

Louis Kaplan, *American Exposures*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 248 pp., 61 halftones, 11 colour photographs, \$26.00 U.S. paperback, \$78.00 U.S. cloth  
Martha Langford, ed., *Image and Imagination*. Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 336 pp., 125 colour photographs, \$39.95

Matthew Brower

Volume 31, numéro 1-2, 2006

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069628ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069628ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

#### Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

#### ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

#### Citer ce compte rendu

Brower, M. (2006). Compte rendu de [Louis Kaplan, *American Exposures*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 248 pp., 61 halftones, 11 colour photographs, \$26.00 U.S. paperback, \$78.00 U.S. cloth / Martha Langford, ed., *Image and Imagination*. Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 336 pp., 125 colour photographs, \$39.95]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 31(1-2), 103–105.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069628ar>

metaphoric value. In those instances, however, where the illustrations are needed as a direct point of reference, their nearly random scattering is tiresome. Last, but not least, the quality of the black-and-white illustrations is very uneven, with some amateurishly unfocused and poorly cropped images placed alongside more professionally produced photographs.

The quality of McEwen's writing and scholarship, however, more than make up for the occasional deficiencies of production. This certainly is a thought-provoking book, whose multifarious, intermeshing lines of argumentation will bear repeated rereading. McEwen opens up a space for radical reflection on long held assumptions, and shifts some of the well-entrenched paradigms underwriting much of today's architectural history. This inspiring text is a must for all those who think they know Vitruvius, just to find out how much more there is to learn.

BARBARA ARCISZEWSKA  
Warsaw University, Poland

## Notes

- 1 See, for instance, V. Hart (with P. Hicks), eds, *Paper Palaces: The Rise of the Renaissance Architectural Treatise* (New Haven, 1998); A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture* (Cambridge, 1999); R. Smick et al., eds, *Antiquity and Its Interpreters* (Cambridge, 2000); G. Ciotta et al., eds, *Vitruvio nella cultura architettonica antica, medievale e moderna: atti del convegno internazionale di Genova, 5-8 novembre 2001* (Geneva, 2003).
- 2 J. Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On the Orders of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); G. Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).
- 3 Kantorowicz explored medieval ideology of kingship, demonstrating that it juxtaposed the visible body of the King (which was subject to age and imperfection) with the King's invisible body (which was eternal and perfect). See E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).

---

Louis Kaplan, *American Exposures*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 248 pp., 61 halftones, 11 colour photographs, \$26.00 U.S. paperback, \$78.00 U.S. cloth.

Martha Langford, ed., *Image and Imagination*. Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, 336 pp., 125 colour photographs, \$39.95.

The concept of the index has been an important element in photographic theory. In Perceian terms, the photograph is an index because it results from the action of reflected light on the negative. Indexicality has been used to describe the photograph's connection to the world and to ground claims for photography's authenticity. For example, Roland Barthes used the concept to ground his argument for the photograph's assertion of a this-has-been.<sup>1</sup> However, the usefulness of this concept to photography has been under question in recent scholarship. In this review, I examine two recent volumes that attempt to think photography beyond the index. The first, Louis Kaplan's *American Exposures*, uses the work of Jean-Luc Nancy to rethink American photography's deployment of community. Kaplan argues that his "expository approach to photography ... contributes to the critique of the index by calling into question its logic of identity, identification, and representation" (p. xxiii). The second, Martha Langford's edited volume *Image and Imagination*, seeks to focus scholarly attention on the viewer's imaginative relation to the photograph. Langford argues that the attempt to move from a theory of photographic representation to one of spectatorial experience has been hampered by photographic

theory's acceptance "of its [photography's] indexicality – its causal connection to the real – as settled" (p. 5). While both writers pursue the analysis of photography outside the confines of the index, their exploration of the space beyond the index takes them in very different directions.

Kaplan's book examines twentieth-century American photography through a series of case studies of what he calls community-exposed photography. It begins with an analysis of Arthur Mole's early-twentieth-century elevated photographs of crowds and finishes by examining Nikki S. Lee's photographs documenting her performances of subcultural identities. In between it examines Archibald Macleish's use of Farm Security Administration photographs in his *Land of the Free*, Edward Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibition, Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependancy*, Romaine Bearden's photomontage *projections*, Frédéric Brenner's *jews/americala representation*, and Pedro Meyer's digital images of Chicano culture. Although Kaplan begins at the opening of the century and ends at the close, his approach is not strictly chronological. In reading these practices, *American Exposures* draws on Nancy's philosophy, focusing particularly on *The Inoperative Community*, to expose photography to the thinking of community. Nancy's version of post-Heideggerian continental philosophy thinks "being" as always "already being-with" or "being-in-common." This leads to thinking "individuality" as being singular plural. Thus, for Nancy, community is not a fusal experience of unity but is only exposed in our encounter with finitude. We are exposed to community through our shared experience of limit in the encounter with the death of the other. Kaplan draws on Nancy to

rethink the photograph's finitude, its relation to death, as being at the same time the exposure of community. This understanding of the relation of finitude and community lies at the heart of Kaplan's expository method. He uses this insight to show how the photographic practices he examines either open themselves up to the exposure of the limits of community or lapse into the flawed model of fusional community by positing community based in shared identity, a possibility that Nancy's thought forecloses. Thus, Kaplan proposes a radical rethinking of where and how photographs do their work by suggesting that in their exposure of the finitude of a moment they also expose the possibility of community.

*American Exposures* is a difficult and challenging book. Despite the leavening presence of Kaplan's wit and humour, the sentence structure is complex and will present a challenge to any reader not familiar with the syntax of continental philosophy. The book also presumes a fairly broad knowledge of contemporary theory and continental philosophy on the part of its reader. While Kaplan provides detailed discussions of Nancy's work, he does not explain the other terms from contemporary theory that he uses. More problematic, from an art historical perspective, is Kaplan's tendency to not show his work when making his readings. He presents quick takes on images that, while often compelling, are not grounded in detailed discussions of the images. This makes it difficult to follow Kaplan when his reading is not initially convincing, or when it is unclear. What this highlights is that while the book focuses on photographers and photography it does not focus on individual photographs. For example, the chapter on Brenner's diasporic photography reads Brenner through Nancy to challenge the Boyarins' formulation of diasporic identity.<sup>2</sup> Kaplan closes the chapter with what he describes as "an extended reading" of Frédéric Brenner's image of a group of Groucho Marx impersonators (p. 152). This reading is a page long and focuses on Groucho as a theorist of community (I don't want to belong to a club that would have me as a member) and on the implications of its title (*Marxists*) rather than on the specifics of the photograph.

Overall, the book seems to be aimed more at exposing photography to thinkers of community than at making the thought of Nancy available to photographic historians. As with any ontological argument, the key is how to cash out its claims in specific cases. Kaplan does this admirably in relation to the thinking of community and identity in American cultural studies. He clearly shows how Nancy's thought undoes many of the binds associated with identity thinking. However, the book's lack of engagement with the specificity and materiality of the photographs it exposes makes it difficult for anyone not already immersed in this material to use Kaplan's work as a model for analyzing and understanding photography.

*Image and Imagination* is in many ways two separate works. The book is beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated with high-quality colour photographs. On the one hand, it is a snapshot of (mostly) contemporary photography documenting Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal 2005. On the other, it is an edited volume of essays on the importance of imagination to photography. The documentation of the festival is interwoven throughout the book in brief illustrated essays on the twenty-nine exhibitions. These imaginative readings are largely written by Langford, with contributions by other authors including Steve Reinke, Marie-Josée Jean, and Pascale Beaudet. The book also contains an appendix listing all of the works in the Mois de la Photo by the more than sixty international artists who took part. Included in the book are images from a broad range of international and Canadian artists including Iain Baxter, Diane Borsato, Michel Campeau, Destiny Deacon, Evergon, Adad Hannah, David Hlynsky, Tracey Moffatt, Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison, Lynne Marsh, Polixeni Papapetrou, Martin Parr, and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie.

The second component of the book is a collection of essays on the role of imagination in photography. This is made up of nine essays on photographic history and theory divided into three sections. The papers vary in approach and quality but all deal with the question of imagination. The first section, "Sightlines into the Imagination," is composed of two essays. The first, Ian Walker's "Through the Picture Plane: On Looking into Photographs," is a meditation on experience of imaginatively projecting oneself into photographs. The essay pays particular attention to the role the materiality of the photograph plays in this experience. It examines how the scale of photographs affects the viewer's imaginative entering of the image. Walker suggests that in the current trend to extremely large photographs the image's grain acts as screen that prevents the viewer from occupying the image. The second, Francine Dagenais's "Eyes and Skin / Gaze and Touch: Productive Imagination and the Bodily Suffix," explores contemporary artists' exploration of technological prosthetics. The essay begins with a brief intellectual history of the concept of imagination. It then examines the work of a number of contemporary artists to suggest that their use of new prosthetic technologies "disrupt[s] the usual relationship between the sign and its object" (p. 49).

The second and strongest section, "Mirroring Ourselves: Recasting Otherness," contains four papers. Geoffrey Batchen's "Dreams of Ordinary Life: Cartes-de-visite and the Bourgeois Imagination" is perhaps the most effective paper in the volume. While the paper suffers from Batchen's tendency to position himself as the only photo-historian not wedded to a naïve version of art history, the paper makes a clear contribution towards understanding the role of the carte-de-visite in nine-

teenth-century visual culture. Batchen suggests that the carte-visite's neglect by art history is tied to its non-individualistic mode of operation. He contrasts the carte's dismissal by art history with its centrality to the practice of nineteenth-century photography. His argument positions the image as a space for the construction of bourgeois selves by reading the carte's mobilization of subjectivity with Marx's analysis of the commodity. Ultimately, he situates the carte as partaking in both the creation of an imagined political community and the commodification of the image leading to the cult of celebrity. Fae Brauer's paper, "Dangerous Doubles: Degenerate and Regenerate Photography in the Eugenic Imagination," examines the role of photography in developing the eugenic imaginary. She argues that the need for a norm linked the two unrelated practices of photography. Degenerate photography's unhealthy bodies, initially taken for medical reasons, changed their meaning as they came in contact with the physically improved bodies of regenerate photography. Brauer argues that photography became the site of an imaginary body phantasy and a new body aesthetic linked to a discourse of eugenics and politics of sterilization. Also included in this section are Langford's essay, "Lost Horizons, or The Gates Close at Sunset: Doubtful Realisms and Paradisiacal Gains," on the changing phenomenological conditions of contemporary photography brought on by the emergence of digital practice, and Kirsty Robertson's essay, "Webs of Resistance: Photography, the Internet, and the Global Justice Movement," on photography in new social movements.

The third section, "Pictures as a way of Shutting our Eyes," contains three essays. The strongest of the three, Martyn Jolly's "Spectres from the Archive," looks at the history of spirit photography to situate contemporary photographer's revisiting of its tropes. Jolly argues that spirit photography's refusal to position the past as past provides a set of tools for artists' political and ethical engagement with history. Catherine Bédard, in "See-

ing Between the Lines: Imagination, Nothing but 'This,' in Max Dean and Michael Snow" (translated by Peter Feldstein), presents a history of the use of "this" in modern and contemporary art as a way of situating Dean's work. Finally, Petra Halkes's "Gottfried Helnwein's *American Prayer*: A Fable in Pixels and Paint" uses Helnwein's practice to re-examine the relation between photography and paint in light of digital photography.

Overall, the collection presents a variety of approaches to the question of imagination. However, the authors do not all agree that thinking imagination requires abandoning or moving beyond indexicality. They also do not agree on which conception of imagination is relevant to photography – a phenomenological imagination, the psychoanalytic imaginary, or Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" – or on whether it is primarily a social, personal, political, or ethical imagination that photography draws on. What the essays do is begin to provide a sense of what it might mean to think photography imaginatively.

Together, these two books present a convincing case that there is productive work to be done on photography outside the framework of the index. Neither presents a fully developed framework for doing so, but they bring to light important areas for further study.

MATTHEW BROWER  
York University

#### Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1982).
- 2 Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993), 693–725.

---

Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Art Czar, The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg*. Boston, MFA Publications, 2006, 321 pp., 16 black-and-white illus., \$35.00 U.S.

Despite the recurrent vituperation of him that has become almost *de rigeur* in the art world, Clement Greenberg remains not only the paramount figure among American art critics but also the object of continual study. Marquis's new biography of him is the second published within the last decade. She acknowledges Greenberg as the "most hated" but also a "prescient," "indispensable" critic, with a "record of influence seldom surpassed." In 1997 Florence Rubinfeld modestly styled her study of Greenberg as simply a social biography,<sup>1</sup> one of two

books she felt the critic warrants, the other being an intellectual biography. Marquis's book is also a social biography, but she justifies this new work by her ambition to be both more complete – she had access to the forty-five boxes of Greenberg papers deposited at the Getty Research Centre (Rubinfeld did not) – and also more "fair-minded" than previous studies. Given the importance of her subject, the widespread misrepresentation of his views and practice, and his impact on a wide range of artists, that fairness and completeness is very much needed.

Marquis is adept at situating Greenberg in the context of the prevailing concerns of the 1930s and 1940s in New York: the fashion for American Scene painters like Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton as fostered by *retardataire* writers like