

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The people, yes

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, April 29th, 2020

In the spirit of Carl Sandburg and Lee Friedlander

I introduce here an occasional series of photo essays combining a paradigmatic image, with some of my own, on varied themes in the spirit of the title of a poetic series by Carl Sandburg: **“The people, yes”**

The paradigmatic image we present here is by the well-known American photographer **Lee Friedlander** who never missed an opportunity *to place the viewer in front of some social-spatial ambiguity as shown in the feature image* titled **“The portrait of the photographer”**, in reference to the projected shadow of his head on the coat of a woman walking in front of him.

*Given the social distancing convention between strangers of different gender in public space, the viewer cannot but participate in the **ambiguity and cleverness, if not the embarrassment, of the situation.***

The figure of the human back

“L’homme de dos” is the title of a scholarly book, on the representation of people with their back turned toward the viewer, in painting and the theatre, and where I found the general inspiration for this post to photographically document ***people viewed from the back, in situations which remain fleeting and open to interpretation.***

The wedding party at riverside



wedding party at riverside

How to read that image outside of its literal content: the bare back bride and bride’s-maid in sandals, holding bottled water, flowers and shoes, seem to have more to do with the spirit of the picnicking group than with the tuxedo clad man leading them.

What are they moving toward?

*The grassy knoll, the rocky river's edge, the blue stretch of water and the deep green forest across it, spell "**nature**," while the tuxedo and dresses spell "**cultural norm**."*

Is the wedding party moving toward a riverside photo-op spot?

Does the wedding party want a break from formality and is heading for a fresh place to dunk their aching feet in?

There is no way to know for certain and the only option open to the viewer is to guess what comes next!

The singer and the tourist crowd



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Her back turned so as to take in the sun, the singer sits on the edge of a wide sitting platform, near her musicians off image.

The statue admiring crowd *seems to have changed places with her, as the center of attention, while three red spots triangulate the image, placing the singer at its visual apex.*

The flea-market antique dealer and the bust sculpture ...



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... seem to have had an argument about where to place that bouquet of artificial flowers ... he seems to have picked one up and placed it in her hair, *before turning around* and moving on.

I suppose the art of antique display must be consciously disorderly, in order for the randomness to underscore the emotional moment of THE FIND by the antique amateur, or for a surprising and revealing ANGLE to be found by the photographer.

Finnegan's open- air flea-market: open mid-April thru mid-October, every Saturday, come rain or shine over Hudson, Quebec.

End words ... and image

The visual figure of the human back does not allow to identify the person, i.e. who it is, but only *what it may be doing and possibly its gender*; in this situation, the context plays an important role in filling the blanks.

The back of a person can draw attention if the person is standing or seated while looking at something or at an event; *in such a case it may arouse our own curiosity.*

The back of a person moving away implies a destination, therefore producing in the viewer *the consciousness of his/her own movement, or potential for such*

I believe film and stage directors, and photographers assigned to them, know how to exploit these basic expressive situations to great effect. Just imagine the photo below without the waving person her back to us ... it would never make the press release!



the waving lady at the Tour de France

Bibliographical note

Banu, George: *L'homme de dos*, Adam Biro, Paris, 2001

Credit

The feature image and the one of the Tour de France, to be credited to thematic web sites of *Bing/images*.

All other images to be credited to Maurice Amiel

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