Lost in Translation?

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Figure 1: Jumping Shadow, Aldobranti 2013, scan from film negative

Abstract

The shadow of the person is very much more widely represented in the Western art historic canon than in classical Chinese or Japanese art. In the West the shadow though was only shown on a basis of narrative need until the nineteenth century CE and the emergence of the modern. It has been taken up broadly in the emergence of psychoanalysis, literature, surrealist art and film. It still remains a very small part of these other culture's visual language. This note surveys the works in either canon, attempts a reconciliation through the study of the media used and questions the nature of the cultural gap.

Keywords: shadow, intercultural comparison, fine art

For the past three years since viewing the exhibition 'Shadow Catchers' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Barnes, 2010) I set out, inspired by the title to explore the behaviour of my shadow when I try to catch it by suddenly jumping upon it – fig.1. I leave the shutter open for a longer time to exploit the fact that the camera remains relatively stationary with respect to my body to isolate the shadow from the background, blurring any extraneous detail.

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While trying to situate this work in a global context it seemed to me that the human figures in the Chinese brush and ink paintings and Japanese wood block prints with which I am familiar were recorded without shadow – for example, fig.2. More extensive research indicates that this

Figure 2: Miyanokoshi, Ando Hiroshige from the series '69 stations of the Kisokaido'

is the case and that furthermore the shadow of the human is much more widely represented in the Western canon.

In the first place a disclaimer: as a shorthand, the word Western and Western culture generally will in this text reference values arising in the area once covered by the Roman Empire; the cultures which derived from first settlements in modern day Iraq in the fourteenth century BCE. I will attempt to avoid the use of the word Eastern and references to Eastern culture generally and reference instead China and Japan appropriately. Before debating this as a contemporary issue, we will first review the visual evidence gathered for art historical references to the shadow in Western culture from the second millennium BCE through to the twentieth century CE. In parallel we looked for the shadow in Chinese and Japanese art in their classical period and in the context of Japan before the Meiji restoration (1868) and the subsequent opening up to Western ideas. Despite the real contribution to European art of the Japanese wood block print we believe that this restriction is fair given a discovered imbalance in volume of representation.

Given that we see a greater number of images of the shadow in Western images we reduce the workload by employing a reductive analysis of the parts in the depiction of the shadow. Firstly we rely on the physics of light: a shadow is defined by the coincidence of the three entities: a light source, the object, and the ground itself.

Then in turn we look at these three parts: Is the light source directly represented in the image? If not, perhaps when the light source is the sun is it indicated (by direction of the shadow) in the image, we will commonly interpret the length of the shadows as informing for the time of day or the geographical location. In some cases the nature of the light source might be secondary to some drama being played out. Another possibility is that the effectiveness of the light source is demonstrably low and without reference to surreality its output and ability to cast a shadow is the point being made in the image: Bacon's image, fig.3 of the death of George Dyer shows an electric lightbulb flooding a bathroom with darkness.

Figure 3: Triptych May-June, 1973, Francis Bacon (Bacon, 1973)

Turning now to the object and in our particular interest the human outline. Commonly the figure is the central part of the image and [in the West] we see the shadow as a natural adjunct to the figure. In some cases though, the image may be showing the shadow in the absence of the form causing it. We are expecting to be able to infer the existence of the object together with its shape and nature.

With regard to the shadow a number of choices for the interpretation of the image present themselves. Although the inhabitants of Plato's Cave must watch detached shadows without visibility of their cause, we expect the figure and the shadow to be appear tied either directly or at least in a plausible conjunction. We may need to explain the absence of a shadow by reference to the lighting and weather conditions but if the shadow is shown and appears to be independent of the figure we will look for any discordant features between the shadow and the figure, given though that these discordant features may be no more than a great discrepancy in scale.

Once we have explored the relationship between these three parameters the question we should wish to address is the artistic motive (if any) in any digression from/distortion of this tripartite relationship.

In Egyptian times, the burial processes were intended to provide for the afterlife of the material body and as fig.4 illustrates the shadow and soul continue to move in the world of the living. If the burial rites were performed correctly there was no cause to fear soul nor shadow. The narrative (due care of the dead) is requiring the depiction of the shadow.

In mediaeval time, again the shadow is portrayed as and when as demanded by the narrative circumstance, whether or not the shadow is shown otherwise seems to be a matter of the painter's expediencies. The bible (Acts 5,15) recounts that early believers would move the sick in Jerusalem where St Peter's shadow might fall on them. Thus the shadow is recorded in Masaccio(1401–1428)'s image, fig.5 but in a later painting (Titian(1481–1576)'s Flight into Egypt, fig.6) the holy figures appear without shadows, seemingly having been stuck onto a background painted with a more conscientious rendering of shadows.

And building on Pliny the Elder's retelling of earlier Greek myths European neo-classical painters, for example Eduard Daege, 1834, fig:7, illustrated the myth of the discovery of drawing in which a young woman traces out the outline of her loved one's shadow. Which of course is all too much to resist for Komar and Melamid satirically minded re-imagining fig.8 of neo-classicism as soviet realism …

The enlightenment and the development of the scientific enquiry came to focus on the nature of mind. Printing and newspapers enabled the dissemination of portraits of the famous and notorious and theories grew to explain character through the visual; in three dimensions the

Figure 4: The soul and the shadow leave the tomb at daybreak,Papyrus of Nefereubenef, 1400BCE, Musée de Louvre, Paris

Figure 5: St Peter cures the sick, Masaccio, 1426, Florence(Masaccio, 1440)

Figure 6: The Flight into Egypt, Titian, 1506, Hermitage Museum, Russia (Titian, 1506)

Figure 7: Die Erfindung der Malerei,Eduard Daege, 1832. Öl & Leinwand, 176,5 x 135,5 cm, Nationalgalerie, Berlin

Figure 8: The origin of Soviet Realism,Vitaly Komar (1943) and Alexander Melamid (1945), from the Nostalgic Socialist Realism series, 1982-1983,(Komar and Melamid, 1982) Oil on canvas, 183.5 x 122 cm Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

study of phrenology explored skull shape, in two dimensions the silhouette enjoyed considerable success – the tightfistedness of Louis XV's finance minister Etienne de Silhouette causing these inexpensive alternatives to portraits to be pejoratively named after him. Concurrent with these interests and supporting them, the physics of lens based technologies of the camera lucida and the magic lantern show begin to lead out the physical nature of the shadow.

With this developing awareness of the self we find literature which begins to identify the shadow as a "player" in its own right. In Chamisso's story of Peter Schlemihl (Chamisso, 2007, e-book) and Oscar Wilde's tale of the Fisherman and his Soul (Wilde, 2009), the shadow becomes the commodity in a fateful trade with the devil.

> What men call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but is the body of the soul. Stand on the sea-shore with thy back to the moon, and cut away from around thy feet thy shadow, which is thy soul's body, and bid thy soul leave thee, and it will do so.(Wilde, 2009, ch.3)

and takes on a criminal, narrative existence of its own(Wilde, 2009). These stories build on Goethe's Faustus(1813) and moving forward have visual parallels in the film of the Student of Prague where the protagonist's reflection is traded. Menzel's illustration of Peter Schlemihl's escaping shadow, fig.9 is significantly showing a shadow with different hands down articulation from its supposed owner and pursuer with arms up(Chamisso, 1843). We begin to think portrayal of the shadow as a distinct entity has a modernist edge to it and the depiction of the shadow begins to exceed the narrative requirement that had been the case upto this point.

Carl Jung (1875–1961), rejecting a theory of a *tabula rasa* of psychological development, proposed a scheme of primordial archetypes or universal patterns to be found in the unconscious. He named one such for the Shadow which should hold those values necessary to balance traits more visibly

Figure 9: Schlemihl chases his shadow,Menzel, Chamisso, 1843

resident in the conscious personality, the ego. Given that the intention of most is to think well of the positive aspects of the conscious self, the Shadow has come in the main to be burdened with the negative and / or those traits disliked in others through the mechanism of projection, though it might just as easily be "contact with the lost depths of the soul, with life and vitality…the creative" (Liliane Frey-Rohn in Zweig and Abrams (1991, p.17)) .

Finally, these psychological elements combine with the trauma of defeat for Germans in 1918 and with Lotte Eisner identifying shadows and darkness as a key part of the German psyche (Eisner and Greaves, 1973, pp.17,130,133) to create the highlights of German Expressionist cinema. The control of lighting fig:10 in 'Der Cabinet des Dr. Caligari' is only sufficient to unsettle the sense of proportion when viewed in the presence of the canvas set with its own Expressionist devices of painted shadows. The viewer is offered enough space to read the shadow of Caligari or the somnambulist Cesare as a consequence of the optics, The set is the real play here, providing a ground for the vertiginous chase of Cesare across the rooftops, a real life shadow. Building on this, the shadow of the vampire in'Nosferatu' fig.11 is deliberately introduced as an expression of evil and an entity separated from the figure. In Bram Stoker's original of 'Dracula' (Stoker, 1897, p.263), Murnau's source, the vampires cast no shadow but in the final scene of Ellen Hutter's seduction of Nosferatu, his shadow is at its largest before his climactic defeat.

The shadow's easy acceptance of the role of 'the other' , the *unheimlich* made for its ready adoption within the psychological aims of the Surrealist painters, fig.12.

Moving now, to examine artwork in Chinese and Japanese culture, we observe fig.13, a nineteenth century example of a Japanese entertainment genre known as *kage-e* popular with children, in which, allowing for the page turning order of a Japanese book a shadowy figure would be presented as if backlit on a shōji paper screen, the page turn would then reveal how this would be explained by a more mundane situation. That this example was made by Hiroshige (1797-1858CE), widely regarded as a major artist says more about Western expectations of 'proper'

Figure 10: fim still 'Der Cabinet des Dr. Caligari',Wiene (2000)
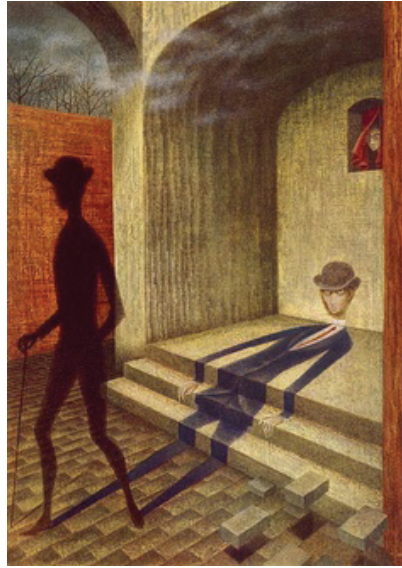

Figure 11: fim still 'Nosferatu',Murnau (1922)

Figure 12: Phenomeno, Varo (1940)

art.

The nineteenth century CE Japanese painters in the ukiyo-e tradition although becoming aware of the West, Fig. 14 amply succeed in depiction of night scenes and menace, the image does record the heavy shadows of the verticals around the tea-room and there is a hint of the shadows of the heads of the figures at the bottom left of the image.

Similarly, shadow puppetry has long been established in China since Han dynasty times (206BCE – 220CE), but now seems relegated to the status of a folk-art and worthy of preservation. The traditions of Chinese shadow puppetry arrived in Europe in the eighteenth century CE with French missionaries and with lens based projection systems, magic lantern shows at home might be enlivened Fig.15 or Fig.16
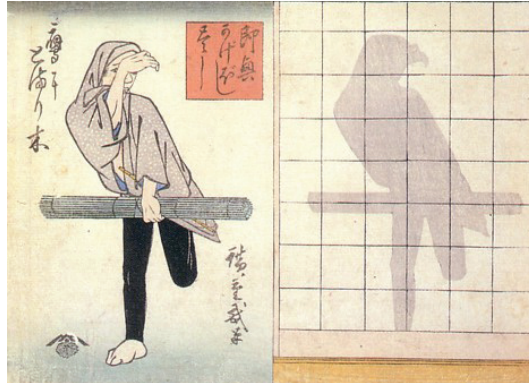
Figure 13: Kage-e, Hiroshige, Edo period Pink Tentacle, 2008

Figure 14: Night Scene in the Yoshiwara, Katsushika (1840), hanging scroll, color on paper, 10.25in x 15.75in, Ota Memorial Museum of Art

Figure 15: Entertainment for the home*shadow puppets rabbit* 2014

Figure 16: Entertainment for the burrow Casati, 2007

Given the ease in which the Western mind now takes to psychobabble an initial concern had been that the shadow, for some cultural reason was a no-go area for thought, perhaps indeed some part of the psychological values that it finds in the West. But while researching this deficit directly, I was directed to the Chinese poetry of Li Bai (701–762CE, Tang dynasty). Li Bai wrote (characters retained for reference)

> …
> 獨酌無相親。I drank alone without a friend.
> 舉杯邀明月。Raised my cup to toast the bright moon,
> 對影成三人。And greeted my shadow for we were three friends.
> …
> 我舞影零亂。I danced, and my shadow wildly swung.
> …

translation found at ChinaPage (2014). And further, in Japanese poetry Ichihara Misano (Gilbert et al., 2006) wrote

> 人を待つ影が来て影ふんでゆく – hito o matsu kage ga kite kage funde yuku//

which may be read as

> while waiting -
> shadows tread
> on shadow

or

> someone's waiting shadow
> passes shadows
> passing

These are quite active roles for the shadow and without psychological overtones. Gilbert et al. (2006) mentions the "kage-fumi game. It is a type of tag game, in which the tagger has to step on the shadow of other players in order to change places with them…a common child's game…[of] the late afternoon or twilight, when shadows become long…a sympathetic magic". Parenthetically, the Jungian Shadow is translated in Chinese as "陰景" – a different form from "影".

> …. Superficially, "陰" means side hill which is in the shade. … "陰" indicates the northern side of the mountain and the southern side of river water. To understand the meaning of this character, we should consider the right part "会" which implies that the sun is covered by cloud layer. The character "会" can be divided into two parts. The upper "今" signifies keeping silent in ancient Chinese, the primitive image of "今" corresponds to the earth matrix of the god of fear, embodying no light and also representing occlusion and emptiness. However, the lower part "云" has a pronunciation similarity with "孕" which means pregnancy and formation. Therefore, the combination of two parts, "陰" implies hidden pregnancy and nutrition. And in "陰景", the shadow, there exists not only darkness, but also brightness and the power of creation and transformation. Through the process of being in shadow, we can gain the power of pregnancy and nutrition, which is the only way to individuation. (Yin, Meng, and Shen, 2013)

Taoism has been the dominant spiritual element in Chinese thought for the past 2500 years and a Taoist world view indicates a dualism and a dynamic of the natural order in unity and tension with itself. Extrapolating this into the expression of the visual, the figure and ground as we understand them in the West become one, the human is a natural part of the soil as ground, humanity and landscape are co-extensive; and fortuitously, the difficulties of 'working' up a figure with brush and ink as might a painter in oils might work up from a ground become irrelevant. The brushed figure is developed by reference to the paper and the ground stands for itself in the values of the paper itself. The shadow on the other hand is a creature, an inhabitant of the ground and in the absence of a theatre, a platform for it, there is no call to display it. The Taoist or Buddhist system of thought is at ease with the absence of the shadow unlike the Western desire for the logical completeness of the picture – the sun is shining, why is the shadow not following the narrative?. In Hiroshige's work 'Light rain at Shono' from '53 views of the Tokaido road' , fig.17, the brushstrokes for the rain fill the ground of the scene to develop more effectively the sense of place, the figures of the travellers carry all the action necessary for the narrative.

The formal aethetics of Chinese painting were first stated by Xie He(471–509CE, Southern Ch'i dynasty) in his Six Principles (Rubinstein, 1999). Appearing as they do as six four character statements, they are gnomic at the least and will tend to be re-interpreted in each age. For example, the first '气，韵，生动' (literally 'gas, rhyme,vivid') will be interpreted to encourage a spiritual outlook in the painting. Importantly, the sixth principle encourages the study, copying and reinterpretation of the masters: not as a rote learning activity but to 'inherit the spirit', in the sense of the proverb, to improve on the standard set by the teacher: "indigo blue is bluer than the indigo plant it is extracted from (Rubinstein, 1999)". This tradition does however make for a conservative strand in Chinese painting and it likely will have stood aside from developments in optics.

Chinese brush painting, is to stress the points made above, content to present the physical in the image; the poem and its calligraphy should carry the allusive elements of the metaphysical. Rubinstein (1999, p.46) more forcefully draws the 'Three Perfections' together in an analogy to the German *lied* and referencing a work 'Yellow Armour' by Xu Wei (1521-1593,Ming Dynasty) details the embedding of political messages in the poetry.

Poetry was a key virtue at the Imperial court, for example when Li Bai's fame grew he was summoned to the court. By this stage, the eighth centure CE the examination system for government officials had long been instituted to provide an administration system for a vast and multi-ethnic population. A written examination required, for that time, a high degree of literacy with a significant knowledge of Confucianism and its role in maintatining the social order. In these ways, the predominant form of graphical presentation in China grew to be the calligraphic scroll in a literati style. It is noted that the Imperial Drawing School added the classics of poetry (Rubinstein, 1999, p.45) for illustration to the examination system and so by degrees the unity of the calligraphy of the poem, the illustration and the scroll was established.

In Japan where Chinese writing was adopted from the seventh century CE the style of painting with a brush and ink was greatly admired but a significant point is in 1762CE with the invention of the polychrome wood block print attributed to Harunobi (Noguchi and Hakutani, 1992, p.200), this mode of mechanical reproduction of the image was timely to meet a growing middle class' desire for images of famous actors and the publication of travel books, the Tokaido Road series among others, to support a mercantile class.

Figure 17: Light Rain at Shono, from the series '53 views of the Tokaido road', Ando Hiroshige, woodblock print, 1834

As remarked above, the unified view in Chinese art of the picture and the poem bears further study in the context of the Western canon. It would be interesting to make a synthesis of visual art and poetry, to explore the possible overlap. In the absence of the plainly unified view, we would look for poets with a perspective on the visual (Bohn, 2001) and conversely for visual artists who can approach their work through the verbal.

From the poetry side, Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) published his poetry, 'Un coup de dés jamais n' abolira le hasard' (a throw of the dice will never eliminate chance) in typography that responded to the text. In his preface he writes

> The 'blanks' indeed take on importance, at first glance; the versification demands them, as a surrounding silence, to the extent that a fragment, lyrical or of a few beats, occupies, in its midst, a third of the space of paper (Stéphane Mallarmé translated by Kline, 2007)

and in the text, he has *drawn* his poem out onto the printed page

<div align="center">

N'ABOLIRA

COMME SI

Une insinuation   simple
au silence   *enroulée avec ironie*
                    ou
                    le mystère
                         précipité
                              hurlé

dans quelque proche   **tourbillon d'hilarité et d'horreur**
voltige   *autour du gouffre*
                    sans le joncher
                         ni fuir
               et en berce le vierge indice

COMME SI

</div>

(Stéphane Mallarmé translated by Kline, 2007)

Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) as an avant-garde poet devised *calligrammes* – poems written out as images, fig.18 – and is quoted "Et moi aussi je suis peintre" (Apollinaire et al., 1987), "I too am a painter". The imagist poetry of e.g. Ezra Pound(1885-1972), inspired by the reduced forms of Chinese and Japanese poetry and created within a verbal minimalism prefigure minimalism in the visual arts. Gilbert et al. (2006) points out the conceptual similarities of Pound's 1916 poem 'In a Station of the Metro' with the work by Ishihara Mindanao quoted above.

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
> Petals, on a wet, black bough. (Pound, 1970, p.89)

Ezra Pound wrote of the creation of this poem

> That evening, in the Rue Raynouard, I realized quite vividly that if I were a painter, or if I had, often, that kind of emotion, of even if I had the energy to get paints and brushes and keep at it, I might found a new school of painting that would speak only by arrangements in colour. ...so, when I came to read Kandinsky's chapter on

the language of form and colour, I found little that was new to me. I only felt that someone else understood what I understood, and had written it out very clearly. It seems quite natural to me that an artist should have just as much pleasure in an arrangement of planes or in a pattern of figures, (Pound, 1970, p.87)

Thus we have poets (Mallarmé, Apollinaire) who consciously direct their words onto precise locations on the page. We have Pound who worked within the Imagist manifesto "…[to] use no superfluous word and no adjective which does not reveal something (Eliot, 1917)" and would therefore aim to make the most exact word [mark] on the page.

Noting that while the text device was a key part of the twentieth century Avant Garde, we are looking for the specific converse, to find artists in the West prepared to use words, the stuff of this text; to think of their work as poetry much as the Chinese painting can be called 'a soundless poem' (Rubinstein, 1999). It seems hard to locate those who write factually about their work, with an Imagist economy of language, avoiding belle lettristic verbosity.

It might be argued that any formal methods identified in an artwork have taken the art out to the textual world. In 1967, Harold Cohen, the painter began a project, AARON to create a computer program, a *formal text* which would create drawings and paintings (Cohen, 1995). Commentary Ignoring issues of artificial intelligence, the identity of the artist or the aesthetics of the realised work, the program is a finished specification of an artistic process: for example, autonomous decision processes are documented about composition, line and colour. Fig.19

From the artistic perspective the gap is one of representation and technique, the expressive compactness of the Chinese logograph pushes the meaning into the text, the decorative quality of the calligraphy embellishes the image: there just has not been the same opportunity for the Western visual artist to redress the imbalance implicit in the equation of a picture being worth a thousand words.
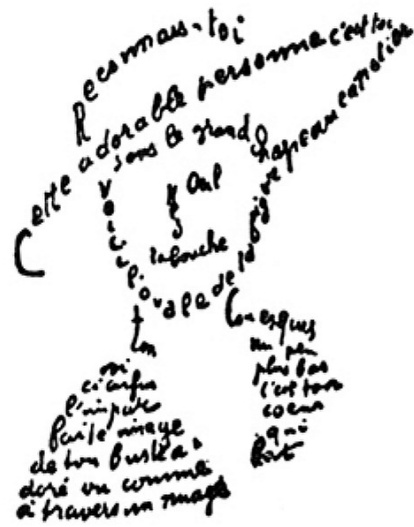
Figure 18: Guillaume Apollinaire, calligramme, extrait du poème du 9 février 1915 (Computer Science and Applications, 2014)

Figure 19: Gauguin Beach 346, by AARON and Harold Cohen

To summarise, we see a weak to non-existent visual identity for the human shadow in classical Chinese and Japanese work and at a contrast, a strong visual and individualised identity in the West. As noted above, we had limited our examination to the classical period in China and Japan, in the contemporary, we now use Google Inc.'s image search function[1] and retrieve image counts to assess the interest in the visual shadow.

	人影 (shadow of people)	shadow of people	shadow -hedgehog -sonic
google.jp	2.63 million	50 thousand	951 thousand
google.com	13.8 million	250 million	1.32 billion

Specifically we searched in the domain google.jp for images sourced in China: attempts to reach google.cn – the Chinese domain – were folded back to Hong Kong, (google.com.hk) and attempts to reach an image search page were further folded back to google.com. We used search terms of '人影' – a man's shadow – and 'shadow -hedgehog -sonic', a necessary restriction to eliminate a vastly popular, though irrelevant character from a computer game. It should be noted that a superficial inspection of results returned from the Japanese site showed a preponderance of photographs shot against the light, silhouettes of people as distinct from records of their shadows. The attachment of health hazard warning stickers are always mandatory for search engine results but I believe that the extreme unbalance in counts is indicative of an underlying effect. Again these results should be checked in Chinese language search engines e.g. Baidu.cn given some expertise in reading Chinese. Further research could validate this empirical approach but it seems probable that there is a real gap in interest in images of the shadow.

The question is: is this a cultural problem? We have the gap in interest across the globe but no gap in comprehension, in contemporary China, film makers make films with a noir edge (Hengcheng, 2010) . This is not a problem but a difference that should be considered in a wider perspective – Morris and Farrar (2010, p.140) caution against the habits of anthropologists in extrapolation from a single phenomenon, particular in comparisons of European and Yangxi based cultures. Is this an interesting situation, beyond my parochial interest? More widely there are good cultural and technical reasons why societies do things differently; say things differently and record things in their own way, this creates our interest in them. A post-structuralist response to this gap is first to point up the significance of the shadow to the Western mind and then drilling down to indicate in Western Fine Art the centrality of the visual over the textual.

We should be interested in the media and communications that drive other societies and we will see that among other channels the visual language of advertising will differ. In the West, given our greater familiarity with the shadow we will be more at home with the humour of fig.20. In China and Japan the shadow does not carry the same psychological connotations and advertising into a global market will need to be tuned with this in mind.

There will be other such differences yet to be discovered but the rapid changes in the global presentation of ideas may eliminate them from the contemporary before they become significant.

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[1] Google Chrome Version 34.0.1847.116, Mac OS 10.7, retrieval date 11 April 2014

The images returned from searches on Chinese and Japanese websites will change over time, it would be fascinating to see how these changes play out.
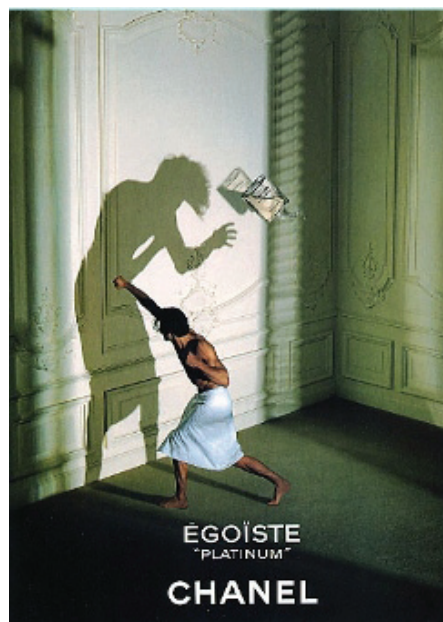
Figure 20: Advertisement for Chanel Égoïste Platinum, *Égoïste Platinum* 1993

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