Sola in nature

YeonHee Choi

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
| Acknowledgments |

I am heartily grateful to my MFA committee chair, Angela Kelly, as well as my committee advisors, Alex Miokovic and Jessica Lieberman. Their encouragement helped me realize what I wanted to present through my work, was instrumental from the beginning to the final stages of its development. This thesis truly would not have been possible to complete without them.

I would also like to thank all of my friends and colleagues who always stood by my side. There are lots of wonderful memories and great experience with them through RIT. Their advice and suggestions have been a huge comfort to me whenever I felt lost here.

A special thank you to my family, my mom, dad, and my grandma for their support, and their being there for me all the time. There are no words to describe their everlasting love for me. I am so lucky they are my family.

Lastly, I would like to offer my regards and blessings all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of my thesis.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... ii

List of Figures ................................................................................................................ iv

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... v

Introduction: Sola in Nature ......................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: The Ambiguity of Nature .............................................................................. 3

1-1. Nature As Desire
1-2. Nature As Oneness
1-3. Nature As Wilderness
1-4. Looking toward Nature

Chapter 2: The images of Selves ................................................................................... 11

2-1. The Idea of Self, “I” As Uniqueness
2-2. The Intangible and Incommunicable Human Mind
2-3. A Foreign Girl in America
2-4. Sola; Alone in Nature

Chapter 3: The Syntax of Photography, through Sola in Nature ................................. 18

3-1. Color, Tone, and Contrast
3-2. Photomontage
3-3. The Narrative of Facial Expressions & Expressive Gesture through A Character
3-4. Discussion on A Woman in Landscape

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 29

Closing Monologue ....................................................................................................... 32

Selected Bibliography ................................................................................................... 34
List of Figures

Fig. 1 YeonHee Choi, *Untitled (from series, Sola in Nature)*, 2010

Fig. 2 YeonHee Choi, *A Chair (from series, Sola in Nature)*, 2010

Fig. 3 YeonHee Choi, *Blue Montage 1 (from series, Sola in Nature)*, 2010

Fig. 4 YeonHee Choi, *Blue Montage 2 (from series, Sola in Nature)*, 2010

Fig. 5 YeonHee Choi, *Close (from series, Sola in Nature)*, 2010

Fig. 6 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled, #92*, 1981

Fig. 7 Wynn Bullock, *Child in Forest*, 1951

Fig. 8 *Sola in Nature* Exhibition, 2010

Fig. 9 *Sola in Nature* Exhibition, 2010
Sola In Nature

By

YeonHee Choi

B.A., Performing & Intermedia Arts, PaiChai University, South Korea 2004
M.F.A, Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2011

| Abstract |

Sola in Nature is an invitation to encounter the internal human experience inspired by nature. Each photograph exhibits different sensibilities; exploring what the psychological self represents in nature through the images. The human mind is like air. We cannot smell, hold, and see the air, but we can feel it when we breathe. We cannot live without it. This thesis transcribes personal experience into a photographic spectacle that provides the public access, with which to examine the sophisticated mind as reflection of the self. Nature is, in this work, considered not only as spiritual existence but also as the psychological environment representing intangible feelings. Photographically, the images are made surreal through the manipulation of colors and contrasts, and through adoption of photomontage as a strategy. This is an attempt to convey the sense of inner experience as abstract and complex, yet made accessible, through the photographs.
Introduction: Sola in Nature

This work, *Sola in Nature*, embodies my internal experience, exploring how nature both inspires and releases me from psychological tension. In this conceptual framework, I explore how aspects of the complex human psyche such as anxiety, isolation, and solitude, can be addressed in images. I am interested in how the human psyche projects the self into the environment in order to express abstract and impalpable feelings. Therefore, I focus on how these psychological concerns are visually translated into photographs of imaginary scenes that I have created. Furthermore, this is an attempt to help the viewer better understand intangible feelings in the human mind.

These images provide a photographic tableau that depicts my personal psychological coping mechanisms. Thus, I set my work, *Sola in Nature*, a narrative photographic sequence of private experiences through nature, not in a particular order but instead, in a circular way.

I photograph a female character, which represents my inner self as my alter ego,\(^1\) because I associate the subject of my images with myself. The process of directing or following the character revealed to me other aspects about myself.

For me, nature is a voiceless mentor, offering serenity, and offering positive moments for garnering courage and consolation in our minds and our lives. I believe nature provides the artist with a place for contemplation, offers self-reflection and solace in a spiritual existence; therefore nature is presented as a metaphorical and psychological space in my photographs. For example, I photographed a desolated place tangled with

---

\(^1\) I describe the character that an actor usually plays on stage or in films as his or her alter ego. Thus, the use of the phrase “alter ego” here, is my expression for depicting a character whose experiences, thoughts, and feelings represent myself, as this concept of alter ego can be found in many of literature to describe fictional or imaginative characters who represent authors in their works.
shrubs and ivies, in order to depict the feeling of void and to evoke the complexity of my psychological experiences through the representation of a natural environment.

My desire in this thesis is to determine how nature functions internally, as a spiritual place for the human mind, and to investigate the relationship of human beings to the natural environment in terms of metaphysical and psychological reflection towards an understanding of our lives.
All men by nature are actuated with the desire of knowledge.

-Aristotle-

In my work, I internalize the existence of nature as an altered reflective place and as a metaphoric space for externalizing the mind by placing a lone individual in the environment.

Here, I explore how the relationship between society and nature has been constructed in a variety of ways – through philosophies, customs, or science – and also observe how nature comes to defined through human desire.\(^2\)

According to Aristotle, human beings pursue themselves, their own nature, their own fulfillment and perfection – and in this way they become what they are to be and realize the plenitude of their being.\(^3\) But, Claudia Baracchi says in the book, Aristotle’s \textit{Ethics as First Philosophy}, that what must be underscored here is that human beings are drawn to such a realization, that their becoming themselves occurs in the mode of desire and not in the mode of self-determination.\(^4\)

Aristotle suggests that this is human by nature, indeed is human nature. As a stepping-stone to western philosophies, Aristotle’s metaphysical investigation of human

\(^2\) Neil Evernden, \textit{The Social Creation of Nature} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992)
\(^4\) Claudia Baracchi, \textit{Aristotle’s Ethics As First Philosophy} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18.
desire marks an influential starting point for shaping the rudimentary structure of the relationship between human and nature.

I-I. Nature As Desire

[This section is inspired and cited from the book, The Social Creation of Nature by Neil Evernden]

Inspired by the exhibition of The Family of Man, put together by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art in 1955, Barthes suggested that

This myth of the human condition rests on a very old mystification, which always consists in placing Nature at the bottom of history. Any classic humanism postulates that in scratching the history of men a little, the relativity of their institutions or the superficial diversity of their skins…Progressive humanism, on the contrary, must always remember to reverse the terms of this very old imposture, constantly to scour nature, its laws and its limits in order to discover History there, and at last to establish Nature itself as historical.

Barthes demonstrates, referencing this exhibition, that the historicizing of nature is a contemporary concept. This is in opposition to the classic sense of nature: as the Great Mother of all living things, as a name for existence as a whole, or for being itself. Barthes is concerned with nature as the sources of humanism, and suggests that this is our relation to nature. He rejects only the concept of physical nature as normative content in human history, but he also claims to find nature historical.

However, Charles Hartshorne, in his book Beyond Humanism, points out “in the best sense humanism is simply an expression of an interest in man but in the worst sense,

---

it excludes interest in anything else”. 8 If the human is the only subject of worth, there is very little motive to consider other subjects.9

1-2. Nature As Oneness

One of the most foundational viewpoints in ancient Chinese philosophies, Tao (道) means “way” or “path” but also, in a sense, “morality” or “principle.” The Tao concept is mainly based on an ethical account of how humans interact in the world. Their attention is on the world that we encounter and experience.10 Also, they focus on the relationship between all of creation, or existence, and humans, or between everything arising in the whole world, not separated into human and nonhuman. Taoists believe everything is connected, and consider all as “oneness” in the experienced universe. This suggests Nature as the root of moral beliefs because, here, human beings are considered a part of nature, instead of nature being the projection of a human ideal. The whole world is not a combination of disparate features that can be labeled either humans or nature, or either human or nonhuman, but is a unified organism, authentic and autonomous, containing features such as trees, and lakes, and flowers: we all are inescapably linked to each other as if we are part of one integral being.11

In the new theory of natural science among modern western scientists and philosophers, we can find a comparable counterpart to the Tao idea of nature as oneness, in the Gaia hypothesis, from the book Phenomenon of Man (published posthumously in

1955) by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who was French philosopher, paleontologist, and Jesuit priest:

The stuff of the universe, woven in a single piece according to one and the same system, but never repeating itself from one point to another, represents a single figure. Structurally it forms “a whole”.  

I-3. Nature As Wilderness

Wilderness appealed to those bored or disgusted with man and his works. It not only offered an escape from society but also was an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult that he frequently made of his own soul. The solitude and total freedom of the wilderness created a perfect setting for either melancholy or exultation.

Roderick Nash

*In Wilderness and the American Mind*

In April 1992, a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. He had given $25,000 in saving to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a party of moose hunters.

John Krakauer

*In Into the Wild*

The story of Christopher McCandless is published in the book "*Into the Wild* (1996),” which was adapted to film in “*Into the Wild (2007)*”. Why did the 24 years old man go to Alaska by himself? Why did he leave the place he was used to being? Did he

---


13 Jon Krakauer, author’s note to *Into The Wild* (New York: Villard, 1996)
just feel tired of living life in an urban setting? Did he want to feel his own freedom in the wilderness? We will never know what he was pursuing. One can only assume what he was trying to do from what is said in the book and the movie.

Why did he leave his home? Home is, primarily, the opposite of the wilderness. Our home is a place of refuge, comfort, or shelter in a domesticated environment made to protect us from a wild environment that has not been touched or modified by human activity. In other words, home is a place to which one is attached by myriad habits of thought and behavior which are culturally acquired.\(^\text{14}\)

To contemporary people, leaving home and the familiar can be an experience of escapism, or even as an exciting or romantic behavior, setting one free from restrained, controlled surroundings. This allows people the space to view, with awe, the wilderness that is less controlled, less dense, and less complicated than human society. In this conceptualization, nature is an unfamiliar, strange, unknown, and foreign environment, not humanized. This dichotomous idea of nature as being against society is a standard way of thinking about that relationship, though it is at least partly a contemporary American concept. We could assume why the young man, Christopher McCandless, went into the wild, if we only get beyond the ubiquitous idea of nature as wilderness. Furthermore, not surprisingly, these typical subject matters – such as leaving the city, going into the wild, and surviving – are generally pervasive in Hollywood-style adventure films.

Today, people generally consider wilderness uncultivated or uninhabited, and think of it as the inhospitable regions of the world, having no influence or association with human histories. According to the professor of history and environmental studies,

Roderick Nash, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, “Wilderness is delineated as uncultured and undeveloped land...The absence of men and the presence of wild animals is assumed.”\(^{15}\) He also says “…the word designates other non-human environments, such as the sea and, more recently, outer space. Any place in which a person feels stripped of guidance, lost, and perplexed may be called a wilderness.”\(^{16}\) In addition, he believes that this specific concept of wilderness is formulated through the American civilization. Wilderness was “the basic ingredient of American civilization; they built a civilization with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning.”\(^{17}\) Nature as wilderness is a modern notion, and an American one. When Roderick Nash talks with a man who lives in the jungle of Malaysia, he discovers people who “lack a concept of controlled and uncontrolled nature,” people who have “no conception of wilderness.”

In comparison to the movie “Into the Wild,” there is another film featuring nature as a part of life. The Korean film, “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring,” by Ki-Duk Kim, is constituted in five fragmentary stories punctuated by the change from each season to the next, and depicts the journey of one young boy’s life through these episodes. The film takes place in a small temple house, floating on a small lake encompassed by a pristine forest. The four seasons reflect on the circle of human life as if it were everlasting, and speaks to the joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure of our lives. Each story has a different message about how one learns the principles of living. When the boy

---


harm animals, as when he throws pebbles at a frog or a snake, he learns to be responsible for what he has done. The monk tells the boy that what he has done affects his entire future life, through the cycle of cause and effect. This recognition links to the title of this film, “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring,” like the cycle of seasons. This narrative teaches us to find responsible models for living in the natural world; it suggests that there is reason to pursue the principle of nature as a model of human living. This implies that the way we live is consonant with the way of nature. We should take up this idea to contemplate our harmonious relationship to nature with a sense of humility, rather than putting humans at the center with nature on the periphery.

1-4. Looking Toward Nature

Since I began researching the meaning of nature in human society, the human relationship to nature from ancient times through to modern times, and through philosophic and scientific traditions, I have realized how the notion of nature has been changed, has varied, and developed over time. The notion has always been in relationship to the status of development of the civilization. To diagnose this inescapable human relationship to nature, however, I recognize that concepts of nature have changed, but human attitudes towards nature have not changed. I chose two recent films, “Into the Wild” and “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring” to demonstrate distinctive aspects or behaviors towards nature, and its representations. I believe, in our contemporary culture, movies are cultural melting pots reflecting specific customs, and integrated patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviors characteristic of groups or nations.

In regards to the modern context of nature, I have been exploring how the idea of
nature is transformed in human society, and how people use nature in their lives. I realize that artificial natural environments, such as botanical gardens or national parks, are, ironically, considered places that are reserved for human comfort, pleasure and recreation in society today. This claim leads in another potential direction: I may seek out nature, as a functional space and as an ideal psychological environment, for my desires and needs, a space not found in my everyday life. This is the logical outgrowth of the contemporary idea of nature according to the determined notion of nature apart from human society.
Chapter 2: The Images of Selves

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed -and gazed -but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.

The Daffodils
By William Wordsworth
In Poems in Two Volumes

In my work, the natural environment is delineated as the ambiguous, yet poetic space emanating from the invisible, but sensuous aura of nature. Photographically, I concentrate on projecting this inward experience of the mind onto the environment, and transforming that environment into images, in order to create an opportunity for self-examination through them.
I explore these reflective photographs of the mind in my work for what those intangible, but specific, feelings are, and also investigate the idea of the self as constructed in our culture. Furthermore, I examine how the self is revealed or applied in modern society to enunciate the relationships between human beings and their culture, and to project how the natural environment exists as a place for freedom, contemplation, and solace, in the human world.

2-1. The Idea of Self, “I” As Uniqueness

By idea, I mean the mental conception which is formed by the mind as a thinking thing.

Belongs altogether only to one substance: consequently, substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, comprehended now through one attribute, now through the other. So, also, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, though expressed in two ways.

Benedict de Spinoza

In “Of The Nature And Origin of The Mind”

Nature is, itself, real. My body is nature. I am real. But I am different than others. I cannot be another human being. I am absolutely one, and unique in the universe. We understand human beings are made of biological materials, which is the primary step in comprehending the fundamental idea of the self, because we know that all mental properties will be gone when we die. We sense ourselves as, conceptually, separate entities in the universe. Human beings think or feel that there is such a thing as the self, and that it is not the same thing as the self of other human beings. At this point, even though the body is experienced only through the self, and is subordinate to the self, the
self is not identified with the physical aspect of the individual. The self is structured within the mind, consciousness, and will. But the self is also identified as an integral part of human culture, as a part of the society.

Yi-fu Tuan asks us, in his essay called “Island Selves: Human disconnectedness in a world of interdependence,” from The Geographical Review in 1995, to:

“Consider the question of uniqueness. In the United States no one wants to be treated like part of the woodwork. Americans want to be recognized for their distinctive quality, their importance to the group.”

In other words, each person wants to be recognized and acknowledge as somehow special and non-exchangeable with others. Also, he concludes “to be special or unique is ego boosting, but it also makes one feel disconnected, an island, which aggravates every person’s sense of isolation and vulnerability.”

This claim can be reinforced by Spinoza, who states that “pride is thinking too much of ourselves, through self-love.” The sense of pride is relevant to the idea of the self as very special and unique from the others. Pride is placed at the core of the idea that each individual is exclusive: one apart from the others.

I have drawn attention to the self as uniqueness – that is, human individuality is encapsulated in such words as distinctive, exclusive, and exceptional. However, the notion of human individuality as uniqueness is also related in such words, as separate, only, and solitary.

It is rather improbable that only Americans want to be individually distinguished. But it is possible that the idea of the self as unique results in a sense of isolation and vulnerability in the end. Sometimes people find themselves just wanting to be free from the crowd. Why is this?

2-2. The Intangible and Incommunicable Human Mind

Direct your eye right inward, and you’ll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be
Expert in home-cosmography.  

William Habington
In “To My Honoured Friend Sir Ed. P. Knight”

We believe that human beings are incomparably the greatest independent beings in this world. But, the individual also finds himself in what he can do in groups, and with other people. Ideally, the self is a free, individual being, but ironically human identity cannot be verified by itself without any social or cultural standards. These standards often repress the qualities of uniqueness in the self, and provoke confusion, disconnection, and difficulty for individuals in society.

The human mind is inherently very personal and very private. No one else can entirely possess or dominate another individual’s feelings or thoughts. Indeed, the human mind is individual, in that only the individual can experience mental phenomenon, and

has to deal with it by oneself, which brings awareness that humans are ultimately alone. “I”, “my”, and “me” cannot belong to anyone.

Fig. 1 YeonHee Choi, Untitled (from series, Sola in Nature), 2010

2-3. A Foreign Girl in America

When I came to America, to attend school at RIT, the hardest change to make was to put aside the version of myself that used to live in a different country, and spoke a different language. But I needed to follow the new social system – its attitudes, rules, values, and goals – in order to fit into the new environment. I longed for belonging within this new environment, and I desired to achieve great maturity in my own field, and to share a variety of thoughts and ideas with new people and cultures. I thought it would be
a great chance to redefine myself: finding out what I can do in a new place, and recognizing how different the ways of viewing the art world are.

Maybe what Yi-Fu Tuan stated about Americans is true: most want to be treated as special, or to be acknowledged as unique. The American social network seems individual and separated. They first recognize my different background and character, through my accent when speaking English, or through different behaviors. Sometimes, it can positively function as an advantage, to be distinctive in a group. But, for me, it makes me feel disappointed in myself, and makes me lose confidence because I can’t make myself fit in. This leads to a lack of a sense of belonging in my community and my relationships.

I am made to feel that I am a mere foreigner, who has had different experiences and grew up in other circumstances. This makes me feel disconnected from the group, vulnerable and isolated.

Our customs, cultures, and history that human beings have made are not only great achievements in human civilization, but also bittersweet evolutionary characteristics, because they arouse the innate dualistic quality of human beings: vulnerability and superiority, both of which constantly create a sense of confusion, isolation, and solitude among other people and other groups, in our social interrelationships.

2-4. Sola; Alone in Nature

Nothing new.
I am alone in the midst of these happy, reasonable voices.
All these creatures spend their time explaining, realizing happily that they agree with each other. Why is it so important to think the same things all together?

Nothing happens while you live.
The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. That's living.
But everything changes when you tell about life; it's a change no one notices.
Nothing has changed and yet everything is different.

Nausea
By Jean Paul Sartre

The individual was alone. The free spiritual self was lonely. Then, the mind felt solitude. The concern is how to manage what I desire, and to get through it, on my own.

In my work, this inwardness creates a psychological push and pull, in which nature represents both my internal concern and introspection, while offering great intervals in which to find solace. Spending time in nature gives me a chance to reflect on the intangible mind, to sense what this mind tells me.

Time spent in the environment is private, and the experience there utilizes nature as a psychological space in which to envision the inner mind. This release of tension restores my desires, and my confidence, which are repressed by something that makes me anxious and is difficult to deal with.

I realize what I deserve is to make it through on my own. Indeed, this is “the bliss of solitude” that I have to cope with. We go alone on a long journey through life, but the path of our lives is like the light of a great but solitary lighthouse in a vast sea. But, we enter nature with the hope that one thing connects us all.
Chapter 3: The Syntax of Photography, through Sola in Nature

That there is a difference between photography conceived as “true expression” and photography conceived (as it more commonly is) as faithful recording is evident; though most accounts of photography’s mission attempt to paper over the difference, it is implicit in the starkly polarized terms that photographers employ to dramatize what they do.

Between the defense of photography as a superior means of self-expression and the praise of photography as a superior way of putting the self at reality’s service there is not as much difference as might appear.

Susan Sontag
In “On Photography”

I compose the photographs expressing an awareness that nature silently embraces the inner self, and this embrace releases my consciousness from my sense of vulnerability and solitude. This conceptual aim speaks of another possible sensibility acting in my work, one that includes confusion, isolation, and anxiety. So, I attempt to depict these senses in the images by de-saturating colors and photographing a void and uninhabited environment. I wish to convey a desolate feeling in a nature rendered supernatural through the use of the color palette.

As an artist, I am interested in converting my experience into images. When producing work, I always concern myself with the elements of color and form, in order to transfer my personal experience into the visual production so that my composed photographs support my ideas.
As a result, the natural environments became not only the subject matter within my work but also a great source for describing abstract feelings through the selective natural atmosphere constructed in my process of making the work.

3-1. Color, Tone, and Contrast

In my photographs, color plays a role in visualizing intangible human feelings. I reproduce colors in my images to symbolize my emotional state by de-saturating and emphasizing certain colors – such as blue – in order to express what I experience in the environment. According to Color Therapists, blue tones help relax the human mind and physically reduce nervous excitement. Blue is the color of meditation and spiritual
expansion, and is more soothing than green in its effect. Therefore the color blue, in my photographs, acts as a metaphor for solitude, independence, and meditation. Hue is one of the main characteristics in color with that effects emotions or associations with psychological aspects. Hue makes different tones of color in different lighting situations, creates a different atmosphere, and dominates human psychology. Particularly, the light at specific times of day, like sunset or twilight, suggests changes in mood and emotional conditions. The weather affects my choices. I use both sunny, and overcast lighting to define the ambience, and to depict either joy or desolation.

In production, I focus on poetic scenes in nature; the sunlight, the breeze, the air, water, trees, and grasslands, rather than beautiful landscapes or typical natural vistas, in order to suggest that nature represents a spiritual energy, rather than just a place offering the beauty of scenery or shelter. In addition, I chose the settings based on location: void grasslands, a ground covered with ivy, and abandoned landscape or wild settings, rather than restructured environments like gardens or landscape yards. The lack of structure implies a sense of freedom.

3-2. Photomontage

In order to highlight my inner conflicts I composed photomontages, a visual method in photography favored by the surrealists, which allows for the irrational collision of ideas or thoughts. In my work, this process allows me to layer my varied experiences in one image. While producing photographs, I transitioned to photomontage to expand my way of thinking about the relation between nature and myself in creating artwork.
The advantage of this approach is that it permitted me to be more suggestive than literal. Through photomontage, I attempt to create a more complex relationship between nature and myself. This type of imagery suggests more abstract thought processes, by combining different photographs, and intentionally constructing images out of confusion. These combinations not only shift the viewer, conceptually, from the conventional photographic aesthetic of realism, but also suggests a less concrete conceptualization of self. This approach to depicting the uncanny human mind allows me to move beyond mere description.
3-3. The Narrative of Facial Expressions & Expressive Gesture through A Character

*Everything internal becomes visible in something external: it follows that everything external testifies to an internal reality.*

*Béla Balázs*

*In Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*

[This section, 3-3 is inspired from Béla Balázs’ 1924 book, Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film.]
I believe “the greatest importance of either the visible object or the object is what creates the powerful atmosphere that we find”\textsuperscript{22} not only in films, but also in photographs. This can be interpreted here to explore what the aesthetics of character in the scene can create and present. The metaphors suggested by the spectacle of the female character in my work, is what suggests to the viewer the photographic context in which the work should be viewed. I believe this context invites the viewers to involve themselves in my images, therefore, supporting the notion that the exclusively personal experience becomes interwoven with others, and with each other. It is “I” who present the setting, the mood, and the content, it is I who signify the character, and represent the

world and the conceptual characteristics of “I.” Yet when the viewer looks at the photographs, the “I” exists no longer; it is the viewer who sees the spectacle, through I, and through my viewfinder.23

The character in my work plays a role in representing me, but the concepts’ similarity to the quality of a character is parallel to such arts as novel, play, and film, in the representation of a person. The most significant effect of this application is that a character is endowed with the ability to represent or evoke feeling, which is then expressed in image, film, or play. Béla Balázs points out that,

“Facial expressions are more polyphonic than language. Facial expressions are vastly more numerous than words. Looks can express every shade of emotion far more precisely than a description. Also, a face displays the most varied emotions simultaneously, like a chord.”24

Expressively deeper, the face is both visible and hidden, and also provides a clue to something internal made external.

The idea of the female character in my photographs comes partly from play theory’s perspective of a performer on a stage. In Cindy Sherman’s early series, “The Untitled film,” a conceptual self-portrait is displayed as a character, which represents an amalgamation of the stereotypical female identities common to Hollywood films or TV.

---


“For instance, say I am reading War and Peace. We all know objectively as the work of Tolstoy. It is Tolstoy who presents the setting, the atmosphere, and the society, who analyzes the character and events according to a conception of the world and a style characteristic of him. Yet when I am reading the book, the author is no longer Tolstoy; it is I, through him.” He states in fact, “the author merely provides us with words, words charged with meaning, as it were, transparent with their signification – as they must be” I recognize we also are looking at images, which we all know objectively as the work of artists.

There is a particular range of actions for producing tensions while applying a character in my work. First, expressive postures or gestures of the character, which originated in movement, sustain a propensity for poetic depictions of intangible emotions and inner experiences within an environment, through cutting out the moving action and encapsulating the motion into a photograph. This language of posture or gesture from a character is the prolongation of other contextual information used to unveil different expressive feelings, while producing the work.

Secondly, the use of close-up in the images excludes any other environments, and successfully calls attention to the character, which makes concrete life details of the life of an introverted mind through facial expressions. “The close-up is hence the art of emphasis”\textsuperscript{25} in these images.

Lastly, the absence of a character in the environment works to accentuate the emotional resonance and the spiritual atmosphere in the relationship to nature in my photographs.

3-4. Discussion on A Woman in Landscape

Throughout the history of Western art, woman has been seen in man’s cultures or man’s gaze as being “closer to nature” than a man, primarily, it seems, because of her “mothering” body. This idea of woman is conventionally represented in Western mythology.

Wynn Bullock’s photograph “Child in Forest” was used in Steichen’s book and exhibition the Family of Man. This view is of a symbolic Lilith, the mythical first woman, which is why Steichen put the picture at the beginning of the exhibit. But, the public reaction at that time was spilt. The photograph was regarded as symbolizing as “new life and the oneness of nature.” On the other hand, it was thought it could be seen as “an image of a dead or molested child.”

I allude to my self-representation by using a female character as a subject in nature. But the female character unexpectedly becomes a stranger to me. The process reveals that I am alien to her. Also, she becomes alien to me. We both remain distinguished from each other.

I realize that the character in my work reflects my mind as a foreign mind through the photographs. Suddenly, I sense strangeness in the character, which ultimately cannot belong to me, or even others. Conversely, it may be narcissistic that I see myself mirrored in the images of the other, or at least view that other as another psychological self-creation. This strangeness to each other in my work implies the metaphor of our distinctiveness or particularity from others.
Beyond the body of my work, this paradoxical reflex represents the sole selves who are reconciled with others in the society, to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners.\textsuperscript{27}

| Conclusion |

Nature as desire, nature as wilderness, nature as way, and nature as oneness – it is very natural to deconstruct nature as a normative, philosophical or psychological category. Undoubtedly, the popular fallacy is that our humanity imposes conceptual characters on nature.

The sunrise and sunset constantly come and go, and the seasons change round and round. There is day and night due to the rotation of the earth, and the sun and moon continue to illuminate the earth, so that creatures can wake in the day, or at night. The wind makes the grass dance around, and flowers and trees sing with the wind. What a truly independent being nature is! Nature flourishes alone, but nature has never ever complained.

I find this solace through the way nature is, and I learn hope and courage from it. I enter nature with nothing I must be aware of, yet with something I believe.

However, Julia Kristeva says, “The consummate name of such a freedom is solitude.” But, what does the freedom she speaks of mean? Where does the sense of solitude actually come from?

Possibly, the solitude springs from the psychological experience of the mind, because of the fact that no one can mentally belong to others. It is like I try to connect with people as a singular harmony, but shortly after, I sense the self as a stranger to others in human relationships.

Beyond this, the rise of the modern way of loving nature can be internally relevant to “the increasing individualization of humanity.” This means that the modern

people live together in a communal society, but they find themselves, and their originality, in nature.

In the last pages of her book, *Strangers To Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva refers to our innate confrontation with humanity:

We must live with different people while relying on our personal moral code, without the assistance of a set that would include our particularities while transcending them. A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners. The multinational society would thus be the consequence of an extreme individualism, but conscious of its discontents and limits, knowing only indomitable people ready-to-help-themselves in their weakness, a weakness whose other name is our radical strangeness.\(^{30}\)

The ambivalence towards humanity, about the relationship between humans and the society – vulnerability and individuality – and human and nature – authority and accordance – will inevitably coexist, as long as human beings exist.

But, why should it be this way? Why are we supposed to unavoidably continue on this equivocal interrelationship with others?

In Zen, it is stated that the cause of every conflict human beings have is rooted in human desire: desire for pleasure, desire for existence, and desire for prosperity. The answers to our questions will continue to elude us, until we transcend or suppress our desires. The contradictory quality of human individuality is generated from an illusory notion of the self as free. The way out of most conflicting ideas is the idea of no self, which is called “mind of no mind.” The perfection of liberation from internal struggles is to have a mind of no mind. If you have mind on your mind, you create the idea of self,


and the idea of self keeps recreating all the desires and attachments. But how do I get rid of attachments and desires in my life? The idea of Zen, just another way of thinking of human beings or our lives, suggests that we should eliminate the self as desiring, possessive, conceptualized, and existent.

Fig. 8 Sola in Nature Exhibition, 2010

Fig. 9 Sola in Nature Exhibition, 2010
In the summer of 2001, I visited the city of Irkutsk (Ирку́тск) at the center of Siberia in Russia with my friends. My Russian friends, who studied Korean in Pai-Chai University, South Korea, guided us. Every moment in Siberia seemed strange but beautiful, and adventuresome but dangerous. Also, whenever my Russian friends spoke in Korean, I felt strangely amazed. I asked one of them about how different the way of life is between Russian cultures and Korean cultures. He said there was nothing different. I teased him about giving a wrong answer, but he asked me “What kind of difference do you think?” He thinks we all look the same. We are not different. There is no difference between us. I was not sure what he actually meant at that time. But, after visiting Siberia, I slowly considered him not as a foreigner who had blue eyes and blonde hair, or even different because he speaks in Korean. Instead, I saw him as a person. Strangely, sometimes I found myself through him, and I recognized him through myself.

During an important presentation of my work, one person asked me about why I chose a female character that looked absolutely different from me (the character was a Caucasian). Shortly after, he questioned me: “Do you want to be an American?” or, “Do you want blonde hair?” I answered that she was just a female character representing myself, and I did not focus on the different appearance of her in my work. I wanted the images to be more psychological and that they could speak to my sensibility. So, I wished to present specific feelings by using the model as a character. As I was a director, she was my actress, playing a role on my stage. I appreciate that this question made me focus on what I needed to do in order to explore in my work more fully. However, it made me feel as if I was an alien who came from another planet. I never thought I was particularly
different from the people in America, before I was asked that question. I kept dwelling on his question for days. I looked at myself in the mirror, and thought, do I look really different from others? Do I seem to very strange to people? I slowly began to feel lost.

Through my experience, I learned that once one admits separation from others, it causes an endless sense of isolation in communication. In my mind, when we only stress differences between individuals, there is, ultimately nothing that could be used to connect us with each other.

We are all the same. There is only respectability in the relationship through the appreciation of the fact that you are as unique as I am. I hope I can be you. I hope you can be me. Then, we can belong to each other, in the end.


