

Editorial Foreword

THE PARTIAL LENS Photography has not escaped the crisis of representations. We know the camera is a selective tool; inevitably, its wielder is influenced by personal and cultural biases. Trick photography is as old as picture taking itself, and the ability of the individual photograph to capture the larger context outside its frame is extremely limited. What we “see” in a photo is mostly what we are already prepared to see by other photographs and imagistic associations. These limitations make photography more revealing as a documentary technology, not less so. Each picture is an inexhaustible generator of meanings, some plainly visible (or so it seems), while others are less obvious to the eye. If we extend this interpretive potential beyond the frame by placing the lens, the photographer, and the object photographed within interactive networks that generate them all, then the creative power of photography is magnified. Three of our authors show how this expanded notion of the photograph, and the photographer, can help us see more in pictures than the lens alone conveys.

Erik Mueggler takes us to the Sino-Tibetan borderlands with Joseph Rock, a botanical explorer who traveled in west China in the 1920s and 1930s, gathering specimens for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Harvard’s Arnold Arboretum. The social world Rock encountered was war-torn and chaotic. He found himself in situations that frightened and repulsed him. The people Rock met seemed to him dirty and cruel; they provoked in him an intense racial disgust. Mueggler shows how Rock used photography to create social spaces in which he could manage his anxieties. His pictures document a routine, often desperate attempt to arrange and record people in much the way Rock treated plant specimens, bringing a familiar moral order to the world of objects. Photography alone could not accomplish this effect, so Rock added phonograph recordings. As soldiers, townspeople, and monks gathered to listen to the voice of Caruso, Rock took their pictures. The images that result hold a mood of suspension, of truce. They record the social space they were intended to create, one in which the lens situates Rock in the gaze of Others, allowing him to see himself, and to imagine a temporary moral connection, in the stares of people who were alien to him.

David Maxwell takes us next to the missionary frontier of the Belgian Congo, where he contends with a case of photographic connection nearly opposite to that of Joseph Rock. Here, among the Luba people who were targets of Pentecostal conversion, the camera is evidence of affection, not distance. William Burton, an English missionary active in the southeast Congo in the

1920s and 1930s, took hundreds of photographs of Luba, and he painted them as well. His images bespeak a fascination with the culture he was trying to redeem, and his Pentecostal commitments did not prevent him from photographing the “pagan” aspects of Luba culture, from fetish objects to artistically posed shots of men and women who, to the shocked eyes of church goers in England, were practically naked. Maxwell argues that Burton’s photography unsettles tired stereotypes about disdainful, ethnocentric missionaries. Burton’s work rivaled that of ethnographers in its sensitivity and attention to detail, and it challenged the way Pentecostals saw the people they were busy converting. The civilizing mission, Maxwell suggests, was not equivalent to the Christianizing mission. Burton’s pictures, which showed his great familiarity with Luba people, their bodies and beliefs, often embarrassed the funders of his mission work. The camera, in Burton’s hands, produced images of mutuality and affection, sensibilities that are often very hard for scholars of the missionary encounter to see.

Rupert Stasch blends our developing themes of photographic affection and estrangement in his study of the recent boom in pictures and documentary films of treehouse dwellers in West Papua on the island of New Guinea. The boom, which began in the 1990s, replicates earlier periods of fascination with New Guinea treehouses. Stasch argues that the treehouse derives much of its appeal, as an oddity, from Western notions of ordinary and exotic house forms. The treehouses built by contemporary Korowai and Kombai, often for the sole purpose of letting Europeans photograph them, are unusual house forms even in their local settings, and much that outsiders think about them is wrong. Stasch demonstrates the temporal durability of the (mostly primitivizing) cultural assumptions Europeans bring to their portrayal of New Guinea treehouses. He then contrasts these to ideas about high and ground-level houses common among Korowai. The foreign lens is extremely partial, missing elaborate notions of kinship, time, sociality, and sorcery that any Korowai person would see in a picture of a treehouse, or any other home. Against this gap in translation, Korowai build bridges of connection, assuming that a relationship of exchange exists between them and the outsiders who photograph their treehouses. Similar assumptions inflected the work of Joseph Rock and William Burton. What these photographers made of their presumed connection to Others is plainly visible in the kinds of pictures they took.

GENDER INCARCERATED The modern prison does strange things to gender. In most penal systems, prison administrators segregate inmates sexually, as punishment (of both men and women), as protection (of women from men), and as control (of sexually charged bodies). In response, prisoners recreate the male/female gender regime within the same-sex society of the prison. This perverse world of gender transgression and incompleteness is now central to the prison’s mythical power of deterrence. Less attention is given,

in popular and intellectual commentary on prison life, to how the correctional regime solves and creates gender problems on the outside, or how the gender politics of the prison (both real and imagined) shapes political movements in which activists expect to be arrested and incarcerated. Finally, attempts to reform the prison necessarily include a strong gender component, and the supposedly stabilizing influence of marriage and hetero-normative family life is often posed as key to the rehabilitation of society's "deviant classes," in and out of prison. Three of our authors examine the prison-gender nexus, showing how it interacts with larger political and economic systems.

Kevin Grant charts the strange route by which the hunger strike, a form of protest used by male and female revolutionaries in Russian prisons, became the celebrated tactic of suffragettes in Britain. The romantic allure of the Russian revolutionary scene was strong in England, and the arrival there of refugee anarchists and socialists created a social scene in which local suffragettes and other progressives could borrow selectively from Russian exemplars. The most appealing models, for the militant suffragettes, were hunger strikers. According to Grant, this model of prison protest played into societal notions of feminine vulnerability and self-denial, even as it ignored more violent tactics of poisoning, self-immolation, and stabbings found in Russian prisons. The hunger strike quickly proved effective in British prisons, where medical staff found it impossible to manage the condition of hunger strikers (often through forced feeding) while attending to other prisoners. The hunger strike, feminized by the suffragettes, was later adopted by men, especially Irish militants, and it eventually became a mainstay of global prison protest. Grant shows how crucial stages in the development of the hunger strike were influenced by feminized models of revolution and resistance that grew out of the mutual influence of British and Russian political activists.

Cecilia Green looks at a national prison culture in which the majority of inmates were women. In Barbados, from roughly 1873 to 1917, the number of women in penal custody exceeded that of men. This pattern is rare in contemporary societies, where male prisoners outnumber females by large margins. Green points out several factors that sent Barbadian women to jail, among them the massive out-migration of local men to work on the Panama Canal. Equally important was the homogeneous plantation economy, which fostered a culture of management and surveillance in which incarceration was a common means of controlling women. Likewise, the public life of women, who were often outside their homes, made them subject to police attention. The prison, Green argues, was part of a larger system of surplus labor management. There were relatively few Barbadian men for this system to process, but many women who, in the absence of men, were considered a threat to the moral order. Green's analysis shows how important ruling notions of domesticity were in creating and controlling a culture of female deviance. Later, when Barbadian migration patterns shifted, the plantation

economy waned, and a nominally middle class culture became available to larger numbers of Barbadians, the longstanding pattern of high female incarceration rates disappeared. Women were subject to new modes of discipline, most of them imposed within the home, not in the public or prison yard.

Peter M. Beattie draws even more explicit disciplinary connections between prisons and gender systems, linking both to ambient ideas of marriage in his examination of nineteenth-century prison colonies in Brazil. Beattie's focus is on male prisoners, but island prison colonies like Fernando de Noronha differed from mainland prisons in allowing free women, the spouses of convicts, to live and work in the colony. Prison authorities believed marriage could be used to control male convicts, whose sexual needs would supposedly lead to depravity, even insurrection, without heterosexual release. The belief that marriage would bring stability to the lives of the people Beattie calls "the intractable poor" was widespread among Brazil's ruling classes. As a result, it led to pro-marital policies in prisons, the military, and among employers of Brazil's slaves and former slaves. Prison authorities associated marriage with social prestige, and they used it to reward good behavior. Beattie argues that conjugal policies on Fernando de Noronha did not have the desired effect of moral uplift (men and women proved equally capable of corruption), nor did they enable more effective control of male prisoners (who continued to challenge the moral and administrative control of their keepers). Nonetheless, marriage figured prominently in attempts to improve the Brazilian poor, and Beattie sees in the persistence of pro-marital policies, despite their obvious ineffectiveness, the power of an ideology of class privilege that linked sexuality and social control in ways meant to favor the married man, both in and out of prison.

CSSH DISCUSSIONS Among the most influential recent trends in social theory is the new material culture studies (or materiality studies, as it is more often called in North America). Conspicuous use of the term "new" suggests the obvious: we have been here and done this before. Material culture studies was once a thing of exotic artifacts and ethnology museums—the details are dimly remembered, and easily distorted—but what did it do wrong that the new approaches do right? Reportedly, the old collections-based anthropology was prone to the fetishization of objects. The new materiality approaches are often criticized in the same terms, and for conceptual sloppiness in the attribution of agency to objects. Indeed, the latter critique suggests that new studies of material culture are insufficiently materialist, that their practitioners risk making fundamental mistakes in their theorization of the relationship between social action and things.

Haidy Geismar sorts through these possibilities in her review of recent work by Daniel Miller, the godfather of material culture studies, and a volume by Henare, Hobraad, and Wastell, which showcases ontologically-inclined approaches to "thinking through things." Geismar suggests that the advocates

of material culture studies are walking a fine line, but a productive one, between the vitality of physical objects and the allure of “ethno-philosophical speculation.” The mismatch between the theoretical claims of the approach (which grow increasingly abstract and complicated) and its analytical practice (which generates powerful results) is troubling to Geismar. She remains confident, however, that material culture studies is an intellectually vital tradition that will continue to provide key insights into how “people make objects and objects make people.”