

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Through the Car Window

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, August 5th, 2020

As seen by famous street photographers **Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, and Robert Frank**, a car window is not just an opening through which to *frame an image*, but that it should *tellingly incorporate **the window itself and what is around it***.

The resulting impression on the viewer, as when looking at the feature image by Frank, is *to feel, in an uncanny way, **like being at that very moment at the place of the photographer**: slightly bending and at close enough range to engage the woman at the window in an exchange that would redirect her attention long enough to discretely press the camera shutter*.

*While Friedlander is a master at compositions that play with spatial and depth perception, Winogrand and Frank produced images sensitive to social situations and conditions ... **effects I have endeavored to cover in the choice of images and in the accompanying commentary***.

When a car window includes a mirror ...

... as in the image below, a classic Friedlander, the viewer has the uncanny feeling the mirror reflects *his/her face, strangely placed in a context that is located behind him/her*.



window with multiple views

The depth of the reflected image causes it to somehow blend with the view out of the window, creating a jarring visual experience particularly when trying to locate oneself in space.

When a car window mediates a social relation between driver inside and people outside



What are you doing here ... fellow?

Stopped at a pedestrian crossing, **in the above image**, Garry Winogrand is getting a “funny” look from some pedestrians *obviously conscious of being photographed by someone who may not have any business being there!*

We can expect the pedestrians who follow them to notice this and maybe turn their head also to see what arose their curiosity.

We will never know if that would be the case but *we can sense, through identification with him, the subtle unease Winogrand may have felt for being told nonverbally that he was out of place photographing them.*

In the image below, did Lee Friedlander have someone take that photo or did he place a camera on the hood of his car and set it on delay? *Knowing he titled this image an **auto-portrait**, it may be the second option he took here.*



autoportrait

Yet we strangely feel, looking at his expression, as if he were waiting for us to get out of the way, and that it is one of us, the viewers, who took that shot while passing in front of the stopped car.

Knowing Friedlander's skill at image composition, the placement of the two windshield wipers, touching each other at the center of the view through the rear window, is *producing a spatial depth rarely seen in portraits.*

Discussion

The narrative potential of the view through a car window has reminded us of the way such play of views had served to create suspense in the heartbreak scene of ***The Bridges of Madison County* film.**

In that scene Meryl Streep is a passenger in her husband's truck, from which she perceives, standing under pouring rain by his truck, Clint Eastwood, with whom she had a brief but very moving affair and who has returned to convince her to leave her husband and join him.

As the scene develops and both trucks have stopped at a red light, Clint Eastwood gives Meryl Streep a sign that she can see through his rear window and her windshield ... at that point the camera goes to her hand nervously playing with the truck door handle.

*That back and forth play of points of view makes us feel all **the emotional tension** in Meryl Streep's situation, and the **suspense** in her having to decide **right there and then** whether to join Clint Eastwood turning left at the light, or to remain with her husband going straight on ... a real heartbreaking scene I invite the reader to see on the You tube link:*

Credit

All Friedlander's images are taken from:

Lee Friedlander: *Like a one-eyed cat – photographs 1956-1987, Catalog of a Seattle Art Museum exhibition*, Harry N. Abrams, N.Y., 1989

The Winogrand image is taken from:

Leo Rubinfien (Ed.): *Garry Winogrand, Catalog of an exhibition*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2013

The Frank image is taken from:

Greenough, S.: *Robert Frank's, The Americans – Looking in*, National Gallery of art, Washington / STEIDL, 2009

The Bridges of Madison County:

A 1995 film, produced and directed by Clint Eastwood with Kathleen Kennedy as co-producer.

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