



PHOTOGRAPHIES EAST

The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia

ROSALIND C. MORRIS, EDITOR

PHOTOGRAPHIES EAST

OBJECTS/HISTORIES

Critical Perspectives on Art,
Material Culture, and Representation

A series edited by Nicholas Thomas

*Published with the assistance of
the Getty Foundation*





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The Camera and Its Histories
in East and Southeast
Asia

EDITED BY ROSALIND C. MORRIS

Duke University Press

Durham & London

2009

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Printed in the United States
of America on acid-free paper ©

Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan

Typeset in Monotype Fournier by

Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-
Publication Data appear on the last
printed page of this book.

James Siegel's essay originally
appeared as "The Curse of the
Photograph" in *Indonesia* 80

(2005): 21–37. Reprinted
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THIS BOOK has been very long in the making, much longer than either I or the contributors could have wished. It was diverted at various points by the personal losses suffered by several of our contributors, a fact that perhaps infused our respective meditations on photography with an additional melancholia. Unlike Roland Barthes, who wrote the death of his mother into the very heart of his theory of photography, our text is more quietly haunted by the fact that three of our contributors suffered their mothers' death while the book was being compiled. It is dedicated to them, the women whom we recall with and without photos.

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ROSALIND C. MORRIS

Introduction

Photographies East

The Camera and Its Histories
in East and Southeast Asia

The contemporary student of photographic history in Asia, as elsewhere, is confronted with the enormously difficult task of apprehending the shock and sense of utter improbability that accompanied the new technology as it moved along the pathways of colonialism, adventurism, and modern capital to displace or transform existing economies of representation. In an era when the camera is not only universally ubiquitous but indissociable from almost every other mode of communication, that shock and sense of improbability is the very sign of the foreign. Indeed, it has been so since the earliest days of photography, when the camera was perceived as much as an instrument of European aggressivity and the occult power of technology as any other weaponry in the colonial arsenal.

IN AN IDEAL IMAGE, THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

Consider, in this context, the writings of John Thomson (1837–1921), the peripatetic photographer whose images of Siam, Cambodia, Vietnam, Penang, Singapore, and China would inaugurate so many of the conventions by which Asia would be represented to and for Europeans. Reflecting on his career in China, Thomson remarked, “[I] frequently enjoyed the reputation of being a dangerous geomancer, and my camera was held to be a dark mysterious instrument, which, combined with my naturally, or supernaturally, intensified eyesight gave me power to

see through rocks and mountains, to pierce the very souls of the natives, and to produce miraculous pictures of some black art, which at the same time bereft the individual depicted of so much of the principle of life as to render his death a certainty within a very short period of years.”¹ Thomson continues in this vein of romantic self-othering, and thus of self-constitution, by noting, “[The] superstitious influences . . . rendered me a frequent object of mistrust.” His account is a veritable cliché of the encounter between East and West via the aperture of the camera, and one is tempted to disregard it as a result. And yet, these by now banal claims to technological heroism and subjective mastery, as well as the insinuations of superstitious excess among the peoples of Asia, are punctuated by two remarkable and revealing observations. The first informs us that greater animosity was displayed toward camera-bearing foreigners in the city than in the country, an observation that forces us to reconsider any temptation to conflate technophobia with rurality. The second is that Chinese photographers fared even more poorly than did Europeans when the suspicions of the mob became cathected to the camera — revealing the problematic of the foreign to be irreducible to radical or at least visible cultural or political difference.

I linger, if only briefly, on these otherwise rather prosaic remarks by Thomson because, despite being mired in a somewhat trite Manichaeism, they also open onto a set of questions about photography in Asia that exceeds the commonly posited dichotomy of East and West as the seats of technological modernity and organic primitivity, respectively. Distilled here are the germs of several themes that are taken up by the contributors to this volume: the intimacy between photography and death, and also between photography, the crowd, and violence; the perception of occult powers inherent in technology, for which the camera serves as figure; the capacity of the camera to disseminate, dislodge, and transmute the category of the foreign; the question of vision as being either prostheticized or surpassed by the camera; the linkage of the camera with practices of political domination and suppression; and the sense that photography is the instrument of History. Of these issues, more will be said. But let us not leave Thomson just yet.

Thomson was a devoted, not to say servile student of Ruskin.² For all his proto-ethnographic pretensions (and influences: he was the instructor of photography at the Royal Geographic Society from 1886 onward), he imagined photography to be an art, albeit one in which the photographer

was less an auteur than a mere “operator” of light. In this regard he was typical of his moment, expressing the simultaneously positivist enthusiasm for nature’s trace and the democratic artist’s hope that the camera could also liberate a new form of beauty for the cultivated and also the unschooled eye. In this particular combination of attributes and possibilities, Thomson thought, a pleasurable and ethically cosmopolitan pedagogy might be found. “The camera should be a power in this age of instruction for the instruction of the age,” he pronounced.³ Accordingly, he submitted his work to sociological ends in both Asia and London. These ends called forth the image of a social type, which Thomson construed in class terms in Europe and in national and racialized terms in Asia.⁴ Thus, his archive is known for the faces of destitution in London’s slums and the situated portraits of both kings and rice winnowers in Asia. In both cases, the essence of the type was tied to the context and the activities of the sitter, but the English subjects appear to have been caught in their respective acts, while the Asians seem rather to be demonstrating theirs.

Despite the relative contingency and temporal situatedness of the European photographs and the self-disclosing and static quality of the Asian images, Thomson’s sociological photography was driven by the possibility that the photograph could distill the essence of a social position. And it is no doubt for this reason that his sociological ambitions were articulated in an aesthetic idiom not far removed from allegory; composition was to be guided by the pursuit of unity, and this was to be achieved through the elevation of a single element to the status of guiding principle for the entire view. In short, the photograph was to exceed the mere reproduction of nature by becoming emblematic. Roland Barthes would later describe this as the basis of a quality in journalistic photographs that he would call, someone disparagingly, “unary,” and it is one of the reasons why much of Thomson’s imagery now seems so stereotypical.⁵ The banality of this stereotypy is a function of its having been reproduced in history; we are now more than familiar with these kinds of images, and they elicit little more than a nod of recognition from us. But the stereotypy itself was intentional. Or, rather, the recognizability of the imagery, as representative of a type, was the goal.

Such stereotypy would be the opposite of what Siegfried Kracauer, in contrasting properly historical representations with the historicism of photography, called the monogram.⁶ The monogram in Kracauer’s analysis is the memory image, the last recalled image of a person whose lived

history and relations to others generates a sense of his or her “truth”; anything which does not signify in terms of that truth — what is often called the essence of a person or personality — is generally omitted from these images. Historically, the monogram was associated with other forms of representation, whether painterly or fictional. And in the early days of photography, when sitters were required to pose for many seconds or even minutes, photographs retained something of this distilled and distilling quality. For this reason, Walter Benjamin suggested that the “procedure caused the subject to focus his life in the moment.”⁷ But with the advent of the snapshot, photographs abandoned this capacity to the other arts. In Kracauer’s reading, the relatively instantaneous photographs were absolutely of the moment in which they were produced and possessed a timeliness which could be seen in the outdated fashion that adhered to older photographs, especially of women. He concluded that, as a consequence, they could not emit the truth of memory or function as monograms.

Kracauer’s pronouncements notwithstanding, the allure of portrait photography continues to be the promise of this now surpassed representational capacity. Indeed, it was the essential or focused truth of being that Barthes sought, so mournfully, in a photograph of his dead mother, and which he finally acknowledged could not be located there (hence, there is no picture of his mother in *Camera Lucida*, the book dedicated to her). Nickola Pazderic tells us of similar, if ironically codified ambitions in the industry of contemporary marriage portraiture in Taiwan. In the end, however, we find this residual but endlessly renewed hope articulated most potently in the moment of a photograph’s perceived failure. It is voiced each time someone says or thinks, “That photograph does not look like me.”

When, by contrast, people say, as they do in some situations, that they do not resemble their photograph, we know that something profound has occurred in the history of representational practice and in the popular consciousness that inhabits the people photographed. I believe it is such a change, at once minute and enormously significant, that becomes discernible when one juxtaposes the writings of Thomson and Kracauer on the question of the stereotype and the monogram. Between the former’s enthusiasm for the imagery of essence and the latter’s jubilant abandonment of it lies the tale of a small revolution, a photographic revolution. Recognizing it, we learn to ask if a comparable change can be perceived elsewhere, in other worlds that the camera has transformed.

Instead of photographs as emblems or stereotypes, Kracauer's analysis sees photography as the evidence of an economic system of which it is the mere "secretion" and which has reduced everything to mere materiality.⁸ This is what it can reveal. Retrospectively (or anachronistically), Kracauer's text contains an implicit accusation against the error of a typological ethos in photography, on the grounds that it misrecognizes in the timely photograph the timeless image of the social type, whether the pauper or the rice winnow, the shoeshine man or the Oriental monarch.⁹ One can imagine Kracauer chastising Thomson for not knowing that the pursuit of emblematic representation is a violation of photography's more radical promise. The criticism would be well taken; many censorious histories of anthropological and colonial photography rest on similar grounds (though they are rarely so evocatively or eloquently stated). Yet, if it is true that the endeavor to produce representative photographs can only fix a moment, thus severing it from a life which must otherwise culminate in death, it is also true that this violent ambition of photography leaks back into the social world and summons people to perform in terms of an image that circulates on their behalf and in terms of which they become recognizable — first to authorities, and then to themselves.¹⁰ Here, the dissonance between life and photography threatens to dissipate in a lived deathliness, as people increasingly attempt to resemble, under the influence of various institutional and technological encouragements, their own (future) images. This, rather than pornographic objectification, is the violence of representation to which so many postcolonial critics point (with more or less precision) when they accuse photography and colonial-era visual anthropology of complicity in cultural destruction.¹¹

The social and historical effectivity of the camera in this sense was rather remote on the horizon of Kracauer's thought. In comparison, Thomson's writing assumes additional interest. This is because it not only espouses the ideology of photography at the moment in which it appears regressively attached to representational functions (allegory, the emblem) previously assigned to painting, but because it also discloses the unseen and not yet realized truth of a world-transforming process which it has inaugurated. That is the process by which people start to comport themselves in terms of the ideal images of cultural types and class profiles which photography disseminates, through such devices as ethnically marked costume, poses, and the ethnographic *mise-en-scène*. If this pro-

cess is dissimulated in and by the fashion industry, which offers the consolation of false difference while artificially hastening the transformation of such images in Western and Westernized contexts, it is nonetheless an increasingly ubiquitous process. Often accompanied by sartorial regulations and practices of governance that entailed ethnic registration and identity documentation, it became a compulsion in many colonial contexts. It was absolutely central to the experience of photography in Asia, where the question of the foreign would lead to a demand for the production of forms that could permit recognition.

What does foreignness mean in this context? And what was photography's relationship to that foreignness, other than the promise of containment through recognition? For, despite being associated with a capacity for linguistic transcendence, the camera seems also to have been inextricable from the experience of an emergent difference. This is why, despite his aspiration to unity and despite his labor to generate the emblems of various social types, Thomson could nonetheless recognize that different aesthetic and social standards governed the portraiture produced by European and Chinese photographers—and the latter were growing in numbers as he made his way across Asia. It was a recognition that may be said to constitute something of a repressed origin for the form of visual anthropology, increasingly prevalent today, which takes for its object the discovery of visual vernaculars and culturally specific modes of photography.¹²

The question of the vernacular retains its significance, and there is much to be gained from accounts of the specific traditions within which photography is taken up, used, and refused (as the writers in this volume attest). However, foreignness, that which the camera generates and that to which the discourse of photography responds with the fantasy of transcendence, cannot be reduced to the question of the local or the idea of the vernacular. The foreignness that Thomson reveals in the discourse of his Asian interlocutors is not a matter of cultural style, and it cannot be properly analogized with language unless, as Marx once said of the commodity form, it is analogized with language as translation.¹³ But the difficulty of analyzing it arises from the fact that it emerges precisely in the talk about cultural style and local predilections.

Whenever he attempted to grasp something of the difference that opened in the field of photography as practiced and experienced by Europeans and Asians in Asia, Thomson seems to have been gripped by two particularly powerful tropes. These tropes expressed an answer to

the question What do they think of the camera? or What does photography represent to and for them? The first trope attributed morbid powers to the camera and linked it with death. It posited the camera as a parasitical technology whose capacity to produce vivacious imagery relied, precisely, on the evacuation of life from the living.¹⁴ The second trope expressed an aspiration to totality in a visible mode and often took the form of an aesthetic that required every photographic portrait (if it was to be made) to reveal both eyes, both ears, and the entire front of the body—all the features deemed representative of a person's wholeness and humanness. According to this aesthetic, which seems, at first sight, to contradict the former, nothing should be withheld from the camera, and nothing should be occulted in or by the image. Such an ambition or prohibition appears to be linked to a suspicion of shadow and, moreover, to express a belief that the camera itself projected shadow upon the face of the one photographed. In this normativizing aesthetic, shadow is a kind of defacement, a wound in the transparency which ought to define the photograph and the communicative relation it was thought to facilitate by those who embraced it.¹⁵

In Thomson's writings, as in those of myriad proto-ethnographers, the talk about local style invariably collapses into a discourse upon either the illegibility of the photograph to non-Western eyes or the supernatural capacities imputed to the camera by naïve, usually non-Western sensibilities. On the one hand, it is a discourse about the lack of signifying capacities in the photograph for those unfamiliar with it; on the other, it is a discourse about the excess of signifying power in the photograph. The choice is meaninglessness or magic.

One may read these putatively Oriental conceptions of photography as mere projections (Thomson's imagining of their imagining). We can also read them as misrecognitions of a discourse that remained largely untranslatable to Thomson, though in this regard, it is not incidental that Thomson produced translations of photographic terminology from English to Chinese.¹⁶ We can even imagine them as an accurate transcription of the alarmed responses of people who would yet submit to photographic technology as an instrument of nature's self-reproduction or as a technique of violent objectification, or even as a mode of self-extension (renown-making) through the circulation of copies. To the extent that Thomson's renditions of Asian responses merely caricature expressions of a falsely essentialized Asian relationship to photography, they can be dismissed. To the extent that they reflect sentiments that have been

superseded, they may be relegated to history, where they can function as the trace of an encounter to which the archive will provide only partial access. But we may also wonder if the insistent and regular recurrence of such statements and their echoes (as described in the essays that follow) reveals something not only about local codes of representation and representability (and the colonists' drive to represent everything as that which can be seen),¹⁷ but also about photography itself. This is, perhaps, an imprecise formulation. I do not mean that these multiply redacted statements reveal something about technological essence. If they can be made to reveal something about photography, it is because they reveal photography *as* discourse, as a discourse of technology — a discourse that is at once of and on the camera, emanating from it and addressing it as an object. Photography may, in the end, be said to constitute the discursive elaboration of a technologized relationship to difference.

What of this discourse, which takes so many forms in so many places and is articulated in so many distinct languages and idioms? If we relinquish a literalist reading of the tropes mentioned above, and if we consider the seemingly contrary sentiments as being, somehow, related to each other, we can perhaps understand that, at least according to Thomson, the camera was conceived by the Asians he met as a source of absolute foreignness. It introduced that which not only interrupted the form and course of a singularly experienced life, but which could contradict it to the point of destruction (either by robbing the subject of life, or by defacing him or her and thereby undermining his or her place in the social field). This foreignness, if we are to grant its existence as a force, was variously related to the fact of European colonialisms and their after-maths, but while it is indissociable from these histories it is not reducible to them. Foreignness as it emerges in Thomson's account of his photographic journeys in Asia is not a property of Asians or of Asians as seen by Europeans, or even of Europeans as seen by Asians in Asia, so much as the structure of a relation between Asia and Europe and within Asia itself: one that marks and figures the experience of a new, technologically mediated historical consciousness and a new experience of history as the name of a mutually othering relation between the bearers of technology and their others. This possibility hangs above all of the essays in this volume, though it is not articulated as such by any. It is perhaps premature to postulate it as an overarching structure within which to read them at this point. I introduce it here as a way of indicating that impossible coherence toward which a collection of differently authored essays can only point.

What characterizes those with photographic technology, it seems, is their own experience of difference as temporalized. The idea of foreignness contained in the discourse of photography, as relayed to us by John Thomson, has as its corollary a conception of the camera as the origin of a fissure. This fissure marks the point of separation between two very different orientations to time. It opens between an orientation to the past as that which is cut off from its own future, and an orientation to the future as the ideal form of the past. Accordingly, there is, on one side, mourning and, on the other, an anticipatory melancholia. These poles are structured by the phantasmatic image of what would have been (that always receding idea of a history or a tradition interrupted) and the conformity of one's self to an image of that which will have been. This polarity emerges because the camera inserts itself into history as something that calls up a consciousness of being looked at—in a very special way, for this being looked at requires the mediation of the camera in order that the reciprocity of gazes not be simultaneous. Reciprocity is both reduced to visibility and subjected to a temporal spacing. The Chinese photographers who, in their conversations with Thomson, insisted that a proper portrait show a man as whole, so that he be judged by others, namely, those viewing his image, on the totality of his physical merits, articulate this sense that a camera produces the conditions in which one poses for others by posing for the camera. They know that this posing entails a waiting. The instantaneity of the photograph is thus consciously bracketed by them, as a ruse behind which social relations are extended in time. This is a radical fact, one that transforms manners and the cultural discourses of propriety at every level. In contexts where photography is organized by the idea of the type, however, the anticipated gaze will greet the image not as the sign of how one once looked, but as the evidence of one's look, in general and for all time. It expresses itself in those quotidian statements, permanently inscribed in the present tense: "Ah, so this is what she looks like." Here, the monogram returns as a specter of desire.

This experience of photography is not peculiar to the Asian context, of course. Wherever there is photography, it seems, there is a conflict between (at least) two times and two modalities of duration and a repeating drama of disappearance and persistence. Wherever there is photography there is a relation of seeing and being seen which rends the co-presence of the seer and the seen and risks casting the latter into an abyssal space

where history constantly threatens to become, quite simply, the past, and even the surpassed. This risk is, perhaps, especially threatening in the space of colonial encounters. In Asia, as many writers in this volume show, photography often appears to illuminate the past as a space of the dead and of those who are condemned to death, of the defeated and the ravished. But an attentive eye also discovers it to be the space of endurance, of fantasy, and of self-making. Photography, we might say, generates the past both to which present lamentation offers its obeisance and from which anticipation makes its own offerings, even when that anticipation is itself simply the imagination of a future anterior in which the subject will have ceased to be.

How, then, shall we write the story of photography in Asia without making it appear either as a mere case study of a universal phenomenon or as an absolutely particular and hence untranslatable experience which remains mute in the face of comparative aspirations? How can we tell this story, or rather, these stories, without hypostatizing as an essence the space called Asia? Without reducing discourse to technology, and hence according it a unity which it does not possess? Perhaps it is necessary to understand something of the contemporary discourse of photography that accompanied people like Thomson in order that we be able to comprehend what happened to that discourse in (East and Southeast) Asia, and what that discourse did within Asia. And perhaps this understanding can reinfect what we think we can understand of history and culture-in-history through the analysis of photography. To this end, I believe it is helpful to briefly consider the writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–91), a slightly older contemporary of Thomson whose unbridled enthusiasm for photography generated some of the most influential popular commentaries on the camera's uses and potential in the English-speaking world. To be sure, Thomson inhabited the sphere of British Empire, Holmes that of American republicanism before it assumed the mantle of the new imperium. But for this very reason, the relationship between their discourses proves instructive. Reading between their texts allows us to observe how the dynamic of foreignness and the conception of photographic technology as that which mortifies by revealing death, but also as that which marks the entry of the newest of the new, was played out in the relation between Britain and the United States. If we can discern this dynamic operating in the space between the two great engines of Western capital and imperialism, then we may well have the means to escape the

persisting tendency which reduces the problem of foreignness to a formula that pits the West against the East.

But first to Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes managed to capture something of the temporal duality associated with photography when he described the marvels of the early stereoscope, which was the form through which many people experienced photographs. In retrospect, his writings acquire an uncanny sound, disclosing as they do the power of the camera not only to mortify but also to project deathliness onto history. Surveying the detailed minutiae of the *carte de visite*, which he likened to “sun sculpture” (in contrast to the “sun painting” of the single photograph), Holmes offered the macabre assessment that “England is one great burial-ground to an American. . . . No one but a travelled American feels what it is to live in a land of monuments.” He concludes wistfully, anticipating his compatriot, Henry James, that it is perhaps “well that we should be forced to live mainly for the future; but it is sometimes weary and prosaic.”¹⁸ What enabled this particular historical consciousness, this sense of being a foundling and of living for the future because one can hold the image of the past almost unto eternity, what attuned Holmes to the merely necrophiliac cult of monuments (and hence, monogrammatic representation) was, precisely, photography.

From the beginning, Holmes’s writings were possessed by what Allan Sekula aptly terms “two chattering ghosts: that of bourgeois science and that of bourgeois art,” and he shared in the “comic, shuffling dance between technological determinism and auteurism.”¹⁹ The photochemical processes for fixing an image represented for him something utterly unanticipated by previous generations. Thirty years after their first appearance, they remained for him a surprise, their discovery an event. The images they produced offered both pleasure and knowledge, as well as the possibility of traversing distance and establishing the parameters for comparative forensic analyses of everything from disease symptoms to inherited resemblances among family members. Most important, photography also promised new kinds of sociality and new desolations. “A photographic intimacy between two persons who never saw each other’s faces . . . is a new form of friendship,” he wrote.²⁰ But also: “The time is perhaps at hand when a flash of light, as sudden and brief as that of the lightning which shows a whirling wheel standing stock still, shall preserve the very instant of the shock of contact of the mighty armies that are even now gathering.”²¹

Insofar as he thought of it as an art form, Holmes saw only gain in the photographic image: “The painter shows us masses; the stereoscopic figure spares us nothing.” The result is “infinite charm” and a small library comparable to “infinite volumes of poems.”²² Although many art historians have since argued that quattrocento perspectivalism was the precondition if not the anticipation of photography, thereby implying a long and continuous history within which photography arrived as the telos of a contrived and specifically European naturalism, Holmes’s ecstatic writings about the new technology emphasize a sense of rupture. It is not an overstatement to observe that, for him, photography constituted an irrevocable point of departure from all that had preceded his moment.

From our own vantage point at the beginning of a new millennium, surveying the totality of transformations of which photography was a part, this discontinuity described photography’s relationship to the field of representation more than to industrial technology. When Holmes recounted his visit to a photographic materials factory for the readers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, it had all the hallmarks of an industrial system, with a division of labor so extreme and alienating that few workers could even conceive of the finished product.²³ Perhaps, then, we can rethink his perception of discontinuity without entirely abandoning it. What if we were to say that, if photography took leave of anything in the Western tradition, it was not of the history of painterly arts but of their future history? For, if the camera introduced a new mode of representation, it did so by preserving perspectival depth in the very moment that painting was abandoning it. Its discontinuity was thus a stubborn continuity, one which may itself have incited a further movement toward that self-reflexive internalization of the exhibition’s plane that would characterize modernist painting, as Rosalind Krauss defines it.²⁴

Reading Holmes’s texts on stereography, Krauss herself repudiates those historians (and they are legion) who want to include photography in the development of modernism. She remarks instead the split within photography that separated lithography and other forms of two-dimensional photographic inscription from stereography. The former, she says, citing Alan Trachtenberg, were part of a cartographic project, linked not only to science but to an expansionist politics based on natural resource extraction.²⁵ The latter constituted something like an effort to redeem the image for depth, and thus for a hallucinatory tactility. In Holmes’s language, its analogue would not be painting but sculpture. Krauss’s attention to the split in Holmes’s discourse encourages us to consider whether the arrest

of tradition is not merely an element of photography in its colonial mode, but is intrinsic to its operations from the start. This possibility allows us to think differently about the fact that photography elsewhere, and certainly in East and Southeast Asia, seems to have operated to transform representational histories by preserving them, which is to say by prohibiting their transformation. And yet, when it goes elsewhere, photography effects more than an interruption of the present. Because it often provides a figure and a metadiscourse for its own operations, photography may be understood not only to have arrested those traditions but, in the colonial context where it was annexed to other institutions and discourses of alterity, to have projected and dissimulated that arrest as the mere object of its representations. What photography in this part of Asia claimed to capture was not only cultural essence, but an essence doomed to vanish; not a fixed moment, but stasis.

This much has already been argued by many others. Indeed, when writing about photography, one often feels that almost everything has been said before—though it is a testimony to the particular capacity of the camera to renew our sense of invention that this familiarity neither becomes uncanny nor seems to exhaust our need to address these persistently recurring issues. Not everything has been or can be said, of course. The essays in this book offer some strikingly new observations to the analysis of photography, and they do so, partly, by extending the analysis of photography's ambivalent temporality—its haunting and haunted status, its split and receding horizon—to the question of foreignness. They help to elucidate the ways photography in Asia often dissimulates the capacity (one wants to say drive) to generate foreignness as a mere technique to typify foreigners, be they peasants, ethnic minorities, criminals, revolutionaries, anticolonial warriors, or simply elders. They show how photography has been projected and misrecognized in the complex relations of mutual othering that have traversed the relentlessly modernizing fields of Asia. In many instances they address not only the mortifying powers of the colonial gaze in its photographic mode, but also the histories by which photography came to be integrated with other aesthetic traditions as the source of their fracturing and preservation through arrest.

The reader must await these careful, historically and ethnographically detailed analyses for a deeper understanding of these issues. But if I may proffer a formula here, we could say that, if photography worked to preserve perspectivalism in the West, it also introduced the perspective of

preservationism everywhere, ensuring the improbable afterlife of what would have passed, and perhaps even gone unnoticed. When Susan Sontag takes up Walter Benjamin's surrealist insight and says that photography makes it possible to discover a new beauty in that which is vanishing, she is only partly correct.²⁶ The question here is not simply a matter of capture, or even of aestheticizing the process of ruination. It is a matter of banishing disappearance while rendering passage irresistible. And one ought to recall here that among the many representational possibilities that photography seems to foreclose are forgetting, anticipatory censorship, and even indifference: the unmarked burial, the demand that proper names become mute, the turning away or masking of oneself. These are all forms of resisting the reduction to a visible trace. In this volume, both Patricia Spyer and James Siegel suggest ways of thinking a negative relation to photography. In doing so, they open the way to a radical thinking about what cannot be narrated within the now familiar rhetoric of the hegemony of photographic vision.

REMAINING DETAILS

Ultimately, what the writers in this volume do is attend to photographs. In addition to their shared acknowledgment of the stereotypy, the discursive violence, and the political asymmetries within which the images they consider have been produced or withheld, they turn to the photographic image and to the history of its viewing for clues and incitements. In each essay, whether written in the grateful shadow of Barthes, Benjamin, Derrida, Foucault, Freud, Heidegger, Kittler, Kracauer, Said, or Sontag, there is an empiricism that matches the compulsive demands of the technology and its claims to manifest the industrial form of facticity. This empiricism, whether virtuous or begrudging, avowed or apologetic, allows these writers to read against the grain of history, of the photographers' intentions, and even the writers' own desires. It allows them to ask, What is that?, or it allows them, all scholars of East and Southeast Asia, to discern in the seemingly saturated plane of an image a significant blank spot and to ask, accordingly, What does this invisibility veil? Sometimes it allows them to wonder what difference is marked by the absence of an image altogether.

In the end, perhaps, this empiricism is itself evidence of the accomplishment of photography, an accomplishment of which we are all at least partially observant. Which of us looks on the photograph of a loved one

and does not say “It is she”? Which of us ever thinks of a photograph as merely constructed, though almost none of us ever pretends that it is not also constructed? What I am calling empiricism here should not be confused with scientism or positivism, for there is no presumption that the observed detail discloses the truth in these essays. Nor does it imply a universally accessible referent. In the peripatetic idiom distilled in the onomatopoeic word *click*, a term that can be heard in so many languages, one could perhaps believe that photography does enable a universal language. This would be the languageless language of signifying reproductions, of naturally produced traces in which truth is equivalent to that which can be seen.²⁷ The conflation of a generalized idiom for a universalized language must be resisted, however, now as in the past.

The empiricism incarnated in these essays never devolves into such an ideological fantasy of universality. Rather, it manifests an ethos and an ethics of careful observation. It redeems detail, as it were, from the ransom of fastidiousness, turning the tyranny of minutiae into a gift. This too is an old theme in theories of photography, though one less admired in anthropology and postcolonial studies, where the critique of the frame (its history and conditions of production) can sometimes obliterate that which survives the violence of the photographic exchange. Barthes famously described the singular detail as that which can wound (rather than shout at) the viewer. He gave it the name *punctum*. Holmes similarly valorized the detail, but described it in an exemplary mode. Its symptomatic form was, for him, the clothesline, whose omnipresence in the urban landscape photographs from across Europe marked the point of departure from painterly convention. Though the clothesline is now a cliché in and of itself (a sign of quaintness if not kitsch), Holmes found in it proof of the inexhaustibility of the photograph, and its discovery in an image was, for him, a moment in which what generally goes unobserved makes itself available to be seen. Long before Benjamin coined the language of the optical unconscious, Holmes remarked that the “distinctness of the lesser details of a building or a landscape often gives us incidental truths which interest us more than the central object of the pictures.”²⁸

These truths survive as remainders in the images that are otherwise intended to communicate more “unary” significations. And it is in the tension between them that a good analyst finds the evidence of an actuality which exceeds its representation, including that of the photograph (though such a discovery does not guarantee access to what exceeds the form of its appearance). So, for example, the slippage and abrasion at the

edge of a journalistic portrait showing the execution of Chinese rebels shows something about the organization of state violence. And the severed head of a bovine in the cogs and wheels of an industrial factory in Java bespeaks something about the synchronicity of two regimes of spectrality. The gold-dusted fingerprint on a portrait of a king evidences reverence for a monarch who has only just emerged into visibility but who is already available for fetishization. And so forth. These examples from the essays that follow should forewarn readers that they are about to encounter a form of analysis that demands attention to the kind of detail that photographic images are so especially, though not uniquely, able to store.

The question of effects is another matter. Sometimes the persistent visibility of the dead, which photographs afford, generates uncanny after-effects, haunting not only the memory of times past but everyday life in thoroughly modern contexts. At other times the camera seems an agent of truly occult powers and appears to reveal magic in the heart of the mechanical order. Sometimes too the object of the camera's gaze refuses to provide that consoling reciprocation of looks that colonial powers and their neocolonial heirs, the tourists, demand and fantasize as their own acknowledgment. The latter example is particularly instructive. One is never sure whether the blank stare or furrowed brow, the turned back or obviously fatuous grin should be written as repudiation, rage, incomprehension, or indifference. The detail never surrenders this other story, this other afterlife of the image. Instead, the detail marks the place from which it may be approached. It is from that location that the writers here begin.

Often enough, when one looks at photographs the fecundity and the instability of the detail is testified to in the caption, which attempts to restore the unity of the image and appears to temporarily reanchor the photograph in the tradition of the monogram from which Kracauer tried so hard to extract it. Bluntly stated, the caption is the linguistic supplement that reduces the photograph to a mere index. This is why there is always a risk that an essay addressed to photographs will appear to function merely as an elaborate caption, a swollen and distended summary. In this sense, the essay addressed to (documentary) cinema can risk transforming the film into a mere photograph. However, to the extent that writing remains dedicated to an exploration of the tension between the generality of the image and the specificity of the detail, as all the essays here do, it avoids the worst pitfalls of captioning. For where a caption

would have reduced language to the lexical fixing of referents, these essays manage to lend language to the photographic. They make it speak in answer to the question What can these images (or their lack) say to us about the history of their production, the world they depict, the lives they transformed, the ways they were appropriated, the possibilities they seemed incapable of acknowledging?

In giving language to photography, by acknowledging its simultaneous paucity and superabundance of signification (what the people represented by Thomson thought of as meaninglessness or magic), the writers in this volume cannot help but construe the relationship between photography and language as a supplementary one. But in writing of photography and thereby posing the question of language, they also pose the question of desire. Indeed, at the end of these introductory musings, what remains to be told is the story of desire. Desire is that which traverses the archive and extends beyond it. It is woven into the fabric of these other discourses: about foreignness, about the fetishization of the past, about the relations between Easterners and Westerners. It is sometimes violent, sometimes mutual, sometimes romantic, occasionally revolutionary, at other times nationalist, and very frequently intergenerational. But there is no account of photography which can evade the force of desire, if by desire we understand both attraction and aggressivity toward the other.

Once again, Holmes. Despite the marvelous uses that he conjured for the new technology, Holmes thought that photography's greatest gift lay in its promise of a duration beyond that which mortal flesh could ever achieve. This duration was a function of its capacity to separate form from substance, a capacity that Holmes not incidentally narrated in a retelling of the myth of Marsyas and Apollo. In the American's version, the flaying of the one who attempted to compete in music with the gods was imagined as a photographic session, the flesh being transformed into the mere image that the vanquished aspirant shed for the camera.²⁹ In other words, photography usurped the place of vengeance (death) with the promise of immortality (the death of death), but only because the victorious competitor, the Apollonian photographer, desired his impudent challenger. Eros inflames this tale, just as it inflames Barthes's adoring account of Alexander Gardiner's 1865 photograph of a young man, Lewis Payne, who, like Marsyas, was sentenced to die. Like Barthes's account, Holmes's narrative depends on the story of violence being subsumed within a story of desire. He imagines Apollo "pleased with his young rival," and hence moved not to kill him but to photograph him. Similarly,

Barthes concedes his own attraction to the languid youth who has been photographed prior to (but not instead of) being executed, in a manner that bespeaks not the bureaucratic interests of the state or the phrenological ambitions of the criminologist, but the unabashed desire of one who is “pleased” with the image of the voluptuously reclining young man. In her first book on photography, Sontag boldly asserted that it transforms everything into a potential beauty. This too is only partly correct. Pleasure exceeds the question of beauty. It is, as Freud well knew, the point at which life and death touch. Another punctum.

It is not always easy to read desire in the photographs and the oeuvres described by most of the authors collected here, even in that genre, the wedding portrait (discussed by Pazderic) that is most overtly structured by the requirement that it show love and beauty. Certainly it can be discerned in the fashionable photo albums described by Carlos Rojas, and Thomas LaMarre reveals to us the deeply fetishistic structure of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s cinema, which deploys the woman as a sign around which viewers’ desire can be organized. But in the collections of images of corpses, the brutal residue of state and imperial violence discussed in James Hevia’s and my essays, and in the brittle surfaces of shadow and flash which expose the underside of Enlightenment, as Marilyn Ivy points out in her explication of Naitō Masatoshi’s use of flash, one is confronted by a certain resistance to the discourse of desire. This resistance can be overcome, however, if we acknowledge that the photograph is not only the site of desire but also its cause (even when one is merely thinking about taking a picture).

The desire that operates in photography can never be confined to that of the photographer, whose investments will remain at least partially opaque to all future inquiry. The desire of photography is both fractured and mediated, passed through the circuit of future regard. It is our desire that sustains photography, our sense of wanting to look, of being unable not to look. For all the hand-wringing and unctuous assertions of righteous disinterest, there is no analysis of colonial photography that does not also desire to look at its images, no anthropology of visual anthropology that is not captured by its pictures, no reading of photojournalism that does not repeatedly invest, if only momentarily, the eventful image. Our curiosity, even when motivated by critique, is a form of desire. This does not mean that we all share the same violent impulses that generated the images in the first place. Sometimes desire is what saves us from the more aggressive desire enacted by someone who went before. What sum-

mons this compulsive looking is, I believe, the indefatigable sense that in each photograph, however familiar, there is also something absolutely singular. That singularity is simultaneously inaccessible and traced in the photograph. Only the most complete repudiation of a transcendental communication could escape this desire, though this is precisely what James Siegel describes in his account of the holy warriors in Atjeh, men who do not care to leave a trace.

Maybe the one who looks at the photograph is attracted to death in an effort to stave it off, while the one who refuses to look has already determined to die—to die in a manner that separates him or her absolutely from the living. In any case, the intimacy between death and photography which so moved both Holmes and Barthes is variously acknowledged in all of the essays here. For this reason it must be understood that this intimacy is not one in which death stands for the force of abstraction, though stereotypical photographs mortify. To the contrary, it is the principle of singularity. (This is why Barthes thought of the photograph as being more theatrical than cinematic.) Because every death is absolutely singular, the culmination of a life which is itself singular, death's laceration of the photographic image is the source of the image's capacity to communicate singularity. This does not mean that the photograph itself (in whatever form, from paper to digital), is singular; since the daguerreotype's surpassing, it has been defined by its reproducibility. Nonetheless this morbid capacity to communicate singularity constitutes one, perhaps the only basis of its ethical possibility, and it is what grips the viewer—to the extent it does—and provokes him or her to survey its detail and imagine, for a moment, that the two, detail and singularity, are the same. They are not, of course. The detail stands in for singularity and, without representing it (that would be impossible), conveys its force. Anthropological and historical readings of photographs often attempt to mobilize this capacity by testifying to the dissonance between the photograph and the one photographed, the image and the actuality. Thus, for example, Ishii may have been posed in his ridiculous role as the last of his kind, but in his photographs we find, in addition to the pathos of costume and the horror of cultural death, the face of a man who exceeds the caricature to which he was so violently subject. In short, he becomes one whom we could desire, however violently. It is what is left of reciprocity in the time of photography. This may be a good thing, or at least not a bad thing, if it is recognized that the camera also enters the world, instigates new modes of worlding, interrupts existing aesthetic codes and forms of representation,

solicits new self-conscious postures, fractures the temporality of the here and now, and introduces foreignness everywhere. But, Holmes's story of Marsyas and Apollo notwithstanding, photography rarely substitutes for violence; the story is, as I said, one of subsumption.

ITINERARIES TO COME

Reluctant though we may be, we — anthropologists and historians of photography in East and Southeast Asia — are all John Thomson's heirs. It is not merely fortuitous, of course, that I commenced this introduction and this book with the work of Thomson. For his itineraries in Asia constitute something of an anticipatory map of the terrain covered by the writers in this volume. This is not because I intend to valorize a colonial perambulation. Thomson's journeys do not chart a geopolitical reality which has remained unchanged since he took his camera with him, nearly 150 years ago. Nonetheless, because he did not merely picture the world but entered it, his interventions have resounding significance for our queries here. The concatenation of essays under the unwieldy geopolitical moniker of East and Southeast Asia nonetheless needs some explanation, for, while it resonates with and even ghosts Thomson's early route, the rationale for this book is not derived from it.

The countries and communities addressed in these essays do not constitute a culture area, a single geopolitical territory, or a bounded sphere of economic activity. The languages spoken in the sites discussed are diverse, from Aru to Atjeh and Java, from Siam to Taiwan and China, to Japan. The forms of economy and society, the traditions of representation, the systems of ritual and belief — all differ from place to place and time to time. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there are no material connections among and between them. Thus, for example, in both island and mainland Southeast Asia, Chinese merchants played a crucial role in the early history of photography's dissemination throughout the region. Though many of these countries were the subject of imperial ambition and outright colonization (British and Dutch, in this case), Chinese merchants worked as intermediaries, apprenticing to European photographers, then investing capital and establishing studios, circulating photo albums, and so forth.³⁰ These material economies and biographical histories formed the basis of an expanding network of discursive and technological exchanges, and they, in their turn, facilitated flows of many others sorts. Historically speaking, these exchanges constitute one of the

conditions of possibility for the comparative project incipient in this volume. They were also augmented by other networks, such as those forged in ironic solidarity between the upper classes of Europe and Asia and produced through the diplomatic gifts of cameras and photographs that laced together the monarchs and statesmen of far-flung worlds in deferred but reciprocal gazes—tokens of that strange new friendship of which Holmes wrote. To the extent that middle classes emerged in these contexts, they became the subjects and the markets for the proliferating pastime that was photography, a pastime inseparable from tourism but also incorporated into other traditions, such as the filial worship of ancestors (photographs of parents and grandparents on shrines in many places).

Japan's experience with the technology was shaped differently in the early decades from that of China and the Southeast Asia states with significant Chinese populations. But it also took place against the backdrop of European colonization. Moreover, Japan's relationships to European empire were spectralized by its relations with China, to and from which it transmitted texts, commodities, ideas, and wealth. Many of the stories of photography's early history in East and Southeast Asia could also be told of South Asia, of course. But unlike South Asia, the histories of which photography was a part in East and Southeast Asia were not as thoroughly overdetermined by British colonialism, and there is some virtue, I believe, in marking the difference that is a corollary of that fact. But not all the absences in this volume reflect a decision of boundary marking, however provisional. The book is not representative. Silent here are the histories of photography in the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Partly that reflects the fact that work on these topics has been published elsewhere. Partly it reflects the need for even more work to be done. And partly too it expresses the merely coincidental connections and partial knowledge of the editor.

Today the rapid and fluid movement of images, texts, ideas, and fashions across vast spaces and between former political antagonists has rendered the question of photography's original itinerary somewhat moot. Many of the essays here are concerned with emphatically contemporary phenomena, phenomena which depend on transnational capital and the globalization of style, as well as nationalist aesthetics and sovereign politics in the post-Second World War period. The continuing coherence of a rubric such as East and Southeast Asia must therefore be understood partly as a function of institutional and disciplinary history in the United

States, where all of us were trained. One must always acknowledge that the boundaries which continue to emanate from a cold war area studies framework have shaped and continue to shape the discursive communities within which Asianists, even those critical of its paradigms, tend to operate. For better and for worse, this volume is haunted by that history. But there is also a set of theoretical affinities which simultaneously cross-cut and reinforce this historically and geopolitically shaped nexus. And they are the deeper source of the book's internal conversation.

There is obvious agreement among the authors here that, despite its many forms and deployments in various times and places, photography invariably entails the logics of iterability and reproducibility, and that it effects a temporal instability which is absolutely central to the temporal consciousness of modernity. But it is also possible to discern a gathering sense that photography must be further understood as the technology that calls for representation to surpass itself. Moreover, the consequences of an increasingly mobile, increasingly instantaneous capacity for image making, the development of more and more forms of light sensitivity, and both digitization and the complete blurring of the boundary between the photographic and the cinematic in the new generations of digital cameras and even cellphones with capacities for movies, and of course iPods, has ensured that the encounter between the new and the obsolete, the modern and the primitive is an experience that everyone undergoes again and again.

The order of this book is determined neither by area nor by historical epoch. There are three essays concerning island Southeast Asia, all from the space now called Indonesia: Pemberton's, Siegel's, and Spyer's. My essay is on Thailand, and Ivy's and LaMarre's are on Japan. Three focus on China and Taiwan: Hevia's, Pazderic's, and Rojas's. It would have been possible to simply group papers according to their geopolitical or linguistic affinities. Similarly, it would have been possible to arrange the essays by historical period: those dealing with earlier moments of colonialism and colonial violence (Siegel, Hevia, and Pemberton, but also Morris), those with contemporary forms of culturalist representation (Spyer, Pazderic, and, differently, Rojas), and those with the question of representation, state power, and the relationship between the aesthetics and the technologies of modernity (Ivy, LaMarre, Morris, Pazderic, and Rojas). There is much to commend these strategies of juxtaposition and organization. Arranging essays according to geopolitical location would have permitted an overt and obvious comparativist analysis within relatively

limited frames of language and shared historical experience. Historical location would have allowed the tracking of emerging problematics and questions across a broader range of locations, and would perhaps thereby facilitate an enlarged form of comparativist analysis, that of a slightly longer *durée*. It is my hope that both of these kinds of readings remain available, despite the fact that I have chosen another set of interests on which basis to place the essays.

The structure of the book emerges from my sense that each of the essays in this volume introduces a particular set of questions, terms, and analytic perspectives, and that, in reading the essays in the order presented here, these questions gather force, complicating each other, reorienting our understanding of what the anthropological analysis of photography might be, and, yes, dislodging us from more familiar approaches to the question. John Pemberton's essay both explores and thematizes the question of conjuncture as the unprecedented experience of coincidence and thereby sets the stage for a series of readings in which the question of photography's history in Asia is understood as one of repeated encounters between forms of foreignness. In addition, his excavation of technological magicality and of the violence of photography's time machine calls attention to that repressed dimension of the camera's sensory impact: the aural. It thereby dislodges the easy readings of photography as the instrument of vision's hegemonization and frames the book as a call for radical attention to the unexpected.

James Siegel's reading of different relationships to history, photography, and the idea of holy war in Atjeh forces us to consider the question of conjuncture when it entails a radical disjuncture, and silence or invisibility. His essay addresses an instance when photography was disavowed not because it threatened the loss of essence but because those pursuing holy war against the Dutch (who bore their cameras with them) did not yearn to be memorialized. Death was not loss but a beginning for them. Siegel thereby opens the question of photography's relationship to colonial and anticolonial violence in an entirely unprecedented fashion.

James Hevia analyzes photography as part of the complex of colonialism, but in such a way as to cast light on the forms of resistance that may actually remain residual in photographs that, so often, are considered not to work. He attends to the blur and makes us see the trace of that which exceeds the frame as he rereads the faces whose putative passivity has been forcibly discerned in an archive made to validate colonial ambition. In this way, he helps us understand that the filling of our consciousness

by the photograph is not only the actualization of photography's force, but may be the effect of a force that has instrumentalized photography.

My own essay continues these themes and explores the relationship between force and power in the history of political representation in Thailand. In asking what binds the ritually elaborated surface of a monarchical portrait with the widely coveted journalistic images of the corpses which the state produced in the moment that power became mere force, I also pose a question about how and under what circumstances we can presume continuity in the body of images that comprise any of photography's local archives. Here, the question of a photograph's capacity to bespeak a failure arises again.

It is not so much failure as anticipated absence, and the redoubling of photography's relationship to cultural othering that Patricia Spyer illuminates in her poignant account of ritual and photography in Aru. Her analysis of the logics of enframement reveals a complicitous relation between anthropology and photography, and an uncanny power at the heart of modernity's claims to technological modernity. In this respect, her essay echoes themes taken up in several of the other essays, but most notably those of Pemberton, Pazderic, and Ivy. But it is the relationship between the enframed and the marginalized that elicits the anticipation of being photographed, which links her essay back to Siegel's in an inverted form.

There is a powerful resonance that links the four remaining essays of this volume, though they vary widely in thematic, theoretical, and aesthetic affinity. Each considers the work of photography in the context of emphatically urban, metropolitan centers of Asian capital, albeit at slightly different moments in their histories. Each of them considers the ways the camera can expose that which the dream of modernity would repress as its condition of possibility.

Nickola Pazderic reads the ur-form of stabilizing ritual photographs, namely, wedding portraits, in terms of an overall demand for the "life-like" and a structure of "transforming/saving" that can lead only to the disavowal of life. He then links this structure to the repression of the "white terror" and to a biotechnological frenzy on which Taiwan has built its so-called economic miracle. Why, in the midst of these seemingly triumphant discourses of successful modernization, he asks, do the images of ideal relation seem so constantly to be disturbed by the contaminating presences of ghosts?

Marilyn Ivy considers the ways a classical set of narratives about such