Reflections on “the looking glass war” photography, espionage and the cold war
Terence Wrightab
a Research Associate of the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, b Teaches Visual Ethnography, Cambridge University Moving Image Studio,
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The article focuses on a syndicated newspaper photograph which was used in 1996 to illustrate an espionage story involving British and Russian diplomats. The photograph appeared on the front pages of two British newspapers. Following an exploration of the formal aspects of the photograph, the paper explores the different editorial agendas of the two newspapers. This leads to a questioning of the documentary value of the image as well as its broader historical, political and literary setting. It not only shows how the photograph alludes to the spy thriller, but the structure of article itself draws upon and aims to mimic this literary genre.

How could he clasp and caress his own reflection? And still he could not comprehend What the deception was, what the delusion. He simply became more excited by it.
(Ted Hughes, “Echo and Narcissus” from his Tales from Ovid, 1997)

All too often visual images are considered to be passive reflectors of the world, serving a straightforward illustrative function. In this context photographs are usually held to be relatively unproblematic images in terms of realism, offering us a view of the person or scene which could have been available to us had we been there at the time. They may be regarded as fulfilling a simple narrative function, providing us with a quick and easy way of telling a story; on the other hand we can treat pictures as more complex phenomena, whereby they serve as carriers or prompts for conscious or subliminal thought trains. In support of this line of argument, Mathews (1993:11) claims, “no matter how limited their projected use, they burn indelible outlines into the mind ... [they can] overwhelm the ideas they are supposed to be carrying ... Images not only express convictions, they alter feelings and end up justifying convictions.”

Following this movement away from the naive realist position we may consider that the photograph offers more than appears at face value. In our everyday encounters with photographs as they appear in newspapers, we may assume that the formal characteristics of this type of pictorial image, and which are unique to the photographic medium, may be able to provide a particular insight into aspects of events that are beyond the scope of the editorial. For example, a single photograph can deliver the immediacy of a facial expression, say, or it may have the power to imbue a mundane occurrence with special significance by creating an image of dramatic visual impact. Furthermore, it may be able to represent the event in a way that adds new meaning to the subject, perhaps stimulating the viewer’s interpretative or imaginary “reading” of the image, functioning in a poetic mode that not only can express opinion but can also convey atmosphere. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1980:135) suggests that any object or practice “that somehow or other signifies” becomes a “vehicle” for ideas. He continues, “Arguments, melodies, formulas, maps, and pictures are not idealities to be stared at but are texts to be read;

Terence Wright is a Research Associate of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford where he runs the project ‘Moving Images: the Media Representation of Refugees.’ He teaches Visual Ethnography at Cambridge University Moving Image Studio and is author of The Photography Handbook (Routledge, 1999).
so are rituals, palaces, technologies, and social formations." The notion that the understanding of culture, or of cultural practices, is to be achieved through "interpretation" and "re-interpretation" is central to the work of Geertz. For the photograph it means we should look to image’s wider context. If we do treat visual representations as fully integrated into a broader cultural pattern and a lineage of artistic practice, we must accept a certain degree of free-play in the signifiers and flexibility in the perceived connotations of the image. Irrespective of the intentions of the photographer or the editor of the journal, the viewer is most likely to draw upon his or her wider experience of understanding visual images.

This poses a problem that is not unique to photography. In the practice of documentary film-making this has been expressed by Barbash and Taylor (1997:51): “even as you may struggle against classic conventions of dramaturgy, you need to be aware that certain viewers will still try to project drama of that kind onto your film.” They quote film editor Dai Vaughan, “We cannot boast of leaving our films open-ended and at the same time complain if people draw from them conclusions we dislike.” If the documentary film-maker is struggling against a preconditioned audience, who inherited a set of expectations and assessment criteria derived from Aristotle’s “Five Acts” (see his Poetics), where do we find the still photograph’s equivalent of the “classic conventions of dramaturgy?”

In his discussion of the photographic genres—documentary, photojournalism and visual sociology, Howard Becker has pointed out “Photographs get meaning ... from their context” (Becker 1998:88). He suggests that a lack of context places the onus on the viewer to resort to “their own resources” (1998:89). While the newspaper photograph exists in a context prescribed by the media institutions, it also reaches out to its broader social and historical location. In the wider arena of the “new visual culture,” alongside “the growing tendency to visualize things that are not in themselves visual” (Mirzoeff 1999:5), there exists the construction of a “world picture” that “does not depend on pictures themselves but the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence” (Mirzoeff 1999:5). The photograph not only provides a visual record of events but, through its ability to function as a metaphor, it also attracts a complexity of cultural connotations. For the field of visual cultural studies this demands an interdisciplinary approach. As van Leeuwen and Jewit (2001:2) point out, this consists not so much in a specific research methodology; but more of setting “an agenda of questions and issues for addressing specific images.” With such sentiments in mind, the paper examines a British newspaper photograph to show how the addition of a caption has extended the interpretative possibilities of the image. In this particular instance, literary allusion undermines the documentary value of the photograph, taking us into an area of visual representation which blurs the distinction of fact and fiction. Furthermore, the paper proposes to show how photographic practice can be fully integrated into aspects of Western cultural performance, including that of political posturing. An analysis of the photograph’s historical, political and literary location aims to reveal greater significance of the image’s metaphorical function than may have been initially realised by the photographer.

It should be added that the essay is intended to be experimental in its ulterior motive of reflecting the genre of the spy thriller. It casts a wide net to gather fragments of “intelligence” in order to piece together the entire jig-saw puzzle (for instance, the quotations that are used to introduce each section). In this fashion the paper combines the facts with hints, suggestions, speculations and the occasional “blind alley”—like the photograph under discussion, it aims to represent a cynical duplicitous world.

**Threats of Expulsion**

“Drop a hint to the London newspapers. Stimulate publicity. Print the photographs.”

“And?”
On 6 May 1996 a spying row erupted between Britain and Russia. It was described by The Times as "the worst espionage row since the end of the Cold War" (7 May 1996:1). The timing of the announcement that nine British diplomats were to be expelled from Moscow, just prior to the Russian Presidential elections, led to speculation that the incident may have been politically motivated. Observers in both countries thought that Russian officials might have timed the incident to give Boris Yeltsin the opportunity to be seen to "act tough" in order to aid his re-election chances in July of that year. During his campaign, Yeltsin had warned repeatedly of a return to Cold War rivalry with the West if he lost to Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist party candidate. Nonetheless The Times editorial (7 May 1996) propounded the view that "obsessive secrecy still shrouds the decision-making in the Kremlin" and, despite the end of the Cold War, Russians remained suspicious of Western intentions. Alexander Zdanovich, of the Federal Security Bureau (FSB—the Russian Federation successor to the Soviet KGB) had made a "stern protest" that Britain was using its embassy for "illegal spying activities." They had caught "red-handed" and arrested a Russian government employee who had confessed to passing on information "of a political, defence and strategic nature" to British agents. The Russian Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying: "A number of English intelligence agents, working under cover of the embassy, have been declared 'persona non grata' and are being expelled from Russia for activities incompatible with diplomatic status." As for London's reaction, the Foreign Office claimed that the allegations were unjustified and would be met with "an adequate response." In Cold War-speak, the phrase "activities incompatible with diplomatic status" means spying and the suggestion of the "adequate response" implies that London would carry out "tit-for-tat" expulsions if Moscow went through with its threat. According to Russia's Segodnya newspaper, "This is an unprecedented scandal in the new post-Soviet history of Russia." Now the Cold War was over, these more recent events raised the question for The Independent "What is the purpose of spying on Russia?" The newspaper put forward three possible reasons: Russia still possessed considerable military strength, its relationship with China and certain Middle Eastern states caused concern, and it had become a prolific source of organized crime.

The incident of May 1996 made the front pages of newspapers in both countries. Britain’s Daily Mail announced “Russia Set To Expel Nine Britons,” while The Times featured the headline “Russia Orders Britons Out In Spying Row.” The following day Vladimir Simonov of Nezavisimaya Gazeta (8 May) asked, “Will the unpleasant incident lead again to a vicious circle of mirror spy scandals which were typical of the Cold War?” This “mirror” metaphor reflects the approach taken by The Guardian where, on the front page of the 7 May issue, a photograph was displayed with a caption which declared the outbreak of the “Looking glass war.”

The Photograph

Covert activity can ... be concealed using a rolled-up newspaper or hollowed out loaf of bread to hide a camera, but such gambits are used more often in adventure movies than in reality. (Broecker 1984)

“The looking glass war” must have been thought to be a rather good title because, in a later edition that day, the paper had promoted it from a caption to the front page headline. This more unusual headline adopted by The Guardian was partly stimulated by the traditional approach that Russia and Britain have taken to such states of affairs: each country “mirroring” each other's actions. However, the origin of the “looking glass war” was primarily derived from the photograph taken by Grigory Dukor, a photographer working for Reuter’s in Moscow. The image features a Russian soldier on guard outside the British Embassy. The fact that a different version of the same photograph ap-
The Times 7 May 1996.

peared on the front page of The Times may serve to illustrate how a syndicated image can appear on the same day in two different national newspapers subject to different editorial agendas. Indeed, a comparison of the photographs in their different contexts reveals the cropping and captioning styles employed by their respective picture editors. The Times has cropped the image so as to reduce the photographer’s own “expressionistic” interpretation of the event, reducing the initial framing of the scene to a more straightforward documentary image. This approach, accompanied by the conventional descriptive caption: “Russia Orders Britons Out In Spying Row,” may have considered the soldier’s reflection a non-essential detail, perhaps detracting from the impact required of a photograph accompanying a front-page headline. In contrast, The Guardian had decided to use more of the photographer’s original selection, but cropping the image tighter on the right-hand side to enhance its symmetrical composition, then taking the step of using the contents of the photograph to inform the caption. This has been achieved by exploiting the inclusion of the soldier’s reflection in a window. The caption “The looking glass war” suggests the “mirroring” of the tit-for-tat exchange that immediately follows a diplomatic expulsion. The photograph of the soldier provides us with one arrangement of visual information, but the inclusion of the reflection has enabled the headline writer to
extend its metaphorical meaning, not only of the photograph, but of the wider political state of affairs. Of course the caption’s literary connotations have been derived from Lewis Carroll’s account of Alice’s adventures through the looking glass; or, from this century, John le Carré’s novel The Looking Glass War (1965). Indeed this “mirror” analogy is often employed in the context of espionage; for example, R. V. Jones’s Reflections on Intelligence (1989). And Anthony Verrier’s Through the Looking-glass (1983) which is described as a book on British foreign policy in the “age of illusions.” We shall return to these considerations.

From my own experience working as a freelance photographer, the spying quarrel would have been considered a “big story”—after all it did make the front pages of the majority of the British national daily papers—and the photographer may well have been dispatched to the embassy to find something that could illustrate the story. While the decision of an agency or picture editor to send out a photographer to photograph the embassy in question may be considered something of a poor fallback position, the opportunity of the soldier’s presence with his tall-fronted peaked military hat signifying authority and totalitarianism (i.e. a conventional pictorial representation of the Russian state), appears to have provided the appropriate analogy for the political state of affairs. Of course a spying row, almost by its
nature, is a difficult phenomenon to illustrate—particularly by means of a photograph. And this is perhaps the central point of the argument—that although the subject under discussion cannot be photographed directly, it can be illustrated by exploiting the metaphorical potential of the photographic image.

While the photograph contains all the ingredients of a stereotypical Cold War image of Russia, the guard, his uniform, Fedor Shekhtel's Neo-Gothic architectural design of the British Embassy building, the iron railings and security kiosk, the militiaman on duty does not appear to possess much authority. He has a rather weak expression, and his gaze, directed out of the frame, seems to suggest his distraction or lack of interest for the matter in hand. Curiously, the three-dimensional representation shows the gate of the embassy to be open, but in compositional terms the railings block our view leading towards the embassy building situated at the centre of perspective.

When looking at the photograph I find myself wondering why I personally found it so compelling. It is not necessarily what one would describe as a "striking" photograph. It could have been that the soldier's face reminded me of an old colleague. Or, from a sense of nostalgia, I found the image reminiscent of my visits to the former Soviet Onion. On arrival at Leningrad airport in 1983, looking out of the plane window it was dark and snow was falling—across the floodlit runway two soldiers with tall, peaked caps, enormous great-coats and carrying kalashnikovs stepped out of the darkness to meet the plane. This type of self-analysis involved in looking at the image is perhaps what Sartre meant in describing the spontaneous imaginative consciousness which we bring to the photograph: "We become aware of animating the photograph, of lending it life, in order to make an image of it" (1940:26).

The Duality of the Photograph

In his The Psychology of the Imagination, Sartre commented that photographs "float between the banks of perception, between sign and image, without ever bordering on either of them" (1940:26). Not only has the camera become closely associated with espionage activities, but both the photograph and the secret agent maintain a certain cultural mystique, sustaining a marginal existence between two worlds. There is a common element of marginality in the subject (spies), the medium (photography), and that of the photographer (as observer).

In his Studies in Iconology, Panofsky distinguishes between "motives" and "stories." "Motives" account for the immediate recognition of things in the picture, "stories" require the viewer's comprehension of a broader contextual/literary discourse. And, in shifting our viewpoint to take in an anthropological perspective, we can broaden the "story" in an attempt to make sense of certain characteristics which pervade a wider cultural setting—this is true of a variety of systems of visual representation. In addition to the close relationship between a visual representation and its social message, more general patterns of visual culture can be identified. For example, in his discussion of symmetry in Maori art, Hanson finds that such compositional strategies resound in the wider patterns of Maori cultural dualism, referred to by Hanson as "Maori Cartesianism" (1983:86–87). While he finds no direct reference or representational correspondence between symmetry in Maori art and Maori cultural practices, he notes similarities in the formal characteristics of the symmetrical composition in art and more general recurring manifestations in the wider social context: "The frequency and variety of its concrete instantiations, both in art and in other institutions, indicates that dualism is an ordering principle of pervasive importance in Maori culture" (Hanson 1983:81). At face value this would seem an ideal hypothesis. Hanson continues to explain that the symmetrical designs in Maori Art are associated with "escalating reciprocal competitive exchange and/or warfare and revenge." This could also prove a fitting description of the Cold War state of affairs. It bears
From this general view, not only are we reduced to a scheme of binary categories, but it also suggests “a single breaking point, a Great Divide, though whether this jump occurred in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, or Greece in the fifth century BC, or in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium, is never very clear” (Goody 1976:3). More specifically, we might consider the relationship between Britain and Russia. There was the so-called “Eastern Question” of the nineteenth century which was concerned with preserving the Ottoman Empire, “the sick man of Europe,” in order to curtail a feared Russian expansion that might threaten British interests in India. The Crimean War (1853–6) was one outcome of this rivalry. In a popular anthropology book written in 1908, A. H. Keane is concerned by “a very real ‘Panslav terror’” (1908:388). He goes on to suggest that the world’s future depends upon maintaining an equilibrium between the Russians and the English. The Russians “in recent historic times displayed a prodigious power of expansion second only to that of the British peoples ... being, next to the English, the most numerous of civilised peoples ... special attention may be claimed for the national temperament, on which the future of humanity itself so largely depends.”

Keane develops his argument with a blatantly racist tone, providing a character sketch of the mental characteristics of the Russian people. But the essential point I wish to address here is the issue of balance, power, equality and rivalry between East and West. Since the end of the Cold War it has become more difficult to determine Russia’s ideogeographical position. According to Haslam (1998:121), some commentators hold the belief that “Russia is not properly part of Europe; yet ironically, the insistence in Warsaw—accepted by the West—that Poland is a central European and not an east European state does not lend much credence to this line of approach: if the Poles are in central Europe, what exactly constitutes eastern Europe?”

On the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain in Poland during the 1950s, for instance, there was
a conscious attempt to "mirror" the West through popular culture. Fashion and entertainment took on a "principle role in [a] bizarre war" (Dziegiel 1998:159) between the authorities and a youth culture that sought to imitate Western style. In this context "Jazz, chewing gum, Coca Cola" were branded as "symbols of the alleged corruption of the non-communist world and at the same time elements of an extremely naively construed mythology of the West" (1998:160). In the wider field of popular imagery, West and East are characterized in terms of ideological differences, yet possessing qualities of sameness (as in most cultures men are classed as different to women, but the qualities of sameness are cited when the contrast is made between human and animal). In our scheme of symbolic dualisms, East and West appear as enantiomorphs—mirror images of each other. In Structuralist terms (see Lévi-Strauss 1969:Chaps 3, 4) it is characterized by a binary opposition where a contrast occurs between our group and outsiders. In this sense the "mirror" analogy is extremely pertinent, for the image not only has a metaphorical relationship (association through perceived likeness) to the "original," but—through its reversal—there is a metonymic relationship (association through juxtaposition of dissimilarity). This dual notion is central to the concept of reciprocity—the relationship which both unites and separates. It unites through the relationship of exchange, while at the same time it divides the participants as separate members of the exchange relationship. True reciprocity can only function if the parties are engaged in a symmetrical relationship. In anthropological terms the tit-for-tat exchange of diplomats would be referred to as "symmetrical reciprocity."

In her book Varieties of Realism, Hagen (1986:211) refers to reflective symmetry—based on the mirror image, in contrast to iterative symmetry which results from the repetition of elements. And, in terms of pictorial composition, the effect of the "Looking glass" photograph is achieved by "reflective" or "bilateral" symmetry from the mirror-imaging of elements within the picture. It is the juxtaposition of the "original" and the reflected image that creates the bilateral symmetry which can be seen in The Guardian photograph—the reflection is achieved optically by "flipping a figure over in a plane, through a line or a point" (Hagen 1986:33). And, as we saw, The Guardian photograph had been cropped so as to increase this appearance. As the mirror's reflection creates an image with this underlying symmetry, an effect is achieved where the parts are identical in shape, yet they remain opposite in their spatial orientation. It results in an East-West reversal either side of the metaphorical divide of the Iron Curtain, which stretched from the Baltic to the Adriatic, according to Churchill. 

**Through the Looking Glass**

There were times when he confronted his own image as a man confronts an empty valley, and the vision propelled him forward again to experience, as despair compels us to extinction, (le Carré 1965:124)

We might well be led to question the newspaper's analogy between news of present-day Russia and its making reference to the novels of le Carré. I would propose that it has been partly motivated by what Rosaldo (1989) would term "Imperialist nostalgia." This occurs when the agents of social change display nostalgia for the passing of an era, the destruction of which they themselves have engineered, and we could justifiably claim that the press had been party to bringing about the end of the Cold War era. However, the photograph under discussion could be criticized for not fulfilling the expected journalistic role of supplying information about actual events, rather it is aiming to express more of a "poetic" feeling or attitude towards events. One could argue that placing the photograph in this context amounts to an act of "fabulation" by selecting facts from reality and using them as the basis for creating a story. This embroidering of the truth can compensate for a lack of knowledge in the area, or act as a replacement for facts that cannot be accepted. In the context of Soviet intelligence, fabulation
was a common practice. According to Col. Mikhail Luibimov of the KGB Foreign Intelligence: “When we drew up reports, of course we dramatised those bits which pointed out the threat to the Soviet Union. By emphasising the right things, I'd ensure that my report would go straight to the top—to the Politburo; if the report was dull and boring, it would just get filed away.”

The metaphor functions through presenting things in the guise of something else. It thus enables us to understand a concept through similarity. This distinction has been succinctly expressed by Geertz (1973:81), “The use of a road map enables us to make our way from San Francisco to New York with precision; the reading of Kafka's novels enables us to form a distinct and well-defined attitude towards modern bureaucracy.” Even so, things are not quite as clear-cut as Geertz makes out. Our consultation of the road map triggers a host of mental associations drawn from popular culture. For example, Kerouac's map-reading (though travelling in the opposite direction to Geertz's proposed journey) was not only associated with the early American pioneers and “dreams of what I’d do in Chicago, in Denver, and then finally in San Fran” (1957:15); it also represented “the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future” (1957:20). By similar means I would suggest that it becomes impossible to apprehend such a phenomenon as the Cold War without recourse to our own cultural mythology, which can include the cinema as well as literary works of fiction and aspects of popular culture in general.

That “The Cold War” is replaced by “The looking glass war”: signifies a change of state from a long-term stand-off to current conditions of absurdity. We might be reminded of Karl Marx's revision of Hegel's notion of history repeating itself. According to Marx, the first time is enacted through tragedy, the second time through farce. Equally, it suggests that the political situation is not dissimilar in character to Lewis Carroll’s (Charles Dodgson) *Through the Looking-glass* (1872) with its central narrative based upon a game of chess. According to Alice, “It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world—if this is the world at all, you know” (1872:208). From the caption, we might take it that the soldier depicted in The Guardian photograph appears as a chess piece who cannot tell if he is moving by his own volition, nor does he have any overall concept of the game plan; he could be said to function as a character in Kafka’s *Castle* or Rabelais’ *Gargantua*. The extraordinary game of chess has proved a useful literary device. For example, H. G. Wells in *The Underlying Fire* describes a game of chess being played between God and the devil. Here too, a literary precedent provides an appropriate metaphor for the Cold War stalemate: “the adversary cannot win, but also he cannot lose so long as he can keep the game going.” Indeed, the most likely outcome of Cold War escalation was considered to be *Mutually Assured Destruction.*

This is something of a “universal” political theme, recognized by Clifford Geertz in the Balinese cockfight, which also has a strong resemblance to the issue at hand:

> Men go on allegorically humiliating one another and being allegorically humiliated by one another day after day, glorying quietly in the experience if they have triumphed, crushed only slightly more openly by it if they have not. *But no one's status really changes.* You cannot ascend the ladder by winning cockfights; you cannot, as an individual ascend it at all. Nor can you descend it in that way. All you can do is enjoy and savour, or suffer and withstand, the concocted sensation of drastic and momentary movement along with the aesthetic semblance of that ladder, a kind of behind-the-mirror status jump which has the look of mobility without its actuality. (Geertz 1973:443)

Similarly, le Carré (1965:223) expresses the world as perceived by a participant in the Cold War espionage game: “he was witnessing an insane relay race in which each contestant ran faster and longer than the last, arriving nowhere but at his own destruction.”
Conclusion

In the spy's world, as in dreams, the terrain is always uncertain. You put your foot on what looks like solid ground and it gives way under you and you go into a kind of free fall, turning slowly tail over tip and clutching on to things that are themselves falling. This instability ... is both the attraction and the terror of being a spy. Attraction, because in the midst of such uncertainty you are never required to be yourself; whatever you do, there is another, alternative you standing invisibly to one side, observing, evaluating, remembering. (Banville 1997:143)

The mirror image has played a significant role in the development of Western Art. From the technical point of view, Brunelleschi's painting of the Florence baptistry was achieved by the use of the mirror (White 1957:114) and Alberti had used mirror images to aid his development of perspective. Contemporaneous technological advances were responsible for a new vision. In the fourteenth century, newly available flat glass mirrors replaced the flat metal and glass hemispherical mirrors. These reflected a clearer image and encouraged a closer association between the field of vision and a two-dimensional flat surface. At the same time there has developed a general integration of the formal properties of reflection and mirroring into systems of representation. The physical attributes of glass act as a pertinent metaphor for the Cold War. Its hardness, yet extreme fragility, is complemented by its optical qualities which (depending on how the surface has been treated) can offer transparency, opacity or reflection. From the symbolic interpretation, the reflected image may be considered to have sinister implication, with the reflection bearing witness to the split or doubled self—the tradition of the Doppelgänger. Knightley proposes that the successful spy depends upon having a split personality which entails doing all the things that a "decent" person would not do: intercepting mail, reading other people's letters, listening in to phone conversations, exploiting the weaknesses in people's personalities, as well as manipulating others for his or her own ends. The adoption of false names, identities and ways of life would result in a schizophrenic "maze of mirrors" (Knightley 1999).

In the context of the Burgess and Blunt espionage scandal, Cunningham (1988:260) refers to the development of the "other" self as "the converging world of the spy, the masked agent or double-agent ... and the world of the homosexual." And this has been well-expressed in John Banville's novel TheUntouchable, with its story based on the Cambridge spying of the 1950s. Here the clandestine encounters within the gay community (before the legalization of homosexuality) paralleled the secret assignations of espionage activity: "the covert, speculative glance, the underhand sign, the blank exchange of passwords, the hurried, hot unburdening" which would take place in "the public lavatories, the grim suburban pubs, the city's dreamily ... innocent parks" (Banville 1997:163). Indeed Leitch makes a quite extraordinary suggestion that practising homosexuality, in a society that repressed such activities, provided the appropriate training for being a spy: "As people were still sent to jail for homosexual behaviour ... an entirely clandestine gay society provide excellent practice in conspiracy and leading a double life." We might further speculate that within Christian mythology, there is an established connection between the act of treachery and a covert gesture of affection between two men in Christ's betrayal by the kiss of Judas. He "gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.' And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, 'Hail, master'; and kissed him." As far as this has an implication for our "looking glass" photograph and the creation of modern myths, Lévi-Strauss proposed a close identification of the behavioural (the performance of social and ritual activities) with the ideational (that of myth and symbolism). Insofar as we can describe newspaper photography as a social (or ritual) activity, we should expect to find that the formal aspects of this behaviour (i.e. the taking and publishing of photographs: the immediate observable structures) cannot be regarded in isolation from the context of expres-
sion and the underlying symbolism (the deeper cultural or generative structures).

In Mauss's concept of exchange, his notion of "the gift" is an essential constituent of a "total system of reciprocity that far from precluding competition, victimization, and power plays, rather situates them culturally" (Boon 1982:93). The mirror image can be said to be analogous to this form of reciprocity. The original and its reflection are divided as separate entities by the mirror's surface, yet at the same time this creates optically a symmetrical "figure" which unites the figure and its reflection. It is the same double function which we encountered earlier: that of setting apart while at the same time uniting, which enables reciprocity to function. It thus serves as a particularly appropriate scheme that can facilitate both the expression and manipulation of social relationships and of identity. In this context we can consider this single newspaper photograph as a synecdoche in which the part (i.e. the photograph) not only stands for the wider practice of photo-journalism and the picture-making tradition (see Wright 1999:106), but also comes to represent the broader political picture. "The looking glass war" photograph is only able to offer a partial impression of the wider state of affairs and lens-based media are particularly suitable for the purpose of supplying selective information of a quality that does not necessarily invite us to complete the picture in visual terms, but that can stimulate the imagination with reference to the wider context. This characteristic has been discussed by Arnheim:

In the film The Third Man the mysterious protagonist stands unseen in a doorway. Only the tips of his shoes reflect a street light, and a cat discovers the invisible stranger and sniffs at what the audience cannot see. The frightening existence of things that are beyond the reach of our senses and that yet exercise their power upon us is represented by means of darkness.

It is often asserted that when objects are partly hidden, "imagination completes" them. Such a statement seems easily acceptable until we try to understand concretely what is meant by it and we compare it with what happens in experience. No one is likely to assert that imagination makes him actually see the whole thing. This is not true; if it were, it would destroy the effect the artist tried to achieve. What happens is that the visible object is seen as incomplete—that is part of something larger. (Arnheim 1956:318)

As this paper has attempted to show, the incomplete "looking glass" photograph is part of the larger metaphorical political and cultural picture. This part/whole relationship leaves us with the proposition that it becomes impossible to separate the fact from the fiction and that we cannot even begin to address (or photograph) such a phenomenon as the Cold War without our becoming entangled with its fictive manifestations (see Harrison 1993). Further, the Cold War phenomenon itself maintained an underlying fictitious structure with its clearly defined roles of "us" and "them" which served to mask the details and intricate nature of world politics. Now the "war" is over we can begin to perceive these divisions more clearly. Returning to Rosaldo's "Imperialist nostalgia," the loss of the Cold War bilateral partition of the world—leaving the two sides without a clearly defined enemy—creates an atmosphere of instability and insecurity. Once again this is not limited to the sphere of political realities since the spy film is also characterized by its tendency for political oversimplification. The spy film genre [along with the country of Russia (see Haslam 1998) and the "Western Alliance"] has yet to renegotiate its place in a new world of increasing complexity, and has found difficulties representing states of affairs that more and more seem to evade binary categorization.

As for the conclusion of this particular episode of "The looking glass war," ten days after the story appeared in the papers (on the 17 May 1996), Russia ordered four British diplomats, instead of the proposed nine, to be expelled from Moscow as spies. Britain retaliated by expelling four diplomats from London. The Russian Foreign Ministry told the British ambassador Sir Andrew Wood "to withdraw four members of the embassy staff within the next
few days." In London the British Foreign Office summoned the Russian ambassador, Anatoly Adamishin, and handed over the names of four Russian embassy staff who were to be withdrawn in the next two weeks. This relatively relaxed time-frame for the exchange not only suggested a compromise, but also that it would be to the benefit of both parties to play down the affair. According to Maureen Johnson, writer for the Associated Press, "British [government] sources said privately that the arrangement was 'very satisfactory'."

Endnotes

1The Russian ultranationalist presidential candidate Vladimir Zhirinovsky, with his reputation for outspoken extremism, said that if he were elected, "Our methods will be different. We will execute them right on the spot" (interview with Associated Press Television).

2The last similar case occurred in 1989 when eleven British journalists and foreign service employees were expelled from Moscow in retaliation for an equivalent expulsion of Russians from Britain. Nonetheless, these events were closely followed by an announcement from Presidents Bush and Gorbachev, during the so-called "seasick summit" (held on a ship off Malta during gales and high seas) that the Cold War was "at an end." "Bush declared, 'We stand at the threshold of a brand new era of U.S.-Soviet relations,' and Gorbachev responded, 'The world leaves one epoch of Cold War, and enters another epoch.'" (Washington Post Monday 4 December 1989). Of course the best-known incident of Russo-British spy rivalry was in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Cambridge-educated ring led by Kim Philby was exposed; among other consequences it led finally to the art historian Anthony Blunt being exposed as "The Fourth Man" of the spy-ring and stripped of his knighthood in the 1980s. Blunt had created for himself a unique blend of espionage and visual representation in being both a secret agent and the Keeper of the Queen's Pictures.

3According to the double agent George Blake: "I was given a Minox camera, and I carried that Minox camera with me whenever I went to work, like I carried my wallet with me, and the reason was that I never knew what important documents I might find on my desk which were worthwhile photographing" (interviewed on the Cold War television series, see Filmography).

4Hanson refers to the "Maori theory of mind; a theory which in philosophical parlance would be called Cartesian dualism" (Hanson 1983:86).

5Indeed, Roger Fenton's photographs of the Crimean War proved to be a significant milestone in the history of photography and photo-journalism.

6This type of symmetrical reciprocity was to become an essential ingredient of the de-escalation process that led to the end of the Cold War. This was proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev in his speech to the British parliament on 18 December 1984: "In limiting and reducing weapons, particularly nuclear arms, we are prepared to match whatever Western negotiating partners would do" (Gorbachev 1996:161).

7From "The Sinews of Peace," Winston Churchill's speech of 5 March 1946, in Fulton, Missouri: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent."

8It is interesting to note that Lewis Carroll's (1872) Through the Looking-glass, and What Alice Found There addresses some "universal" political themes. J. B. Priestly (1957) proposed that The Walrus and the Carpenter were two archetypes of politicians. Indeed we find that the Walrus (in Tweedledee's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter") displays a type of "Imperialist nostalgia" in his mourning the oysters he is consuming:

"I weep for you," the Walrus said,
"I deeply sympathise.
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

9Interviewed on the Cold War television series (see Filmography).

10For example, we can find the musical connotations to Geertz's map: we "leave our hearts" in Tony Bennett's "San Francisco" to arrive in Sinatra's "New York, New York!"

11In Carroll's book, the world becomes inverted and the text contains many references to left and right reversals, and in a representational style similar to the photograph in The Guardian, Carroll's ridiculous characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee are described as mirror images of each other. According to Gardner (1970:10) this can be related to Carroll's own self-image: "In appearance Carroll was handsome and asymmetric—two facets that may have contributed to his interest in mirror reflections. One shoulder was higher than the other, his smile was slightly askew, and the level of his blue eyes was not quite the same." Not only did Carroll practise "mirror
writing" (1970:182), but it may be relevant that Carroll was a photographer. His writings may have been influenced by his first-hand experience of the formation of the photographic image, the “negative” of which is an inverted image on a glass plate which also displays left and right reversals. That the conceptual framework of photography would have appealed to Dodgson’s fertile and surreal imagination has been noted by Taylor (1998:32): “large things were reduced in scale. Adjust the camera and small things were enlarged.” In addition, one of Carroll’s photographs titled “The Reflection” (1862) shows his sister Margaret posed next to a looking-glass. Furthermore, Carroll’s portrait of the actress Ellen Terry employs a compositional strategy that is very close to Dukor’s photograph featured in The Guardian. On this matter our speculation may be curtailed as the portrait, with mirror, had become something of a fad during the latter part of the nineteenth century and such a compositional device was not especially unique to Carroll.

Another way in which the “Looking-glass game” is analogous to the Cold War is in the permanent threat of imminent conflict: “Let’s fight till six, and then have dinner,” said Tweedledum. Threats rarely develop into action (the fight between the Tweedle brothers, and that of the Lion and the Unicorn). When conflict does break out, it does so by operating to absurd “rules;” for example, in the combat between the White Knight and the Red Knight: “Another Rule of Battle, that Alice had not noticed, seemed to be that they always fell on their heads; and the battle ended with their both falling off in this way, side by side. When they got up again they shook hands, and then the Red Knight mounted and galloped off” (Carroll 1872:296). In the context of Cold War espionage, Knightley (1999) maintains that “the KGB, the CIA and the British SIS had agreed not to delimiting the extent of conflict. For example, the KGB, the CIA and the British SIS had agreed not to serve. This particular instance of the Lévi-Straussian scheme (of East-West ideological differences, while still maintaining qualities of sameness) manifested itself in the adoption of unwritten codes of conduct, delimiting the extent of conflict. For example, the KGB, the CIA and the British SIS had agreed not to kill each others’ agents. Some interpretations have regarded the “looking-glass” contests as political allegories on Carroll’s part, suggesting that the lion and the unicorn stand for the Victorian politicians Gladstone and Disraeli (1999:243). This may, or may not, be so.

12This has been outlined by Stolowicz (1988).
13Guy Burgess played a central role in the 1950s Cambridge spy-ring. He was described as handsome, charming, flamboyant and an alcoholic.

In his essay “The Well of Narcissus” Auden imagines Narcissus not as young and beautiful but as fat and middle-aged. Drunk, he gazes at himself in the glass, and says, “I shouldn’t look at me like that if I were you. I suppose you think you know who I am. Well, let me tell you, my dear, that one of these days you’re going to get a very big surprise indeed.” That seems a very fair description of Burgess’s character. (Bennett 1994:211)

14Page 3 of his introduction to Modin (1994).
15This episode reflects a similar instance in the Old Testament (I Samuel, X: 9, 10) where Joab kisses Amasa and “smote him therewith in the fifth rib” with his sword “and he died.” In the cinema a more explicit identification of betrayal and homo-eroticism appears between two lesbian lovers in Chabrol’s Les Biches (1968).

16It is interesting to note that the term “legend” was used to describe the details of an agent’s persona when establishing a new identity.
17An example of Cold War over-simplification can be found in President Reagan’s use of the term “evil empire” to describe the Soviet Union.

References


**Filmography**

Reed, Carol. 1949. *The Third Man*. 104 mins B&W; prod: GDF.