

DOCUMENTARY FILM AT THE
HEART OF TRAUMA

by

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DEDICATION

For Margrit Fehlmann, with special thanks to Mike and Maggie Adkins, Homer Terry, Arlene Roemer de Feltre, and the friends and faculty who never waived in their support of my academic career.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the inherent complexities involved in the creation and interpretation of documentary film and photography as it addresses historical trauma. Each auteur is situated in, and limited by, the ideological frameworks of their time. This makes documentation around sites of trauma problematic. The Johari Window is used as a template to show that cultural blind spots are inevitable. The works of Jean Rouch and Edward Curtis, who documented colonized Africans and colonized American Indians, respectively, are offered as proof that these blind spots show up in our work. Critiques of Rouch and Curtis reveal the auteurs' racism and colonial privilege, despite their seeming enlightened perspectives about the colonized Other. The repetitive return by Rouch and Curtis to victimized and dominated subjects serves as evidence of their own trauma around the human atrocities inflicted by their own social group. Enrichment from colonization does not preclude traumatization, especially when one is witness, but helpless, to end the suffering. With contradictory forces at work in our psychologies, documentary can be an opportunity for intervention and healing or it can reiterate and reinforce the hierarchies that enabled the violence in the first place.

INTRODUCTION

Documentary film has long been drawn to sites of trauma: *Shoah* (1985), *Ghosts of Rwanda* (2004), *Hearts and Minds* (1974), *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976), *Roger and Me* (1989), *Gasland* (2010), *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), and the list, of course, goes on extensively. These films demonstrate that “[h]istorical trauma is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma” (Brave Heart, 1995, para. 2).

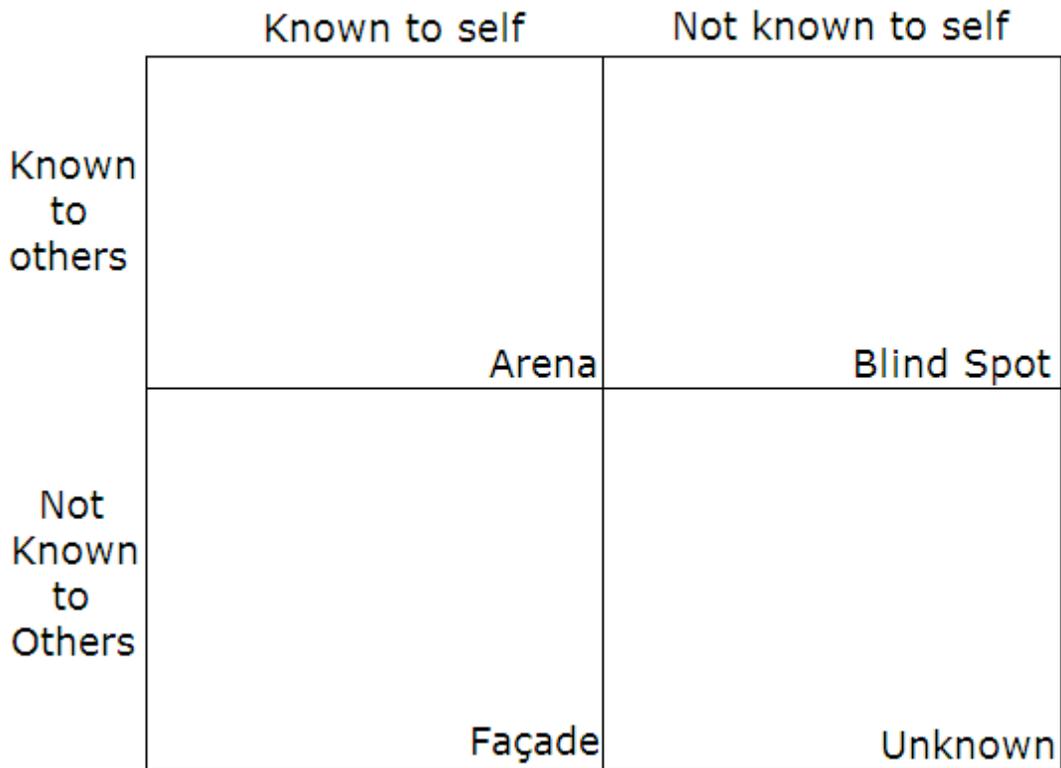
Documentaries that foreground trauma, make an effort to expose human atrocity and to give voice to silenced victims. In doing such, they potentially play an important role in providing understanding and potential healing. At the same time, documentarians need to be cautious in the way meaning is constructed in their films, especially when the subjects are outside of the auteur’s cultural framework.

The Johari Window is a cognitive therapy technique, invented in 1955 at the University of California, Los Angeles, by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham to help people understand relationships with themselves and others. The Johari Window (Fig. 1) works on the same principles as the Punnett Square, a “simple graphical way of discovering all of the potential combinations of genotypes that can occur...given the genotypes of the parents” (anthro.palomar.edu). The Johari Window breaks up the human psyche into four quadrants: 1) The Arena: that knowledge which is known by both the individual and the group about the self; 2)

The Blind Spot: that knowledge which is known by the group but not by the self about the self; 3) The Façade: that knowledge which a person knows about himself or herself but that is unknown to the group; and 4) The Unknown: that which is not known by either the self or the group about the self.

I introduce the Johari Window because it offers a profound insight: we do not, and cannot, know everything about ourselves or about another. The Other is a concept articulated most directly in terms of imperialistic relationships by Edward Said in *Orientalism* as referring to the way the West has defined itself as the norm and everyone outside of this group as alien or divergent. By defining an Other, it “confirm[s] what is already evident: that they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves” (Said, 36). This defining of the Other in the Western narrative has naturalized the language of hierarchy between marginalized groups and those in power. This othering has very little to do with the actual subjects and, instead, speaks more of Western projections. When processes of othering become naturalized, they become invisible. Therefore, it becomes difficult to *fully* comprehend our time or the mechanisms of power at work in the culture in which we are immersed. Since it is the role of documentary to provide spectators with visions into the panes of the Johari Window, through the Façade, and into the Blind Spot, it is imperative that we as documentary filmmakers understand, as well as possible, the codes of meaning in our own cultures so that we might make informed choices as to what worldviews we wish to reinforce in our work.

Johari Window



(Fig. 1)

This conundrum of known and unknown information is unavoidable and not meant to dissuade the auteur, but rather to provide insight. Documentary has the power to form public opinion; therefore, we must keep in mind the example of Johari Window to illustrate that unconscious and subconscious formations underpin our endeavors. It is inevitable that the contemporary operating assumptions informing our work contain unrevealed codes of power not within the scope of our intention or within our ethical understanding of others or ourselves.

The Johari Window provides evidence in support of theories of trauma, in that traumatic events are notorious sites for blind spots and unknowns. In the Freudian lexicon, “Disavowal (Denial)” is “a mode of defense which consists in the subject’s refusal to recognize the reality of traumatic perception” (Cohen 225). Furthermore, “[u]ncomfortable truths are too threatening to ‘know,’ so they are unconsciously banished to some inaccessible zone of the mind” (Cohen 23). This denial of information within and by ourselves offers some explanation as to the mysterious existence of the Unknown pane of the Johari Window. By addressing traumatic events in history, around culture and nature, documentary endeavors to break through modes of ‘defence’ and reveal community experiences that have been banished to the Unknown pane.

Films as artifacts of culture reveal layers beyond topic and exposition, surrounding the disavowal of the wound. These reels of images provide a taxidermy, a preserved specimen, of the psychological make-up of the auteur. Since the filmmaker controls what the audience sees and constructs meaning through juxtaposition, the cultural narratives that inform the filmmaker can be read in these artifacts. This paper examines two colonial/imperial documentarians, Jean Rouch and Edward S. Curtis, that made subjects of the colonized Other. Both devoted their lives, through their work, to documenting groups their own cultures had marginalized. This required nonviolent, working relationships between themselves and their subjects, yet their works are criticized today for their dominant and racist portrayals.

For the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who grappled with concepts of morality, “language is a social battleground, the place where political struggles are engaged both comprehensively and intimately. Human beings do not simply enter into language as a master code; they participate in it as socially constituted subjects” (Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* 79). The historical documentary work of Rouch and Curtis both failed at recreating codes of meaning and served to reinforce colonial concepts and hierarchical power relations.

Agendas with power and control as their underlying motives are most often situated squarely within dominant ideologies and utilize the language in place to persuade the masses. Even seemingly politically neutral forms of media, such as products meant for entertainment or education, can reinforce hierarchical frameworks and garner unconscious support from consumers. It is primarily in hindsight that hidden agendas and embedded codes can be deciphered. The NGS (National Geographic Society), for example, “is a master narrator, steeped in the techniques of giving visual pleasure and satisfying the desires for pleasure through the filmic rhetorical strategy of identification” (Haraway 158). NGS photographs and narrations have compelled generations of Western readers from all walks of life to enjoy its pages while subliminally reinforcing notions of the exotic Other in the Western mind. Rouch and Curtis, despite their noble intentions, made products out of the colonized Other for public consumption. In so doing, they essentially exploited the people they documented. Therefore, documentary must be certain that in addressing historical trauma, it doesn’t just make spectacle of it.

POSTMODERNISM

Contemporary film theory has of necessity to confront the phenomena summed up in the slippery and polysemic term “postmodernism,” a term which implies the global ubiquity of market culture, a new stage of capitalism in which culture and information become key terrains for struggle (Stam, *Film Theory* 299).

Postmodernism continues to inform dominant theoretical frameworks today; it is the language from which this author cannot escape. According to most critics, “[t]he postmodern era may be said to date from the end of WWII, determined by Hiroshima and even more importantly by Auschwitz” (Gans, 209). Postmodernism was born out of historical trauma, “[d]ominated by victimary. . . [t]he usually noted characteristics of the postmodern esthetic--its distrust of ‘the subject’ and of ‘master narratives,’” (Gans, 209). Postmodernism today, however, is considered wrought with instability. According to Stam, “postmodernism is seen as the aging of Aquarius, a symptom of the battle fatigue of tenured leftists, a signal of the obsolescence of left politics, now seen as uptight and puritanical” (Stam, *Film Theory* 302).

Third World critics have argued that postmodernism in general was merely another way for the West to repackage itself, to pass off its provincial concerns as universal conditions. “For the African, writes Denis Epko, ‘the celebrated postmodern condition [is] nothing but the hypocritical self-flattering cry of overfed and spoiled children’” (Stam, *Film Theory* 306).

At the same time that postmodernism reflects the abandonment of revolution, it also abandons the very notion of truths. Jacques Derrida countered the postmodern view that “all is interpretation” at the Cerisy Conference in 1993 by saying, “[t]o

embrace a “philosophy of interpretation...is to abandon altogether the very idea of facts: No facts, nothing but interpretation...” (Wood and David 20). Gary Steiner says that the pastiche of postmodernism and its emphasis on interpretation has “dire consequences for ethics.” He writes, “For entering this poppy field, we abandon the ideal of truth, and we render obscure if not entirely incoherent the idea of a basis for making ethical determinations that can be discussed and defended” (Steiner 8). Steiner goes on to point out the irony that:

[T]he postmodern denial of truth is itself a truth claim . . . [w]hat we are left with is an “endemic mistrust of positive truth claims” and the inability to articulate a constructive critical standpoint, on the one hand, and a sincere concern for problems of exploitation and suffering, on the other (Steiner 9).

Aesthetically, postmodernism allows for artistic freedom in documentary filmmaking. On the other hand, the postmodern pastiche makes a collage of everything, including the wounds from historical trauma. While references may be made to issues surrounding generational wounds, the reference is not *address*, and the issues remain fetishes of disavowel.

Commodity fetishism also bears witness to the persistent allure that images and things have for the human imagination and the pleasure to be gained from the belief in phantasmagorias and imaginary systems of representation...Objects and images, in their spectacular manifestations, are central to the process of disavowel, soaking up semiotic significance and setting up elisions of affect. Most of all, they are easily sexualized (Mulvey 5).

Therefore, postmodernism, does not really know how to address the issues of historical trauma in ways that would allow for healing.

TRAUMA THEORY

“Bollas comments: ‘Each of us is aware in ourselves of the workings of denial, of our need to be innocent of troubling recognition’”(Cohen 24-25).

A compulsion of repetition is a key component of the cycle of trauma as elucidated early on by Sigmund Freud and confirmed by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder research. Freud, in *Moses and Monotheism*, utilizes his psychoanalytic theory to hypothesize about the life of Moses. Modern scholars reject this analytical work as it “cannot be maintained in the face of contemporary views of biblical history” (Symington 72). However, the work is mentioned here because it reflects the trauma he experienced in the face of anti-Semitism and the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938.

The many false starts to the work... and Freud’s doubts that he can prove his argument, are symptoms of trauma: the style of the work embodies Freud’s traumatized consciousness as he writes. Traumatic markers dog the book throughout, not only in the many false starts, but in the repetitions, the constant return to past arguments, and the weaving in and out of positions vis-à-vis Moses (Caruth, 44).

This lens on Freud’s work provided by Caruth is the one applied to the works of Jean Rouch and Edward Curtis later in this thesis.

It is well established that humans are psychologically disturbed by the observation and awareness of violence despite not being the direct victims. Julia Kristeva, in her book *Black Sun*, “...argues that ‘the shattering of psychic identity’ that accompanies even the periphery of such events has an intensity no less violent

than war itself, but that is hard to perceive” (Caruth, 4-5). In her research and analysis of sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors, Alice Miller reveals:

[M]any psychological studies are being conducted that show the long-term effects of the war and Nazi regime as they relate to the second generation. Time after time, the amazing fact is uncovered that sons and daughters are unconsciously reenacting their parents’ fate – all the more intensely the less precise their knowledge of it. From the few bits and pieces they have picked up from their parents about early traumatization caused by war, they come up with fantasies based on their own reality, which they then often act out in groups during puberty (Miller 133-134).

Alongside the idea that members of a dominant group also experience traumatic responses to historical wounding events, is the placement of conscience in the colonial psyche. The absence of any constraining guilt or shame “implies a defective conscience mechanism. When a conscience-free individual emerges because of an inadequate or corrupting early environment, no amount of good will, understanding, [or] compassion will rectify the problem. . . .” (Palermo and Kocsis 27). A seat of privilege does not subsume conscience. Denial within the dominating group is due in part to in-group psychology and fear of going against the power that is committing violence, lest the violence be committed on the outspoken. Denial may also be the product of guilt and shame. This is where documentary that addresses historical trauma gets tricky. Viewing atrocity brings of denial, however, it may also simply pacify the audience and assuage their guilt and shame about not doing anything to stop the violence.

Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, “has been called upon by contemporary critics as showing a direct relation between Freud’s theory of trauma and historical violence, a directness presumably reflected in the theory of trauma he produces” (Caruth 58). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud opens with the “perplexed observation of a

psychic disorder that appears to reflect the unavoidable and overwhelming imposition of historical events on the psyche” (Caruth 58). This is to say that trauma has lasting, generational effects that inform the individual and collective psyches. This brings us back to the Johari Window with its knowns and unknowns. “It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience” (Caruth 58). Additionally, as Cohen point out in *States of Denial*, “Denial is always partial; some information is always registered. This paradox or doubleness – knowing and not knowing- is the heart of the concept” (Cohen 22). Ultimately, this doubleness provides a favorable moment for documentary, in that its mission is to discover and to reveal and the more potent the revelation, the greater chance to connect in a deep and meaningful way with the audience.

CULTURAL BLINDSPOTS

Early travelogues and exploratory ethnographic films, showed the grandeur and spectacle of exotic places. Viewed today, however, through the filter of contemporary theory, we discern that travelogues blatantly spell out the codes of imperial power. At the time when Martin and Osa Johnson were in Africa and the South Pacific, racist notions were so embedded in the Western worldview that the master-slave dialectic came naturally and unconsciously to the filmmakers. It has been stated that “[t]he Johnsons’ films...exploited racist conventions of early ethnographic filmmaking, exaggerated in their sensationalist stunts, as when in *Congorilla* (1932) they gave cigars to African pygmy tribesmen and photographed them choking” (Horak, “Osa Johnson”). Imperial codes are embedded in later films like *The Lost World of the Kalahari: Life in the Thirst Land* by Laurens Van der Post (1956), wherein Africans are always standing behind the explorer and white Imperials are always fore-grounded, making a very distinct separation between the highly civilized and the savage.

There has to be a *projected* Other for traumatic social relations to occur due to the predominant existence of the individual conscience. The Other is turned into Object through projected ideologies, and once objectified, the Other can be eliminated. Non-whites were historically labeled as savage, bestial, repugnantly sexual, therefore, extinguishable, like a dangerous wild animal. As savages, non-whites have been projected to be closer to nature, thus justifying the unconscious conclusion in the imperial mind that native death is more natural, a more obvious conclusion, in contrast to the elite colonial death, considered appalling and unnatural. Thus the native is made fetish,

Object, a worship that is a worship of the projection. “Both Freud and Marx use the concept of fetishism in an attempt to explain a refusal, or blockage, of the mind, or a phobic inability of the psyche, to understand a symbolic system of value, one with the social and the other within the psychoanalytic sphere” (Mulvey 2).

Filmmaking and photography, by virtue of the actual object/product for spectator viewing, reinforces the unconscious Western view of native as Object:

[T]he photograph has been said...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. Still, the presumed consent of the other to be photographed can give the viewer the illusion of having some relationship with him or her (Lutz and Collins 197).

To make this even more problematic, “It is well known that the fetish very often attracts the gaze” (Mulvey 6). Voyeurism is an intrinsic part of this social malady we call racism.

As documentarians we need to be aware that pictorial representation can function to reinforce constructed hierarchies of power and authority and not only mask, but legitimize, atrocity by confirming the Other as Object.

JEAN ROUCH, *LES MAÎTRES FOUS*

Jean Rouch was part of the French New Wave, politically aligned against colonialism. Rouch spent the greater part of his life, sixty-one years, in Africa working and making films with and among African companions. He held what were considered enlightened views on human rights, similar to those of Fanon and Sartre, yet his work still reflects his colonial privilege.

Jean Rouch's ethnographic film, *Les Maîtres Fous*, (1955) documents The Hauka, a religious ceremony and movement in French colonial Africa, formed in response to the historical trauma of colonial invasion. The Hauka ceremony mimics colonial hegemony in Niger, Africa. The Hauka ceremony is a symbolic inversion of the colonial invasion and domination. It is a practice of the carnivalesque, wherein power structures are turned on their heads.

As the "privileged locus of inversion," carnival allows all those who have been socially marginalized to take over, for a brief period, the symbolic center of national life. The business district, usually synonymous with serious productive labor, becomes the irradiating center of playfulness, and night changes places with day (Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* 130).

Since the carnivalesque serves a subversive psychological function for peoples located in marginalized positions, the Hauka are the masters of the ceremony. However, when the ceremony becomes the subject of documentary for colonial perusal, it equates to yet another, or even ongoing, loss of power, traumatization, and framing of the fetish. While Rouch filmed the Hauka in their seat of mastery, the film had negative responses beyond his intentions.

Les Maîtres Fous was banned in Niger and parts of Ghana for perpetuating “exotic racism” (Ferguson, 554). Even while Rouch lived in Africa and committed his life’s work to African peoples, as colonial auteur, the subject matter, gaze, and the language in *Les Maîtres Fous* was deemed to be in service to his master dialectic. Despite the deep relationships that made his work possible, Rouch’s work coded the colonial worldview and subsumed the healing and reciprocity between himself and others that arose from the direct human contact and well established respectful relationships he developed. The ban on Rouch’s film serves to support that personal and collective traumas do play ongoing roles over time in personal lives and in cultures.

For Western audiences of *Les Maîtres Fous*, the viscerality of the film has most often overridden the symbolic gestures in the ceremony and prevented deeper understanding of the meaning. The ceremony on screen does not accurately reflect the historical context from which this symbolic gesture arises. The frothing at the mouth, losing of consciousness, and sacrificing of a dog are located within the frame; the brutal and bloody truth of the colonization are excluded from the frame. In the absence of the direct horrors of the colonial experience, the symbolic performance becomes mere spectacle and serves as a means of erasure of the real horrors of the early colonization. The film, played in a theater for comfortable viewers, subsequently served to solidify the denial of the French offense and an erasure of guilt. In support of this:

On the one hand, photographs allow participation in the non-Western scene through vicarious viewing. On the other, they may also alienate the reader by way of the fact that they create or require a passive viewer and that they frame out much of what an actual viewer of the scene would see, smell, and hear, thereby atomizing and impoverishing experience (Lutz and Collins 197).

Rouch was also limited by the language of his colonial predecessors, which was the soil in which he was reared. This is evidenced throughout the film, but especially in his narrative use of the term “boy” to refer to African man. Contradictory though it may seem, his only option for discourse in rebellion to colonial pedagogy is the language and thought formations in which he was enculturated, amidst colonial legitimization, racist by necessity. His generation was at the beginning of the altering of the language in the battleground of colonial theory but had not yet developed.

Rouch’s career engagement with the colonized Other has the same stamps of trauma as Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, and reflects his own grappling with the trauma of his role as colonizer by proxy. As Alice Miller illustrated with her psychoanalytical work with the offspring of Holocaust survivors, I argue that Rouch and subsequent generations show signs of traumatic response to colonial and neocolonial violence and this wound within themselves compelled their work. It has been said that “[t]rauma is suffered in the psyche precisely, it would seem, because it is *not* directly available to experience” (Caruth 59). Rouch is unable to fully understand himself due in part to this wounding that is readily apparent but was not directly available to him. As a European, he can see the effects of colonization and be appalled at the behavior of his country, yet the subconscious workings of his own wound around colonization remain hidden in the Unknown pane of the Johari Window. In fact, it must go unrecognized and unacknowledged due to the intensity of the suffering of the direct victims and his relationship to the perpetrator. These factors combined leave Rouch never able to

completely identify with the colonized or be accepted by them. His suffering can only really manifest as guilt and further exploitation.

EDWARD SHERIFF CURTIS

In his first of 222 volumes of *The North American Indian*, published in 1907, American photographer and ethnographer, Edward Sheriff Curtis wrote, “The information that is to be gathered...respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost” (Curtis, sec. 1).

Contemporary, Native American theorist Gerald Vizenor elucidates the same point:

Natives were first simulated as savages in the common cultural binaries of savagism and civilization. Then, by chicanery, federal treaties, and military means natives were removed to reservations and nominated the vanishing race at the end of the nineteenth century (Vizenor 183).

Products for the visual pleasure of the dominant group played a role in providing an ethereal mystique to this vanishing. This included “George Catlin and many other artists, photographers, politicians, and an entire cultural system created the image and historical idea of the tragic savage at the vanishing point” (Vizenor 183).

Today, Curtis’s practices of “saving” culture have acquired the negatively viewed label of salvage ethnography. Salvage ethnography refers to the creation, in the name of preservation, of what a race looked like before white men arrived, at least according to the fantasy of the white man. “Mick Gidley rightly argues in *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Incorporated* that:

[T]he ideological thrust of the heritage of photographic pictorialism in Curtiss’s images worked, almost synergistically, to disguise, even deny, what was, in fact and effect, a seemingly almost endless series of damaging political and economic decisions. These decisions based on agency policies and new federal laws, such as the allotment act that reduced native treaty land by more than half, were carried out in the presence of Edward Curtis (Vizenor 185).

Curtis did not record the suffering of the Native Americans or show the crimes committed by the American government; instead he created beautiful pictures, both as salvage ethnography and for profit back in the cities. These are practices that theorists now resent and criticize as unethical and damaging (Vizenor 185).

Real images of real people make us think these photographs must be truth claims, when, actually, in Curtis's case, they are recreations, fictionalizations, and interpretations. Vizenor points out that "Curtis paid natives to pose; he selected ornaments, vestments, played the natural light, tone, picturesque reflections, and the solitary nature of natives in his pictures" (Vizenor, 188). He "created simulations of surveillance, the pictorialist pose of ethnographic images. He removed parasols, suspenders, wagons, the actual traces of modernism and material culture in his pictures of natives" (Vizenor 188). In one of Curtis's original photos "an alarm clock has been placed as a symbol of luxury between Little Plums and Yellow Kidney. Wanting to eliminate any trace of modern civilization from "The North American Indian," Curtis carefully retouched the photograph for the encyclopedia" (Edward Sheriff Curtis 96).

Removing the technology and tools of the white man solidifies the racist depictions of the American Indian as uncivilized and intellectually inferior; therefore, the act becomes political. In fact, the act is pure deception and Dino Brugioni outlined for us in *Photo Fakery*:

. . .four distinct kinds of faked photographs . . . The first two are the removal and insertion of details; the other two are photomontage and false captions. Curtis was clearly a photographic faker by his removal and insertion of details, and by false captions (Vizenor, 189).

This unconscious alteration of the history he purported to be documenting, reveals structures at work within Curtis's blind spot. In attempting to preserve, he was actually preserving the native as Object Other.

The modernist constructions of culture, with natives outside of rational, cosmopolitan consciousness, are realities by separation, a sense of native absence over presence in history. The absence of natives was represented by images of traditions, simulations of the other in the past; the presence of natives was tragic, the notions of savagism and the emotive images of a vanishing race. The modernist images of native absence and presence, by creative representational faculties, are the rational binary structures of the other, an aesthetic, ideological disanalogy (Vizenor 181).

Despite his relationships with the people he photographed and a lifetime devotion to preserving native stories, language, music and images, his practices are read as products of cultural domination. While this collection is highly valued, the ongoing critique reflects the living nature of the wound around the systematic genocide of native peoples. Curtis endeavored on the front lines of this genocide to preserve a culture as witness, in part, due to his empathetic response to the trauma that he participated in by being of the dominant culture and by virtue of his viewing of the atrocities. Despite Curtis's ability to communicate across cultures and the rapport he had with Native Americans, his salvage ethnography solidified projections of the native Other and reinforced racial stereotypes.

Curtis's removal of the clock from between Yellow Kidney and Little Plums symbolized the retention of power in so-called civilized hands. While photographs had to be staged during Curtis's era by virtue of the technology, staging does not preclude accuracy of representation. Details specific to individual tribes and customs were not important for Curtis because the defining of the Other comes naturally to the dominant group. While

Curtis had romantic notions of preserving a culture, he objectified Native Americans rendering them pictorial products for consumption by the perpetrators.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF DOCUMENTARY

Ironically, film is a medium of projection and psychological projection is the means by which the violence resulting in historical trauma is enabled. A goal of documentary film that addresses historical trauma is to reveal the truth, yet it can never be the reality that it seems to represent. Documentary film, from its inception, has combined fictional and nonfictional elements. In addition, some human perceptions occur within ideologies and some lay hidden in the Unknown and Blindspot panes of the Johari Window. These factors combine to make documentary that addresses human trauma a slippery endeavor.

It makes sense to think our actions can help where there is trauma, and at times, they can and do. Despite our best intentions, however, our assumptions and unconscious projections often precede us. Pascal Bruckner informs us that the Western postmodern quest of saving the Other, whether it be people or nature, is a personal quest. He states, “[t]here really was a Third World, but it was just a reflection of the one we had devised” (Bruckner 34). This is to say that part and parcel of the saving work that documentary takes on, reinforces to this day, a rescuer/victim dynamic that erases the authority of the Other. Bruckner goes on to say, “The movement that designates them as poor is precisely the same one that prevents us from seeing them as human” (81). In other words, movements or documentaries that speak for the Other or attempt to save the Other, need to be carefully analyzed. While the rescuing acts may appear to be moral imperatives, they can simply repackage the language of colonialism. Neocolonialism has the same traumatic markers as its ideological predecessor. It is apparent that “[i]n their

desire to move us emotionally, the newsmakers produce poverty as the single truth of undeveloped countries, and newscasting assumes the character of testimony. . . The camera denies that life ‘over there’ is anything but a long cry of the oppressed” (Bruckner 78). Like Rouch and Curtis, we have inadvertently, as producers and consumers of the Western newscast, made fetishes out of the Third World.

While images in the news are quickly replaced by others, in a succession of seemingly unrelated topics, they do in effect traumatize the Western viewer. No matter how anesthetized we are by the repetition of suffering around the world, viewers do subconsciously construct their psychological narrative in response. One of those responses is guilt and as I said before, guilt is a profound tool for manipulation. Guilt is played to us daily in that “[o]ur way of life is put in numerical terms in order to ridicule it...the less we suffer, the more we must feel responsible. An elaborate, ramshackle, logical system that tries to establish a causal link, no matter how far-fetched, is set up between myself and this suffering” (Bruckner 64-65).

As filmmakers, we provide the products for the media and the various social and political agendas. Bruckner goes on to contend that:

It is celluloid suffering; a continuous stream of images flows from those who produce pageants of others’ deaths for a worldwide audience. It is pornographic display, in that it gives us the right to see everything. And of all our impulses, the only one it stimulates is voyeurism – because the producers believe that, in order to get people’s attention, the show has to be increasingly crude (Bruckner 48).

In the framing of the wound, the totality of the situation is never experienced; the subjects are objectified and reduced to victims needing to be rescued. The spectator, on the other hand, is at home or in the theater. The comfortable seat reinforces the separation between

the Western audience and the underprivileged. Spectatorship renders the suffering of the victims as both real and unreal. Subsequently, the wound of witnessing is marginalized to the Blindspot and the viewer can subconsciously maintain a position of power and order within themselves, return to postmodern meandering, and think they understand the whole picture from the screen.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us return to the Johari Window to recall its key insight: Blindspots and Unknowns lurk in the personal and cultural psyche around sites of historical trauma. Jean Rouch and Edward Curtis, despite their presumably noble intentions, were producers of images that constructed the Other for the Western mind. Their films and photographs helped to stabilize racial stereotypes and hierarchical power dynamics. In so doing, their work helped to erase and/or legitimize the crimes of colonization and human extermination for audiences from the dominating groups. While both of these auteurs had close, respectful relationships with the subjects of their work, colonial and white privilege loomed large in their blind spots.

Les Maîtres Fous is a volatile film in terms of colonial theory. The Hauka ceremony evolved in response to colonial invasion. This performance is an arena where the African participants are in a seat of power. Rouch could not have gained access to this ceremony if he did not have relationships with African members of the movement. Despite his good standing among Africans, his own naturalized racism is glaringly obvious in the film. The ceremony as spectacle for Western audiences, solidified the construction of the exotic Other and confirmed that colonization was a civilizing endeavor.

Curtis, in faking his photography by painting out symbols of modernity, erased the contemporary Native American and preserved the mirage of the noble savage. His representations bar the subjects' access to technology, thus controlling the ability to progress with the times. The images erase any trace of the fact that Native Americans

were becoming teachers and doctors at the time. Curtis, while endeavoring to preserve a “dying” culture, produced a romantic version of a native Other that masked the violence of the genocide and the broken treaties. Curtis’s photographs offer concrete confirmation of the Other and ultimately help absolve white audiences of any responsibility or accountability.

Like Rouch and Curtis, modern filmmakers are traveling the world to save the planet and their animal and human Others. This is part of the discipline’s service and practice. This is why it is profoundly important that in addressing historical trauma we take the examples of Rouch and Curtis very seriously. By framing a human victim, especially one outside of our own cultural group, we must be careful not to remove their authority. Codes of meaning, some of which are embedded in the Blindspot and Unknown panes, that construct an Other, may well reside in our own minds. If so, our work will perform the opposite function from the one intended, in the same fashion as our well intended predecessors.

As filmmakers and individuals devoting our lives to the address of historical trauma, we must be aware that we are at the mercy of the narrative of our time and the cultural seat informing our development. Blind spots do exist in our own psychological make-up. *Orientalism* is a dynamic of contemporary history, not just the past. Documentary can be a site of privilege and power; therefore, practitioners must be impeccable in their language and impeccable in their cultural and political work. Film constructs and reinforces cultural narratives. Filmmakers are engaged in the battlefield of language and in foregrounding historical trauma, it becomes the job of filmmakers to

decode unequal power relations, to help end suffering, and to facilitate the healing of historical wounds.

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