

## PHOTOGRAPHY'S OTHER HISTORIES

edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson. Duke Univ. Press, Durham, NC, U.S.A., 2003. 296 pp., illus. ISBN: 0-8223-3126-8; 0-8223-3113-6.

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When 19th-century experiments made it possible to combine light and chemicals to record images on a sensitive material, what we now call photography was born. Relatively new in the scheme of things, photographic replication has nonetheless had a powerful impact on global communication from its inception. *Photography's Other Histories* introduces several geographies often left out of the academic accounts and expands historical critical debate beyond what the authors see as a Euro-American bias. This approach allows the 12 essays in this publication to convey successfully that the cultural experience of this new technology was not homogenous. Chapters devoted to Australian Aborigines and American Navajo, and to Papua New Guinea, China, Japan, Peru, Kenya, India and Nigeria, convey photography's influence on global development and cross-cultural communication. Each point is doubly articulated by the use of the forceful images that the writers reference. As a result, selections offer a lens on worldwide geopolitical histories as well as reminders of the degree to which

many traditions found the Western use of this tool invasive.

Overall these case-centered contributions work in elaborating photography's reach and underscore the multifaceted issues that have arisen as our world has grown smaller. Indeed, several authors presented research that was so powerful I found my mind circling back to the details for days after the reading. In part the impact was no doubt due to my unfamiliarity with the subject matter. Given that much of the research was new to me, it was particularly useful to find the textual descriptions enhanced by the camera's ability to present the faces and topography from various perspectives. I particularly value the way the publication presents alternatives. For example, James Faris's astute comparison of a published and an unpublished image of one woman often depicted by Edward S. Curtis aided immensely in presenting the thesis that the Curtis photographs were frequently contrived and misleading. In this case, Faris includes a Curtis picture showing that this woman had a rich, warm, beaming smile that remained unknown to us due to Curtis's decision never to share her expressive face with the outside world. Instead, all of the images this well-known photographer published of her depict a somber native who, as Faris relates, was apparently "dressed up" for the camera.

Organizationally, the book shows that choices determine how a story is told. The editors favor portraying the histories in a postmodern fashion and through anthropological eyes. Bracketing the book into three parts—"Personal Archives," "Visual Economies," and "Self-Fashioning and Vernacular Modernism"—leads to the mixing of traditions within parts. While the global feel of this mixture is a positive, the approach often separates related essays. It is not a major problem, but I did find that the placement of contributions undermines the book's ability to connect articles that share historical crosscurrents. For example, I would have liked the four essays on the Aus-

tralian Aborigines to be placed together.

The initial chapters set the stage with three first-person accounts by two indigenous Australians and a Seminole/Muskogee/Diné artist. After reading through Christopher Pinney's quite academic introduction, I found Jo-Anne Driessens's essay, "Relating to Photographs," notably refreshing. Using a human voice, she eschews dry jargon in favor of clear presentation of her poignant story. Adopted at 2 weeks of age, Driessens explains that she discovered her Aboriginal background through photographs in the Tindale Collection. I was immediately won over by the sincerity expressed in this piece. Although the shortest in the book, in my opinion, it is the best.

The next two sections might be characterized as a mix of anthropology and visual culture. Roslyn Poignant's exposé of misused photography is presented in the "The Making of Professional 'Savages': From P.T. Barnum (1883) to the Sunday Times (1998)." As Pinney explains, she "inserts photographic representations of abducted indigenous Australians in the context

of a history of earlier depictions." In this fragment of forthcoming work, Pinney raises important questions regarding the well-known historical trend of stereotyping and demeaning others. Also of interest is Morris Low's essay on the documentation demonstrating Japanese colonialism in Manchuria. Nicolas Peterson's treatment in "The Changing Photographic Contract: Aborigines and Image Ethics," is the best in this section, in my opinion, due to its scope. Dividing the topic into three periods (1840s–1920s, 1920s–1971, 1971–present), Peterson successfully communicates how photography registered in relation to Aboriginal culture. Here we see that the tool opened a dialogue as issues were identified, misunderstandings were clarified, and differences about the role of photography matured over time. To his credit, Peterson writes with an even hand in conveying how difficult it is to reconcile the Aborigines' right to protect their heritage with the desire of anthropologists to document this culture. Placing the subject in a broad framework allows him to illuminate heartfelt positions. His presentation also reinforces the impressions I formed after a recent visit to Australia, where I was struck by the population's struggle to come to terms with the range of viewpoints regarding these issues and the historical record.

The third section raises important questions about how other practices relate to photography. To oversimplify, this section was more like life: both rich and diffuse. I was enthralled by Deborah Poole's "Figueroa Aznar and the Cusco *Indigenistas*: Photography and Modernism in Early-Twentieth-Century Peru." Poole suggests that Figueroa, a painter and photographer, borrowed heavily from the literature and art of European Romanticism. Subsequently he created an approach to both photography and modernity that intentionally departed from European Modernism. Poole's expansive piece demonstrates that this artist's tangentially modernist style was shaped by Peruvian understandings of photography and art. Also of note is the final essay, by Stephen F. Sprague, "Yoruba Photography." Sprague, who explains that daguerreotyping came to Africa only 3 months after it was invented, conveys the degree to which the Yoruba integrated the technology into their own culture. His analysis also underscores that photography propagated

throughout the globe almost immediately after its discovery.

Although far-reaching and ambitious, *Photography's Other Histories* is not flawless. The essays too often seem to dichotomize cultures. This simplification to some degree stems from the decision to highlight the "Other," an approach that is ingrained in anthropology's essentially Euro-American methodology. The concept, to my mind, seems to defy the intention to broaden cross-cultural awareness. While it is widely accepted, I continue to believe that the characterization as Other, by definition, undermines the idea that each culture has a history for those who live through its events; and to present these episodes in the language of "Otherness" is to document the research from what is at times an inappropriate vantage point. The problem of "Otherness" is especially noticeable in some of the early, personal essays, where it seems that some writers editorialize on the Other in a way that initially gave me the impression that the book was too heavily weighted towards presenting Fourth World points of view. As it turns out, it is a balanced publication overall.

One dramatically evident oversight related to this approach is that the emphasis on the Other here fails to consider that the traditional canon equally ignores Euro-American contributions that do not fit easily into the well-developed story of photography. Including some of these overlooked histories would have strengthened the contributions by demonstrating that the Euro-American tradition has excluded those whom we would define as Euro-American. For example, the California nature photographers (e.g. Carleton Watkins) of the 19th century are similarly hard to fit into the traditional historical discourse. They, too, could have been presented easily in terms of "photography's other histories" to accentuate that the narrow photographic discourse generally adopted excludes all kinds of trajectories. Although quite American, these Californian photographers are difficult to conceive in terms of the "spectacle society" so often used to assess 19th-century photography. Navajo history, too, is surely American history. Yet, in the structure provided by this book, it seems that indigenous histories are basically termed non-Western, and crosscurrents tend to be read in increasingly proscribed ways as a result.

Clearly, the way in which Euro-American versus non-Western terminology implies a colonial dimension is worthy of discussion. Still, in my opinion, the complexity of communication is too real to characterize lightly. How local histories develop can be needlessly over-simplified, a problem that is exacerbated when characterizations are inaccurately presented in terms of an artificial dichotomy.

In summary, this book is an excellent reminder of how much all cultures have to learn about others. At times the essays too strongly project opposing cultural views. Still, its scope and structure suggest *Photography's Other Histories* would be a good choice for a textbook. General readers will also find the book appealing. These well-researched essays concisely bring to mind the reality of the photographic experience.

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