

## **You don't know, you weren't there**

During that 'post-summer holiday' period we are all flooded (more and more so online) with other people's photos of thumbs up posing, inane smiles, burnt skin on the beach and unbelievable blue skies. I am always left wondering about the edit - what happens to the imagery of the arguments or the drunken crying when a partner was too flirtatious with a member of the hotel bar staff? It's that old story; everyone else seems to be having more fun - or maybe I am just jealous.

This is not to say these less glamorous incidents, just as human and emotionally valid as enjoyment, always occur but from personal experience, they often do. Of course, during those moments when things are going wrong, my own instant reaction isn't to get out that ever-available camera phone or even my video camera. 'Hold on, stop shouting, I just need to re-charge the battery'. On the Internet, where you would expect every kind of salacious piece of information to be found, out of the 228,000,000 results for 'holiday pictures' on Google, these incidents are poorly represented (except for a mocked up version I found relatively easily, of a couple arguing to depict a story by the Daily Mail).

It is a natural desire to present, as unarguable fact or through some calculated forgetting of the fact, an idealised aesthetic image of our personal history. With the technological ease of text or image being stored as binary code that can be repeated, reproduced, re-cut and re-pasted ad infinitum and with little or no degradation, there is a greater pressure to edit out those memories that fit a little uncomfortably in our psyche. So, somewhere along the line we remove some of the fascinating human, emotional ambiguity to the narrative content of our documentation.

The practice of piecing together fragments of a jigsaw, the emotional or physical nuances of a story, as both object and subject, are becoming a lost activity or at least more difficult. The development of interweaved, complex, layered and multi-faceted threads of narrative are easily lost to a flat reading from a tertiary source.

Truman Capote, for the writing of 'In Cold Blood', interviewed, researched and investigated the worlds of the murdering protagonists, Hickock and Smith. Creating an emotional link (for both Capote and the reader) that opened larger questions as to the motives for the killing of the Clutter family; how did they reach their conclusion, their ultimate death sentence and hanging? Was it circumstance, luck or lack thereof, upbringing or just a pure psychological preference for blood lust? Reducing the narrative to a binary didactic, of right or wrong, correct or incorrect, of a definitive historicity, would oversimplify. The ambiguity between fact and fiction, explored through one's own personal experience with the subject, opens up a new approach, a new voice.

"...it is necessary to have a 20/20 eye for visual detail--in this sense, it is quite true that one must be a "literary photographer," though an exceedingly selective one. But, above all, the reporter must be able to empathize with personalities outside his usual imaginative range, mentalities unlike his own, kinds of people he would never have written about had he not been forced to by encountering them inside the journalistic situation. This last is what first attracted me to the notion of narrative reportage."<sup>1</sup>

This has much to do with being taken beyond the prescribed 'as read' formula, of questioning authenticity and of an empathetic, open mind replacing pre-made judgement. In a media savvy generation, it is surprising our own sharpness at developing an interview practice, on a communicative social scale, is not more honed. Interview technique as taught, is a game of evasion, power plays and empty transference. Saying a lot without saying anything. Not entirely dissimilar to those holiday snaps that scream 'hey, I had a great time!' but in no way describe the whole story - even if you do fill up a 1GB memory card.

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<sup>1</sup> Truman Capote interviewed by George Plimpton, 'The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel' [New York Times], (January 1966) <<http://times.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html>>, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

With 'Coming Out Of The Woodwork' I became interested in the relationship between a secondary, removed experience - allowing the viewer to see the development of the works through an online live webcam feed and blog - and the physical one, of actually being within the space. The story of the construction in the space, its trials, tribulations and successes are embedded within the work, lying surreptitiously beneath each installations conceptual narrative structure. As a viewer, you are encouraged to adopt the position of being an investigative reporter, a physical interlocutor so as to piece together the journey between the works as well as their structural function. Each response is personal and temporal. Feel free to blog, tweet or inform others of your findings and experience, but in the end, no matter how much information is documented, disseminated, dispersed, digitised and discussed, you will still need to remind people that if they weren't there, it's just not the same.

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[www.comingoutofthewoodwork.co.uk](http://www.comingoutofthewoodwork.co.uk)