Eerie Changelings

Daniela Caselli

Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009; 312pp, paperback £14.99;

Anthony Krupp, *Reason's Children: Childhood in Early Modern Philosophy*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2010; 261pp, hardback £50.50;

Karen Wells, *Childhood in a Global Perspective*, Cambridge, Polity, 2009; 220pp, paperback £15.99

'On ne connaît point l'enfance', claims the Preface to *Émile* (1762). Rousseau's famous dictum both defines the field of childhood studies as a legitimate area of research and exposes the main paradox at its core. Childhood, and the even more contested 'child', questions the limits of what can be known and asks from which perspective we can claim to possess such knowledge. The child, however, also displays an intimate proximity with sensorial and affective presence and plays an essential role in kinship and the question of being human: while epitomising otherness in Rousseau, for many thinkers after him the child is a material presence that defies interpretation and shows us the limits of language. The contradictory co-existence of a perfectly knowable and romantically inaccessible child threatens to breach the contract that enables any field of study to sustain itself: its members' claims to expertise and their ability to produce knowledge. Routinely accused of being too fluffy or, conversely, too worthy for its own good, the study of the child entails the risk of its own superfluity.

A number of studies have however vindicated the wider cultural relevance of this paradox: the now classic *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* by Jacqueline Rose (1984), and the work of Valerie Walkerdine (1991; 1997), Carolyn Steedman (1994), Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (1994; 1998; 2002; 2004; 2011), Allison James and Alan Prout (1990), Chris Jenks (1998), James R. Kincaid (1992; 1998), and Erica Burman (1994; 2006) have cast the foundation for a critical approach to the child, which has gained further momentum in the fields of gender and reproductive technology (Marilyn Strathern,1992, 2005; Sarah Franklin, 1997, 2002, 2007; Claudia Castañeda, 2003; Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, 2009) and queer studies (Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, 2004; Lee Edelman, 2006; Carol Mavor, 2007).

Three recent books tackle some of the problems thrown up again and again by the child: Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* follows Edelman in questioning the role of the queer child in history through twentieth-century literature and film; Anthony Krupp's

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Reason's Children: Childhood in Early Modern Philosophy traces the history of childhood in seventeenth and eighteenth-century rationalist philosophy; and Karen Well's *Childhood in a Global Perspective* maps out the place of childhood in contemporary social studies, and by doing so works through some key political problems, from legislation and policy to race, rights and education. *The Queer Child* puts the child in question, reading it as perspective:

> We should start again, with the problem of the child as a general idea. The child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back. It is a ghostly, unreachable fancy, making us wonder: Given that we cannot know the contours of children, who they are to themselves, should we stop talking of children altogether? Should all talk of the child subside, beyond our critique of the bad effects of looking nostalgically in fantasy? (5)

Brilliantly queer, the child is for Stockton not a being but a troubling act of looking at the self: this is why the child vindicates the strangeness of any form of sexuality. Stockton wants to give her theoretical framework a historical dimension too: making Carolyn Dinshaw's queer history speak to Lee Edelman's political rejection of the child as the paradigm of historical continuity, Stockton argues that by illuminating 'the darkness of the child' (3) 'the gay child […] makes us see children getting queerer in the century that enshrined and protected the child' (6). The twentieth century is the period when children start to get queer, but they do so not in history but in 'the waywardness of fictions' (9): 'The ghostly gay child (emblem and icon of children's queerness) […] sit[s] next to History' (9). From Henry James's *The Pupil* (1890) to the film of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), Stockton traces

> the gay child's 'backward birth'[, which] has piercingly postmortem features. […] The protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection after death. For this queer child, whatever its conscious grasp of itself, has not been able to present itself according to the category 'gay' or 'homosexual' - categories culturally deemed too adult, since they are sexual, though we do presume every child to be straight (6).

Stockton's complex defence of fantasy is remarkably effective in showing us how much cultural work the child can silently do, as Jo-Ann Wallace has demonstrated. Leading us through discussions ranging from the literal 'growing sideways' of the fat teenager in *The Hanging Garden*, (1996) to mothering in *The Children's Hour* (1961), *A.I.* (2001) and Djuna Barnes's fiction, Stockton looks at many 'dangerous children', and helps us along this journey by providing us with the categories of the ghostly gay child, the grown homosexual, and the child queered by Freud. Her interpretation

of *Nightwood* as a work of embroidery on sexological and psychoanalytical theories of the female homosexual is illuminating (93); the reading of Sally in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as 'the future Mrs. Dalloway's delay' (94) is nothing short of brilliant; and, due to its impressive queer studies pedigree, even the apparently quirky notion that Radclyffe Hall's, Virginia Woolf's and Djuna Barnes's 'girls hid their pleasures and their sorrows in their dogs' (120) wittily holds.

The book - which contains three previously published essays - reads an imposing amount of disparate material: among others, we read about the films *Lolita* (1962 and 1996), *Hard Candy* (2005), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *Elephant* (2003), *In Cold Blood* (1965), *Blood Diamonds* (2006), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1968) and *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993). Inspiringly, Blake's complex use of antinomies in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* makes Stockton's texts cohere under a critical framework that sees innocence as normative strangeness, while also enabling her to explore the difficulties thrown up by the child in legal and political contexts involving issues of consent, intent and motive.

This is an impressive, stimulating, and engaging study that queers the child in ways that show its enormous critical potential. It disproves many current responses to Edelman that predictably see his work as apolitical and redirects in innovative and often path-breaking ways the efforts of many of the theorists I cited above (although the study strongly - and sometimes puzzlingly - privileges North American over European scholarship).

There are two issues, however, which Stockton's book raises but does not fully resolve: one is the tension between the 'queer' and the 'gay' child. What we lose if we equate the two (or play with this equation, as occasionally the book does) is the central idea that, in psychoanalytic terms, the child's sexuality threatens all forms of sexuality. From this point of view the 'protogay child', however politically important, stabilises the troubling quality of the queer child into one form of sexuality. In this respect, the child is still being used as a source of comfort to 'hold off any possible challenge to our own [sexuality]', to go back to an important point made by Jacqueline Rose (4). The Sedgwick-indebted troubling movement of queer occasionally collapses here into a Michael Moon-influenced proto-gayness that consolingly belongs to the same identificatory innocence that the book as a whole critiques. Judging from the recent output in queer studies (from Heather Love to José Esteban Muñoz) the times are ripe for this form of associative historicity, which has succeeded in mobilizing relatively large readerships. However, I see Stockton's book doing something much more innovative and exciting: its real strength lies in evoking the persistently disturbing quality of the posthumous gay child's resurrection, not in eulogising its past life.

The second question, and it is a difficult one, which the text imaginatively poses, has to do with the notion of real children inhabiting the figure of the child. Lesnik-Oberstein in a recent piece in *Feminist Theory* has pointed

out how the main problem in Edelman's otherwise radical polemic lies in his residual attachment to the difference between the 'lived experiences' of historical children and the figure of the child (resurfacing in Stockton at times: 'and then there are bodies (of children) that must live inside the figure of the child' (5)). Although Stockton is keenly aware of the tricky division between the literal and the metaphorical, she sometimes ends up reverting to the reassuring opposition between bodies which experience and figures, or ideas, which do the work. The child, however, prevents us from being able to draw a neat opposition between the literal and the figural, reality and fantasy. *The Queer Child* helps us to see this, and in doing so confers renewed intellectual power on the study of the child in the humanities.

Anthony Krupp demonstrates that the child in philosophy is at the centre of the oppositions between the literal and the figural, the essential and the accidental, the human and the non-human. Focusing on five key rationalist philosophers - Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten - Krupp's precise and understated approach is based on attentive close readings of key passages which either focus on the child or dismiss it in highly significant ways. Working with what he calls 'the unit-idea of childhood (broadly conceived, thus including infancy and adolescence)' (16) and within a more traditional historical framework than Stockton's, Krupp's starting point is a sceptical one, attempting to understand not what the child is in general terms but rather 'what five philosophers believed they knew about childhood three centuries ago' (20). Krupp's resistance to constructivist approaches is evident in his choice to discuss 'childhood' rather than 'the child', which I read as a reflection of his allegiance to Lockean ideas rather than to post-Freudian and post-structuralist (not to mention queer) takes on the child. However, this is not an anti-theoretical book that believes in the transparency of language; it is a thoughtful and often illuminating exploration of how 'during the period we sometimes call the Age of Reason, children were defined as beings that have not yet attained the age of reason' (15). Guided by his surprise at not finding, in the empiricist tradition based on the idea of experience, a specific philosophy of childhood, Krupp gradually becomes aware of how, in the words he borrows from Avital Ronell - childhood 'constitutes a security risk for the house of philosophy' (15). Rather than a uniform understanding of childhood, then, we hear of Descartes's 'enfance' as 'a bodily limitation on an always already rational soul' (17); of Locke's rational human being troubled by children who, lacking reason, have to cease being human; of Leibniz's 'noncausal harmony of soul and body' to explain the apparent lack of reason in childhood; of Wolff's pedagogy devised to accelerate the maturation process of the 'not yet reasonable' child (18); of Baumgarten's ultimately anti-Cartesian treatment of 'sensation as a legitimate kind of knowing, rather than as a hindrance to knowing' (18).

Krupp's book helpfully guides us (in at least four languages) along the intricate paths followed by the child in early modern philosophy and

unearths some surprising gems. We are so used to generalising the child as a blank slate or to sloppily romanticise it as a visionary being belonging to a blissfully pre-lapsarian state, that it is almost refreshing to be confronted with the severe legacy of St Augustine's and St Paul's sinful infants condemned to eternal damnation. I cannot possibly do justice to the many moves in Krupp's study, whose strength lies in its attention to detail and refusal to simplify his philosophers' arguments on childhood (which are often not only paradoxical but plainly contradictory). The strongest portions of the book are on Descartes and Locke. For Descartes childhood is the time of prejudices: literally, it is the time when we make premature judgements, of which we should free ourselves if we want to arrive at a method. This ought to be done at quite an exact point in time - at about age 31, Descartes helpfully suggests - when one should wipe one's slate clean and renounce the prejudices of childhood (48). This purging of 'childish ways' (48) is not quite an infanticide (as Henri Gouhier would have it in 1999), but we are very far from the Socratic midwife (in rationalist philosophy all nurses and mammas play the peripheral role of superstitious 'old Women' who lead budding rationalists astray with their dripping sentiments - unsurprisingly, infant girls are nowhere to be seen). *Enfance* is a 'physical impediment to the essentially unphysical activity of thought' (33), and even if the mind is thought by Descartes to be rational even *in utero* (albeit not endowed with memory at that point), we need to free ourselves from the captivity deriving from the mind's immersion in the body.

The move from Cartesian *method* to Lockian *knowledge* (from rationalism to empiricism) is also quite brilliantly explored through childhood: 'Whereas Descartes viewed the senses as a potentially muddying medium that disturbs the view of these innate ideas, Locke held that the senses provide (rather than obscure) the basic material of knowledge' (58). Children are deficient but not defective in Locke: young children can occasionally even be thought of as 'total empiricists' and '*specula naturae*' (59). Accompanied by the idiot and the savage, the child becomes the essential sounding board for the plain thinking Man, the real hero of Locke's philosophy (whose arch-enemy is the scholar who has lost his love for truth in search of adversarial victories): 'in Locke, one must be an adult to be a natural historian, but since the natural historian enumerates simple ideas, he could in theory speak a language that even a child could understand' (91). The problem, however, remains for Locke that 'men cannot know for certain what beings count as men' (92); this is where the rather creepy changeling comes in, polluting Locke's clear waters: insofar as we cannot decide if it belongs to the category of the human, the eerie changeling makes Locke's moral Man vacillate.

After Locke we are led through Leibniz's *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humaine* (1704-5), which were only published in 1765, even though intended as a reply to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke's death put an end to Leibniz's improbable hopes to be granted a much sought after dialogue with the English philosopher). Here is where Leibniz 'cease[s]

regarding children as belonging to the category of the obvious, and begin[s] considering them as relevant to explicit philosophical concerns' (51). Issues of infant damnation, *theodicy*, Pelagian heresies, Augustinian revivals, and various debates on the role of free will after the fall dominate this section, followed by a discussion of Christian Wolff's *Ethics* (1710) where children - intriguingly - are equated with drunks (153) and his *Politics* (1721), which shows us very clearly what Rousseau will revolt against in *Émile*: children are both deficient and free from prejudices (and here we can gauge the huge distance from Descartes, 160) and their parents have the role of making them slaves to the good through early intellectual education (162). No Rousseauian 'losing time is gaining time' for Wolff, then. One last word on Baumgarten's *Meditationes* (1735), which bizarrely advocates a Cartesian turn (where previous experiences ought to be discarded to make space for a new method) in order to develop an anti-Cartesian focus on the senses. For Baumgarten, and we now feel light years away from Descartes, 'the child who imitates beauty (vs. merely appreciating it) engages in beautiful knowledge' (167): the child has become 'nothing less than the *source* of culture' (175). And it is here that we find the still current idea that 'identification of improvisation and play in infancy and childhood [are] a model for all aesthetic activity' (18).

Krupp's book is enlightening and often exciting: it legitimises the child as a prism through which to see classic philosophers in a new light, and carries out an impressive amount of intellectual work. Krupp tells us that the 'book may seem more congenial to constructionism than essentialism' primarily 'because I have studied ideas about children, rather than actual children' (21). But by keeping the two separate (in a much more overt way than Stockton would ever be prepared to do), Krupp does side with Locke's plain speaking Man, 'who regards ideas as objects of understanding' and leaves knowledge as 'a separate question' (21). By creating a neatly neutral position from which to distance himself from both 'radical constructivism and historical essentialism', Krupp divides facts and meaning, 'actual children' from the 'idea of childhood': while his critical practice shows the slipperiness of the child (not just that of childhood), his reflections want instead to hold on to the opposition between the literal, the actual, the lived experience, and the figurative, the conceptual, and the philosophical.

Unlike the other two texts, Karen Wells's *Childhood in a Global Perspective* is primarily aimed at students, introducing each topic and subtopic clearly and informatively and including suggestions for further reading. Wells wants to show 'how the concept of childhood shapes children's lives and how children, in turn, shape concepts of childhood' (1): the two need to be kept separate in order to be demonstrated to be mutually linked (the attentive reader will probably begin to see a pattern here). By adhering to a 'social constructivist approach' (even though her rigorous, if brief, reading of Butler demonstrates that a division between bodies as matter and bodies as ideas is not possible unless we revert to a liberal humanist position), Wells

ultimately sees childhood as having 'universal features because all children by virtue of their immaturity, have similar needs and limitations' (2). This theoretical sleight of hand allows her, nevertheless, to construct a robust political argument: working with a division between the solidity of material fact and the plasticity of culture, Wells explores the tensions between the local and the global, between what she calls 'cultural relativism and liberal universalism' (183). The case studies provided do however reveal how these two philosophical stances silently interact, for instance, when The Convention on the Rights of the Child is gradually being incorporated into national law (3), or when we see the emergence of the Humanitarian and Human Rights Law as 'a product of globalization' (23). Wells' analysis of the frictions between universal definitions of childhood and particular, local practices cast new light on issues that are too often still taken for granted. She leads us through the century of the child with eyes wide open, and is not afraid to show us, for instance, how the data on child labour ought to be reconsidered once we take into account the dynamics of an 'economy of care' (101). She presents, very convincingly, counterintuitive arguments when she looks at schooling and at political activism (her explosion of the generational cliché in her 'young moral guardians' section is exemplary). Her disenchantment is often both seductive and informative: she tells us that the US has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (the only state aside from Somalia), and that 'the UK entered reservations in respect of immigration law' (19). Her reading of the 'politics of pity' (via Hannah Arendt) through the images of childhood in the Save the Children campaigns (especially the campaign for the Kashmir earthquake) are persuasive and well informed. The ways in which race, gender and class are looked at together in the volume is enlightening: it shows us how enormously difficult it still is to have them recognised in official discourses (her example is the UNICEF 2006 report on *Excluded and Invisible Children* (68)).

The backbone of the book is the trajectory from 'child saving' to 'child rights': at a point in time when benevolent moralism seems to be creeping back into the public arena in the UK, it is instructive to be reminded how politically crucial was the shift from considering the child as a form of moral duty to giving it social rights, from having the child as subject to theorising it as citizen. But Wells is also very well aware that, as the history of the 1924 League of Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child and of the UNCRC show, it is extremely difficult to conceptualise a child that has 'a right to participating in decisions over themselves' (32). Here is perhaps where I would have liked to see Wells connect her critique of 'capitalism and its constant production of crises' (184) with a more robust criticism of the notion of agency. Agency seems at the centre of what she defines as 'the new social studies of childhood' (1), and yet I did not find in the volume a discussion of how the apparently progressive idea of children's agency is also rooted in individualistic notions of choice and rational self-presence that sit

at odds not only with any psychoanalytical, post-structuralist, or queer child, but also with a gendered, racialised and classed child. As she herself puts it: 'once childhood is seen as a racialized, gendered and classed position, the notion of childhood as having the possibility of being innocent, in the sense of existing outside of the symbolic and material nexus of political economy, has to be abandoned entirely' (69). But then why do we need 'agency' and why do we need a 'bedrock' child that is universal in its shared features of 'immaturity' 'needs' and 'limitation'? Could not we argue, after having read two very different books as Stockton's and Krupp's, that these very notions are dependent on a specifically historical and ideological notion of the human as race, class and gender-free (that is, white, western and male) mature, whole, and potentially 'unlimited'? I do not want to underestimate how pursuing this theoretical line might throw all sorts of political spanners in the wheel of a social sciences argument, but Wells is aware that what is at stake here is no less than the notion of the human. This is why I like her conclusion, which argues that 'The problem of children's insecurities, in other words, lies not with individual children and their families, but with the structural inequalities that mark their lives' (184).

If the child, as a cultural notion, is still in the position in which 'the woman' was before the impact of feminist theory in the 1960s and 70s, these three texts have nevertheless contributed to creating the conditions for a cultural paradigm shift by asking important questions, unearthing new material, and developing new perspectives. What remains to be fully accounted for is the peculiar way in which the self - stubbornly and familiarly - stares back every time we constitute the child into an object of study.

Planetary Counter-Archive

Tara Blake Wilson

Amad Paula, *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday and Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010; 408pp, paperback £24

This first book-length study of Albert Kahn's multi-media *Archives de la Planète* (1908-1931) proclaims from the outset that what will follow is neither a catalogue nor manual but rather a 'cultural ethnography' of the Archive. Throughout the book, whose theoretical weight equals its empirical detail, Amad writes in intimate contact with the facts, in a sense enacting the principal rule of Jean Brunhes' geographical vision she describes in the final chapter (p289). Although she does not continue to deliver the rich ethnographic descriptions offered in the introduction of the 'techno-archival peepshow' (p3) she experienced whilst conducting research at the Albert Kahn Museum, Amad deftly weaves experience, biography and historical detail with Bergsonian philosophy, Annales Historiography and early French film theory (among other bodies of thought) to explore how the archive was transformed in the age of cinema. *Counter-Archive's* tight cultural-ethnographic focus on *Archives de la Planète* affords Amad a great deal of theoretical manoeuvre which she utilises impressively, zooming out from the depths of the archive to rethink the relationship between memory, film and the everyday in French modernity in the light of the counter-archival challenge Kahn's project inspires.

The *Archives de la Planète* was one of the many botanical, publishing and philanthropic-related projects of the affluent and eccentric Jewish banker Albert Kahn, and is a unique case study for Amad's counter-archival thesis for several reasons. While Kahn's attempt to archive the world was in line with the pseudo-ethnographic aim to record apparently vanishing cultures popular in the early twentieth century, he took the unusual step of turning the camera on his own culture, the flea markets of Paris appearing in the Archive as a subject of nostalgic scrutiny as valid as the temple of Angkor Wat. Secondly, contra the commonly held assumption (made explicit in Carolyn Steedman's 2002 book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*) that documents are never born in an archive, they end up there, Kahn's recordings (that include over 72,000 colour photographs and 183,000 meters of film) were produced solely for the ambitious purpose of making an archive of the world. They were, as Amad puts it, still-born. Their development was also arrested in the sense that the archive is unfinished due to Kahn losing his fortune during the Wall Street crash of 1929, forcing him to end the project in 1931. Related to this, the films were not intended to be shown to a (then) present-day audience, but rather crafted as a time-capsule, confiscated from

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the contemporary for the benefit of an imagined future audience, for us. One of the contradictions of *Archives de la Planète* is that although its project was to capture everyday life, the ordinary man across the globe, in its heyday the only audience allowed to view it was a small handful of Kahn's intellectually and financially elite friends who attended rare screenings on his property among the world-themed gardens. Lastly, the archive stands out because of Albert Khan's, and by extension the Archive's, conceptual and personal connection with Henri Bergson.

It is perhaps a mistake that the pre-eminent French philosopher is not included in the title of the book given that the critically attentive wedding of Bergson's personal connection to the Archive with his writings on film and memory (and its subsequent criticisms, particularly via Deleuze) is perhaps the strongest and most interesting thread in *Counter-Archive*. In Chapter 1 we discover that 'Mr. K', was a student of Bergson's and a close friend until the philosopher rose to fame and the correspondence between the two (contained in the archive) ceased. Nonetheless Amad makes a convincing case for the importance of the relationship between 'the millionaire and the philosopher'. She argues that Kahn's baroque version of the archive can only be understood through Bergson and, more challengingly, that Bergson's connection with the *Archives de la Planète* is his most significant yet overlooked involvement with the medium of film. In the third chapter the relationship of Bergson to Kahn's archive is interestingly, although not always entirely conclusively, used to debate Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin's (among others) reading of Bergson on film and memory. One of the main strengths of Amad's historically detailed approach is her tracing of the then contemporary popularisation of Bergson into a number of 'Bergsonisms' that shaped early twentieth-century French modernity. Given that there was a Bergsonism for the political right and left, for the avant-garde, and even for advertising psychology and cellular theory, Khan's written reflections on his own projects might be understood, Amad argues, as 'a Bergsonism for financiers' in which the banker contorts 'Bergson's classical syntax into the language of an apocalyptic archivist' (p103). Kahn and Bergson are, in a sense, conceptually twinned, the former as counter-archivist and the latter as counter-archival philosopher of memory.

Amad's original and challenging conceptualisation of the counter-archive infuses each chapter with varying levels of effectiveness. Early on we are told that the term will be mobilised in four related ways throughout the book. The third rendering of the term counter-archive is the most convincing and might be more usefully thought of as a node from which the other less theorised meanings stem. This nodal conceptualisation rests on Amad's thorough primary and theoretical research into the implications of an increased attraction to the everyday in French modernity, particularly as manifested through film recording during the inter-war period. The crux of the argument is that the medium of film, particularly when used for non-canonical purposes with a bent towards the recording of the everyday,

is counter-archival because it does not privilege data in the same way that paper archives do. Rather than servicing positivist history, film subverts it. Amad explores the anxiety and fascination elicited by film's uncontrollable counter-archival tendencies during the early twentieth century. She comes to argue that the unruly ability of film to automatically capture more than is intended results in the production of too much data for archives to order and, particularly when recording everyday life, the sometimes accidental collection of anecdotal and arbitrary histories that the official archive often overlooks and at times actively suppresses. In this way, Amad argues, film is counter-archival because it is both encyclopaedic and incoherent.

In my view there are two main problems with the explication of the term counter-archive. Firstly, though the term is developed carefully over the first half of the book, crystallising in chapters 3 and 4, it is then pinned too freely to various phenomena (surrealists, flea markets, and at one point all archives are termed counter archival, for example) and with its dispersal the term loses some of its critical weight. Secondly that the term counter-archive has several similarities with Derrida's term *mal d'archive* [archive fever] (the impossibility of completing and assuring order in an archive for example) conceived in his well-known and critically pivotal 1995 book of the same name, yet this gets little more than a mention. The term counter-archive would most likely stand up to the accusation that it is merely a rephrasing of the term archive fever, particularly because of the importance and transformative agency Amad grants the medium of film, which Derrida does not. However, the absence of a defence of this kind, or at least a discussion of counter-archive in relation to archive fever is perhaps, as followers of Derrida would argue, a striking critical oversight, and is certainly a missed opportunity to refine the meaning of counter-archive.

Nonetheless, Amad's theoretical stance is principally robust, especially when, through a series of moves including invoking and successfully critiquing Foucault's conceptualisation of the panoptic archive, film is convincingly instated as 'the memory of modernity' providing the possibility of a 'new history' from which the historical subject appears to gaze back into the future. Questions of vision, and the historical and ethnographic subject, are explored in the last two chapters on 'The Reception of the Kahn Films' and 'The Aerial View', in which Amad's reading of the Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931 as the expositional analogue of the Kahn Archive (p291-2) is particularly compelling. The harnessing of her earlier writing on Foucault and Brunhes to postcolonial thought is left a little late but is interestingly assembled through the trope of micro and macroscopic views in the final chapter. In these last two chapters it clearly emerges how Kahn's archive was not bound to a straightforward scientific notion of objective evidence or familiar realism (he granted his cameramen the status of 'artists' for example) but with its combination of indeterminacy and order, sensuousness and nonsensuousness, pleasure and knowledge, it sat between the avant-garde and scientific research. Avoiding the

utilitarian status of a traditional archive, Kahn's, Amad argues, replaced the functional equation of seeing 'in order to act' with the Bergsonian challenge of seeing 'in order to see', granting it the status of 'a pragmatically functionless yet perceptually purposeful counter-archive' (p228).

The critical question we might ask of the book is whether the term counter-archive is sufficiently solid to warrant wider scholarly use. When applied to archival film recorded in the context of French modernity it is watertight, however if applied to archives more widely there are two likely difficulties. One (mentioned earlier) is the overly dispersed use of the term in the second half of the book which dilutes its critical strength, the second the lack of a serious discussion relating the term to contemporary culture. Although an archival study does not necessarily need to engage with the contemporary, the impressive philosophical scope of Amad's text does call for a more explicit situating of her ideas in present-day thought and culture. On the first page Amad tells us that 'at the conception of every archive … there resides a gamble with time in general' (p1). The far-reaching implications of this assertion are not fully graspable until the pivotal third chapter in which Amad successfully pitches Bergson's ideas on memory as '*a counter-archival reconceptualization*' (p119). This is based largely on Bergson's brave assertion that memory does not reside in a place as a memory-as-archive model would attest, but exists solely in time. In my view this insightful rendering of Bergson begs a discussion of the 'place-less' archives of the digital age. Similarly Kahn's preoccupation with making an archive for the future-present would seem to invite a re-assessing of his archive with the hindsight of being in 'the future'. It is therefore disappointing that Amad leaves a discussion of the digital age and its uses of the Kahn Archive to the very end, and I expect that it is only through a development of the ideas condensed in these last few pages that counter-archive might become an established critical term. That said, *Counter-Archive* is an ambitious and compelling book which elegantly ties meticulous archival detail to astute theoretical challenges, and its conceptual hook may well inspire further critical attention.

Plus Ça Change …

Annebella Pollen

Risto Sarvas and David M. Frohlich, *From Snapshots to Social Media: The Changing Picture of Domestic Photography*, London, Springer, 2011; 199pp, hardback £39.95

With backgrounds in Human-Computer Interaction, Risto Sarvas and David M. Frohlich have a distinctive take on the study of photography, yet in *From Snapshots to Social Media: The Changing Picture of Domestic Photography* they set themselves a challenge. Attempting to find a 'middle ground' between interaction design research, which they find 'technology-centric', and the Cultural Studies-influenced Visual Culture, they aim to address perceived imbalances between these differing approaches in their survey of domestic photography by drawing together literature from both sides. The authors argue, in their favour, that photography studies are inherently interdisciplinary, stating 'Few systems have had the privilege of being studied in the arts and humanities, engineering, design, the social sciences and business studies' (p183). With an awareness that 'issues such as privacy, power, social structures and economic factors are almost missing from design-oriented science and engineering research' and that 'historical, cultural and political contexts are often absent' from technology studies (p3), this book is their attempt to provide historical and cultural photographic context for their intended readership: 'researchers, engineers, and designers of digital imaging technologies, social media, and Web services or other products relying on mediated social interaction' (p2).

The authors pursue this aim by following a structure that sections the history of photographic technology into three consecutive periods, which they label 'The Portrait Path (ca. 1830s-1890s)', 'The Kodak Path (ca. 1888-1990s)' and 'The Digital Path (ca. 1990-)', but not before they have spent a chapter defending their approach. Arguing for a Kuhnian model based on an understanding that technological changes are non-linear, non-cumulative and non-incremental, but are instead based on paradigm shifts, they posit that changes in media come about cyclically. They state that change begins when established technological patterns are disrupted, leading to an 'era of ferment', and ending with a new path 'characterised by a dominant design' (p14). At pains to defend this method from accusations of technological determinism, they spend some time in the early chapters of the book detailing what they are *not* claiming: that 'the inherent qualities of the technology are the sole determiners of the path' (p18). They state that reductionist historical readings, and a lack of attention to social and economic factors, has led to

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the creation of technological myths, particularly in relation to Kodak, and that this is an approach that they will be careful to avoid.

It is rather frustrating, then, that the historical chapters that follow seem to adopt precisely this approach. Chapters 3 and 4, covering domestic photographic technology from the 1830s to 1990s, reproduces much of the commonly held consensus about photography's origins and establishment. Those with knowledge of this territory will find little that is new here, apart from occasional retrospective and sometimes contentious assertions, for example, that 'profile pictures in online social networking services have the same function as *cartes* [*de visite*] in demonstrating specific social stratum or a subculture' (p37) or that the ability for a camera owner to take their own photograph, as a result of growth in camera ownership in the late nineteenth century, was 'user-generated content over a century ago' (p60). Generally, however, this teleological technological approach rather smoothes over photographic history, particularly in relation to photography's consumption and use, which is conspicuously under-considered. The structure of 'paths' could be defended as no more than a practical organising strategy aimed at managing an extended period of history into two short chapters if it was not for the occurrence of such deterministic statements such as 'The Portrait Path was going to end, and the Kodak Path was beginning' (p44) and 'The camera, named Kodak, was ready to change photography forever' (p51). These early sections of the book function largely as an extended literature review, and one that is content to take its sources at face value. For example, it is claimed that the Kodak way of photography" was domestic alone. The authors state, '"Kodakers" did not take photographs for news purposes, to create art, to shape public opinions, to present themselves for a public audience, to sell pictures, or simply to partake in public discourses', yet a quick consultation of *Amateur Photographer* magazine, for example, from the early decades of the twentieth century, would have revealed that a whole range of practices and purposes for popular photography coexisted with the domestic, from 'record' photographs with historical aims to pictorialist images with aesthetic ambitions, as well as those intended for competition, exhibition and beyond. This lack of nuance is further exacerbated in the excessively rapid coverage of the period from the turn of the twentieth century through to the 1960s. Whilst it is convenient for the authors' later argument for digital photography's complexity to claim that 'The Kodak model did not change for a century, and the role of technology in this model changed very little as well' (p66) statements such as 'People born at the beginning of the twentieth century would witness technological marvels such as a man walking on the moon and aeroplanes but see no radical change in photography in their entire lifetime' (p80) are so sweeping as to be unsupportable.

Moving into Chapter 5, which considers 'The Digital Path' from 1990, the authors must take a different approach, not least because their admitted former method of drawing on 'milestone' histories (p83) cannot continue

when so few exist. As the authors note, little research was conducted into the early days of digital photographic technologies; additionally, convenient trajectories of progress are not possible in an era still in ferment. It is in this refreshing chapter, and particularly the following one, that the authors are clearly on more comfortable territory, and the literature that they draw on is much more recent, less well-known, and at times of their own making. Necessarily drawn from a range of locations to cover all aspects of new technology and its uses, sources such as marketing reports, journalism, social science studies, and research and development user trials bring together a range of voices to assess patterns in digital photographic technology and uptake. Chapter 6, 'Digital Photo Adoption', is perhaps the strongest of the volume. Detailed and empirically-grounded research into a wide range of 'current photo ecologies' is provided in order to examine a key question, that is, 'whether the digital revolution has changed the very nature of photography and why we perform it' (p103). Building on the foundational research into popular photographic practice established by authors such as Chalfen,[1] Sarvas and Frohlich attempt to establish whether the principal motivations for personal photographic practice remain rooted in practices of memory, identity and communication despite changing media forms.

1. Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green University Press, 1987.

While the authors acknowledge that a number of small changes *are* apparent in domestic digital photography - the curator of family photographs may be more likely to be the teenage child rather than the mother; digital photographs are more concerned with immediacy of communication than memorialisation and reflection - there are a number of areas where, despite all of the popular rhetoric of digital 'revolution', continuity in practice is most strongly evident. These include the amusing observation that generally digital photographs are still kept in a state of disorganisation despite users' 'misplaced faith in the power of digital technology to help them organise their images' (p108), and the interesting assertion that photo-sharing, despite its technological neologism, remains more pervasive in practice off-line than on-line. The authors note that 'conventional methods of display' (in the form of printed photo products, from posters and photobooks) are 'historically more established and better supported than ever before with digital printing technology' (p121).

So far, so similar, then. Where changes *are* more significant, however (and the observations most fascinating), is in the use of personal photographs in social media. Despite the vast quantities of photographs circulating on platforms such as Facebook (hosting 48 billion images from some 500 million users globally), the authors observe that, surprisingly, there is an almost total lack of research into this area, and thus must infer conclusions of their own. As the core business model of Facebook is to sell targeted advertising space through social interaction (where demographic information, including age, gender, home town, religion, politics and education, is provided by the user), personal photographs function to make the service attractive to people by

helping to aid communication and establish identities, but also 'lock in' the user and provide the host company with saleable information about social networks and connections. The authors assert that risks in retrieval (e.g. the lack of security that Facebook will even exist in, say, twenty years' time) provide further evidence that immediacy of communication rather than memorialisation is the principal function of digital domestic photography. They also observe that the photographic industry - with its porous boundaries - now makes money less from selling consumables but from 'selling advertising space and perpetually changing technology' (p171). Certainly, a fundamental movement from photography supported by a recognisable photographic industry to an ICT infrastructure is evident, and the authors admit that with new social media functions and 'cloud' computing facilities, 'the meanings and definitions of both words in the term "domestic photography" are somewhat outdated' (p184).

As an attempt to provide missing social, historical and critical context to studies of human-computer interaction, this book has an admirable purpose. In the close attention it pays to the diversity of digital photographic practice and through its thorough summaries of recent research in the area, it provides insightful appraisals and clearly identifies gaps for future study. Whether it will achieve its aim of fostering a closer collaboration between business development, product design and visual studies, however, remains open to question. For a reader with interests in the historical and cultural study of photography, rather than a technology designer, in order for the research to be fully satisfying there needs to be more challenge to terms used throughout, including interrogation of changing notions of domesticity, closer analysis of the wholly unquestioned category of 'snapshots', and more acknowledgement of the complex meanings, uses and applications of personal photographs pre-1990. As the authors repeatedly note, digital technology is fast changing and complex, and it is likely that the picture of domestic photography will continue to shift. It is a shame that the authors flatten nearly two centuries of photographic practice as a largely straightforward and stable trajectory in order to provide a foil for this upheaval.

Cosmos And Colony

Bart Moore-Gilbert

Robert Spencer, *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; 240pp, hardback £50

A certain sense of malaise and exhaustion has been evident in Postcolonial Studies for some time now in terms of its strategic goals, with a host of commentators seeking to 'relocate' it, wondering when it was (past tense) or seeking its abolition. While the production of postcolonial literary criticism continues unabated, the theoretical orientations and political investments of both its proponents and opponents have changed little in the last decade or so. Robert Spencer attempts to inject a fresh sense of direction and urgency into the field by drawing on theories of 'cosmopolitanism', to promote both 'a defence of the moral and political efficacy of postcolonial writing' and to recuperate the *reading* of such texts as a means of 'fostering a sense of mutual obligation and even … solidarity' between the western reader of such work and non-western constituencies which have suffered, and continue to suffer, the depredations of imperialism. Following figures like Walter Mignolo, 'cosmopolitanism' is seen to provide a potentially powerful critique of the discourses and processes of globalisation, which the author rightly sees as all too often providing a fig-leaf for new dispensations of imperialism in the contemporary world.

There is much to admire about this text, the arguments of which deserve close attention. Its moral energy is refreshing, particularly in some finely outraged passages about the cant surrounding contemporary imperial adventures like the invasion of Iraq. It also offers a compelling call-to-arms on behalf of the idea of the efficacy of literary studies as one means, amongst others, towards the creation of a less unequal world-system. Spencer's premise is that a genuinely democratic, just and *new* 'New World Order,' to which 'cosmopolitanism' properly aspires, is 'a cultural as well as political undertaking and therefore entails not just the regulation of economic activity but also the re-imagining and even the invention of new and more meaningful forms of human relationship'. The author draws productively on an impressive range of cultural theory to scaffold his argument, including some figures, notably Paul Ricoeur, and even F.R. Leavis, whose work has hitherto been under-utilised as a resource for postcolonial literary studies. His close readings of individual postcolonial texts are often penetrating and admirably attentive to issues of form as well as to thematic or political issues. Further, he convincingly demonstrates the value of drawing on a wider range of Said's writing than is customary in Postcolonial Studies - while also

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showing a commendable willingness to critique or supplement aspects of his mentor's thinking. Spencer also usefully reminds his readers that imperialism and colonialism are not the exclusive property of the West. As his chapter on Timothy Mo demonstrates, even recently decolonised nations like Indonesia are prone to quickly pick up the bad habits of erstwhile European masters, a trend which is likely to increase as western power wanes.

Yet Spencer's programme for a reinvigoration of postcolonial literary criticism is debatable in certain key respects. In the first place, his typology of 'cosmopolitanism' is over-schematic. He divides approaches to the discourse within Postcolonial Studies into three schools, the 'sceptical', the 'celebratory' and the 'socialist'. It's surprising to find Gayatri Spivak, whose substantial and complex oeuvre is summarised in Chapter 2 in a few brief lines, assigned to the first group, which is allegedly characterised by its investment in 'local identities and communities as the natural units of affiliation and action' and its lack of interest in 'the relationship between colonialism and capitalism'. This is not only simplistic as a description of the thrust of Spivak's work, but contradicted by Spencer's later praise for her promotion of 'transnational literacy' as an analogue of his own programme of 'cosmopolitanism.' Equally simplifying is the inclusion of Said's remarkably 'cosmopolitan' *Orientalism* in this school, for one of the notable, if ostensibly contradictory aspects of the text, is Said's recognition of the many 'good' Orientalists, who escape the influence of the 'archive' to achieve something like the outlook Spencer prizes. Rather than offering Said and Spivak as examples of scepticism about 'cosmopolitanism', the author might have been better advised to look at figures like Ngugi or Brathwaite, certain works of whose much better exemplify the 'nativist' tendencies he associates with the 'sceptics'.

Equally surprising is the inclusion of Homi Bhabha in *both* the 'sceptical' and 'celebratory' schools. It is hard to understand how he can simultaneously inhabit each camp and it is less than fair to lump him in with the latter group insofar as it is identified with the attempt 'to hide the persistent repulsiveness of neo-liberal capitalism'. Indeed, this characterisation of Bhabha is contradicted when Spencer uses him as a primary template to orient discussion of the 'cosmopolitan' qualities of *The Satanic Verses*. Spencer's strategic argument is further problematic in terms of his more extensive and admiring treatment of the third, 'socialist', school of thought, most of whose members would, ostensibly, sit comfortably amongst the 'sceptics', given their apparently unwavering attachment to the 'local community' of the nation as the privileged site of resistance to globalisation. (Spivak's exclusion from the 'socialists' can only be on the grounds that her self-reflexive and sometimes post-Marxist forms of political and economic analysis diverge from those orthodox kinds chosen to represent this body of thinking.) Spencer's investment in this school sits particularly uneasily with the perspective of the primary texts which he considers in later chapters, for one thrust of all four writers is deep scepticism about nationalist ideology and practice. Even

Mo's *The Redundancy of Courage*, an allegorical treatment of the colonisation of East Timor by Indonesia, shows 'a decidedly admirable sensitivity to the shortcomings of nationalism and nativism'.

Spencer is more contentious still in his assertion that postcolonial scholars 'have dragged their heels when it comes to the various resources required to supplant (as opposed to merely criticise or bemoan) the gross inequality and violence of imperial rule'. Thus the disobliging treatment of John Beverley, allegedly representative of the 'quietistic brand' of postcolonial criticism, revolves round the argument that he resigns the responsibility 'of knowledge, communication and even corrective political action' to address the inequalities of globalisation - by raising questions about the western academy's capacity to '"speak for the subaltern"'. In fact, Beverley expresses what is surely an admirable humility in the face of the dangers of appropriating such constituencies. Indeed, as Spencer notes, one lesson of the writers he engages with lies in drawing attention 'to the inevitable shortcomings of any effort to speak of [situations] so distant, murky and contested'. Paradoxically, Beverley's properly self-critical humility is precisely what Spencer advocates as a constitutive aspect of 'cosmopolitan' consciousness and it has not prevented him from being a distinguished advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples in Latin America. Further, Beverley's prescription for the impasse he allegedly finds himself in, namely '"a radical change in the direction of a more democratic and non-hierarchical social order"', is identical to Spencer's, even if he does not immediately specify any concrete programme for its accomplishment in the passages Spencer quotes. Indeed, if 'cosmopolitanism' must first and foremost 'be a cogent and feasible platform of economic, political and institutional proposals', then Spencer's own primary focus on *reading* as a 'corrective' for the ills of globalisation becomes vulnerable to some of the charges of textualism which have been made against postcolonial literary studies almost since its inception.

A further point to debate might be the choice of texts which Spencer deploys to illustrate his thesis. This entails several problems. In the first place, two of the chosen authors, Yeats and Coetzee, might be described as the (albeit partly dissident) products of settler colonialism rather than postcolonial in any straightforward way. One cannot skate over, as Spencer does, Yeats's affiliations to the Protestant Ascendancy, whose status within the (Catholic) nationalist dispensation waned rapidly after 1891 - for good political and historical reasons. Yeats's late poetry may participate in a 'rejection of capitalist social relations' but it does so on behalf of cultural values associated with a diminished land-owning aristocracy of alien origin - *not* the enhancement of democratic politics. In this regard, one might be tempted to reverse Spencer's argument and suggest that late Yeats laments not the 'merely partial' but, rather, too successful, decolonisation of Ireland represented by the emergence of the Free State. Further, Spencer underplays Yeats's interest in fascism as a potential means to restore some of his class fraction's lost authority. One

would not guess from this account of the poet's late work that it coincided with his writing of 'marching songs' for O'Duffy's Blueshirts.

Coetzee is also perhaps a more politically ambiguous figure than Spencer admits. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is more about the tortured conscience (and body) of the dissident coloniser, represented by the Magistrate, than it is about the ethnically Other 'barbarians'; indeed Coetzee repeats one of the standard tropes of colonial discourse in the exploitative relationship between the Magistrate and the 'barbarian' girl he rescues. To this extent, his text lays itself open to the kind of charges Achebe famously made against *Heart of Darkness*. As Achebe acerbically remarks, Conrad's experimental narrative technique is organised round exploration not of the humanity of Africans but the breakdown of a 'petty' western mind. And Coetzee's decision to decamp to Australia, following the tentative emergence of a newly 'cosmopolitan' or 'rainbow' nation in South Africa, sits uneasily alongside Spencer's claim that one of the writer's primary interests is to advance new ways of thinking about 'living alongside those previously castigated by imperialist discourses'.

Rushdie and Mo, by contrast, are products of diaspora, located since childhood in the West and from privileged class backgrounds. Spencer advances the common idea that 'the migrant's experience of multiple points of view … potentially makes him or her profoundly sceptical of the dogmatic certainties of the powerful'. While this indicates why (some) migrant writers might suit Spencer's arguments about 'the cosmopolitan', it ignores the many postcolonial writers who have stayed in their countries of origin but who have no less attempted to enact 'cosmopolitanism', not least by showing how those at the periphery can subvert and hybridise the cultures enforced on them by colonialism. The absence of any such figures suggests that Spencer is himself prone to the charge made by the 'socialist' school which he endorses earlier, namely that 'cosmopolitan' theory tends to ignore those denied the privilege of mobility which figures like Rushdie and Mo have enjoyed.

Further issues arise from Spencer's claim that 'cosmopolitanism' 'does not equal homogeneity but seeks, on the contrary, to lay down the conditions that must generally prevail in order for difference to be safeguarded and encouraged'. In the first instance, this ideal is contradicted by the masculinism of Spencer's choice of writers. Not only are all his chosen examples male, but so are the overwhelming majority of the critics he draws on. More attention to the rich tradition of feminist postcolonial thought and writing might have suggested not only that patriarchy is a more immediate enemy than imperialism for large sectors of the world's population but that women contribute distinctive inflections to the discourses around 'cosmopolitanism'. Spencer's choice of forms to represent the 'cosmopolitan' or postcolonial imaginary is similarly vulnerable to the charge of homogenisation. Without exception, the writers favoured are designated as 'modernistic' (never, for any explicitly articulated reason, 'postmodernistic') in their choice of styles. The 'fragmentary, muddled and even circuitous' narrative modes espoused

by Coetzee, Rushdie and Mo are thus valued because they are allegedly particularly effective in compelling self-scrutiny in the reader, as well as 'scrutiny of the forms of representation that permit the imposition of imperial power'.

Two problems with the valorisation of such writing suggest themselves. The first is that it is not always easy to square such incoherent modalities, which bespeak a suspicion of all 'forms of ideological certainty,' with any clear commitment to the articulation of what Spencer calls 'the [cosmopolitan] goal of universal human emancipation,' a notably coherent and didactic master-narrative. Secondly, the implication might be drawn that 'realism' is intrinsically unable to express 'the flawed and incomplete character of the social whole' effectively, thus disenfranchising a whole host of postcolonial writers from the 'cosmopolitan' project. Spencer cites, without taking fully onboard, Eagleton's jarring retort to the idea that 'ambiguity, indeterminacy, undecidability are always subversive strikes against an arrogantly monological certitude; on the contrary, they are the stock-in-trade of many a juridical enquiry and official investigation'. The liabilities entailed on the over-valuation of 'radically disharmonious, unfinished and ambiguous' styles are evident in Spencer's reading of Yeats's late work, the experimental form of which, it is claimed, 'is the most eloquent rejoinder to the accusations of fascism'. But the equally 'cosmopolitan', ambiguous and multiplicitous style of Pound's *Cantos*, its 'distinguishing stress on the free intellect' and its capacity 'to generate images that stimulate the mind' prove no guarantee against reprehensible political investments - an argument that might be extended to many of V.S. Naipaul's experiments with form since the 1970s.

If such relatively narrow conceptions of the representatives and forms of literary 'cosmopolitanism' bring into question some of Spencer's claims about 'cosmopolitan' respect for difference, the problem is amplified when one begins to consider wider issues. Indeed, one might wonder whether 'cosmopolitan criticism' is not itself one more Eurocentric, rather than genuinely internationalist, mode of engagement. There are, once more, several aspects to the problem. In the first place, 'cosmopolitanism' is evidently at one level as exclusionary and difference-blind as the ideologies against which it is mobilised - notably mainstream Western neo-liberalism and non-Western fundamentalism, to which very substantial sections of the world's population are, for better or worse, attached. What happens to them in the 'cosmopolitan' dispensation? But even non-fundamentalist cultural practices from the non-western world are sometimes represented in surprisingly ethnocentric terms, as when Spencer fails to dissent from Rushdie's vision of Islam as 'rule-bound, fixated with discipline, cold-hearted and credulous'. *Contra* Rushdie, it might be acknowledged as a system of belief which can be notably 'post-national', anti-capitalist, indeed 'cosmopolitan', in its own right. Is there any place for Muslims - or any kind of religious belief - which inevitably involves 'rules' and 'discipline' - in

'cosmopolitanism' as Spencer conceives it?

The 'universalism' which he claims on behalf of 'cosmopolitanism' is also questionable in terms of its espousal of values like 'free thought'. If by this Spencer actually means 'free speech' or 'free expression', (for what can prevent 'free thought'?) then these are patently relative, not universal values, as the strikingly different laws governing them in the US and Britain, to take just two instances, make manifest. Equally, Spencer's faith in 'a commitment here and now to an existing body of principles and laws', notably 'international law and the UN Charter', betokens a perhaps insufficient acknowledgement of the ways in which such institutions and discourses were cast from the beginning in the image of the West and remain instruments of its power (to be flouted whenever they work against its interests, as in the case of Iraq or the International Criminal Court). It may be that such institutions are the best we have for the time being and the only basis on which to move towards a 'cosmoplitan' world. However, the 'universalism' which such institutions currently express demonstrates a danger which Spencer acknowledges in other contexts, namely that 'avowals of cosmopolitan purpose risk acting as a kind of rhetorical cover for the imposition of political and intellectual presuppositions that are in fact provincial and self-interested'.

Cosmopolitan Criticism may provoke more questions than answers, but this is a lucidly-written, substantial and thought-provoking work which announces the arrival of a lively new voice in Postcolonial Studies. Perhaps what is needed to take the field forward is not so much attempts to produce a singular, water-tight master-narrative of 'cosmopolitanism' as an engagement with a broader range of 'cosmopolitanisms', understood as congeries of unevenly developed and articulated processes, in different parts of the world - including some of its Islamic parts - in order to inch towards the brighter future Spencer adumbrates.

Documentary: negotiating the public sphere

Jeffrey Geiger

Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary Film*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2008; 432pp, paperback £20; hardback £62

Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011; 296pp, paperback £18.50; hardback £56

Thomas Waugh, *The Right To Play Oneself: Looking Back on Documentary Film*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011; 336pp, paperback £20.50; hardback £61.50

Documentary, once largely neglected in film theory, has been a subject of escalating interest over the last twenty years. Partly due to documentary's uneven yet persistent resurgence since the late-1980s, partly the result of intensified interrogations of the status of truth and authenticity in representation, a number of scholars - such as Bill Nichols, Brian Winston, Vivian Sobchack, Michael Renov and Linda Williams, to name a few - have helped recast the ways that documentaries have been analysed and taught. With *Intelligence Work* and *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*, Jonathan Kahana and Elizabeth Cowie, respectively, contribute important historical, political, and psychoanalytic insights to an area of inquiry still testing its parameters. Thomas Waugh's *The Right to Play Oneself* (on at least one level a tongue-in-cheek reference, Waugh notes) performs a somewhat different task: 'looking back' while reasserting the value of Waugh's longstanding contributions to the field of political - or what he has called 'committed' leftwing - documentary.

Much critical work on documentary - and the above books stand out - has relied on negotiating between established notions of the form as social practice (stemming in particular from the legacies of John Grierson and Paul Rotha) and transformations of the documentary idea as it interacts with its 'publics' and the changing public sphere. Documentary has long produced a kind of imagined space - and 'real' place - for social engagement. It designates more than just a cinematic '*object*', as Sobchack suggests: 'along with the obvious nomination of a film genre characterized historically by objective textual features, the term also - and more radically - designates a certain *subjective relation* to an objective cinematic or televisual text. In other words, documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience*'.[1] The idea of documentary film as experience - as socially produced and apprehended through cognitive, psychic, and bodily processes - is crucial to the readings found in Kahana's and Cowie's books. In Waugh's writing we get a profound sense of documentary

1. Vivian Sobchack, 'Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience', in Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (eds), *Collecting Visible Evidence*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p 241.

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film viewing as personal experience: a site of tension, both empowering and potentially troubling.

Kahana's approach to US documentary recognizes the mobile status that the form has long held, travelling between the domains of 'official' and 'unofficial' or 'counterpublic' iterations. Somewhat paradoxically, documentary owes its ongoing relevance to 'its simultaneous appeal to both state and capitalist institutions *and* their critics'. Drawing on Charles Taylor's concept of a 'social imaginary', Kahana engages documentary as a recognizable yet fluid 'metagenre' that 'helps us envision the collective consequences of our thoughts and actions, no matter how ordinary or idiosyncratic' (p1). The impact of documentary, then, lies in its ability to gesture towards worlds, experiences, emotions and structures of feeling beyond the 'evidence' it depicts. Documentary representation can make visible 'the invisible or "phantom" realities that shape the experience of the ordinary Americans in whose name power is exercised and contested' (p9). In this sense, documentary doesn't just reflect social consciousness, it helps us imagine ideas and futures beyond its immediate framework and subject matter; it can make palpable - and transform - ideas of citizenship and relations to a national imaginary.

Critics such as Waugh, Paula Rabinowitz, and Patricia Zimmermann have been key to outlining documentary's public functions, and Kahana rightfully acknowledges these contributions while laying the stress on a history of political slipperiness and ideological conflict in US documentary. Yet his intricate unpacking of documentary's forms and functions never obscures a passion for the subject, nor does it elide an investment in what Waugh calls 'committed' filmmaking and its social potential. For Kahana, the currency of the documentary idea - and ideal - might be expressed in the multivalent senses of the term 'intelligence work' (taken from Walter Lippmann), where documentary joins other social media in 'making visible the operations of groups and institutions to themselves and their publics [. . .], intelligence workers [according to Lippmann] would make possible more hospitable environments for social and political action' (pp11-12). Elaborating on this process, Kahana's approach navigates what might be called the interstices of political critique, revealing documentary's multiplicity while marking its relative successes and limits. Expressing a wariness of 'liberal commonplaces' (p19), *Intelligence Work* is able to use documentary as a lens for highlighting ingrained paradoxes at the heart of US politics and their cultural expressions. Indeed, especially in its later chapters, Kahana's book indicates that all documentary advocacy isn't always necessarily 'productive' exchange; the very malleability of the documentary form (as seen in the conspiracy theory film *Loose Change* [2005]) sometimes finds it participating in 'the foreshortening of the social horizon [. . .], the idea that the postmodern present is a period of collective confusion about how to [politically] act' (p336).

One of documentary's core functions, as John Corner has observed, has

been to contest established viewpoints and confront complacent investment in common beliefs. Yet there have also been longstanding tensions - visible for example in the 1930s, when street-level radicalism in the US was appropriated into New Deal state-funded projects - between political documentary as a mode of expression 'in which radicals and progressive intellectuals grappled with the problem of how cultural form and social action could be related', and documentary as a mode for organising audiences 'in a hegemonic capacity, announcing crises and managing them on behalf of the state' (p68). Starting in the 1930s - as the documentary idea was gaining the attention of government bodies responsible for engineering solutions in the name of 'the people' - *Intelligence Work* moves through three 'paradigmatic' moments when documentary was mediating US political life while at the same time reinventing and reasserting its own capacity for truth telling.

The book's first part, 'The Sentiment of Trust', examines the era of the Depression and New Deal, when documentary authority was harnessed to construct seemingly transparent unities amongst dispersed and often atomised political movements, coalitions and government aims. The second, 'Lyrical Tirades', covers the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, when documentary developed multiple strategies - such as direct cinema, insightfully critiqued here - for making visible, and intensely personal, the deep divides and abstractions of US political and social life. The book's third part looks at the 'public sphere of suspicion' as manifested in recent years, during which documentary has commented on, and sometimes participated in, what Habermas calls the 'New Obscurity'. Kahana's historical and dialectical analyses are consistently shrewd: in stressing that 'a politics of truth depends upon symbolic discourse', his book becomes an apt companion to Maren Stange's important examination of US documentary photography, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, where the documentary idea is seen as grounded in symbolic discourses and gestures that have both served left-liberal aims *and* acted as 'state apparatuses', contributing to the perpetual making and unmaking of hegemonic national interests.

A key critical intervention here lies in expanding the reach of criticism on political documentary while bridging ongoing gaps between political history and theory and film history and theory. Cowie's work similarly brings theory and astute critical practice to bear on documentary texts while underlining their social and interpersonal nature. *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* outlines what is at stake in documentary's discourses of truth and authenticity, focusing more intently on the psychoanalytic and phenomenological implications of reflecting and constructing experiences of the world. Cowie's reading thus posits a politics of the 'citizen-spectator': a desiring, knowing, embodied, and socially situated participant in the film experience. Here, documentary's conjoining of desire and knowledge - its engagement with linked scopophilic and epistemophilic drives - marks out its distinctiveness as a filmic mode. Usefully, Cowie outlines a broadly applicable documentary impulse that isn't limited to recent practices, nor even just to film, but that

implicates wide-ranging phenomena that unleash 'the pleasure of the specular as access to knowledge' (p15): the grand tour, the circus, the world's fair.

Drawing on over ten years of research, Cowie's book interweaves several threads relating to documentary as discursive practice and filmic experience. Her first chapter looks at documentary as a storytelling mode, asserting that fiction and nonfiction are 'not simple opposites' but might, still, be seen to circulate in distinctive ways. Meditating on what Kees Bakker and others have called the documentary 'contract' between producers and consumers, documentary becomes something more than fiction dressed up as truth; though 'never an ontological fact', documentary asserts the relevance of its reality inscriptions via its thorough 'polemical assault on the nondocumentary' (p45). The second chapter revisits documentary's watershed years in the 1930s and, as does Kahana, homes in on the role of voice in 1930s documentary in addressing and encapsulating the vagaries of quotidian experience. Cowie's reading, however, stresses the subversive influences of the European avant-garde, where documentary voice and aesthetics can be seen introducing the possibility of dissensus, rupturing social fixities and disturbing 'the subjectivizing of objective discourse' (p59). Ensuing chapters trace the contours of documentary identification, the inscription of trauma though documentary memorialising, and the 'surreal of reality' in Jean Rouch's pioneering ethnographic work, all elucidating how documentary produces sites that speak to the 'authentic' and 'real' of human experience amidst the phantom displacements and slippages of filmic representation.

Cowie's final chapter delineates documentary as an elusive yet persistently compelling art form that (re)produces the event as uncanny 'presence again'. Documentary's ability to elide temporal and spatial gaps engenders 'specters of the real', and Cowie considers questions of time and representation raised, specifically here, by both Derrida and Žižek. Meditating on film and gallery installations ranging from the overlapping images and sounds of Milica Tomić's *Portrait of My Mother* to the textual interweavings of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, Cowie gestures towards the aporias not only of documentary inscription but of psychoanalysis itself - the blank spaces and silences of history and subjectivity which animate desires towards recovery, towards (re)materialising reality and (re)making presence. Overall, the politics of documentary involve a complex yet distinctive set of strategies, both personal and interpersonal, which bring (as in Kelly's work) aesthetic engagement together with processes of 'coming to know' the world.

Recording Reality, Desiring the Real takes us beyond the contexts, issues, and 'messages' of documentary 'evidence' to reveal how documentaries construct their realities, work as experiences, function aesthetically and culturally, reflect and engage the world around us. While on the surface Cowie's commitment to densely theorizing the form might seem at odds with Waugh's Marxism-inflected (in earlier essays), historical, and frequently anecdotal approach in *The Right to Play Oneself*, Waugh's collection once

again reveals documentary as a potent art form: far more heterogeneous, involving, alive, and disruptive than allowed by those who characterise it as sober reflection or pure manipulation of social events. It makes sense, then, that Waugh's and Cowie's books appear in Minnesota's 'Visible Evidence' series as volumes 23 and 24, respectively, reminding us that documentary analysis isn't easily reduced to a single or unified critical framework. Ranging from meditations on Dziga Vertov, Joris Ivens, and Emile de Antonio already published and widely cited elsewhere, to 'less traveled' pieces such as 1990's consideration of documentary performance, 'Acting to Play Oneself', Waugh's prose bridges the divide between wry humour and political seriousness. In this sense his essays perform - and pay homage to - the off-centre, candid, and frequently confrontational views found in the documentaries that he writes about.

Waugh's essays, framed here with historical and personal notes, are arranged roughly in chronological order of their subject matter rather than of the time they were written, providing a bumpy but always engaging journey through documentary activism that ranges from *Kino Pravda* in the 1920s, to New Left figures such as de Antonio, to Canada's Challenge for Change program, queer documentary, Indian activist documentary, and finally to an overview of documentary's radical legacies. Particularly interesting is the way that Waugh's work on queer/LGBTQ documentary - which charts the 'years of famine' in the 1970s through the robust New Queer productivity of the 1990s - speaks to, and sometimes jars against, the leftwing documentary movements discussed elsewhere in the book. Here, telling tensions which Waugh discerns in issues of sexuality and sexual identity as he returns to de Antonio's films only hint at what he might have done with 'queer' re-readings of Vertov or Ivens.

To paraphrase Bill Nichols, the task - the ever receding horizon, perhaps - of documentary relates to transforming spectacles, sights, sounds, testimonies and other kinds of information into forms of complex knowing, gesturing towards what Nichols calls 'magnitudes' beyond the immediate and visible.[2] In documentary, at its best, 'facts' become experience. Of course, as I've suggested elsewhere, this process of endowing meaning and subjectivity to discrete fragments of filmed reality is a fraught process of negotiation, contestation and, frequently, manipulation. These days, documentary filmmaking can no longer rely on its tacit 'contract' with audiences: the public culture of trust built up by documentary from the 1930s through the 1970s increasingly appears to be eroding in the face of digital manipulations and exploitative, empty (to many critics) television reality programming. Still, Waugh suggests that the extent of this social disenchantment is actually 'less than they claim' (pxix), while Cowie attests to our ongoing 'fascination with facts' (p87). As Waugh sums it up, the ongoing popularity of documentary remains just 'as interesting as it is precarious' (pxiii). Documentary criticism continues to encounter areas - as

2. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p233.

in the theoretical implications of documentary animation ('icon' crossing 'index'), for example - that, like postmodernism a couple of decades ago, seem poised to undermine the foundations of the documentary idea, but will likely just advance an ongoing process of critical revision and revitalisation.