

difference in the manifestation of their ideas, both Silverman and Barthes state that an object's desire to be seen exercises a dominant influence over visual attraction.

Photographic practice⁴ engages with chance, and no two images can ever be exactly the same. Various factors including weather, light conditions, and, in particular, time all conspire to make each photograph unique. What is present before the camera at the instance that the shutter is opened can never be exactly repeated or recreated. Silverman writes, "The language of things is the language of presence." (144). She is insisting that by being present within the world, objects have a language with which to communicate and make themselves apparent. In my series *Lake Kennedy* (2010)ⁱ I photographed the landscape whilst an unexpected weather front caused intense fog to blanket the landscape from view resulting in a short series of photographs that are unique. In Silverman's terms, chance could be the play of the world attempting to be seen and creating a stimulus for myself, the photographer, that is visually attractive and prompts me to make a photograph at that particular moment.

Within his practice, photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper absolutely refutes Silverman's position. In his most recent project, *True*, Cooper records the world at its most extreme edges. His photographs are beautiful, often abstract in appearance, yet situated within Cooper's personal experience with the world. Cooper describes his practice as being concerned with the act of gazing. He gazes at the world and records this gaze through his photographs. In his essay "Gazing at the Void", which accompanies *True*, Ben Tufnell

⁴ In this instance I am referring to practices based outside of the photographic studio, that are not able to enforce a constant environment onto the subject.

states, “He stands with his back to the land and looks out at the sea. His characteristic position here is one of looking out – at the void – and thereby looking inwards. For the gaze that lights upon a blank plane is inevitably turned back upon itself.” (28).

Suggestive of Zen thought (Tufnell 28)⁵, but also referring to a subjective visual relationship with the world, Tufnell is describing both the basic methodology of Cooper’s practice and the contents of his images.

True, is a smaller section from Cooper’s much grander project - *An Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity – The World’s Edge – The Atlantic Basin Project* – a project that aims to photograph the rim of the Atlantic Ocean. Tufnell declares that the project is “Destined to fail” (29), whilst insisting this is also the strength of the project as it, “tells us about the world and how big and unknowable it is.” (29). In this sense Cooper’s project, though destined to fail, becomes successful as it portrays the scale of the world. This epic undertaking becomes about Cooper recording his own subjective experience of the world. What I find particularly valuable about Cooper’s work, beyond his scope to engage with the world, is that he is actively looking at, or *into*, the world. His gaze searches out the content he will record in his photographs. Cooper is actively searching the world before him, a conscious act that contradicts Silverman’s claims that the eye is attracted to seeing an object. Is it possible to actively look or is the seen object intending to be seen anyway? It could be that Cooper gazes, looking into the void at the edge of the world for a particular vision he already knows of, or it could be until his vision is pricked by

⁵ Tufnell states “In Zen thought and iconography the void is something to be sought and embraced. It represents clarity in opposition to the dense static of the world. It is an emptiness that allows us to find a true sense of relativity. It induces a welcome loss of ego.” (28)

something wishing to be seen, the eye and object both achieving their goals, to see and be seen? Cooper is adamant of his role within his photographs, unwilling to abdicate his authority over his work. In his image: “*uncharted dangers*” – *blanketing dense fog, The Bransfield Strait, The Mouth of The Antarctic Sound, Looking towards Prime Head, “Catherine Island”, Antarctica, 2008*ⁱⁱ, Cooper stood in a location so remote that more people have stood on the moon (Tufnell 27). From this remote and dangerous point of land, Cooper looks into the fog, towards the northernmost tip of Antarctica. The image is a swirl of dark greys, which represent the movement of water around the static black of rocks. At the top edge of the photograph is a large white mass, floating sea ice. Cooper has placed his camera at this absolute point of extremity and gazes still further out into the world. What appears on his negative is his subjective vision of the world. Within these images there is a vague description of the physical world but also, significantly, a depiction of Cooper’s own view of this world. His images are filled with narrative and metaphor, suggestive of intangible moments, the witnessing of the sublime, the heroic and romantic ideals of great explorers travelling in search of unknown lands. Cooper follows in their footsteps, taking his camera to these extremes, and at these outer edges of human knowledge and experience he makes his photographs through his subjective view of these places. Cooper makes a further point regarding his authority over his images by insisting he ‘makes’ rather than ‘takes’ a photograph. To ‘take a photograph’ would imply that an image pre-existed and the result is not the product of his controlled creation. Yet through Silverman’s ideas, one could argue that even within his controlled practice, he can only ever see the world as it appears to him, and this is what is present within his images. But that Cooper claims he is ‘making’ rather than ‘taking’ is

significant in challenging Silverman's claims of the world's intention to be seen.

Cooper's intent also acts as a challenge to Barthes' ideas because he absolutely intends what the viewer will see and how. Through his photographs the viewer is shown the world as experienced by Cooper. Here lies a contradiction of opinions, one stating the photographer creates, another saying the viewer interprets, and a third saying the world intends.

Chapter 3 - Understanding The Effects of Place On Subjectivity

If we take Robert Adam's insistence that, "Landscape art, the main business of which is a rediscovery and revaluation of where we find ourselves." (20) literally, then we must examine the importance of rediscovering and revaluing where we find ourselves. The human geographer Yi Fu Tuan, who specifically explores human subjectivity in relation to place in his book *Space And Place*, describes the intimate and emotional relationships we create with places. These relationships are intense and deeply set within our being. Poetically evoking the essence of Barthes' punctum and Silverman's discourse on the relationship behind seeing Tuan states,

Intimate experiences lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form but often we are not even aware of them. When for some reason, they flash to the surface of our consciousness they evince a poignancy that the more deliberative acts – the actively sought experiences – cannot match. (136)

In Tuan's writing the significance of mundane places, such as the home, is outlined and examined. Tuan explains that, "The home place is full of ordinary objects. We know them through use; we do not attend to them as we do to works of art. They are almost a part of ourselves, too close to be seen" (144).

To understand the relevance of Tuan's ideas within the context of a photographic practice, I want to consider the work of Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi. Her practice is based in the documentation of the everyday, yet documentation suggests there

is a form of fact within her images. Rather they are representations of her visual relationship with the immediate physical world around her. In her work the insignificant is made significant through her gentle observations and acute awareness of her immediate surroundings. In her series *The Eyes, The Ears*, Kawauchi is located absolutely within her local surroundings, at times barely seeming to leave her apartment. Such is the richness of what she discovers, she has no need to travel further a field to engage in a relationship with the world. The images chart the most banal moments and instances. Kawauchi expresses her fascination with the things that most people ignore, finding in them an importance and significance: the way concrete has rippled around a pole as it has driedⁱⁱⁱ, she compares soap bubbles on one page with the lumpy skin of a toad^{iv}, she photographs a few strands of hair out of place on a head whose face we can not see^v. In one photograph a young girl is standing at a desk^{vi}, pencil in hand, seemingly in deep concentration, behind her a blackboard hangs with no information on it. The girl is bathed in brilliant light, burning out her pink sweatshirt and highlighting her hair. The simplicity of this moment, a school child possibly doing homework, is familiar to many, yet Kawauchi elevates it to a moment of intense beauty and poignancy. There is a delicacy and understanding shown by the colours and light she captures within the photograph that many people would not notice in passing, but Kawauchi lingers on them, looking to them for significance. This act is significant in Kawauchi's practice. This lingering is reminiscent of Silverman's ideas of visual intent. Kawauchi though, offers a middle ground between the polarising arguments discussed so far. Empathy with the familiarity of her subject matter allows the viewer an entry point into her work, and a bond is created between photographer and viewer through this. Kawauchi herself, whilst

looking for the moments she will photograph through her subjective vision is also open to the world making itself visible to be seen. She seems especially sensitive to the prick of attraction to see the world. Tuan explains the intangibility of what Kawauchi is attempting to portray within her pictures,

A mere smile or touch may signal our consciousness of an important occasion.

Insofar as these gestures can be observed they are public. They are also fleeting, however, and their meaning so eludes confident interpretation that they cannot provide the basis for group planning and action. They lack the firmness of words and pictures. (137).

These fleetest of moments and feelings that feel so immensely overpowering are important to defining and understanding where we find ourselves. Kawauchi's ability to make visibly tangible these moments is important so that one is not left with only inadequate descriptions, but an actual sense of what these moments are and where they lie.

Kawauchi has stated; "People often say that I have a child's eye. For example, I stare at ants gathering around sugar, or when I seek shelter from the rain, I gaze upon snails.

These are things which you often do when you are a child aren't they? I have a very similar sensibility to that." This acknowledgement of 'staring' bears a resemblance to Thomas Joshua Cooper's act of gazing in that their eye is consciously lingering on the physical world around them, actively searching the world. However Cooper gazes with intent whilst Kawauchi suggests she looks to be affected by the world. The innocence she speaks of within her practice, of the subject matter, of her attention to the

insignificant, comes through her openness to see the world, to be conscious of her relationship with the world and to enact upon her observations. Tuan succinctly reasons the importance of this relationship further, explaining,

Home is an intimate place. We *think* of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well: the attic and the cellar, the fireplace and the bay window, the hidden corners, a stool, a gilded mirror, a chipped shell. (144)

Kawauchi, entranced by these tiniest of details, seems content to let the world come to her as it wishes to be seen, much as Silverman describes our visual relationship with the world we encounter.

The Italian writer and journalist Italo Calvino, through his Novel *Mr Palomar*, examines the act of observing the world, so inherent to the practices of Kawauchi and Cooper, through his character-cum-alter ego Mr Palomar. Taking the solipsist position, that we can only know ourselves, *Mr Palomar* attempts to open up one man's interior world and make it public. Mr Palomar is an awkward character, who views himself as a social misfit, and the novel explores his inner thoughts as he undertakes his series of observational exercises in an attempt to better understand the world he lives in and his relationship to it. Through Mr Palomar, Calvino offers a description of the subjective viewpoint of the individual looking out from his interior world to the exterior world around him. Calvino sets up a series of situations that allow for a study of the world's natural phenomena and an individual's subjective reactions to these phenomena. This

subjective viewpoint is inescapable and affects our understanding of, and relationship with, the world around us.

Taking *Mr Palomar*, as a starting point, I have explored through my own photographs how a place can be represented inclusive of my own subjective point of view^{vii}. I observed the garden at my parents' house; a small garden, that in summer is bursting with bushy plants and flowers. It is also the garden of my childhood, and I have many personal memories rooted within that place. The photographs I made were taken during August when everything seemed to be at its fullest and brightest. Mr Palomar's attempts to understand his place within the world and his inability to escape it led me to consider how I can view the world around through the lens of my experiences and memories. Within my series of images I endeavour to mimic Mr Palomar's attempts to see a wave and record its whole. The images are not intended as a true visual representation of my parents' garden. Instead they are photographs of the sensation of being present within the garden. I am alluding to my own relationship with the garden and the history of stories and emotions involved in that relationship. The images show no detail, just a mix of colours and shapes that one could suppose to be leaves or flowers. Shapes and colours can be assigned descriptions in an attempt to describe the garden, but this will be an invented series of names. These images are a deliberate obfuscation of the visible world. By refusing the viewer a literal image that would describe the garden, I am denying the details of my vision. Through this I am controlling the image and its content, so controlling what the viewer can see. By controlling what the viewer sees I am expressing

solely my own subjective view, I am taking command of what appears within the image and also how it is viewed.

As Mr Palomar reacts to the visual stimuli around him, inciting various observational exercises, so my immediate surroundings act as my own stimuli within my practice.

Calvino describes the difficulty in considering the world through Mr Palomar's first observational task: to see a wave. Calvino describes this task as,

To perceive all its simultaneous components without overlooking any of them, his gaze will dwell on the movement of the wave that strikes the shore, until it can record aspects not previously perceived; as soon as he notices that the images are being repeated, he will know he has seen everything he wanted to see and he will be able to stop. (4).

Mr Palomar must be obsessive in the extreme to complete this task. He must pay absolute attention to every detail of the wave, and surely to reach the point where he has seen the whole of the wave, even in segments, he must spend an immense amount of time watching an infinite number of waves. Mr Palomar starts to consider all that is involved in his task and attempts to control the parameters of his observations, reducing the area he will observe to a small square of sea. He repeats his act of observation, every time thinking he has seen it all, but each new watch reveals more stages in the wave's existence. He keeps piecing the various parts together to create the perfect viewing of a wave. But "Concentrating the attention on one aspect makes it leap into the foreground and occupy the square, just as, with certain drawings, you only have to close your eyes and when you open them the perspective has changed." (6). This description of vision

also relates to the photograph and how the photographer controls, or manipulates, how the image is viewed. Directing the viewer's focus to one part of an image, or taking focus away from another allows the photographer to convey intent by dictating what appears as important. In my work I reduced the area of the garden I was looking at, attempting not to photograph the whole, but just a small part. However, through photographing this small part I am attempting to allude to much more; to a whole personal history to form continuity with ones self as memory.

In the final set of stories, Calvino has Mr Palomar examine his role within his observations. He starts by claiming that Mr Palomar, “will be looking at things from the outside.” (101). Attempting to explain Mr Palomar's attitude in understanding this shift of his observations, Calvino writes, “Yet it has always happened that certain things – a stone wall, a seashell, a leaf a teapot – present themselves to him as if asking him for minute and prolonged attention.” (101). This seems to speak to the practice of Kawauchi and her attention to the smallest details, creating a sense of empathy with which the viewer can relate to the content of the image, or in this instance, the reader can relate to. Mr Palomar and his subjective relationship with the world is a relationship we can all relate to as we all experience through our own histories and memories, we all have a subjective relationship with the world before us and around us. In effect Mr Palomar is also complying with Silverman's insistence that vision is attracted rather than cast, that something wants to be seen, rather than the eye intending to see it. Calvino reasserts this suggestion by stating, “Mr Palomar has decided that from now on he will redouble his

attention: first, by not allowing these summons to escape him as they arrive from things; second to attribute to the observer's operation the importance it deserves." (101).

In relation to the concept of a subjective viewpoint already discussed, Tuan states, "Intimate occasions are often those on which we become passive and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, exposed to the caress and sting of new experience" (137). He succinctly describes how we must open ourselves up to those moments described by Calvino and shown by Kawauchi. Tuan is stating that we must give up the act of searching for them and allow those moments to appear before us. Seemingly agreeing with Silverman's suggestions that we are called to see, Tuan sets about describing a method for engaging with the world through our vision, a method that is passive. Defining the relationship we all have to place as, "Each intimate exchange has a locale which partakes in the quality of the human encounter" Tuan is stating that reacting to the stimulus that calls our attention has a direct relationship to the place we are present in (141). Place allots further significance to these moments as place allocates these moments within specific memories.

Tuan suggests that, "There is far more to experience than those elements we choose to attend to. In large measure, culture dictates the focus and range of our awareness" (148). Tuan is stating that culture influences and affects each person, meaning the specific cultures in which we have grown up also affect our relationship with the larger world, as well as influencing our relationship with others. Landscape too, falls into this category. It affects our relationship with the world. The idea that there is "far more to experience

than those elements we choose to attend to” almost seems a poetic description of the photographic frame. So when Tuan suggests that as individuals we can only ever do the same, we can never see the whole, like Mr Palomar attempting to step back from the world to see it but failing, we can never truly leave the world to observe it, for we are always a part of it. Tuan goes on to describe the paradox that Mr Palomar finds himself trapped within when he writes, “Thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence” (148). We see the world like a photograph, limited by a frame of vision. This paradox allows the audience to empathise with a photographer’s subjective experience, as we can never see the whole, larger picture outside of our immediate vision and surroundings.

In considering my own relationship to place, I have explored my own relationship to the specific landscapes of my homeland, England. I have spent time photographing the coastline of the North East of England^{viii}. The coastline from the North East is diverse; covering sandy beaches, to high rocky cliffs, to industrialised towns, to empty, almost uninhabited areas. This landscape has been an influence on the history of the region: in terms of industry, it was a former mining and ship building hub; in terms of cultural changes, it was a point from which religion and invaders such as the Vikings, entered the British Isles. The Sea is a very definite entity that has affected many artists throughout history. Thomas Joshua Cooper’s images from *True* described in the previous chapter

exemplify this, as does Hiroshi Sugimoto's series *Seascapes*⁶, by acting upon an acknowledgement of the influence of the sea upon people.

My own images were taken during winter, a particularly bleak time in the region where the colours seem to be de-saturated into a mix of browns and greys. The photographs were made during a time of introspection as I considered my own changing relationship with this landscape I was in the process of leaving behind. Charting the coastline, the images turn inland and also out to sea as considerations of this region are shown. The land shows the history of the place, scars from industry, specific features, the topography of the land. The images that look out become more introspective as they consider the influence the sea has had upon the region and also personally upon myself. Through the series of images I engage with Adams' three verities by showing the geography, my personal relationship with the landscape, and, through the alternating view of looking inland and out to sea, offers a sense of metaphor as to the effects of the landscape on the region and myself by offering a visualisation of my own act of looking out to the

⁶ In this evolving series of images, Sugimoto places his camera on top of a cliff overlooking a sea and frames the photograph so that half the frame is filled with sea, the other half sky. He then records this potentially identical image numerous times at many points upon many seas. Whilst each image appears different due to light and weather conditions, the underlying composition is identical. The lack of any defining landmarks or gestures within the images makes identifying where the images geographically are almost impossible. Michael Fried eloquently describes the repetitive composition of *Seascapes* as; "all have the same extremely simple internal structure though they also differ considerably from one another depending on lighting and weather conditions and the precise state of the water." (294). The only information we are given is contained within the title Sugimoto gives each image, which offers a geographic location, for example each image carries a country name and the name of a specific sea or ocean. Sugimoto has spoken coherently of his ideas behind his project, addressing his relationship to The Sea within some of his writings and talks. The Sea becomes almost a character of childhood memory and imagining for Sugimoto, visiting him in half dreams and obscure moments (Kellein 91).

landscape and looking internally to my subjective view. Further, I am controlling vision and intent, and building up a story examining my internal and external relationship with the landscape. Through this simple act of looking in and out I am directing the viewers attention to my own relationship with landscape.

As Mr Palomar considers his troubles with his attempts to bear witness to the world, he ponders on his place within it. He comes to the conclusion that to really see the world he must step back to be outside its parameters. However, he realises his problem with this conclusion; he is contained within the world, so he can never step outside of its parameters to reconsider it. Mr Palomar then realises he will only see the world as and when it calls to him to be seen. He may see objects before him but cannot force significance upon what he sees, concluding that he will only feel an emotional connection when something calls to be seen. The significance in Mr Palomar's struggles is that through his observations he offers a photographic like representation of the world he is contained within. He describes the topography of his surroundings, and describes his internalised personal relationship to what is around him. Finally he expands upon that immediate relationship by attempting to understand the links between his solipsistic inner world and the exterior world he physically inhabits. In many ways he describes the geography, autobiography and metaphor that make up Robert Adams' three verities. Importantly, Mr Palomar describes his world through the specific framing of his subjective view, and much like the photograph's frame, it shows a specifically chosen view.

Chapter 4 - An Explanation Of *Neither Here Nor There*

My Thesis Project, *Neither Here Nor There*^{ix}, represents my relationship with two specific landscapes. To indicate a sense of displacement, that I am emotionally between places, it has been entitled *Neither Here Nor There*. This is suggestive of my personal position of having left one place to arrive in another, and finding that I am being influenced in this new place by memories of the previous place. One place is the landscape of my childhood, in the North East of England. The other is of Vancouver and its immediate surroundings, this is the landscape of my adulthood.

The images seek to dissect and examine my subjective relationship to each individual place shown. The photographs are separated into two categories for each locale. The first is a series of landscapes while the second is a series of photographs concentrating on interior spaces. Both these types of places, interior and exterior, are shown side by side in contrast to each other. The contemplation of place as described by Yi Fu Tuan is deeply imbedded within my work. Tuan surveys the differing associations we make regarding home, and its importance within many facets of our lives. As I have explored my own position within the world and my specific relationship to the two locations, I have imbued these places with personal significance and importance as they represent the place of my childhood and the place of my adulthood. The aim in this is to consider the concept of home by examining different definitions of what home represents. Home can be the house, the building one shelters in, but it can also be expanded out to be a land or landscape (Tuan 144-145).

The act of taking the images has been based around observing the places depicted, and considering my personal relationship to them. Each image is considered via the filter of my personal perspective. I have my own memories of each place. These memories are the starting point for my re-examinations of place, which, ostensibly, is what these photographs are. The reasoning behind each image is essentially private, something I, the photographer, will not openly share with the viewer, but which I use in a metaphorical way to frame the image. I am enticing the viewer in with an unexplained, unobtainable, and intangible reasoning – my own.

The images shown are part of a growing series. The intent is to have between ten and fifteen images for each geographical region. The images from England explore my memories and experiences associated with the region, and the images from Vancouver show my explorations of this place through experiencing it first hand. The use of a series allows each pairing of images to delve into its own story of memory and experience whilst offering a description of the locale, whilst the overall effect of the series describes my overarching sense of each place. It allows me to be suggestive without being direct in each image, as they are only a segment of a larger representation of my relationship to the two defining places depicted in the series.

The interior photographs are concerned with small details within the spaces depicted, objects that can allude to a specific memory without ever informing the viewer what that memory may actually be. There is a deliberate ambiguity within these images so as to be

suggestive, they act as signifiers and clues to the viewer, but without ever stating why I am specifically looking at this. At times they seem like they could carry a weight of significance, but do not suggest what this significance is or where it stems from. The worn armrest of an old chair could be representative of many moments in the past that are personal to the photographer, but can also carry a weight with the viewer's memories of home too. The viewer is left with a freedom, through a lack of specificity, to impose their own interpretations and experiences onto the photographs. A shower curtain photographed with an almost deadpan banality carries a lot less narrative and is much harder to read. What associations can one make with a shower curtain? Again this ambiguity as to why the camera has been trained on this specific object and framed in such a way is intended as an invitation for the viewer to participate in the reading of the image. Often there is a deliberate use of depth of field or focus to obscure aspects of the image. This pushes other elements or details within each image sharply into or out of focus, directing the eye of the viewer to specific details within the image. The question the viewer must consider is "What exactly is the photographer intending me to see?" Though I offer up an image, I deliberately make the point obtuse, not wanting to state why I am showing this particular image. Yet within the image I am deliberately directing the viewer's eye.

By contrast the landscape photographs act as descriptions of two geographic places. But within this concept of description there is a banality of content and a generic sensibility within the composition. Through this a lack of specificity is offered to the viewer. The importance this has upon the images is that rather than stating where the image is, it

states where it is not. This is the entry point for the viewer. To the viewer the images show non-places rather than specific locations, however to myself, the photographer they show locales in which memory is based. Again, information is deliberately withheld from the viewer, preventing the images from being documents, or documentary in intent, and enhancing their subjective nature, much like Kawauchi's images cannot be described as documents. There is no polemic about either place, but instead a subtler attempt to confer a personal relationship onto this non-place. To further emphasise this, within the images taken around Vancouver, where the city is heavily present throughout, the banality of the quotidian world takes the place of the emptiness of the landscapes from England. Within both sets of images there is a lack of direct human presence. This emphasises my intent as the images are rooted in memory. A memory cannot be reproduced for another person. So although my photographs use personal memory as a starting point, and this cannot be re-conveyed to the viewer, I am asking the viewer to accept the importance of the content without describing the significance of the memory that lies at its base. Importantly it further imposes my subjectivity onto the images and further removes the ability of the images to be descriptive documents.

The exterior photographs from both places have been taken whilst on walks⁷, and are a product of my response to this experience. As stated my personal memory becomes the fundamental reason for taking these photographs. I am constructing these images as a

⁷ Walking is a significant act, loaded with meaning and historical importance and is a prevalent tool in many forms of art and writing. Notable influences on my own thoughts around the act of walking include Robert Walser, W G Sebald and Rebecca Solnit. My use of the walk enables me to slow down the process of my vision. By this I mean it allows me to be present within the physical world and let it influence and affect me. Walking offers time to stop and reflect on the relationship I have with the physical world.

result of my responses. My view of these landscapes is grounded in my personal and subjective experience, as I stated earlier, and they are not intended as factual representations of any historic and geographic location. Exemplifying this subjective and deeply personal relationship with the landscape is an important part of the project. It represents the invisible connections we all have through memory and experience to Place. The Place of our childhood is deeply significant as it is the starting point of our explorations into the larger world. As Tuan states, we start with the comfort of the cradle of parents arm and branch outwards (138). Through these images I have re-explored memories, considered why I still feel drawn to these places through childhood remembrances. The image becomes a representation of the present landscape though my relationship with it based on an older memory invisible to the viewer. My former experiences and memories of this place can be re-valued by actually being present there once again. Importantly, I am also able to re-examine these places through the filter of the photographic process. Taking Sontag's concerns with regard to the camera mediating experience - that the camera acts as a barrier from experiencing the world - in this use the camera acts as a focusing tool. The camera allows me to use the process of photography to permit myself to consider more than the world directly in front of me, making the resultant photograph more than a mere reaction to the world, but a considered response to my being present in a place where my personal memory already exists.

By contrast the landscapes from Vancouver and the surrounding area are explorations of a place in which I am currently resident. They record the construction of memory rather than the reliving of it. Whilst based within my immediate scope of experience and

memory, these images have more in common with Barthes' idea of the punctum and Silverman's concepts on the authority of vision, as I am exploring the landscape, experiencing it first hand, making photographs that are influenced by this immediacy of experience. They are recorded reactions to the physical world as witnessed by my presence within it. They are images based on an interaction with and a reaction to the world. Through this the world is offered an opportunity to express itself by affecting my vision and attraction, much in the way Silverman has described. These are images based on a physical interaction with the world, but based in a subjective reaction of what that exterior world is doing to my self. Moreover, through this interaction the world is offered an opportunity to express itself, via the visible landscape, through the photograph, in this instance *my* photograph. The relationship between what I see and why I see at a particular moment is allowed to flourish, unlike the interior images, or indeed the landscapes from England, where I enforced my own intent onto the resulting image.

As I explore Vancouver, creating new experiences, I build up a body of memories of this place through the act of photographing. These images become a documentation of exploration, but unlike traditional documentations of place, they are heavily affected by my own subjective vision and attractions. I focus on what I am drawn to, rather than any specific topographic or factual representation. While I may be in a visual relationship with the world, each photograph I make is carefully constructed. Each image is deeply autobiographical as it shows my presence within these places.

Mr Palomar's observational exercises have affected how I have approached this project. Having considered my relationship to specific places, in a manner described by Tuan of many individuals' relationships with the concept of home, my next act was to consider how I would observe these places in order to photograph them. By considering how one looks at the physical world, and the attention given to specific objects or scenes, allows me to further investigate my own relationship to specific places. Calvino uses Mr Palomar to explore an individual's relationship with the world they are contained within, both physically via the external tangible world and internally through their subjective experience of the same world. By considering how I am drawn to a place and then discovering what in that place draws me further into taking a photograph, be it memory or attraction, allows me greater control over my photographs. The framing of the content becomes more considered, influencing how the image will look, and how it will relate within the series.

The pairing of the images is an important aspect of the project. These pairings are based on formal qualities, choosing images that complement each other and offer an intriguing composition, rather than a direct relationship between interior and exterior, which would be difficult to construct. I state this because all the images are linked yet still separate entities in their own right. By linking these images the viewer again must consider why they are being shown these different places and what within them seems to be thrown into focus and why. And likewise, what is obscured and why.

To summarise, the photographs in this project are deliberately constructed through my subjectivity. They are paired, interior and exterior, to form a dialogue between two quite different places, both of which I refer to as home. Charting cityscapes, agricultural landscapes, mountains, forests and seascapes and contrasting this exterior world with the interior space of the abode, also referred to as home, the images chart my personal sense of Place within the larger physical world. The importance of this is to state “*This* is England! And *this* is Canada!” further, to state, “I regard this place as home and this place as home.” In effect I am attempting to realise Robert Adams’ statement from the beginning of this essay; “a rediscovery and revaluation of where we find ourselves” (20). Adams’ statement describes the methodology behind my practice and an entry point for the viewer to access the work. By offering this access point I allow for the viewer to empathise with the image and its contents. This project is a rediscovery and revaluation of where *I* find *myself* through my own subjective viewpoint. As discussed earlier in this paper, the viewer will bring their own histories of experience to bear on the photographs, and this is beyond the control of the photographer, it affects how the image is received. However, I have asserted my own intent by representing my subjective vision and experience of these places, and I am claiming this authorship as still significant in the understanding of the photographic image.

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Fig. 1 - Adam Stenhouse. From The Series; *Lake Kennedy*. 2010

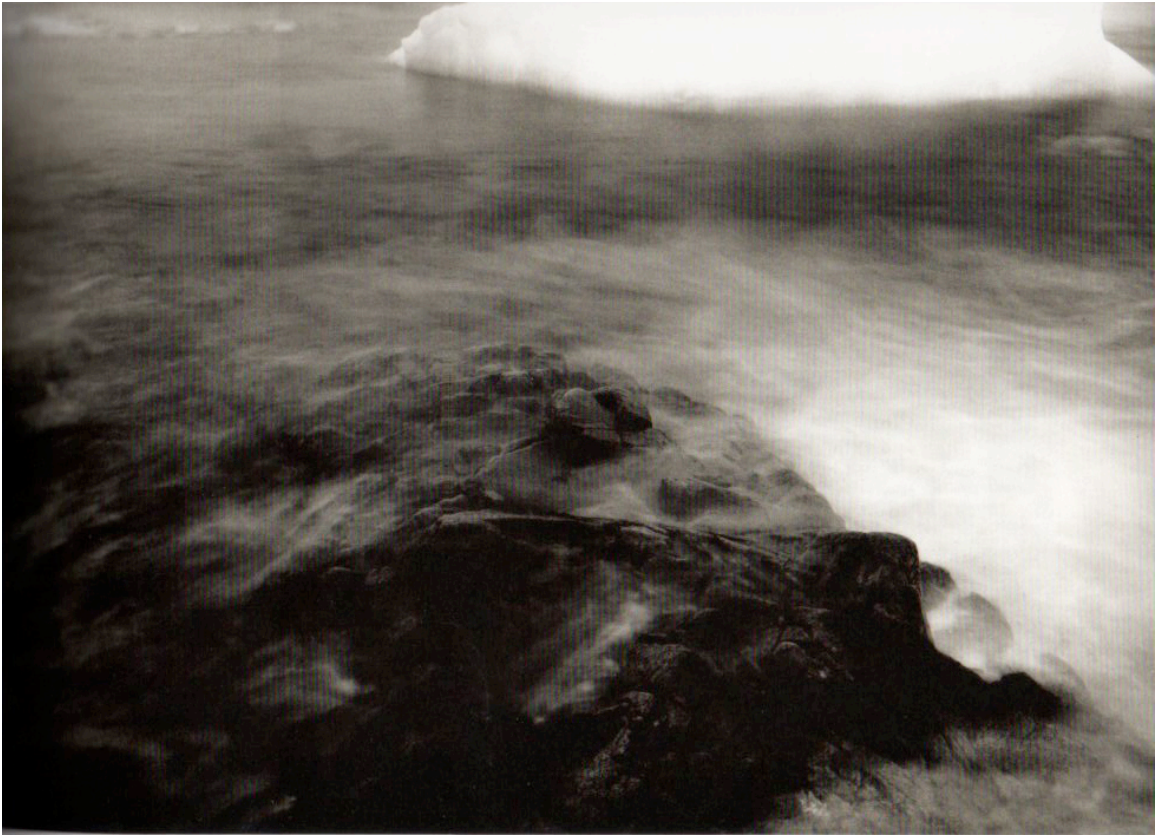


Fig. 2 - Thomas Joshua Cooper. *“uncharted dangers” – blanketing dense fog, The Bransfield Strait, The Mouth of The Antarctic Sound, Looking towards Prime Head, “Catherine Island”, Antarctica. 2008.*

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Fig. 4 - Rinko Kawauchi. *Untitled* From *The Eyes, The Ears*. 2005.



Fig. 5 - Rinko Kawauchi. *Untitled* From *The Eyes, The Ears*. 2005



Fig. 5 - Rinko Kawauchi. *Untitled* From *The Eyes, The Ears*. 2005



Fig. 6 - Rinko Kawauchi. *Untitled* From *The Eyes, The Ears*. 2005.



Fig. 7 - Adam Stenhouse. *The Garden III*. 2011.



Fig. 8 - Adam Stenhouse. *The Garden I*. 2011.



Fig. 9 - Adam Stenhouse. *Untitled* 2011.



Fig. 10 - Adam Stenhouse. *Untitled* 2011.



Fig. 11 - Adam Stenhouse. *Untitled* 2011.



Fig. 12 - Adam Stenhouse. *Neither Here*. 2012.



Fig. 13 - Adam Stenhouse. *Nor There*. 2012.