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Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination. Edited by Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan. (London: Tauris, 2003. 288 p. ISBN 1-86064-752-9 US\$27.50 pb.; ISBN 1-86064-751-0 US\$75. hb.)

In compiling this anthology aimed at students of cultural studies—photography as a socially constructed, culturally constituted and historically situated practice—the editors of *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, have chosen inclusiveness over a narrowly defined area of investigation, stating that “photographs as visual images, historical documents and material object . . . provide the focus of this volume.” With

twelve contributors and two editors, the volume is divided into three parts: "Picturing Place," "Framing the Nation," and "Colonial Encounters." Each part comprises three or four essays.

Since I am neither a geographer nor a cultural historian, but an art historian with a specialization in photography, I did not start my reading of *Picturing Places* with an appreciation of the meaning and relevance of the phrase "geographical imagination." In fact I remained skeptical of its usefulness until I hit chapter three in part one, David E. Nye's "Visualizing Eternity: Photographic Constructions of the Grand Canyon." This absorbing essay convincingly illustrates not only the relevance of the term but also the book's title as a whole. Nye chronicles the history of visualizing the Grand Canyon as a formidable site that did not submit to being rendered intelligible, legible or picturesque; nor was it deemed worthy of political attention until it was viewed in its entirety from a plane in 1919. Nye points out that a study of the Grand Canyon through its visual representation almost amounts to a journey through the history of landscape depiction since the late nineteenth century, revealing its various stylistic and philosophical evolutions as well as scientific connotations.

That photographs were often found to be wanting in their ability to transmit the distinguishing character or "essence" of a particular landscape is a recurring observation in several of the essays. Jeremy Foster makes this point in his essay on the South African Railways and Harbours' practice of utilizing photographs in the creation and promotion of national identity, noting that the corporation would finally adopt the pitch that "you had to be there" to experience its true impact, as with the Grand Canyon. Maria Antonella Pellizari's essay, "Retracing the Outlines of Rome," reveals that some of the salted paper prints taken and annotated by British traveler Charles Scrace Spencer Dickins between November 1856 and March 1857 were enriched with diagrams and pencil inscriptions to overcome their lack of completeness. In her essay on nineteenth-century photography in the biblical lands, Kathleen Stewart Howe notes that Colonel Sir Henry James, Director of the Ordnance Survey office, commissioned maps and three-dimensional models to compensate for the inadequacy of the medium to record subterranean systems.

Jens Jager brings fresh insight into the relationship between landscape photographs and the building of national identity (or an imagined national identity) in his essay, "Picturing Nations: Landscape Photography and National Identity in Britain and Germany in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" that appears in part two, "Framing the Nation." He questions why landscape photography was received differently in Britain and Germany, particularly in its application as a symbol of nationhood. To

understand this difference he compares Britain's prevailing conditions of political homogeneity—reinforced by common foreign foe, parliament and religion—with Germany's class-based diverse views on national unity, and the general lack of will among Germans to define the country as a political unit. Making a distinction between the forces of political and cultural nationalism in Germany, he notes in the latter case that the movement towards cultural unity became stronger after 1849. In addition, Jager asserts that the three prerequisite conditions—a belief in the photograph's objectivity, its symbolic value, and its governance by a prevailing landscape aesthetic—were absent for such a relationship to exist between the German people and photographs of landscape. In France, as Christine Boyer demonstrates in her essay on the *Mission Héliographique*, publications like *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* tended to prepare the path for large programmatic attempts to capture the history and cultural achievements of the past through photography.¹ In Germany, G. Wiegand failed to inspire a parallel photographic undertaking with *Das malerische und romantische Deutschland*, and *Galerie pittoresker Ansichten des deutschen Vaterlandes und beschreibung derselben: Ein Hausschatz für Jedermann*. As Jager succinctly puts it, “[the] majority of the German public was not prepared to read a photograph of a building or landscape as a symbol of nationhood.” Some nations, it would seem, were more susceptible to being “framed” by photography than others.

Two essays in part two examine national railway systems in the early decades of the twentieth century and their use of photographs to create a sense of nationhood. While Foster in the essay alluded to earlier “locates identity in modes of life and practice that give rise to—rather than result from—particular representations of place,” Osborne, writing on the interrelationship that photography created between corporation (the Canadian National Railways), state, and immigrant, “searches for the grain of truth in a moment.”

Alison Blunt's “Home and Empire: Photographs of British families in the Lucknow Album, 1856–1857” and Deborah Chambers' “Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space” focus respectively on the role of the photographic album in the mid nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries. The former looks at two albums containing photographs of “Indian and British individuals and groups” by Ahmed Ali Khan and correspondence by British chaplain Henry Polehampton, who was a subject of Khan's but whose portrait has not been identified as one of those found in the albums. As Martha Langford has noted, “[t]he translation of an album poses an impossible task.”² Both Blunt and Chamber's essays left me with the impression that an understanding of the structures of these

albums fell victim to the overwhelming scale of the undertaking. Langford also observes that a “book of photographs layers surface upon surface of real and virtual intersections; clusters and breaks are spaces of association whose meaning must be taken into account.” In the albums that both essays discuss there is a lack of specificity about the relationship between the images, as well as the gaps that might have existed between them. This lack voids the meaning that these essays might have otherwise yielded.

The epilogue by William J. Mitchell, “Wunderkammer to World Wide Web: Picturing Place in the Post-Photographic Era” provides a fitting close to a volume that chronicles the various ways in which human imagination has harnessed the photographic medium to serve both fictitious and heuristic ends.

While all of the essays in this anthology tackle worthwhile subjects, there is a tendency amongst some of their authors to rely too heavily on well-worn mantras (“embodying the gaze,” “scopic regimes,” “totalizing,” “Other”) or to create new ones that lead to obfuscation rather than clarification. The editors also tend to adopt a stance of intellectual piety when they refer to bringing together “nineteenth century agendas and converging twentieth century concerns.” “Agenda,” “concern”—isn’t it all a matter of perspective? This having been said, the editors must be congratulated for their prescience and courage in undertaking a project of daunting scope. Any student or scholar interested in the culture of images and the history of photography must read *Picturing Place*.

Ann Thomas

1. Charles Nodier, Alphonse de Cailleux and Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor, ed., *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* (Paris, 1820–1878).
2. Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 4.

Biographical Note: Ann Thomas is curator of photographs at the National Gallery of Canada, where she is responsible for the custody and development of a collection of nineteenth century photographs. Among her numerous publications, she has written books of interest for readers of this journal: *Environments Here and Now: Three Contemporary Photographers* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1985), *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and “The Portrait in the Age of Genetic Mapping,” *Genetic Self-Portrait* (Camera Work, 1999). Address: Photographs Collection, National Gallery of Canada, 380 Sussex Drive, P.O. Box 427, Station A, Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 9N4, Canada. Email: <athomas@gallery.ca>