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Interview with Christopher Pinney

Christopher Pinney, *Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London, was a* ***guest professor at the CEIAS*** *in February 2019.*

Here, he answers ***Zoe Headley****'s questions about his recent work, his current project and the field of visual studies in South Asia in general.*

ZH : You have recently added to your vast and very rich publication record, two new volumes: *A Waterless Sea* (Reaktion Books, 2018), which delves into the theories and history of mirages, and *Lessons from Hell: Printing and Punishment in India* (Marg, 2018), which documents a specific genre of prints, the *Karni Bharni* (reap as you sow). Could you tell me more about the political history of these hellish images and how they contribute to what you term the "tenacious presence of messianic thought" in contemporary India?

CP: Like most of my work its origins lie in the village in Madhya Pradesh that I've been visiting since 1982. That was where I first encountered these amazing "karni bharni" prints, which show the punishments enacted in hell for sinful acts. The images were clearly powerful pedagogical tools for the villagers and they would use them to instruct me in the principles of (their version of) Hinduism, pointing to different transgressions and their punishments. I was immediately struck by the images' ambivalence: the clarity of their moral condemnation seemed to be at odds with the obvious fascination of the artists with naked bodies being tortured.

Over decades of collecting as many images as I could and talking to their owners I came to see that the images have a complex history and politics. The politics is perhaps a little more straightforward than the history: in essence they articulate a clean-caste vegetarian code that prescribes punishment for eating meat and fish, and for cruelty to animals. The code is also highly patriarchal, even misogynistic one might say. So one of things I explored in the book was this politics and social positioning, or rather the sociology of the anxiety. Much of the imagery also seemed to speak about the frontier between the rural and the small-town market (the sin of "overloading a bullock cart" is for instance a stock motif). It was also possible to see that what appeared to be unchanging concerns (e.g. about the sin of theft) were inflected with anxieties about change. The thief is often depicted as an Adivasi for instance, and one can begin to glimpse how these apparent changeless images might also be viewed as historicized vignettes testifying to anxieties about a newly mobile workforce and so on. So looked at in the right light the image can be seen to have a history and to express an awareness of historical change alongside what appear to be epochal cosmological and eschatological divides.

So on the one hand the images can be seen to embody a subtle history of changing (and remarkably tenacious belief). But they are also material evidence of a history of changing media, especially of the rise of lithography. The sins and punishments in these popular printed images have several deep textual antecedents (most notably the Garuda Purana). But within Hinduism there is no deep tradition of visualizing these punishments (except within various Swaminarayan texts, which are relatively recent). The images seem to be indebted to a Jain manuscript tradition, part of which is co-opted by early Calcutta presses. So it is possible to detect various continuities between how 17th century illustrators of Jain manuscripts were conceiving of punishments and the motifs that early lithograph entrepreneurs looking for new saleable material c. 1880 were encountering. Sometimes this continuity comes through very clearly as with "the fruit of killing birds," which was always a distinctively Jain trope.

These images are supposed to evoke horror and condemnation: their task is to mimetically convey "badness" but the skills of the artist and printer are usually such that one is left admiring, and sometimes enjoying, the terrible scenes depicted. This is where (to echo Homi Bhabha) the intentionally "pedagogic" mutates into an unpredictably "deformative-performative." The instability of these images interested me a good deal and I suppose connects with my interest (following Walter Benjamin) in the role of contingency in determining photographic possibility. The 1952 Film Censorship Directive (which I discuss at length in the book) provides an interesting exploration of what Ravi Vasudevan called the "exhilaration of dread," and I also found J. M. Coetzee's discussion of the "Problem of Evil" in his novel *Elizabeth Costello* highly productive. Coetzee wonderfully describes the prurient compulsions of such forms of obscenity, the addictive pleasures to be had from observing what should be abject and which after all ensures the survival of these images of atrocity.

A further historical twist occurs from the 1970s onwards when the cellular *karni bharni* template gets co-opted into series of "Ideal Boy" (*Adarsh Balak*) posters and large format Nehruvian-style exhortations with titles like "Good Citizen" or "Our Duties towards Our Government." Like the original *karni bharni*, these were intended to be hung in schools as charts offering moral instruction. The Ideal Boy images, together with their complementary pairs, "Bad Habits" (*Buri Adaton*), have since acquired a retro appeal and been subject to several recent parodies (as well as found their way into the Mumbai artist Atul Dodiya's work).

One of the features that first attracted me to *karni bharni* images was the crowd scenes that featured in the "false speaker" vignette. This was initially a lying Brahman who over time as the images evolved became a politician speaking (usually through a microphone) to an assembly of people signifying the "public." The vignette is very similar to an episode in the Hindi film *Pratighaat*. Initially I thought that this was a manifestation of the "public sphere," of a new axis of evaluation in the sphere of morality. My hunch was that one could see the signs here of a new "horizontal" dimension of judgment and that accompanied the rise of a new model "citizen" who supplanted the religious devotee. At the end of my study I had to conclude however that this was illusory and that the cosmological axis remained totally vertical, i.e. predicated upon a visible material world underneath which lay vengeance (performed by devilish *rakshasas*). In the false speaker vignette the politician is

certainly speaking to an assembly that looks as though it could form a public but in the end they don't have any role to play in the matter: the punishment is performed on the vertical, cosmological, axis. In this sense the world of *karni bharni* remains violently enchanted, this is the "tenacious presence of messianic thought" to which I referred.

Karni bharni still just about survive in rural markets and several Indian publishers still produce them. I was amazed on a recent trip to Bangladesh to discover that in the first rural house I entered near the border with Meghalaya that pride of place was given to a karni bharni image! I also encountered many near Barisal in the south of the country. Maybe in the future I will be able to study the valence of such images of retribution as part of a fragile minoritarian religious culture.

ZH: You are currently leading the ERC-funded project "Citizens of the Camera: Photography and the Political Imagination" (2016-2020) for which you are conducting fieldwork in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. This project also involves researchers working on Nicaragua, Nigeria, Greece, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. I am curious, are there at this stage any striking facts or findings which allude to a specificity of South Asia, as compared to the other regions under study, in the interplay of images, citizenship and politics?

CP: Well if I may be permitted a rather contradictory response I think that the evidence from South Asia points to something specific in the formal potential of photography which however, once identified, turns out to be a feature of practices in other regions as well. This was crystalized for me recently when responding to the Mumbai photographer Ketaki Sheth's recent project on Indian photo studios. Her photographic documentation of these provincial spaces, and some of their remaining customers, plays with what Andre Bazin termed the camera's "screen" as opposed to a painting's "frame." Bazin imagines the screen, characterized by arbitrary edges and "cut-off-ness" as something like the default setting for photography (Benjamin also has something similar in mind, I think, when he writes of what is "native" to the camera). Ketaki Sheth's project underlines the extent to which Indian studio practices resist this default, favoring instead symmetry and frontality, i.e. features associated with the frame.

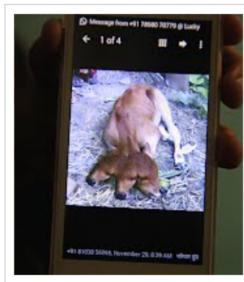
It would be tempting (and quite easy in fact) to see this as characteristic of South Asia but actually once identified in an Indian context it becomes possible to identify it elsewhere (e.g. in Nicaragua, Nigeria, and in other locations where studios survive). This is the cultural space that I've described in the past as "more than local, less than global." It's not peculiar to South Asia, although it is very marked and visible in South Asia. It is very striking how iconophiliac India and Nepal are, and

how tenaciously local studios survive (due in large part to the bureaucratic state's demand for ID photographs and also the continuing importance of wedding photography). Thinking about this extra-regional space is driving our thinking in the project about "demotic" photography rather than "vernacular" photography. Demotic suggests a ground up, often shared, subaltern practice as opposed to reactive practices determined through their opposition to dominant class practices) as in Bourdieu's account of 1960s French peasant photography.

The emerging comparative themes in the project concern (among others) visual representation as the precondition for political representation, the emergence of "proleptic" photographic identities, and the role of social media and these cut complexly across the different fieldwork locations.

ZH: The so-called "visual turn" in South Asian studies, heralded by Diane Eck's Darshan: *Seeing the Divine Image in India* is closing into its third decade. In your opinion, what are the new frontiers of this field of study?

CP: Well the first thing is that I think that the "career" of *darshan*, post-Eck says something about the unfulfilled need for anthropologists to cling to over-arching concepts in the wake of the collapse of the culture concept. I think part of the appeal of "darshan" as a tool was that was a means of restoring coherence. In this sense I think we should be skeptical about its hegemony. In the part of Madhya Pradesh I know, you are just as likely to hear the term "barkat" (from the Arabic "baraka") in relation to (the fruits of) Hindu image worship but maybe because it's too hybrid it doesn't get invoked by scholars in the same way.



However, I think the study of visual practices in South Asia still has a long way to go. *Lessons from Hell* indicates that there are whole genres of south Asian visual culture which are focused on problematics of looking that have never been properly investigated and there are entire communities and traditions about whose visual practices we still know next to nothing. There have been many important contributions to the study of visual practices in South Asia that show the continuing fecundity of the field. For instance, I think of Andy Rotman's study of early Buddhism *Thus Have I Seen*, Clare Harris's almost detective investigation of photographs produced in the Younghusband Lhasa Mission, Yousuf Saeed's and Jamal Elias' tantalizing work on Muslim image practices. Then there are important works investigating visual history, which problematize the role of the *visual* as evidence *(The Camera as Witness*, Joy Pachuau and Willlem Van Schendel's book on Mizoram and Sugata Ray's forthcoming book on eco-aesthetics and Krishna imagery. I take all these as evidence of a field that is still really only starting to open up: it's not nearing completion or exhaustion.

ZH: Narrowing into the field of the study of photography in South Asia, would you agree with Sophie Gordon's characterization that scholarly output in this field is largely caught in an "aesthetics versus context" debate? Or would you say that since her statement (2007) the field has diversified, and, if so, how?

CP: To be honest I don't understand that distinction: it seems to me that context determines aesthetics. If you crave the subtle tonalities of John Murray's wax negatives (huge, amazing records of north Indian buildings made in the 1850s) then painted photographs infused with Bollywood excess will probably repel you. With any aesthetics one needs to get inside a context, learn a code, learn what matters, what is beautiful and what might be less so: these are never self-evident superficial matters. All learning and appreciation involves what Nelson Goodman called "world-making" through which you come to understand internal coherence and consistency: context helps open up new aesthetic frontiers.

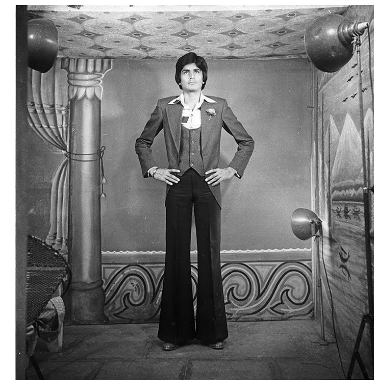
Sophie worked as the London curator of the Alkazi Photographic Collection at a time when the collection was moving away from its focus on canonical 19th-century colonial photography (John Murray, Samuel Bourne etc.) towards demotic Indian practitioners and she may well have been reflecting on that institutional shift of direction.

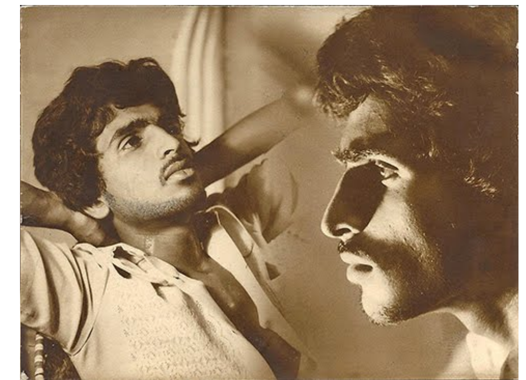
The flip side of this distinction involves subjecting bodies of images that were previously inoculated from political scrutiny by their "aesthetic" status to political critique. This was one of the objectives of my *Coming of Photography in India* (2008), which explored how work by photographers like Murray and Bourne was produced within a "colonial habitus."

ZH: Leaving aside academics, but staying in photography, could you share with me which contemporary photographer(s) working in the South Asia you most appreciate, whose vision you find particularly significant?

CP: Well largely thanks to Shahidul Alam's inspirational vision there is an incredibly strong contingent of committed photojournalists in Bangladesh. Shahidul's own work on migration provides a compelling example of how photography can be used to investigate process and movement. Taslima Akhtar (perhaps best known for her images of the Rana Plaza disaster) shows how the camera can be yoked to activist causes and Munem Wasif has produced an arresting study of the increasingly politicized forms of faith in Bangladesh.

In India Ronny Sen produces images of mysterious evanescence, and Ketaki Sheth's recent *Photo Studio* is a wonderful study of small-town aesthetics. Cop Shiva from Bangalore shares with Ketaki an interest in how subjects present themselves performatively. I've recently come to a new appreciation of the late Raghubir Singh, and like him Cop Shiva is a master of color who shoots in the street but whereas Raghubir was fascinated by the contingency and improbable alignments of the street, Cop Shiva approaches it very much as a formal theatrical space.





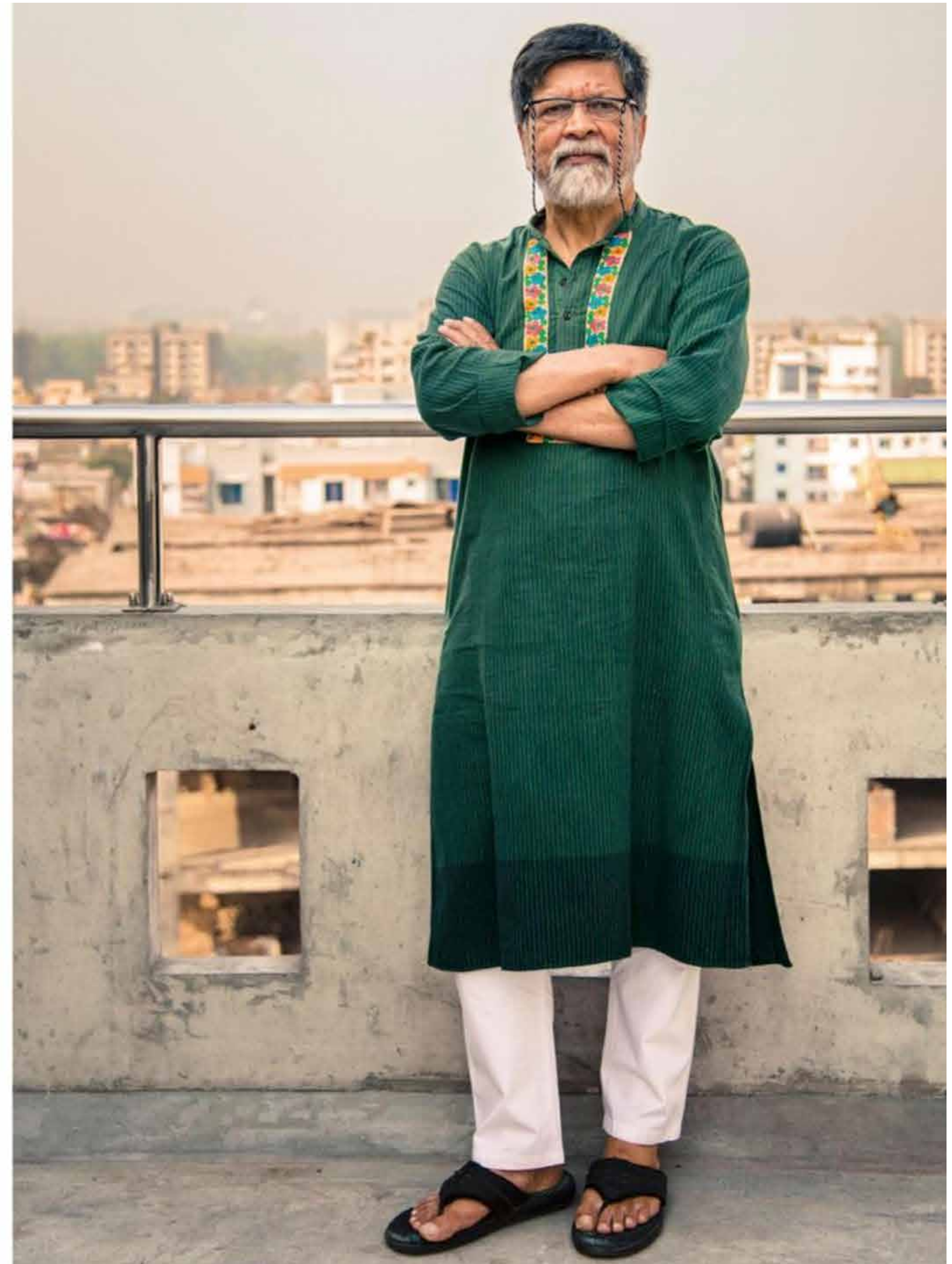
I like Ishan Tankha's quiet and reflective work on Naxalism in Chhattisgarh. His focus on the symbolic and material lexicon of peasant struggle puts me very much in mind of Ranajit Guha's Elementary Aspects. Sohrab Hura is probably the most remarkable young South Asian photographer/film-maker. His short twin-screen video piece *The Lost Head and the Bird* is truly remarkable both as a creative invention and a documentary record. It trawls social media images to produce a prophetic account of the intertwining of political sentiment with the personal in contemporary India. It's exhilarating and scary. Finally, it's been good to follow the trajectory of Suresh Punjabi's work as it has orbited from a small town in Madhya Pradesh (where I've been working intermittently since 1982) into the art world. Both Punjabi's work, the wonderful Ajmer photographer Ram Chand (recently documented by Christophe Prebois), and the Tamil studio world you yourself have documented are the tip of a still submerged iceberg of demotic photography.

Shahidul Alam On Freedom and Resistance

A Conversation with Christopher Pinney

Shahidul Alam is Bangladesh's best-known photographer and activist—and an energizing presence throughout South Asia. He is the driving force behind initiatives such as the Drik Picture Library; Chobi Mela, Asia's first international photography festival; and Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, where he has built a powerhouse of talent by fostering and encouraging a uniquely skilled group of younger photographers and teachers. His work has been exhibited internationally, including *Kalpana's Warriors* (2015), which was shown in Delhi and pays homage to Kalpana Chakma—an activist murdered in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts—using innovative techniques to recover evidence of her life, struggles, and disappearance.

Recognized as both a cultural figure and a longtime dissident champion of the oppressed, Alam was abducted from his home in August 2018, following a live *Al Jazeera* interview in which he criticized the violent state response to student protests about road safety earlier that year. He was imprisoned for 107 days and tortured, and his incarceration triggered an extensive international campaign demanding his release. In 2018, Alam was awarded the Lucie Humanitarian Award and was also named a *Time* magazine person of the year. He remains on bail and subject to surveillance. Alam recently spoke via Zoom with Christopher Pinney about images and activism in Bangladesh and beyond.



Previous page:
Shahidul Alam, Dhaka,
February 2021
Photograph by Tahia Farhin
Haque for Aperture

This spread:
Shahidul Alam, *Ilish fishing*,
Daulatdia, Bangladesh,
2001

Christopher Pinney: **It's now been more than two years since you were arrested. What's been happening since?**

Shahidul Alam: We've challenged the legality of the case. They've appealed against it. But their case is just so tenuous that there is no way they can actually win. So over the course of time after their appeal, I am sure we will eventually win. And once we do, I then want to sue the government for false imprisonment. See, that's the thing that doesn't happen. Their general strategy is to let the case go on forever, as a Damoclean sword, to keep you occupied and prevent you from doing other things.

CP: **Has your case had a chilling effect on photojournalism?**

SA: Very much. Not just photojournalism but journalism generally, and free speech completely.

After my incarceration, their assumption was that once I came out I would stay quiet. But I have continued to say everything that I was saying before. Yet I have to be careful. I don't go around on my bicycle anymore, for instance. I don't walk the streets on my own. I don't carry a mobile phone. There are many safety precautions I have to take.

CP: **In *The Tide Will Turn* (2020), your most recent book, there's an illuminating episode where the photographer at the prison in Keraniganj comes to you seeking advice on photography. To me, it sums up one of your amazing strengths, which, alongside being an extraordinary photographer, is being a builder of institutions, and of people's confidence and skills. I wonder if you could say a little about that encounter?**

SA: When you go into prison, no one tells you anything. You don't know what the rules are. I was treated very well by my fellow prisoners, so that was nice, and they were the ones who told me that "tomorrow morning at 5:30 a.m., you have to go to the Case Table." The Case Table is where you line up, and you are physically inspected, and your mug shot is taken. So this guy knows who I am from taking my mug shot. We didn't really have that long a conversation. But later on, he learned from the other prisoners that I was approachable.

His problem was quite simple initially—it was just backlighting. He had a bad lens, and it was backlighting, so he had all this flare. I was able to set up a little mini-studio for him, which worked wonders. You know, I have many years of teaching experience so that was something I was very comfortable with. Then he took some pictures for me.

I was also interested in having good-quality photographs of the painted murals that I'd been able to do with other fellow prisoners.

CP: **Are you referring to the mural based on *Red Sail*, which shows fishing boats at Daulatdia, one of which has a vivid red sail?**

SA: Yes. But there are about thirty-five murals at the jail now. It looks like a museum. Some of them are over thirty feet wide. Initially, the murals were of exotica, the sort of backdrop you would have in the typical photographic studio, say, ten years ago, of waterfalls and foreign scenes.

CP: **They were modeled on photography studio backdrops?**

SA: Well, the people who were doing it were mostly sign painters. I said, "Wouldn't it be interesting if we painted pictures of ourselves, if we told our story?" They liked the idea. Then we had a whole series of pictures of them in the workshop, going about everyday life in their prisoner outfits, in the library, and things like that.

CP: ***Red Sail* is pretty much an alternative national icon.**

SA: It's very interesting you say that because, of course, the boat is the mascot of the Awami League, the government in power. So while I was in jail, I discovered that they had actually begun using my *Red Sail* picture for the election campaign. Which is ironic!

CP: **Looking at the images in *The Tide Will Turn*, but also at a lot of your earlier work, it's clear that it's obviously quite difficult to photograph in Bangladesh without including, or in some sense replicating, a national or nationalist iconography. I wonder whether you have any observations on that. Is it possible to do photography outside the nation? Or, how does one live within that repertoire of signs?**

SA: I have not found it problematic because I look at the iconography as a cultural motif. And therefore, if you are to talk about a people, you take on board their cultural motifs.

I think the national emblems I would talk about are more complicated than the

Shahidul Alam, *A mural of Noor Hussain painted at Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka*, 1990

I wanted to depict Kalpana as this activist, struggling for the rights of her people.

motifs you're talking about. So I'll give you a very different relevant example: the very famous picture of the bayoneting of four alleged collaborators on December 18, 1971 . . .

CP: **By Rashid Talukder.**

SA: Well, Rashid Talukder has the image. But, in fact, the famous image is by Michel Laurent and Horst Faas, who won the Pulitzer in 1972 for it. Talukder was also there taking the same picture, or from the same location, and made a similar photograph. But he didn't publish that picture because it was too dangerous at the time—because it gave a version that we denied. Officially, we were the victims. Things had been done to us. The fact that in any war bad things happen, and pretty much both sides do bad things, is something we were not prepared to admit. In 1993, I convinced him that enough time had passed and that this was a historic image that needed to be presented. So I published that picture for the first time in 1993.

And then in 2000, at Chobi Mela, I did a show, *The War We Forgot*, about the Bangladeshi War of Liberation, collecting work from pretty much the who's who of photography that happened to be in Bangladesh—Don McCullin, David Burnett, Mary Ellen Mark, Raghu Rai. We also included Laurent and Fass's picture of the bayoneting. We blew up that contact sheet in a huge print. I was showing the war as it happened.

And then, at 10:30 at night, on the eve of the show, someone from the ministry rings me to say that that picture must go. I wasn't prepared to do that. He says, "Well, you either have the show or . . . if that picture stays, then the show is closed." So we took the show down from the museum.

Now, it's not easy taking things into a museum. It's more difficult taking things out of a museum. It's particularly difficult taking things out of a museum at 10:30 at night when the only people there are the security guards. But we took the entire show out. We put up the show at our own gallery, and, of course, everyone came. And then the government had to defend its position: How come this show was not in the National Museum?

CP: **The bayoneting photographs, how do they circulate today? Are they now part of that narrative?**

SA: Yes, though they are not celebrated as such. You can't print them. For me, that is the difficult space—the fact that, today, it's a particular version of history that cannot be contested, which is being propagated and established as the holy truth and nothing else. We are trying to create this space for those questions to be asked.

CP: **In *The Tide Will Turn*, you have an account of a 2005 exhibition, produced by Panos Pictures, at the Oxo Tower Gallery, in London, which you present as a kind of archetype of a Western-dominated, colonialist bit of photojournalism where white Western journalists are saving the rest of the world. You suggest that the discriminations that lay at the heart of that exhibition are articulated now through the suggestion, made by the same vested interests, that photographers in the Global South lack the necessary eye to have their work accepted and circulated. Could you talk about that?**

SA: Yes. So it was a show set up by respectable NGOs. There were good photographs by good photographers. But the type of imagery, that typical NGO "save the Natives" sort of thing, was there. I spoke to the director of Panos Institute, and he sort of defended himself by saying that the curator of the show said that they (Majority World photographers) don't have "the eye." I mean, he didn't say it himself, but he said it through someone else.

CP: **Is that a purely instrumental cloak for racism and discrimination?**

SA: I remember Stuart Hall's expression that a Black man with a black camera will not necessarily take Black pictures. The type of pictures I take depends upon my politics, which may well be very different from another person of color taking pictures. So the idea of typifying a white photographer or a Black photographer or a woman photographer, for instance, as being capable of only a certain type of imagery is, itself, very problematic.

CP: **In the educational work of Pathshala South Asian Media Institute is there any differentiation between a global**

Left: Shahidul Alam, *Newspaper clipping from a report on Kalpana Chakma, a young leader of the Hill Women's Federation, who was abducted from her home by military personnel and civilian law enforcers on June 12, 1996, at gunpoint*, 2014; right: *A book on Lenin found on Kalpana Chakma's bookshelf*, 2014

Shahidul Alam, Guests at the wedding of the daughter of a powerful minister, held while the nation was still reeling from the effects of a devastating flood, Dhaka, 1988

tradition of photojournalism in contras to a Bangladeshi tradition?

SA: From the beginning, one of the things I've tried to do is to make sure that there is a plural approach when it comes to teaching. We very consciously bring in people with radically different points of view so that the students are aware that there can be a multiplicity of values and approaches. But they need to be aware of it, they need to understand the logic, they need to understand the ideology within which it sits. And, at the end of the day, they need to decide who they are going to be.

CP: **You have quite a lot to say about the experience and authenticity that photographers from the Global South can offer. How do you think that translates visually?**

SA: One of the things that happens very often is photographers reduce people to tropes. So a brick breaker does this, a sex worker does this, so-and-so does this. The fact that they are human beings like you and me, and that we may well relate to them in that way, is something that often photographers fail to show. I think Bangladeshi photographers can be as Western in their visual approach as anyone else, and I am sure there are Western photographers who can be as different from the traditional Western approach as anyone else. Within that spectrum, we have to find the type of imagery that we respect.

CP: **In *Kalpana's Warriors*, you appear to be fascinated with the utopian possibilities of the index, of using the camera and very specific camera techniques and printing techniques to recover evidence. On the other hand, you presented the image in a different register by printing on woven mats.**

SA: Kalpana Chakma was disappeared on June 12, 1996, and the first show was on June 12, 2013. So a lot of time had passed and the investigation was still ongoing. When the police did the investigation, they asked the Paharis (Indigenous hill people), they asked the Bangali settlers, they asked the military, yet the points of view of only the Bangali settlers and the military were taken into account. The fact that the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts had said that they had seen this person, they knew of the abduction, there were eyewitnesses—all of that had been obliterated from the investigation. So my

Top:
Shahidul Alam, Students demanding justice for fellow students murdered by buses on rampage, Dhaka, August 2018;
bottom: Suvra Kanti Das, Bangladeshi activists protesting on Shahidul Alam's hundredth day in jail, November 13, 2018
Das: Courtesy the artist and Drik

Opposite:
Shahidul Alam, A Bangladeshi flag flutters over a funeral gathering for the murdered blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in Shahbagh Square, Dhaka, 2013
All images by Shahidul Alam courtesy the artist, Drik, and Majority World

idea was to ask the silent witnesses what they had seen.

CP: **Does that mean the inanimate objects?**

SA: Yes. I walked along the path that she had walked on, on the last walk that she made, and picked things up, treating them as witnesses that I wanted to interrogate. And the technique used was deliberate because I felt that had there been a genuine interest in the investigation, then there would have been a forensic approach, there would have been a rigorous attempt to unearth what had actually happened. So it was a pseudoforensic technique that I was using to highlight the fact that the investigation was flawed.

CP: **Could one then say it was an imaginative exploration of the utopian possibilities of the camera?**

SA: I looked at the camera as a point of departure. I needed to tell a story, but I didn't want to limit it to the way in which it had been told.

The images printed on straw mats were the third in a series of exhibitions. The second in the series was actually Kalpana's personal objects, which I photographed.

Because one of the things I wanted to talk about was the fact that hill people were othered by the Bangalis, and it was that othering that allowed us to tolerate the fact that there is still a military occupation in Bangladesh. The fact that a nation that had fought a war for the right to speak its own language was denying other people the right to speak theirs within their own nation-state was something I wanted to unpack. I felt that was possible because of the othering that was perpetuated. And, therefore, I wanted to depict Kalpana as this activist, struggling for the rights of her people. I've got details of the books she used to read, her clothes, and things like that—basically trying to point to the missing person amidst the personal belongings that were hers.

But the third body of work, the mats, relates to something I did a long time ago. In a sense, that goes back to the period where I was using a more traditional, black-and-white, classical approach to photography. You will know perhaps of the picture of Noor Hossain by Pavel Rahman. On his bare back is written, "Let democracy be freed." He came out in the protest against General Ershad on November 10, 1987, and he was killed by the police. I did a show on November 10, 1989, called *The Last Two Years*, as an homage to Noor Hossain because he became a symbol of democracy.

In that series, which has become part of an ongoing body of work, *The Struggle for Democracy*, I have a set of two pictures of the wedding of the daughter of a very powerful minister. This wedding was taking place shortly after a devastating flood. I juxtaposed those pictures as an obvious statement—that this opulent wedding was taking place when the nation was reeling from the flood. The Alliance Française was going to sponsor the exhibition, but they backed off. Then none of the traditional galleries in Bangladesh would show the work. The Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka, found a convenient excuse. They said, "It's photography, it's not art, so we can't show it."

Anyway, I managed to show the work, and I was very surprised when it was reviewed in a magazine owned by the minister's wife, the bride's mother. I was fascinated. This piece is critical of the regime and what's been happening in it, yet it gets reviewed. So I was curious. It was a beautiful review, which talked about the artistry of my work, the quality of my prints, the composition, the beauty, the aesthetics, all of that—completely ignoring the politics. That's when it hit me that this is how they manage you: You can be an artist. You can get your little award

and your grant, and be reviewed and be famous. Leave the politics out of it.

So I made a conscious decision that I would not let my work be dissociated from my politics. I would ensure that my politics were embedded within the work so much that you could not separate them. If you engaged with the work, you would have to engage with the politics. You couldn't simply look at the images from an aesthetic point of view.

When it came to *Kalpana's Warriors*, the mats were basically all the furniture these people had. For me, it was quite important to say, "Here is a woman who has so little, yet she is such a powerful symbol, and the state fears her so much that they have to disappear her." And the mat embodied that.

CP: **In *The Tide Will Turn* there is a very rousing, remarkable letter Arundhati Roy sent to you while you were in prison, which must have been a wonderful thing to receive. How have interactions with other activists who are not photographers been important to you?**

SA: When I was in jail, initially, I had no way of knowing whether people knew what was happening. I'd screamed and yelled and tried to make as much noise as I could before I got picked up. Then, pretty soon, I found out that people did know, and they would do things. But inside, I wasn't getting their communications. But I knew of the letter, and later on, it was smuggled to me, so I was able to read it, but, of course, I couldn't write back.

But it meant a huge thing. First, it meant I was not alone. It meant that people who I respected and cared about, they cared about me, and we had mutual respect. Because one of the things the government was doing at that time was a very strong vilification campaign against me: I had all these love children across the globe. I was a Mossad agent. I was a war collaborator. The fact that people could see through all that, and still relate to the person that I was, gave me a lot of hope. And it was a lovely, warm, very optimistic letter, though it recognized the reality. The decision to title the book *The Tide Will Turn* is based on that letter.

CP: **Let's hope that it is already turning.**

SA: It needs to. It has to. I think that is the one belief we cannot let go of.

I should tell you something that I think is very important. I was known in professional circles before I got arrested. But the average person didn't know me. As a result of my incarceration, I became a symbol for resistance and freedom to the country people, to the ordinary people in the street.

After I came out, I was leaving the office, and as I walked out, there was a woman standing outside with a little baby. And she comes up to me and says, "Can you bless my child? I want him to grow up to be as brave as you." That was very, very powerful. Particularly because for her to do that was dangerous, because I am, as far as the government is concerned, public enemy number one. And to be seen with me, to be friendly with me, was not a safe thing. And she was of subaltern origin herself, so far more vulnerable than you and me. Yet she wanted to express that, taking that risk.

Middle-class parents say to their kids, "Keep your head down, stay out of trouble. It's not your issue. Why get into this?" Here was a woman who wanted her child to grow up to be brave, to be a rebel, to be defiant. I think if the average person continues to feel that way, there is always hope.

Christopher Pinney is a professor of anthropology and visual culture at University College London.

Backdrops

Conversation with Chris Pinney

Paolo S. H. Favéro

"Studios seem to be transformative places where people could act out new forms of identity in advance of society."

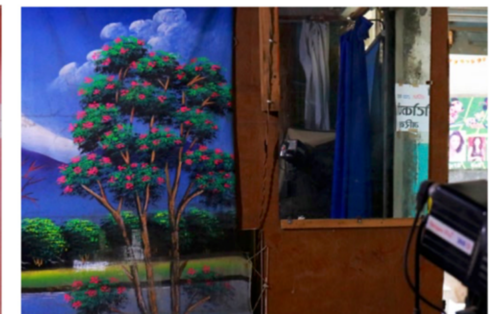
The conversation between the two researches revolves around the central question of backdrop, its meaning, position inside the studio practices. It delves into the performative aspect of backdrop photography putting it in proximity with theatre and cinema, question its nature as a prop in the process of staging an image. The question seem to be how can photography as a general practice can be understood and its theoretical notions enriched through research into rich backdrop practices (in case of Pinney and Fevero mostly in India and surrounding region) and how can we explain those practice via the established theoretical cannons. The conversation negotiates through main notions of authors such as Michael Fried, John Tagg, illuminates on usually neglected nuances of Barthes *Camera Lucida* to finally elaborate the profilmic nature of backdrop photography and its representative role of the society in which it functions. What kind of politics of space does it represent; is it transformative or representative? What is the meaning of the notion of the prophetic nature of photography?

Christopher Pinney, Chakra Studio, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2018.

Shall we start with defining what a backdrop is? And more specifically, is a backdrop a matter of representation?

Well, in a very simple sense backdrops (as part of the apparatus of studio practice) often demarcate space for representation: they set a kind of target for the subjects of the camera and for the camera itself. I have always liked early images in which the subjects were out of alignment with the backdrop – they are sometimes too tall or standing asymmetrically, so that the backdrop appears as a kind of faulty double frame within the image … in those cases the backdrop contributes to the inevitable contingency (in Walter Benjamin's sense) of the image but mostly the backdrop is conscripted as part of attempts to control and minimize contingency. Its function is to overwrite everything that might otherwise unfold unpredictably behind the subject and, of course, it also imposes its own slice from a usually very restricted repertoire of possibilities. I just bought some new (hand-painted) backdrops from a photo supplier in Old Delhi. They were painted about ten years ago and have a small photographic reference image sealed inside their plastic wrappings and they are all different yet very similar, showing luxurious villas with well-ordered gardens in lush natural settings. I could not buy backdrops only of mountains, or the sea, or of high-rise cities – only ones that conjured this in-between space of a sort of peasant dream of success (the villas actually look like couple of the houses built by the richest villagers in that part of Madhya Pradesh I often visit). It

Christopher Pinney, Barisal, Bangladesh, 2018.



Christopher Pinney, Dwarika Studio, Nepal, 2018.

reminds me of Pierre Bourdieu's observation about the disjuncture between all the infinite variety of things that could theoretically be photographed and the astonishingly narrow range of things and idioms that do actually get photographed. Studio backdrops are part of that technology of exclusion.

Would you agree that backdrops in a way transgress the boundary between photography and theatre? In other words, we could say that they highlight the performative meaning of being photographed. I have experienced that intensely in my work on long exposure self-portraiture that I started up in the aftermath of my father's death. Positioning myself in the photographs, with timer and long exposure, helped me to open up time, I transformed the act of being portrayed in an act of becoming, becoming a new person in a new life. My father's actual house was there in the background, functioning as a backdrop, demarcating a kind of stage encouraging me to enact that transformation. What do you think?

Well yes, I think you are pointing to two features that exist in a kind of tension: the inter-medial or mixed-media nature of photographic practice and also (conversely) its medium specificity. The backdrops that get used in photo studios in South Asia are intimately connected to backdrops used in various local theatrical traditions from Parsi Theatre to religious folk theatre, and there are also of course lots of strong connections with cinema. The Old Delhi retailer who sold me those studio backdrops said (unprompted), that the only people still buying these backdrops (though there are very few who are), were small town and village studios, and also *Ramleela troupes*, by which he meant touring theatrical groups that stage village performances of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. So, there is a fascinating ongoing entanglement between these subaltern performative practices. One could say something similar about cinema: the backdrop painters also produced film banners, and the poses of clients in small town studios demonstrate the central role that Bollywood plays in their imaginations.

In this sense, the backdrop should be classed together with other kinds of props that you used to find in small town studios – telephones, radios, guitars, guns, motorbikes even, and the more restricted items that you can still find, such as jackets and ties and different kinds of hats. They all assist the staging of the performance that the sitter offers up to the camera with the assistance of the studio owner as a sort of theatrical impresario. In the last year, I have been working in Nepal and Bangladesh studios, and ties and jackets are still *de rigeur* as props, and also the so-called Dhaka *topis* in Nepal. Older citizenship photographs in Nepal required males to wear a Nepali style hat and you still see these hanging up on pegs in studios for customers who still want them. In Bangladesh, the jacket and tie were essential for some visa photographs and although these are now usually Photoshopped in, many studios still keep a selection of clothes.

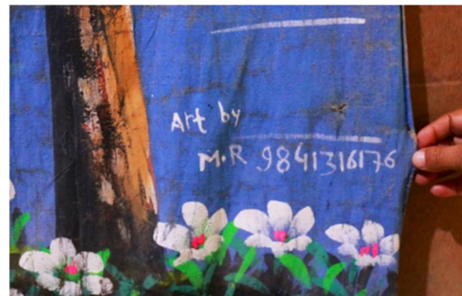
Of course, in the John Tagg/Foucault version, ID photography would be seen as coercive "instrumental realism," the subordination to the "carceral network" and so on, but it makes much more sense to me to see them as part of the performative spectrum that photography invites. You act out the role of a visa applicant. But then one would also want to make a different sort of argument that stresses photography as enmeshed in mixed-media practices (theatre etc.) and say that the performativity that unfolds in front of backdrops in photo studios is precipitated by something that is medium-specific to photography, which encourages what Karen Strassler calls the "as if" nature of photography, or what I would extend into the domain of the subjunctive or proleptic.

Kandinsky said that art does not only "echo" but also functions as "prophecy," anticipating the future. Can backdrops have this function too?

Well, I think that is very perceptive. Photography has, or can have, this function. I once wrote a book called *Coming of Photography in India* which tried to apply issues current in the "history of the book" to photography, and the final chapter in that work was titled "Photography as Prophecy." It is very striking how commentators such as Bourdieu (in his very significant study of 1960s French popular photography) present photography as a monument to everything that is past. In that book Bourdieu says several times that family photography serves as a "gravestone" by which I think he means a kind of empty monument to everything that has gone before. By contrast, when I was studying nineteenth-century Indian studio imagery I was struck by the mismatch between the social groupings that appeared in photographs and the social groupings that cultural history and anthropology would lead one to expect; in photos you predominantly found individuals and conjugal couples, whereas outside the studio the organizing units were collectivities such as castes (*jatis*), "brotherhoods" (*biradaris*) etc. So, it did not make sense to conclude that society was organised in a particular way and this was then reflected in what the studio produced. Studios seemed to be transformative places where people could act out new forms of identity *in advance* of society. This helped me make sense of Barthes' wry observation in *Camera Lucida* that it was "odd" that no-one seems to have noticed the "disturbance" that photography causes in society or to have really grasped the extent of its "madness." I was also encouraged by Jacques Attali's argument (in a book called *Noise*) that music exists in "advance" of society, having a "quicker code." Both these ideas suddenly seemed to illuminate photography.

What is there to learn about photographic theory by studying backdrops?

Well, I think two things. I would say that their performative invitation directs our attention to the mise-en-scène and the profilmic. And there is also the question of whether the backdrop



Christopher Pinney, Dwarika Studio, Panauti, Nepal, 2018.

Christopher Pinney, Panauti Studio, Nepal, 2018.

Christopher Pinney, Venus Studio, Nagda, India, 1991.

Naresh Bhatia, digital backdrop template, Krish Digital, 2018. Courtesy of Christopher Pinney.

Naresh Bhatia, digital backdrop template, Krish Digital, 2018. Courtesy of Christopher Pinney.

can be deployed in a different politics of space. I think the first question leads us to what I think is the major theoretical achievement of *Camera Lucida* and which seems to have been totally overlooked. This revolves around the distinction Barthes makes between *corps* and *corpus*. His argument is that we want (or as he says "need") photography to generate a corpus, but it cannot. Because it is tied to the singular contingency of an event it can only produce a "body." Photographs can only ever be traces of singular acts or performances (as Barthes says "only some bodies") *and yet* we want them to signify something more, something general or generalizable. Barthes blinding insight (which my former SOAS colleague Kit Davis helped me grasp) is that this is an impossible demand: you simply cannot transcend or escape from the singularity of each image.

For me this really illuminated, in a very major way, a phrase I had heard many times in my work with central Indian studios. Studio owners would often say that their clients wanted "to come out better" and they explained the (perhaps surprising) survival of photo studios in an age of digital phone photography because the studio, with its lights, backdrops, props and skilled technicians, was able to offer the best outcome. But "coming out better" also points to the autonomy of the photographic performance. I never had the sense that anyone in central India thought, or said, "but you are not really like that" (not as glamorous, not as beautiful etc.) because they recognized intuitively that that was an aspect of what Barthes would call the "corpus" which properly speaking cannot be a question for photography since photographs can only ever be documents of the profilmic. The corpus, he says, can only be established by "classification and verification" i.e. through an extended and different kind of knowledge than a trace of a photographic event can possibly provide.

This connects to the second aspect of the question because the backdrop also serves to exclude a larger continuum and depth of the real in which we might be tempted to find ways of establishing the "corpus" (remember that, although Barthes says this is an impossible quest, we nevertheless "need" it, we are endlessly searching after it). This observation could perhaps also be linked to an argument I made in a piece called "Notes from The Surface of the Image" that contrasted two kinds of spatial practice within photography. The first one is something a bit like Heidegger's "World as Picture," or what Martin Jay termed "Cartesian perspectivalism" in which objects are modeled three-dimensionally in space. There is what we might think of as a "depth effect" that presents the world as what Heidegger called a "standing reserve" – graspable and available for exploitation. To me this is a good way of summing up what is often meant by "colonial." The other politics of space deploys backdrops to shunt everything forward into the space of the beholder. Often (the Malian studio photographer Seydou Keita is perhaps exemplary) patterns on the subjects' cloths fuse in the shallow space in front of the backdrop to present a flattened space deprived of depth cues. One effect of this is to foreclose the world as "standing reserve" and to enhance the embodied presence of the beholder. If the viewer in the "colonial" images is invited to be effectively invisible and incorporeal, the viewer of "surfacist" images has to confront their own physical proximity to the image.

This was the duality I first started to think about a long time ago in the context of popular religious chromolithography in India, with the help of Michael Fried's distinction between "absorptive" and "'theatrical" beholders. It seemed to me that early (colonially inculcated) perspectival representations hoped for a secularizing effect. The Indian "theatrical" rejection of this introjected the beholder into a space of mutual presence with the depicted deities. But I think there is a similar polarity in photography's different politics of space, in which backdrops often play a central role.

And how does digital practice change this?

Well, there is a lot that remains the same. Unless your brains are hardwired to a computer, human perception remains analogue. In that sense, it does not make any difference whether you are looking at a paper image printed from a negative, or an image on an electronic screen. But when the backdrop arrives, courtesy of Photoshop, the photographic event becomes something very different: an endless series of permeable events. There is a very interesting supplier near CST railway station in Mumbai called Krish Digital. It is run by Naresh Bhatia, who creates massive TIF file backdrops for sale to Mofussil studios. He photographs his wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, locates them in utopian bourgeois settings and then deletes their faces. Small town studios buy these files on sets of DVDs and then insert their client's faces into the ready-made space. This is massively colonizing in a new kind of way: it disseminates a metropolitan aesthetic and radically de-skills the local photo studio. We could think of it as a kind of McBackdrop. It is in the context of these kind of developments that it was so encouraging to find a Delhi supplier still finding customers for his stock of hand painted cloth backdrops.

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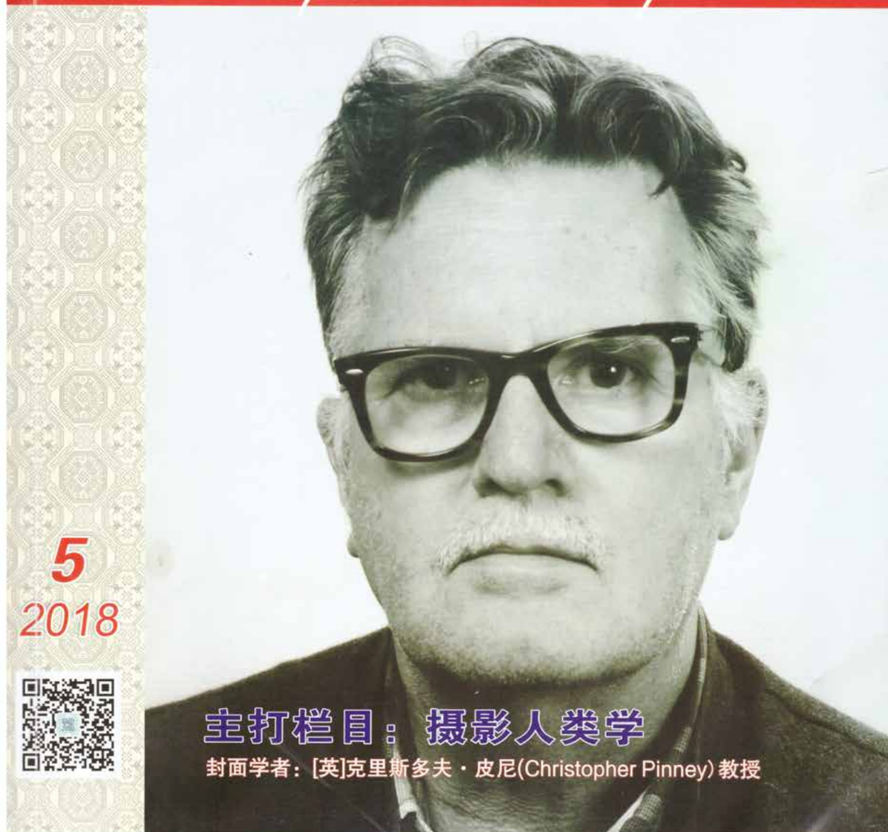

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主打栏目：摄影人类学
封面学者：[英]克里斯多夫 · 皮尼(Christopher Pinney) 教授

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反科学的图像:摄影与人类学的史前史*

□[英]克里斯多夫·皮尼(Christopher Pinney)

[摘 要] 摄影与人类学的历史存在着交相呼应的关系,反映在四张不同历史时期的图像中。这里面包括了原住民和人类学家如何通过摄影互动、原住民如何接受了摄影并将其变为权力运动的工具、早期人类学和民族学家如何通过摄影凝视“他者”,生产关于“他者”的视觉知识以及照相机普及以后持相机的人类学家当如何自处的问题。因此,需要在超越工具的层面上思考摄影在本体论意义上为人类学家带来的启迪,即通过福柯提出的“反科学”论和贝尔廷的“图像人类学”论对两者的“双重历史”进行剖析。

[关键词] 摄影;图像;反科学;摄影人类学
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一、引言:四个时刻与四张图像的思考

让我们来思考四个时刻以及四张图像。它们引领我们沿人类学与摄影之关系的历史转变轨迹而行。第一张图(图 1)是一幅描绘了 1880 年代中叶一名工作中的人类学家的线条画。① 这幅画出自一位我们不知其名的尼科巴艺术家之手,它表现了一名井然的警卫和一名撑伞的仆从协助爱德华的·霍雷思·曼恩(Edward Horace Man)进行摄影工作的场景。曼恩的脸藏在了他照相机的冠布之中,相机则指向了倚靠于一棵树前摆姿势的三名孩童。所有这一切都出现在三联水平竖排图画的最上一幅之中。在中间那幅随后被曼恩用数字标记了的画里,我们可以看到一系列尼科巴的海洋生物,包括了儒艮、鳄鱼、海龟和鳐鱼。底部的图画则绘制了以一个马六甲的村庄、斯派德福湾(Spiteful Bay)和雷达港(Leda Point)为背景的南考里号蒸汽船(Nancowry)。

这一贴在 E·H·曼恩其中一本关于 19 世纪晚期孟加拉湾尼科巴岛生活的重要摄影图册的三联图画混合了几种创作类型。最明显的是,它是一幅与摄影相关的图画。没有那么明显的是,它以 henta-koi 这一尼科巴长久的表征传统的僵硬风格为基础,将照相机所生产出来的“横幕”进行了并置。这三联画把水平竖排的作画方式转移到了纸上,而这种作画方式原本出现于由萨满安置在受疾病侵扰的尼科巴人家中的木盾上,并用以抵御邪灵。Henta-koi 常常融合了水生生物形式(螃蟹、男性人鱼、乌贼)的描述和尼科巴岛与缅甸、马来及锡兰商人、耶稣会传教士和各种沉船碎屑的长久文化交流的特征。它们包括了航行的船只、船上的指南针、怀表、望远镜、信封和镜子。这种极具异域风情的混合物似乎是保护尼科巴人的一种力量之源(Pinney,1990:284)。

摄影的保护力,即令它可抵御邪恶的辟邪之力,是 20 世纪早期昆士兰原住民与其接触时的核心作用。据原住民策展人迈克尔·埃尔德所言,为自己和家人定制布尔乔亚式肖像的原住民们“感受到了一种在欧洲社群中声明他们的成功的真实需求,以确保来自压迫的‘保护’政策的保护”(Michael Aird,1993:vii)。《1897 年鸦片销售的原住民保护及限制法案》是持续至 1960 年代的殖民地法律机制的其中一个要素,并使得被认为受到了“忽视”的原住民儿童从其父母及社区强制移走成为可能。要求得到国家援助的成年人则可能被强

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译自 Pinney, C. (2008) “Prologue: Images of a Counterscience”, in Photography and Anthropology. London: Reaktion Books, pp. 6~16. 副标题为译者添加,文章由出版社 Reaktion Books 授权发表,本刊发表时有部分修改。

① 在皇家人类学会摄影收藏中与画作放在一起的一张小纸条可追溯至 1885 年 10 月 24 日。

制重置到原住民保护站(Aboriginal stations)(Lydon,2005)。埃尔德认为,依据欧洲的标准,照片指代着成功,而摆拍中所展示的中产阶级的体面则被用以拉远原住民主体和惩罚性国家行为的可能性之间的距离。比如说,来自上洛根河的威廉姆·威廉姆斯的一家“居住和工作在自己的土地上”,而埃尔德的看法是,他们成功地延续了这种生活的一部分原因是他们能够在自保的行动中使用摄影。他们的孩子成为饲养员、牧人、斧匠和管家。他们的后代继续居住在昆士兰并“自豪地把自己称为穆南嘉里人”(William Williams,1993:60)。在一张可追溯至约 1910 年的手工上色照片中,威廉姆·威廉姆斯站立在他坐着的妻子艾米丽·杰基(Emily Jackey)身旁:他面朝世界,直直盯着它的威胁,艾米丽焦急地注视着他(图 2)。

图 1 不知名的尼科巴艺术家所绘制的工作中的 E·H·曼恩(E. H. Man),1880 年代

图 2 彼得·许勒斯泰兹,艾米丽和威廉姆·威廉姆斯摄于波德塞特,1910 年,手工上色的照片

25 年后,德国科隆。由一名人类学家收集的混合的图像(图 3)被认为是危险之源。这些图像由喀麦隆民族志学家和劳藤斯特劳赫-约斯特人类学博物馆(Rautenstrauch-Joest anthropological museum)策展人朱利叶斯·利普斯(Julius Lips)收藏。在科隆的激进原始主义思潮中,“人人都谈论着原始艺术”,并且“流行歌也采用着这一主题;海报也都在宣传它”(Eva Lips,1938:7)。作为这一活跃思潮的一分子,利普斯开始从博物馆的图像和器物收藏中积累大量照片档案,其中殖民地人民记录下了他们的“责难、滑稽、震惊和误解”。正如他在随后流亡美国时所写的,这是被殖民者“对他的殖民者施以报复”的机会(Julia Lips,1937:xxi)。其中的一张图片也源自尼科巴,是一张劳藤斯特劳赫-约斯特博物馆自身所藏的木雕的照片。在利普斯逃离德国后,他出版了一本关于这些藏品的书,其中这张照片和另一张拍摄了这个木雕所指的真人的照片被并置在一起:爱德华七世“为此君本人是也”。尼科巴人通过这张照片加倍谋求一些 henta-koi 的保护作用,因为它是一个“吓人的形象”,也是一张地位崇高者的肖像,“邪灵”在它面前只能惊恐而无能地逃走。通过照片指涉对象的形变——“人物张开的大嘴与国王和蔼的笑容之间奇特的对比”——以及利普斯所强调的面对“一位在欢呼声中感谢受鼓舞的民众的国王,与同样一位吓退邪魔的国王在态度上的巨大差异”(Julia Lips,1937:234-44),这种效用的可能性是存在的。

个案 1:正如利普斯所指出的,希特勒在 1933 年所取得的德国统治权很快会导致“所有德国科学的灭绝”和凋零……古老的科堡徽章上的非洲人头像被一把剑和“卐”字所取代。1933 年 3 月,利普斯的其中一名学生——一个曾经帮助过他装裱其照片档案的希特勒狂热崇拜者——在国家秘密警察的陪同下来到了他的办公室。他们声称,利普斯的所作所为“与元首的种族理论相左,而这些在上方贴了图片的卡纸来自博物馆,因而也该属于博物馆”(Julia Lips,1937:xxv)。利普斯的照片中包括了德国军政官员的肖像,由“黑色人种”

拍摄,而且"单单是持有这些图片"就已经被认为是一种"反国家犯罪"。利普斯逃到了巴黎,惊险地逃过了逮捕,并从巴黎前往美国。他将在历史上的黑人大学霍华德大学的人类学系找到工作。人类学领军人布拉尼斯拉夫·马林诺夫斯基在1937年为利普斯的著作《野蛮人的反击》撰写导言时盛赞他"确实是本地人的代言人,不仅了解本地人的想法,而且关心本地人的利益和委屈"(Malinowski,1937:viii)。

个案2:在E·H·曼恩拍摄安达曼和尼科巴的125年后,距孟加拉湾以北500英里处,照相机被看作一种护身符。2007年9月,缅甸正经历着一场革命……秘密摄像记者协同"缅甸民主之声"拍下了随后的混乱和死亡,包括了一名日本新闻摄影记者之死。他的死亡片段被不断地在安德斯·厄斯特高(Anders stergaard)的电影《缅甸VJ》(Burma VJ)中播放(图4)。2007年在缅甸发生的这些事件标志着人类学与摄影的极点:这就是在一个貌似后人类学世界里的文化斗争,以及对政治和表征自主权的争夺。如果人人都有照相机,那么还会有任何的位置留给持照相机的人类学家吗(Strassler Karen ,2010)?

图3 选自朱利叶·利普斯《野蛮人的反击》(1937年)中的图209及图210

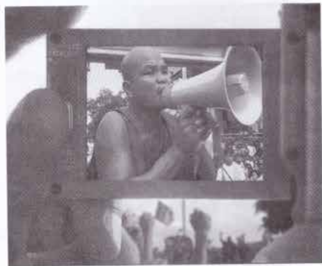

图4 安德斯·厄斯特高,《缅甸VJ》(2009年),电影静帧

二、图片人类学

人类学有很多种。然而,有一种人类学密切而批判地细察了它带有殖民性质的过去,把自己看作是一种伦理—政治的自我批判,且这种自我批判有可能比社会科学和人文学科中的任何其他实践都要更加鞭辟入里。因此,人类学(或至少某一种人类学)占据了一个好位子——或许是一个独特的、有特权的位子——以思索图像与文化、图像与权力之间的关系。人类学介入了跨文化问题中的因果关系、证据、人格和纪念性(还有许多其他关心的问题),这种介入要求:通过一种与所有这些议题都密切相关的技术实践(即摄影)来达成介入的这一历史本身也带上人类学的印记。

米歇尔·福柯提出,人类学(在他的用法中即"民族学")和心理分析是现代的"反科学"(Michel Foucault,1974:379)。二者皆构筑了一种"对经验和概念的囤聚和一种永不满足的原则,总是要质疑、批判、争论那些在其他学科看来似乎有定论的事物"(1974:373)。因此,这不是一个紧张的学科对摄影不断利用的驯化史。反之,它试图询问,一种在人类学与摄影的关系之间的人类学不稳定性看起来会是什么样子的。

在所有对摄影的人类学思考中,有一种随后被艺术史家汉斯·贝尔廷称为图像人类学(Hans Belting,2001),它在1930年代源于文化批评家瓦尔特·本雅明(Walter Benjamin)。在一个从感受性的角度来看断然属于人类学的论述中,本雅明描述了早期照片如何把灵光存放在它"最后的焦点"——人脸中。用以生产这些肖像的技术创造出了一种新的时空:"这一生产过程本身使得被摄者关注起他生命中的这一瞬间,而不再让其匆匆消逝;在漫长的曝光过程中,被摄者……成长为图片,与快照中的形象形成了最鲜明的对比"(Benjamin,1999:514)。因此,达盖尔银版摄影术可以呈现人们特别有力的个性化的面貌。本雅明引用了卡尔·朵田戴(Karl Dauthendey)对这些早期摄影中所出现的人脸的担忧:"我们让这些惟妙惟肖的人物照闹得

局促不安,并相信这些图片中的小脸们能够看到我们"(Benjamin,1999:512)。本雅明历经年岁的回应就像黑暗甬道中的一脉银光一样(Adorno & Benjamin,1999:7),近期的人类学研究回报,乌干达西南部的班言科尔人会把往生者在照片中的眼睛刮出来,"以防死者'回看'生者"(Smith & Vokes,2008:283)。

尽管很多摄影的自我宣传强调它们令人惊讶的新颖性和与先前事物的极大差别,本雅明却找到了它们与古老而普遍的实践之间的亲缘性。摄影师其实是"预言者和占卜师"(augurs and haruspices)的后人,而摄影则开启了一种"光学无意识",并"使得技术与巫术之间的差异以一种彻底的历史变数的形式被看见"(Benjamin,1999:512)。在这里,本雅明认为,技术与巫术并不属于完全分离的两个世界。技术即照相机设备和它用以表现世界的化学手段。巫术则指向一种接触性的特质和生产超越平常身体的效果之能力(图5)。预言者(以鸟类的飞行作为未来事件的征兆的罗马神职人员)和占卜师(通过骨头和内脏来查勘未来之人)以摄影师的身份留在了我们身边,他们那具有魔法的图像为我们诊断着过去与未来。本雅明希望把巫术和技术放在同样的光谱之中,二者相互交融,并且各自拥有在对方的时间线上喷涌而出的潜质。

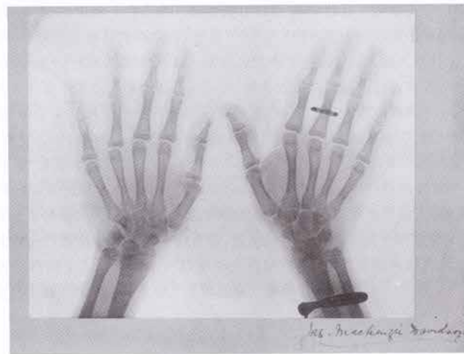

图5 詹姆斯·麦肯锡·大卫森,X光摄影

从1880年代往后,许多物理学者的实验对象为摄影的"占卜"潜质提供了视觉隐喻。

这一本雅明式的看法需要在20世纪末时才被人类学家——如阿尔弗雷德·杰尔(Gell,1988:9)和迈克尔·陶西格(Taussig,1993)——所熟知,而我认为,它可以让我们更多了解横跨了19世纪的人类学与摄影的关系。技术与巫术的平行以及关于一个更广阔的图像人类学的诸多问题,再次引用本雅明的话,是"有意义而又隐秘的,足够隐秘到在白日梦之中寻得一个藏身之所"(Benjamn,1999:512)。

三、摄影作为一种写作

早年,一种对本土语言的焦虑是定义摄影的人类学潜力之背景的一部分。这是双重去柏拉图化的其中一个方面:对柏拉图而言,写作是一种死气沉沉又危险的传播技术系统,正如阴影和其保持的外在形式是心灵之真相的降格复制品一样。对早期的人类学家来说,外在形式通过泰勒随后所说的"实物课堂"提供了稳定性和确定性。人类学家想获得关于这个极其多元的世界中各种人群的原始资料。1922年,詹姆斯·弗雷泽爵士——《金枝》的作者——得以赞扬源自长期居于"田野"的新型民族志。在介绍马林诺夫斯基改变了研究范式的著作《西太平洋的航海者》时,弗雷泽注意到,作者曾"像本地人一样生活……用他们的语言与他们交谈,并从最可靠的来源——个人的观察和当地人用当地语言在没有其他介入或翻译的情况下的直接陈述——来推导他一切的信息"(Frazer,1932:vii-viii)。在19世纪,得出这样的论断会是非常困难的。人类

学家对语言资料持怀疑态度,而"个人观察"则缺少它日后方能获得的方法论上的严谨性。"本地人的证词"是一把双刃剑:人类学家们很有可能并不理解它们,因为他们大多数人都缺少了必要的语言能力,但他们也对"本地人"的真诚报以怀疑,事先便认为他们的话语中很有可能充斥着无关、有偏见和不真实的信息。弗拉沃的观察明确地说出了一种对纯语言信息的普遍不信任:"生理特征是最佳的,事实上是唯一可靠的……语言、习俗等等可以有帮助或提供指示,但它们常常是误导的"(Risley,Flower,1915:6)。随后,连E·H·曼恩(他精通安达曼和尼科巴的语言)都认为,"通过照片可以获得比任何语言描述都要多的正确信息"(Griffiths,1996:21;1886:440)。我们可能会对这一观察增加一个深刻的不确定性,即什么样的声明会被认为是与正在发展中的人类学相关的?与任何一种新的学术实践和学科形成一样,重要的是保有一种参与了其历史关节的不连贯性和矛盾的感觉,以及以回溯和不合时宜的方式赋予它一个它所缺少的目的和统一性。

从这个意义上来说,我们需要强调19世纪的人类学家们对"文化"是多么地不感兴趣。在那个世纪的大多数时间里,是人类身体构筑了像样的研究领域。此外,对大多数人而言,人类学无非是一种比较解剖学的形式罢了。对于"文化"的人类学定义直到1871年才在爱德华·伯内特·泰勒的《原始文化》中出现。更甚,那会儿并没有单一的某种方法论。很多被称为"人类学"的东西是"在现场的人"、理论家和综合论者基于殖民宗主国(牛津、巴黎、柏林和其他地方)的劳动分工之结果。在现场的人有可能是传教士、商人或殖民官。他们中的一些人按自己的方式进行了理论和出版工作,并没有诉诸泰勒或弗雷泽来介入自己的观察。

摄影很快被当成了一种资料传输的重要工具,通过它所生产的资料也被认为是可靠的。正如本雅明所写,摄影与它所呈现之物的化学联系事实上是"现实的烙印"(Benjamin,1999:510)。这表明摄影有可能可以捕捉与表达"无可置疑的事实"(Read,1899:87;Poignant,1992:62)。当人类学家从"在现场的人"中被分出来时,摄影被看作是一个重要的调停者。19世纪末,作为新兴人类学中心方法论的田野调查之出现使得早先的劳动分工体系土崩瓦解:人类学家现在要负责他们的研究的所有部分了。很多与哈登有联系的人物,尤其是W·H·R·里佛斯和查尔斯·加布里尔·塞利格曼,都是这一新的神圣法则的先行者。然而,是布拉尼斯拉夫·马林诺夫斯基的自我神话化才在20世纪早期使他以一个新学科之父的身份为人所铭记。(杨云鬯/译)

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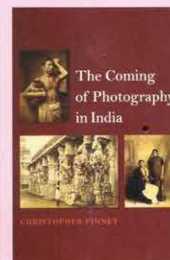

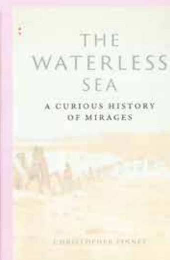

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电子信箱:xb3260122@gxun.cn

网　　址:www.gxun.edu.cn

电　　话:0771-3260122

传　　真:0771-3260122

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Citizens of Photography: the Camera and the Political Imagination

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The PhotoDemos Collective is a group of six researchers.

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Vindhya Buthpitiya (Sri Lanka)
Konstantinos Kalantzis (Greece)
Christopher Pinney (Bangladesh, India, and Nepal)
Ileana L. Selejan (Nicaragua)
Sokphea Young (Cambodia)

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