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Bodies Real and Virtual: Joseph Rock and Enrico Caruso in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

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I

In 1934, during twenty-eight years of wandering west China, the American botanist Joseph Francis Charles Rock made a brief trip to England. He clipped the obituary of an old friend from the Times and pasted it in his diary. On the facing page, he pasted a photograph two decades old, and wrote this caption:

> J. F. Rock (standing) with his older friend Fred Muir, Entomologist at the Haw[aii] Sugar Planter's Exp[eriment] Sta[tion], Honolulu. Photographed in our home in Liloa Rise (Breaside), Honolulu in the spring of 1913, while our phonograph played Spiritu Gentile, Caruso singing.[1]

Rock had been traveling in west China since 1922 as a botanical explorer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Harvard's Arnold Arboretum and as a geographical explorer for the National Geographic Society. He did not marry. He was long out of touch with his only family, a sister in Vienna. His significant relationships were all with friends, all men. Some may have been erotic, at least in spirit. He was lonely, ill, and uncomfortable during his visit to London and he spent much time in his hotel room recalling domestic scenes from his past, often including the sounds of his gramophone. Though he spent his life on the road, he always sought ways to construct real and imagined domestic spaces

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[1] Joseph Francis Charles Rock, Diary, 25 Mar. 1934, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (hereafter RBGE). While copies of parts of Rock's diaries exist in several locations, the complete, original notebooks are kept at the RBGE.

within which to nurture bonds of friendship. Remembering his home on Liloa Rise with this collage was one way of rebuilding such a habitation.

Rock's memorial incorporated many layers of conventional encoding. He made a lifelong habit of copying or pasting obituaries of old friends in his diary and supplementing them with photographs taken years before. Obituary-clipping and scrapbook-making were common practices at the time, and they had strong formal affinities with the botanical work of pasting dried plants and tags onto paper and annotating them with text. The photograph itself is conventional—a portrait of friends in a moment of studied domestic intimacy. And though Rock's diaries were kept from others' eyes during his lifetime, this memorial was implicitly a public act, its caption addressing an imagined audience. To evoke Roy Rappaport's posthumous book on ritual, Rock's memorial substituted public clarity for the private obscurity and ambiguity of his relationship with his nearly forgotten friend. In short, Rock's creation of this collage easily meets Rappaport's minimalist definition of ritual: "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers."[2] It was a ritual act of mourning.

But I would like to call attention to some other features of this memorial. It is true that, as ritual, it evokes conventional criteria to establish a social relation. The photograph and caption might be read to perform the same function as the illocutionary utterances that, as Rappaport argues, create, maintain, or transform social relations in ritual acts. Yet the core of this collage is no illocution at all. It is an evocation of affect: of intimacy, domesticity, and spiritual harmony. Friendship here is not a mere category of relatedness; it is a specific affective relationship between the two bodies portrayed by the camera. Indeed, it is *only* this specific relationship. There exists no other evidence of this friendship. This little ritual recalled it to existence after many years of complete absence, and it likely melted away again a day or two later into the flux of a wandering life. Two gazes directed and aligned by the camera, two bodies harmoniously composed: I notice the jaunty slant of young Rock's arm and the tilt of Muir's head into the protective triangle it forms. This evocation of domestic intimacy is heightened by Caruso's energetic voice emanating from the unseen gramophone and the title of his song, suggesting a harmony of spirit. Camera and phonograph were the instruments of memory and affect here: they granted this friendship all its qualities of spiritual intimacy, domesticity, and harmony. Without them there would have been no possibility of recalling this relationship in this remade form for this brief moment in 1934. Can the way that these two technologies are combined tell us anything in particular about the status of the bodies they compose, represent, or, perhaps, replace in this relation?

[2] Rappaport, Roy A., *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

FIGURE 1 Page from the diary of Joseph Rock, 25 Mar. 1934 (courtesy Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh)

In his seminal study of narratives of discovery, Stephen Greenblatt pointed out that representation is never merely a product of relations of power; it is constitutive of new relations.[3] A large body of recent work on colonial

[3] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), cited in Satadru Sen, "Savage Bodies, Civilized Pleasures: M. V. Portman and the Andamanese," *American Ethnologist* 36, 2 (May 2009): 366.

photography has expanded this insight to show how visual representations can be seen to constitute social relations in the round—as power-laden indeed, but also as sensory, corporeal, affective, and historical.[4] A smaller body of work on colonial phonography has begun to explore the specific ways that sound recordings expanded this production of social relations into problematic aural spaces.[5]

Some of this scholarship takes cameras and phonographs as instruments of perception as well as representation, showing how they are used to create or manipulate social relations by shaping what is seen or heard at the moments representations are produced on the road, in the field, or in the studio.

In this article, I follow Joseph Rock on his early journeys in Yunnan and Gansu Provinces, watching him ritually combine cameras and gramophones in efforts to bring specific forms of social relatedness into being. I am interested here in the evanescent social relations of travel pieced together with the resources at hand, enduring moments or hours before melting away, to be ritually recomposed when chance offered other occasions. Such relations of the moment were often largely non-discursive, fashioned of mutual looks and gestures, delimited by the positioning of bodies, textured by the nonlinguistic aural field. This is why cameras and gramophones were powerful tools for their production: they could be used to arrange bodies, align gazes, and command voices with very little discursive intervention. Ritually delimiting perception with such instruments, I argue, allowed this botanical explorer to manage the world about him, controlling not so much what or how he saw and heard as how he found himself to be seen and heard. At any moment, our bodies, gazes, and voices are largely products of the looks and words of others; Rock used his camera and gramophone to shape the ways others

[4] A selection of the literature on colonial photography that has influenced my approach here includes: Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, eds., *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and The Technologies of Enchantment* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ann E. Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Clare Harris and Tsering Shakya, *Seeing Lhasa: British Depictions of the Tibetan Capital, 1936–1947* (Chicago: Serinda Publications, 2003); James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

[5] See, for instance, Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Thomas R. Miller, "Mannequins and Spirits: Representation and Resistance of Siberian Shamans," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 10, 4 (Dec. 1999): 69–80; Robert Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997); Michael Pickering and Emily Kneightly, "Echoes and Reverberations: Photography and Phonography as Historical Forms," *Media History* 13, 2–3 (2007): 273–88; Ivan Kreilkamp, "Speech on Paper: Charles Dickens, Victorian Phonography and the Reform of Writing," in Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, eds., *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 13–31; Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

looked at and spoke to him so they might give him back a body and perceptual relations with the world that he could find bearable.

This was a desperate struggle, for the world Rock wandered in the 1920s and 1930s was in desperate straits: violent, impoverished, ill-governed, tortured by war, wracked by natural disasters. Much writing about colonial and semi-colonial situations focuses on explicating the criteria that mandated the "rule of difference" under which colonial states operated and investigating the effects of such rule on the daily lives of colonial subjects.[6] In the west China that Rock saw in the 1920s and 1930s, however, there was no "rule of difference": there was a chaos of different systems of difference in continuous transformation. Serf-holding Tibetan principalities warred with slave-owning Nuosu clans in south Sichuan/southeast Kham; the enthusiastic militia of a briefly independent Tibetan state fought unwillingly conscripted Chinese soldiers across west Sichuan/Kham; fluid coalitions of egalitarian nomads fought disciplined hierarchical Muslim armies in northwest Gansu/Amdo; huge warlord armies clashed across Yunnan, Sichuan, and Gansu; everywhere war transformed criteria about who could acceptably do what to whom.

Rock and the other European and American botanists who scoured west China for alpine flora between 1904 and 1940 attempted to import criteria for establishing difference from the British and American empires, only to find them useless: none of the state, military, and administrative structures established to enforce them elsewhere existed here. How was their own difference to be configured in the absence of these criteria? How were they to act in relation to the different others around them? How were they to maintain dignity as moral persons in this context, where it was so very obvious that their personhood was largely a product of the eyes, words, and acts of others? Making these judgments was largely a matter of keeping their balance as they waded through streams of affective responses to those eyes, words, and acts, with the aid of the largely non-discursive resources left to them. In Rock's case, the affects were most prominently rage, fear, and visceral racist disgust. He used his camera and gramophone to ritually transform the ways his body was embedded in this world and to create new arrangements of social relations around it. Above all, this was an ethical struggle. By using perceptual technologies to rearrange the world into a more habitable form Rock was able to distill from this vicious mix of emotions an active, if measured, sense of compassion for some of the suffering bodies he encountered. Perceptual technologies are very often analyzed as instruments of power, and Rock did use his camera and gramophone to control the looks and voices of others. But they were also ethical instruments, used to create social diagrams within which limited acts of compassion might have a place.

[6] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

11

He ran away from home at eight; he left for good at eighteen. His father was a steward in the Viennese winter palace of the Polish Count Potocki and son of the amateur orientalist Count Jan Potocki who had gained fame with his *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, a tale of mystical wanderings in the East.[7] His mother died when he was six, and his elder sister Lina cared for him after that. His father hoped, then demanded, that he become a priest; he wanted to join the navy. He left directly after finishing *Gymnasium.* He wandered Europe for four years, nearly penniless. Eventually he sailed for New York, where he borrowed a bed, began to learn English, fell ill with tuberculosis, and steamed southward towards dryer climes. In San Antonio he attended English and Bible study courses at Baylor University. After a few months of that, in October 1907, he sailed for Hawaii. He had a single gold coin in his pocket.

Rock fell in love with those islands—with their strange forests and sun-flecked oceans. He instructed Latin and Natural History at a private middle school in Honolulu and taught himself systematic botany with extraordinary speed. He quit his job to spend more time outdoors; then Hawaii's Division of Forestry hired him as its sole botanist, tasked with building an herbarium of indigenous plants. A few months later he published his first scientific paper. In 1911, the Division of Forestry transferred him and his burgeoning herbarium to the College of Hawaii, soon to become the University of Hawaii.[8]

In a 1913 report, he compared a herbarium to a museum, a laboratory, and "a great illustrated volume."[9] He used photography to pluck leaves of this volume from their laboratory setting to insert between leaves of text. He was among the first to replace botanical drawings with photographs in his publications. At first, the photographs were beautifully rendered reproductions of herbarium specimens, complete with tape and tags. They did away with the stylization of botanical drawings, rendering lucid every pit and scar, as though to place the herbarium page whole and unaltered in his text. Still, that page, with its dried, flattened, and faded leaves, was hardly an accurate representation. He began to photograph twigs and fruit cut recently from living plants and placed on white cards with no tags or rulers. He was trying to reproduce the style of the specimen—isolated from context, arranged artfully against a paper background—while overcoming the specimen's failure of representation. In some photographs the leaves appear to be flattened with a perfectly

[7] Jan Potocki, *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1805).

[8] These two paragraphs of biographical information are drawn from Alvin Chock, "J. F. Rock, 1884–1962," *Newsletter of the Hawaiian Botanical Society* 2, 1 (1963): 1–13; and Stephanie Sutton, *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* (New York: Hastings House, 1974).

[9] Joseph Rock, "A Herbarium," *Newsletter of the Hawaiian Botanical Society* 2, 1 (1963 [1913]): 14–15.

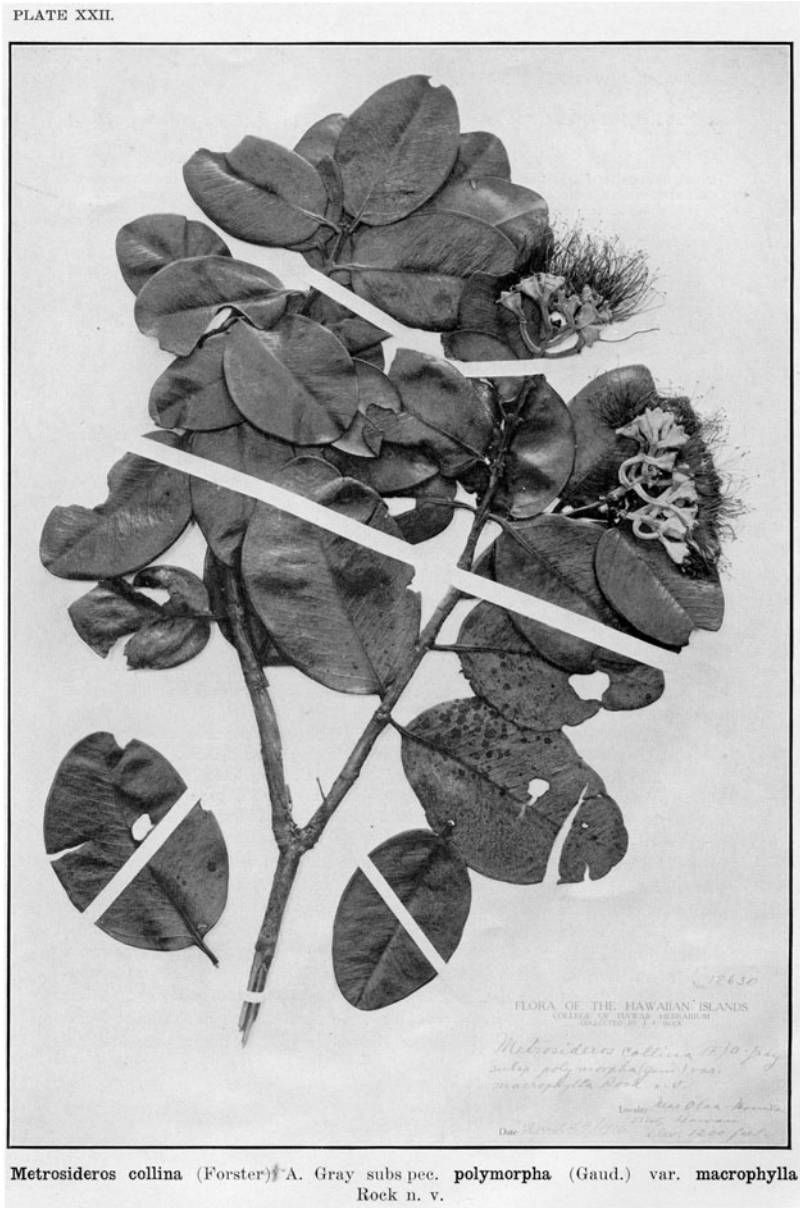

FIGURE 2 Rock, Joseph Francis Charles. The Ohia Lehua Trees of Hawaii: A Revision of the Hawaiian Species of the Genus Metrosideros Banks, With Special Reference to the Varieties And Forms of Metrosideros Collina (Forster) A. Gray Subspecies Polymorpha (Gaud.) (Honolulu, Board of Agriculture and Forestry, botanical bulletin no. 4, 1917).

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transparent plane of glass. In others, the flattening effect is produced by the camera: he perfected a technique that did away with depth—no shadows, no foreground, no background, only surface. As one looks at Rock's specimen photographs, the eyes are caught up in a play of light refracting from glossy leaves and pitted fruit, a play that makes this surface vibrate with virile reality. The photographs insist upon this surface: this is all there is.

The sole student in his 1919 Systematic Botany class described his photography of herbarium specimens:

> If he were singing snatches of grand opera in French, German, or Italian when he arrived in the morning, the day would be a pleasant one.… In making pictures of herbarium specimens, he used a very slow emulsion plate. He would cut down the diaphragm, open the shutter, and walk off to attend to other matters; in a minute or so he would return, announce to himself that the shutter had been open long enough, and close it.[10]

His student does not actually say that Rock sang as he photographed, but he surely did. He had learned to love opera in Vienna. With his teaching salary he collected the Victor "Red Seal" recordings of Enrico Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba, which had begun to appear in 1902. Recordings of voices, absorbed into his body and memory, gave him the pacing with which to time the shutter. He would return to this fusion of photography and phonography in later years as he searched for ways to see his own body through alien eyes.

The history of photography is often narrated as a gradual accumulation of scientific mastery of time and space. The chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge is often seen to mark a decisive moment in this process. Marey developed instruments to chart human movement photographically. He used a rotating shutter to make, on a single glass plate, multiple instantaneous images of a subject moving before a black background. His devices tended to directly detect and record motion, eliminating human mediation: he "wished to exceed the human senses, to correct them by detouring around them, thus eliminating human intervention, observation, and error."[11] Muybridge achieved his motion studies of racehorses by removing the human body from contact with the photographic apparatus. He placed fifty cameras along a racetrack and used trip wires to trigger electronic shutters as the horse galloped past. Later, he used similar automated process to do studies of human bodies, nude and clothed, walking and working. Scholarship on Marey and Muybridge often sees their work as beginning a long process in which the photographic apparatus gradually freed itself from mediation by the

[10] E. M. Bryan, "An Anecdote Concerning Joseph Rock," *Newsletter of the Hawaiian Botanical Society* 2, 1 (1963): 16.Though Bryan wrote his article forty-three years after his class with Rock, he worked from journal entries he had written at the time.

[11] Todd Gunning, "Never Seen this Picture Before," in Philip Prodger, ed., *Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 247.

FIGURE 3 Rock, Joseph Francis Charles. Notes Upon Hawaiian Plants with Descriptions of New Species and Varieties. (Honolulu, College of Hawaii Publications, bulletin no. 1, 1911).

human body while subjecting the body to mechanical measures of time and motion. Photographic technology is seen to produce an extensive, metrical time that becomes the measure of movement, breaking movement into segments, each of which has the same form and speed as every other. This is

then reflected back to perception through pictures and moving pictures.[12] For Rock, to ignore the shutter timer and time his photographs "by feel"—or more likely, as I have suggested, by voice—was to sidestep this narrative of progressive mechanical abstraction, already by the end of the nineteenth century attached to the camera. It raises the possibility of a different history, a history of human bodies, voices, and temporalities becoming intimate with the technologies of mechanical reproduction, fusing with them, and shaping their rhythms.

In 1913, after a scant five years in Hawaii, he published a masterpiece: *The Indigenous Trees of the Hawaiian Islands*.[13] The book described more than three hundred native Hawaiian trees, including seventy-two new species, varieties, or forms, and it included 215 full-page photographs. He tried to present three photographs of each tree.[14] The first were identical in style to photographs in earlier publications: twigs, leaves, and fruits arranged on white cards, sometimes with rulers along the bottom or side, photographed with rigorous clarity. The second were of a section of the tree trunk, showing the bark, usually with a flowering or fruiting branch pinned to it. Each photograph included a measure of scale: his knife used to pin the cut branch against the trunk, or simply stuck horizontally into the bare bark. It was always the same knife: about eight inches long with a sharp tip and a crosshatched handle. He carried this knife for at least five years. The third set of photographs, of the entire tree, included a similar measure, usually his soft, broad-brimmed hat lying against the base of the trunk, sometimes his horse and empty saddle. It is significant that these marks—knife, hat, horse—were extensions of his body. It was as though he was explicitly, if instinctively, rejecting the idea that a photograph of a plant specimen is merely "objective," merely a portrait of a plant, and suggesting that it is also a self-portrait.

In some photographs of the full tree, the marker of his horse is held by a Hawaiian guide, face obscured by his hat. In many, the measure is a Hawaiian guide alone. The guides—ranch hands borrowed for a day or two—stand or crouch in rumpled work clothing, facing the camera in formal poses. Their faces are always difficult to discern—darkened, muted, or obscured. These photos contrast markedly with the few where a Euro-American replaces the Hawaiian. In these, the features are usually clear, and the men stand in attitudes

[12] Rebecca Solnit makes this argument forcefully in *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking, 2003). See also the essays in Prodger, *Time Stands Still*; and Marta Braun and Etienne-Jules Marey, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[13] Joseph Rock, *The Indigenous Trees of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: privately published, 1913).

[14] Rock describes this effort in his resume of the book, included with his 1913 report on the College of Hawaii herbarium to the Hawaiian legislature, reprinted as Joseph Rock, "A Herbarium," *Newsletter of the Hawaiian Botanical Society* 2, 1 (1963): 14–15.

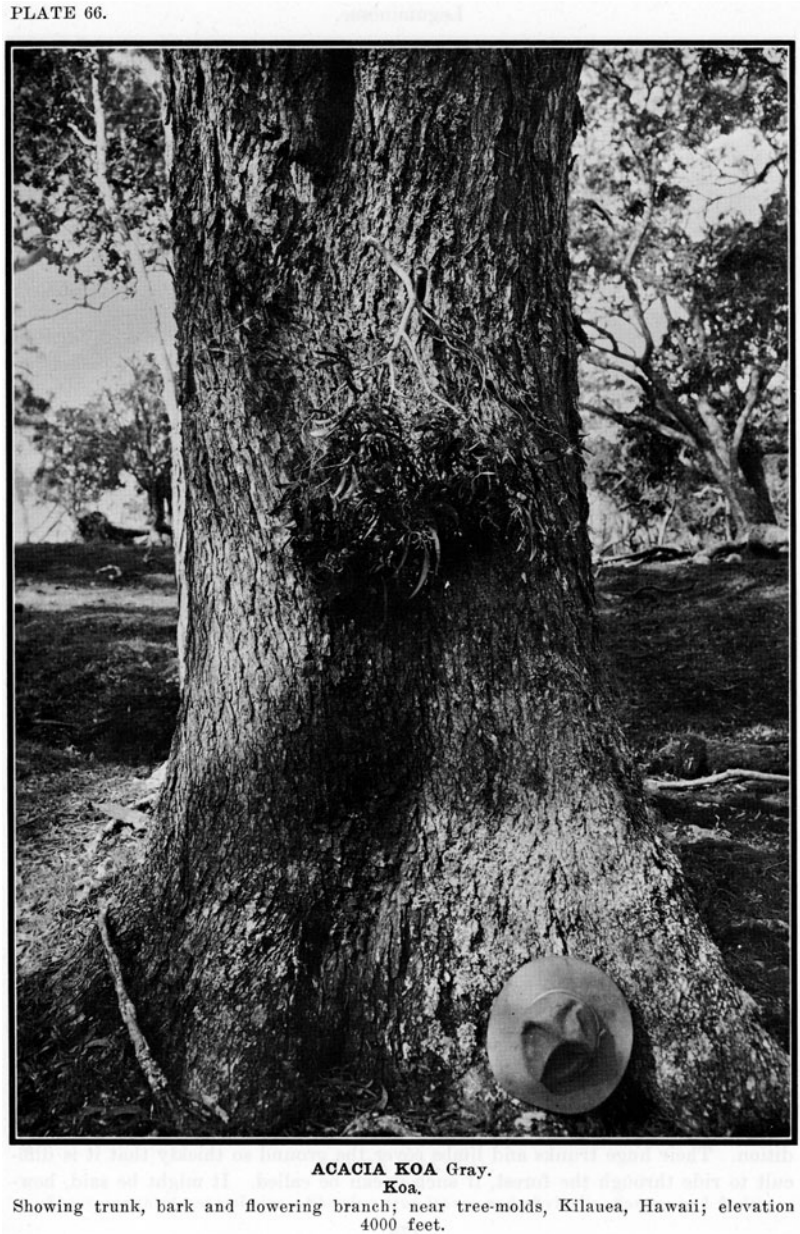

FIGURE 4 *Acacia Koa* with hat to mark scale. From Joseph Rock, *The Indigenous Trees of the Hawaiian Islands* (1913).

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that place them in relationship with the tree: looking up at it or leaning against it. The Hawaiian guides are placed in a frontal relationship to the camera but no relationship to the tree; their ostensible function is to show the scale of the photograph, replacing the ruler, the hat, or the riderless horse. But emptied of discernible features and personality they act in these photos in exactly the same way as knife or hat, as placeholders. They mark Rock's absence from the photograph while, with their straightforward stares, they mirror his presence behind the camera. In this way, Rock's botanical photographs of Hawaiians are complex self-portraits.

In 1920, The U.S. Department of Agriculture hired Rock to travel to Siam and Burma in search of a tree called Chaulmoogra, which had shown promise in the treatment of leprosy. In 1922, the Department extended his contract: he was to search Yunnan Province for blight-resistant oaks, chestnuts, walnuts, pears, and plums. In February 1922, he walked over the border between Siam and China into the Tai Lue state of Sipsong Panna.[15]

III

Having a body, moving through the world, seeing it, being seen in it, he found almost unbearable. This is what I find most appealing about him. He had terrible faults, but he was sensitive to the abjection of bodily being—his own and others. His desire to find solutions and escapes, practical and fantastical, to the abject conditions of bodily being were his furies, compelling him relentlessly onward through much of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. He came to this engagement with abjection gradually. At first, it was merely by observing "filth" and being disgusted by it. From the moment he crossed the border from Siam, nearly every entry in his diary takes up the topic of filth. Here is a typical entry, made in the town of Nanjian, en-route from Sipsong Panna to Dali in April 1922:

> Today was market and crowds were on the open spaces outside of the town, peas, beans, corn and sugar cane were the only articles of which there were quantities, pigs wallowed in the large stinking pools surrounding the town, myriads of flies hovered and buzzed about quagmire, Chinese dishes, sugar cane, pigs, and the dirty faces of the children encrusted with filth and skin diseases. We bought some sugar cane to be sent to Washington.[16]

He attempted to hold himself apart from filth, avoiding markets, skirting towns, sending little boy monks away while eating lunch at a monastery, nearly thrashing a "dirty Chinaman" who "wiped his hands on my nice American flag."[17] But this was impossible. For one thing, the very roads beneath his feet were

[15] Joseph Rock, Diary, 14 Sept. 1913, RBGE.
[16] Rock, Diary, Apr. 19, 1922.
[17] Rock, Diary, 14 Feb. 14, 1922; 13 Feb. 1925.

PLATE 68.

ACACIA KOA Gray.
Koa.
Showing straight growth of bole in wet or fern forest, near Volcano Kilauea, Hawaii; elevation 4000 feet.

FIGURE 5 *Acacia Koa* with white companion and Hawaiian guide. From Joseph Rock, *The Indigenous Trees of the Hawaiian Island* (1913).

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covered in filth. In the town of Shuizhai, on the way from Dali to Tengyue, in October 1922:

> Like every other Chinese village no more than a filthy piggery; pig stables in America are a beautiful parlor in comparison to a Chinese place of abode; instead of cleaning their roads they throw all the rubbish out, hold babies out the door over the roadside to relieve themselves and let the attending dogs clean them, this instead of "Onliwon" [a brand of toilet paper]. In the middle of the road a pig is cleaned and all the dirt and filth remain in front of the house, people stepping over or in it.[18]

More often, it was not immediate physical contact that immersed him in filth; it was the exchange of glances. When the gaze was his own, it was armed and protected by his camera. This was the case in his very first diary entry about filth, written before he even crossed China, in a small Hmong village in northern Siam.

> The dirt and filth is indescribable. The people wear dark blue home woven cloth with long narrow blue aprons in front … they never wash their faces or bodies … several of them were idiots.… Took a picture of a spinning wheel; the girl working on the wheel ran away at our approach as did all the women, they hid themselves in their houses and refused to come out.[19]

Usually, however, the gazes impinged on him from elsewhere, and it was he who had to run away. His instinctive response was to battle it out with the most potent weapon he had. In the spring of 1923, in a Yi ("Lolo") region of north Yunnan, he visited the market town of Wannian Jie. His diary entry from that day details a complex, running battle of gaze and countergaze:

> The dirtiest wares as brown sugar exposed on the dirty ground, tobacco leaves, pigs, chickens, silver ornaments for the tribes-women, rice, blue cotton cloth, … strings of cash … mules and horses standing in the middle of the filthy street, pigs squealing as they are stepped upon by the pedestrians; beggars, their clothing made of tiny bits of rags picked up on the street and stitched together haphazardly so that every square inch of the surface exposes some part of the skin; these poor wretches with hair like a witch's … matted with filth … their fingernails like claws … barked at by every mangy dog … such rub shoulder to shoulder with the gentry, such as, it is in their abode of filth.
>
> This place boasts a small temple and hither we went … and clouds of dust announced that the whole of the market behind us is descending on us like a mad riot.… Women and children shrieked for fear at the sight of me and the men fought for the small space in front of the temple. I took three photos of the mob … I went to the dark narrow room of the temple and closed the gates … in every hole [in the latticed door] … there poked a nose, or some eye strained sideways to get a glimpse of me.…[20]

Seeing and, especially, being seen drew him closer into the world around him, too close to be comfortable, close enough to be *visceral*. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty elaborated a vocabulary to describe the

[18] Rock, Diary, 4 Oct. 1922.
[19] Rock, Diary, 10 Jan. 1922.
[20] Rock, Diary, 16 Mar. 1923.

lived body as a worldly object among worldly objects. The body, in his words, is "a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and [from the other] what sees those things and touches them." A body is a worldly thing "in a stronger and deeper sense" than are insensible things: seeing is an encounter in which one's own body becomes visible to oneself as though from the position of things seen, things that are outside the body, but that may also be a part of it, "even entering into its enclosures."[21] He quoted a painter who feels as though the trees are looking at him. It is not that the trees have eyes; it is that vision places one in the midst of things; one always sees oneself looking as though from the place of the visible. There is, he wrote, a "fundamental narcissism to all vision." This is yet more the case when the visible is not trees but other bodies, with their own eyes:

> As soon as we see other seers we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate of glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves from whence we see them: henceforth through other eyes we are ourselves fully visible; that lacuna, where our eyes, our back, lie, is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars … I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes.[22]

Merleau-Ponty makes these observations in his efforts to understand the carnal body as involved in the "flesh of the world." Sensible bodies are, according to him, "exemplary prototypes," or "remarkable variants" in a "massive corporeality," in which the sensed always coils back upon the sensing body.

Seeing and being seen made Rock aware of his deep involvement in the flesh of the world—and its viscera, its filth. As Javier Sanjines remarks in a reading of Dario Antezana's painting *Complicidad*, of two massive, slimy bureaucrats, with satiated expressions and extended, semi-transparent guts, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the "flesh of the world" is hardly carnal enough. For all its virtues, Merleau-Ponty's extended descriptions of the lived body stay for the most part with its visible and palpable surfaces, neglecting its innards and the flows that pass in and out of its viscera. "Flesh," writes Sanjines, "is mass … the stomach, buttocks, cheeks, tongues, palms, eyes.… Bodies are slimy surfaces that sweat, the hairs that grow in total disorder, the stomach fluids that exude gases. Bodies exhale shit, piss, mucus, fluids, microbes; they spread viruses, toxins."[23] This viscerality involves the lived body as a thing among worldly things as much as does seeing and being seen or touching and being touched. For Rock, being seen drew him into the "massive corporeality" of the world. But this was not merely the corporeality of his sensing gaze coiling back upon itself through

[21] Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lefort, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968 [1964]), 137.
[22] Ibid., 143.
[23] Javier Sanjines, "Visceral Cholos: Desublimation and the Critique of Mestizaje in the Bolivian Andes," in Terry Smith, ed., *Impossible Presence: Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 223.

the eyes of others. It was a visceral corporeality, of bodily flows and wastes, in which bodies shared their substance not only through touching and seeing but also through ingestion and infection.

Rock experienced the unveiling and projection into the world's flesh that the eyes of others exercised upon his body as an assault rather than as the joyful opening up into the world that Merleau-Ponty imagined it to be. At bay before that little temple at Wannian Jie, he turned on the crowd and fired back three times with his camera. The camera did not effect an "objectification" in the usual sense. At the moment, there was no object—no photograph: he was looking through the shutter. Instead, the camera acted on his own body. For the moment, it replaced his body, forcing the crowd to see it only through the lens. In this way, it opened up again those dark "lacunae" that had been filled in by all those eyes. If he had been "completely turned inside out" under those eyes, the camera let the portions of his body previously unseen be unseen again, allowing him to cast off the weight of eyes on his back, his legs, his torso. It made him a thing in a world of objects again, gave him back that "plate of glass of things," that "feeble reflection" or "phantom" of himself that those things allowed him. It was an attempt to reestablish the relationship with himself as a visible being with which he felt most at home, given in those photographs of Hawaiian trees, in which he appeared as a mark—a knife or hat—in a world of surfaces.

Back in the market, in that tumultuous battlefield of gazes, were the beggars, their skin stitched over in a mosaic of bits of cloth, their hair like witches' hair, their fingernails like claws. In this field of visibility, in Merleau-Ponty's account, other bodies, like mine, are both worldly things and sensible beings; they too have the inverse and obverse sides of the seen and unseen. But not for me. Though my involvement in the flesh of the world may give me full access to their sensed side, the side of them that is "object," my access to their sensing side is partial and variable. I access it only to the extent that their senses touch upon me—that I feel the palpations of their eyes—and even then imperfectly. For Rock, the beggars had no eyes. In great contrast to everyone else, they seemed insensible of him. They were a kind of a hole in the field of visibility that enmeshed and tortured him. But at the same time, they were full participants in the field of corporeal flows—as they scrabbled with the dogs for grains of spilled rice. They were bodies, with all the mass and all the flowing viscera of bodies, yet withdrawn from that network of gazes that make bodies social. This was the status of the abject for Rock: sensing flesh reduced to insensibility—visceral meat. His attitude towards abjection would come to resemble that which Deleuze ascribes to the artist Francis Bacon—"an immense pity for meat."[24]

[24] Gilles Deleuze and Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), 38.

FIGURE 6 Market crowd, Dali, Yunnan, 1922 (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

FIGURE 7 Crowd peering into a temple in Goutouba, Gansu, 1925 (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

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He soon learned to focus his revulsion on a particular form of excreta—the stickiest and slimiest kind. In December 1924, he was on his way from Yunnan Sichuan and Gansu. An assortment of travelers met along the way had sought the protection of his large military escort:

> We stopped for lunch among some trees near the streambed while the soldiers and Chinese travelers regaled themselves in the fly-ridden food stalls with their mangy dogs and the usual filth accompanying such impossible places. The continuous spitting, cleaning of the nose with the fingers and wiping them either on rocks, trees, shoes or clothing or still better table and chairs or the nearest thing handy, the filthy muddy road, the squealing pigs, and one has a picture of the lunch stops on a caravan road in Yunnan.[25]

It is difficult to show just how central mucus was to Rock's diaries. He wrote of it frequently, intensely, and at length. These diary entries were not merely the occasional expressions of disgust of a man fed up with traveling. They were a deep and sustained engagement with filth, a lingering, meticulous exploration of its trajectories from body to body and around to the proximate world. In February 1931, he was traveling with the journalist Edgar Snow, whom he disliked. He was in a very bad temper, since Snow had awakened him at two in the morning, "scrabbling for something":

> We reached the rotten hole of a place called Hsia Kwan [Xiaguan] with its indescribably black oozy filth in which pigs wallowed, with the walls of the houses cracked and leaning every direction. The filthy populace is lousy and encrusted with the dirt of years, the so called gentlemen leaning forward and, taking their nose between two fingers, wringing it and then throwing the thus recovered contents of their filthy noses in a wide circle from them, and wiping the remaining slime with the palm of their hand in an upward direction or movement over their face and the hand on the nearest object, post, wall, chair, table, or in the absence of all the above on their shoes or clothing or rubbing both hands together until all the filth has been thoroughly rubbed into the skin; such is a mild description of unspeakable Hsia Kwan and its lousy degenerated populace.[26]

It appears that at times this investment seemed excessive even to him. He sometimes struggled to domesticate it, to frame it within more acceptable discourses. Of course the most readily available of these, fashioned with great energy to be adaptable for just such purposes, was the discourse of racism. At times, he made ample if anguished use of it. His diary entry about Xiaguan continues.

> Missing links exist here by the hundreds, not single ones, the faces of the people remaining of the lowest type of apes, of a degenerated and idiotic type at that, with goiters which hang down their chests. They are … lower in mentality than a cow or water buffalo; … their lips cannot even hold slobber, and the slime and saliva runs out of their mouths like babes in arms; what a wretched race.… White people are depraved enough and silly to want to save the souls of such a despicable people. They have no souls, no more than lousy flea ridden dogs have. Why not let them steep in their filth

[25] Rock, Diary, 18 Dec. 1924.
[26] Rock, Diary, 13 Feb. 1931.

and ignorance and leave them alone to let them rot in their bandit-ridden country. The best thing that could happen to the world would be a huge catastrophe which would annihilate that miserable selfish mean filthy degenerate race. O how I hate and despise them.[27]

His was a tormented racism, miserable, often hysterical. But at least it was not "scientific." He played at random with a few concepts—"degenerated type," "yellow peril"—but always in the most unsystematic way. He had no theories at all. He was contemptuous of missionaries who thought they were bringing the light of civilization to Chinese or Tibetans; he believed them to be moral worms. Though he sometimes thought of peoples Kachins or Tibetan nomads as "primitives," he erected no hierarchies. Instead, he kept his racism close to its roots—his revulsion at the "filth" of bodily emissions.

IV

In 1922, Rock traveled with an escort of men from the Lijiang valley to the Tai Lue state of Zhanda, near Yunnan's border with Burma. He was riding in a forest after finding a species of chestnut: "one of the loveliest trees I know … small leaves, a rich deep green, golden brown beneath, silvery when young." His horse nearly trod on a man lying on the forest path. From his horse, he could not see the man's face, but when he dismounted, "death looked up at me from his staring eyes." As always, the abjection that compelled him was that in which a body became an unsensing object—meat:

From his neck to the center of his breast he was laid open, ending in a five-inch-broad wound, the skin and fat hanging in rags from him. He was ice cold and shivering. I felt his pulse and, when I touched his hand, he was terrified. He could not speak. He was out of his mind.… His terrible wound was running with pus, and in such a condition he was lying in the cold and wet 2 days and 2 nights.[28]

Rock's escort made a litter of bamboo and carried the man down the trail. They met some laborers in a rice field, and Rock paid them to carry the man five miles to the town of Longling. In a temple there, he cleaned and bandaged the wound and gave the man a clean shirt.

The laborers stopped in the market to eat, and there they ran into their employer. "He raised a terrible howl and cursed me up and down. What right had I to take his men from the field *wasting their time carrying that man to Lung Ling*." Enraged, Rock grabbed a big stick and, trailing a crowd, marched to the man's shop in the market. "He was leaning against the wall, surrounded by friends, laughing, filthy as a pig and as fat. A soldier pointed him out. I made one dash for him, grabbed him by the throat, and pulled him out into the street, *a multitude of people watching me* [my emphasis]." Rock pushed the

[27] Ibid.
[28] Joseph Rock to David Fairchild, 1 Nov. 1922, Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Pittsburg, Pa. (hereafter, Hunt Institute).

man against the wall and screamed at him until he was hoarse. He then dragged him before the magistrate, "followed by the whole of Lung Ling." He said that the man had insulted him and insisted that he be punished. The magistrate sentenced the man to six weeks in prison. "Such are the people of this province," commented Rock. "God forbid that a similar fate should befall me."[29]

All the tumbling affects of compassion, self-righteous indignation, and racist disgust in this incident were subtended by a precise organization of gazes. On the forest path, Rock was captured by "dead eyes" that swallowed up his own gaze rather than reflecting it as objects did, a deep pit in the happy visibility of the world that he had just been enjoying as he collected his lovely chestnut. For all his horror of the man's terrible wound, he felt a certain competence in this form of relationship to another body. About a month before, he had camped in the courtyard of a military compound in Dali, where sick soldiers had been left behind by their unit. "They were covered with scab from head to foot … I mixed sulphur and lard and made an ointment and had them rubbed all over with it; they were in terrible condition, raw flesh and encrusted, finger-thick with scab."[30] "Encrusted" was one of his favorite words to describe "filth": "the dirty faces of the children encrusted with filth and skin diseases"; "the filthy populace is lousy and encrusted with the dirt of years." But here, drawn up close to these bodies, close enough that their wounds rather than their eyes were the central object of his encounter, "filth" was not an issue.

But then he found himself in the market, drawn again into the viscerality of that world, where the most significant social exchange seemed to be the spread of excreta among bodies. His response was to create a theater. Many historians have remarked upon the theatrical organization of the county courts of justice in the late Qing—forms which carried over nearly unreformed into the Republic in remote, rural counties like this one.[31] And Rock played up the theatrical effects of his performance: "Now, I said, we are not through yet. Now I am going to take you to the magistrate to whom you wanted to report me. His friends pleaded with me, but I said no, I have no mercy for such a wretch." And later, "I thought the people should see such a lesson."[32] It was a deliberate realignment of that network of gazes, just as when he had turned his camera on the crowd in the market at Wannian Jie. He faced all those eyes frontally, catching them with his own eyes. He became again, to a degree, as an object in a world of sensing objects, seen by them, to be sure, but seen as the reflection of his own gaze. In this way, he sought to empty those gazes of their inherent ambiguity as sensed bodies and sensing beings. What mattered about them to

[29] Ibid., Rock's emphasis.
[30] Rock to Fairchild, 22 Sept. 1922, Hunt Institute.
[31] See, for example, Linxia Liang, *Delivering Justice in Qing China: Civil Trials in the Magistrate's Court* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[32] Rock to Fairchild, 1 Nov. 1922, Hunt Institute.

FIGURE 8 Species of *Castanopsis* from Longling, Yunnan, 1922 (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

him now was their eyes: the visceral corporeality that so frightened him melted away as they were reduced to their more purely sensing side.

It is true that these are relations of sensation. They are ways of organizing perception, one's own and that of others, of arranging lines of sight and of deciding what, and whom, may be heard. But they were also *social* relations in as full and solid a sense as relations of kinship or kingship. Rock's exploration of "slime and slobber," his capacity to be drawn into the dead eyes of abject bodies, his attempts to extricate himself from visceral exchanges with camera or stage—all this was a deep and serious struggle to negotiate a place for

himself in the social world, moment by moment, and to find ways of acting that would make inhabiting that place bearable. In this sense, it was an ethical struggle, involving a series of ethical judgments, founded on affective reactions rather than thoughtful reflection.

Composing himself as a subject in relation to the social world was a matter of working on the world, not just upon himself. Whenever the opportunity presented itself he arranged the world into stages—geometries for aligning and focusing gazes. In May 1922, on his way from Dali to Lijiang:

> On arrival at Peisumei, we found a dirty smoky school full of dirty brats so we decided to stop at a theatrical stage. A ladder was procured, and we climbed the stage, where we are now comfortably located, the caravan being below. I attended to the horse boy, who had very sore eyes, etc.[33]

He had already found, only four months into his first sojourn in China, the scene that suited him. It had each of the elements that he would come to rely upon: the filthy crowd (here of children), the stage on which he situated himself, lining up the crowd's gazes, the abject body at center-stage, which he, intimately, treats, and with which he emphasizes, as a kind of meaty and insensible double of his own.

When in a town, whenever possible, he put up in a temple: the alternative, public inns, he found unbearable. He often remarked upon the little theatrical stage that one found facing the courtyard of every temple in Yunnan, used for performances of *Dianxi*—Yunnan opera. At times, he pitched his tent on this stage. More often, he set up a cot at the foot of the god icons—theatrical enough. He liked the backdrop the gods provided him, especially on evenings when he felt lonely. Often, he and the gods shared their stage. The dead were frequently present, in coffins lying in the courtyard or stashed under the little stage, and there were always graves just outside. In 1925, journeying from Yunnan to Gansu, he set up his tent inside a temple near Zhaotong to wait out a storm.

> It was a lonely place; the only neighbors I had were a few graves.… One night, it was moonlight, wolves came to the temple door and howled for hours. … they [dug] up a newly buried man, and devoured him. All we found the next morning were a few blue rags and the open coffin.[34]

In 1930, walking through west Yunnan, Snow and he avoided the "filthy hole of a place," the city of Jianchuan, "and climbed to the temple among the dead on the western hillside, where we used to stop to lunch at previous times, the dead being a thousand times preferable to a living Chinaman."[35]

When the bodies were living, they were abject. In a temple near Dali: "Ten soldiers are guarding the front of my temple, not outside, but within the courtyard and in front of the doors of the shrine. They are all diseased with skin

[33] Rock, Diary, 9 May 1922.
[34] Rock to Ralph E. Graves, 17 May 1925, Arnold Arboretum.
[35] Rock, Diary, 17 Jan. 1930.

troubles and ulcers.… Every one I have treated every day, and they seem to be grateful."[36] In these war-wracked times, the temples were often full of wounded militia. In 1928, passing through the town of Sanying, near Dali, he repaired to the temple for the god of wealth, where he had often stayed. The town had been attacked by bandits the day before.

> What a dreadful sight I beheld! Some of the soldiers had their feet chopped off, others their legs; one sat on a platform with a rag on his head, and as I removed it his brain was exposed and pulsating. He died shortly afterwards. I did not have enough bandages, so I cut up my irreplaceable bed sheets and worked all night bandaging the wounded.[37]

Abject bodies moved him when they shared his stage. On the road, in a marketplace, on the streets of a town, he was rarely compelled to treat diseases or bandage wounded limbs. (Even on that rare early occasion when he stopped to help the wounded man in Zhanda, he repaired to the temple to treat him.) Yet, bounded in this way, compassion was absolutely at the core of the social subjectivity he was arranging for himself. Corpses dug up and devoured by wolves, soldiers abandoned and at the point of death: these bodies were at the very threshold of the social. They were in the process of being purified of all subjectivity, becoming senseless—becoming meat. As he negotiated a social geometry within which he could establish his own subjectivity, Rock found himself pressing right up against this threshold. On his stage, with his gods, when he was not finding fellowship with abject bodies, he was often contemplating his own death. It was always (and quite unrealistically) the death of a stranger—forlorn, unmourned, torn by wolves, left to rot in the wasteland.

It was a diagram: an arrangement of gazes, actual and virtual, an organization of intimacies and distances, of written voices and enforced silences. To speak of social subjectivity as merely internalized is always an error, of course: one is social always through arrangements of relationships, some materialized, others imagined, involving other beings, human and inhuman. Rock's difficulty was that he had to carry his sociality about with him like a snail carrying its shell—or rather a hermit crab which, at each resting place, finds another shell and collects objects to arrange about it. He was not without resources in this endeavor however. He had his machines.

V

From 1924 to 1927, Rock and twelve young men from one small village in the Lijiang valley were employed by the Arnold Arboretum to explore Gansu Province, which then included most of what are now Ningxia and Qinghai Provinces. The vast western part of Gansu included most of Amdo, the northeastern province of Tibet. The expedition was unusually well funded. For the first time in China, Rock bought a top-of-the-line portable Victor

[36] Rock to Fairchild, 22 Sept. 1922, Hunt Institute.
[37] Joseph Rock, "Bandits—a Government Asset," unpub. MS, Arnold Arboretum.

gramophone, invested in a collection of Victor Red-Seal recordings, and assigned a mule to carry it all. The second day of the expedition, walking north from Kunming, Yunnan, the party stopped at a village called Yanglin. There was a harvest festival at the temple, so Rock decided to stop in a public rest house:

> The window consists of iron bars; the floor is dirt; there is a large upstairs, but it was so filthy that it would have taken weeks to clean it. The place is inhabited by idiots. To cheer myself up I unpacked the phonograph and played Caruso's favorite operas. A large crowd gathered at the window outside.[38]

Three months later, the party was traveling through the dusty plains of Gansu—"nothing but stones and stones." They reached the hamlet of Goutou Ba, "a miserable conglomeration of houses built of loosely piled-up rocks." The night before he had slept in an inn. "The smells were very bad, and as the mule men continuously opened the doors into the stable, the stench became unbearable." He had ordered a soldier to tell the landlady, "a nasty woman" who kept "chatting and chatting, true to her sex," to shut up, so he could write. To avoid a repetition of all that, he pitched his tent in the village among the scattered houses: "Today I played the phonograph in my tent; it attracted a very peaceful and well-behaved crowd which seemed very amused. After this, his irritability melted away, and he wrote that it was the countryside, "not the people," that was inhospitable.[39] In a few days, they stopped in the village of Qingshui, where the tiny temple was too small for his bed:

> We go to an inn … I stop in a room containing the family shrine.… I opened the phonograph and gave the people of Chingshui a concert; they … stood in amazement amassed around the music box listening to Caruso's Celest Aida, the Quartet of Rigoletto, etc. I took several pictures of the mob while they listened to the phonograph. I then took the phonograph to the top of the roof and photographed the throng that gathered on the roofs of the houses across the narrow dirty street.[40]

It became a habit. During this expedition, he played his Victor on village streets, in the grasslands, in monasteries—whenever he felt lonely or miserable.

Rock's goal on this expedition was to reach a great mountain in northern Amdo known as the Amnye Machen. War between Tibetan and Muslim forces kept him from venturing towards the mountain for nearly two years. But in the spring of 1926 the party set off from their base in the monastery town of Chone towards Labrang monastery and the Amnye Machen. From Labrang, their escort was a group of nomads.

> Yesterday I played my Victor to an audience of nomads of the Sokwo Arik tribe. They listened and listened and still wanted more … I had taken a number of pictures of these sons of the grasslands, each with his scalp lock sticking up from his otherwise bare head,

[38] Rock, Diary, 14 Dec. 1924.
[39] Rock, Diary, 4 and 5 Apr. 1925.
[40] Rock, Diary, 11 Apr. 1925.

FIGURE 9 Soldiers guarding a temple near Dali, Yunnan, 1922 (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

as they sat around the Victor listening to Caruso and Melba, Plancon, Titta Rufo, and others, screaming with laughter at the most pathetic passages—"Boheme" or "force del destino." They said what funny clothes I wore and what a funny hat. The son of the Chief (now dying of paralysis) looked the picture of an African negro.[41]

Rock's photographs show twelve men and boys and a little girl sitting on the ground around the Victor, perched on a packing case. Their attention is split: some attend to the gramophone, others to the camera. These photos might be contrasted with his other pictures of his escort. When he was able, he separated them into small groups, posed them against a smooth background, and shot vivid frontal portraits. An autodidact in all his enthusiasms, he had a facility for investing in the emblematic forms at the roots of disciplines and exaggerating their formal properties to surreal perfection. He coupled this with an autodidact's tone-deafness to disciplinary flux. His portraits have roots in the anthropometric photography of the nineteenth century, from which had

[41] Rock, Diary, 9 May 1926.

FIGURE 10 Listening to Rock's gramophone in Qingshui, Gansu, 1925 (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

FIGURE 11 Listening to Caruso on the Amdo grasslands, 1925. The gramophone is in the center on a packing case (courtesy Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh).

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FIGURE 12 After the concert (courtesy Harvard Yenching Institute).

grown the massive trunk of comparative ethnological portraits.[42] Like those, Rock's portraits are of "types" (a common label in the Royal Geographical Society archives) oriented to the camera and severed from their social or material context. But, like his specimen photographs, they exceeded the form of "type" photographs by exploring the particularity of his subjects, insisting upon their individuality.

Much has been made of the capacity of photography, frequently observed, "to induce an imaginary *rigor mortis* through its capture of the frozen moment," as Christopher Pinney puts it.[43] The most precise reflections on this connection remain those of Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*. Looking at the image of Lewis Payne awaiting execution, Barthes reflected that the "punctum"—that which stings, or wounds—in this photograph "is: he is going to die. This will be, and this has been." The photograph is a real moment, a moment that happened, a man who is about to die, and who is now dead: the sting is the "inevitability of one's own mortality."[44] The Sokwo Arik nomads in Rock's photograph are not condemned to die any more than you or I, but they are dead now, as we will be soon enough. Rock

[42] For some of the many analyses of this evolution, see Christopher Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography," in Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920*, and the other essays in that volume; Alison Griffiths, "Knowledge and Visuality in Turn of the Century Anthropology: The Early Ethnographic Cinema of Alfred Cort Haddon and Walter Baldwin Spencer," *Visual Anthropology Review* 12, 2 (1996): 18–43; Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[43] Pinney, "Parallel Histories," 80.

[44] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981 [1980]), 96.

often obsessed about this: his portraits were all, in his view, of people and ways of living that would very soon "disappear from the surface of the earth." Such reflections depend upon an essentialist theory of image making, the idea that referent and representation are physically linked in the photograph, justified by the fact that, in photography, light physically traveled from the object to make an imprint upon the film. "Photography is an imprint, a photochemically processed trace like fingerprints or a death mask."[45] In an essay that describes how photographs are closer to fetishes than film, Christian Metz, a founder of the psychoanalytic approach to cinema, comments on the consequences of this central feature of photography, which may be called its indexicality. "What is indexical," Metz writes, "is the mode of production itself, the principle of the *taking*." Compared to film, "Photography … remains closer to the pure index, stubbornly pointing to the print of what *was* but no longer *is*."[46]

> The snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out off the world into another world, into another kind of time … the photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death and like the constitution of the fetish in the unconscious, fixed by a glance in childhood.… Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for a long immobile travel of no return. Dubois remarks that with each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate and thus is protected against its own loss.… Not by chance the photographic act (or acting, who knows?) has been frequently compared with shooting, and the camera with a gun.[47]

One does not have to adhere to this "essentialist" idea of the photographic image to observe its effects on those who might. For Rock, photography could, in nearly every way, substitute for collecting. These were short steps: from collecting pieces of plants, to photographing those pieces as specimens, to making photographs of people that functioned, in all important ways, like specimens. This kind of photography was indeed "a cut inside the referent," liberating fragments of the world from their fate, preserving living beings as dead specimens. Rock's portraits imitate his specimen photographs in all the ways I have already noted: the careful arrangement of the object against a featureless backdrop, the obsessive attention to detail, the careful flattening. The only difference is that the mark of scale, the empty mark of his own presence, is absent from the portraits. But not really. He is present there, as a reflection in his subjects' eyes, an empty reflection, devoid of content as the knife or empty hat. By rendering his subjects as specimens he made them into things again, or as close to things as was possible. And these things gave him back his own body not as a complex social organism involved in the visceral flesh

[45] Christopher Pinney, "Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism and Vernacular Modernism," in Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
[46] Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (1986): 82–83.
[47] Ibid., 84.

FIGURE 13 He Xueshan, one of Rock's collaborators, with head of blue sheep (courtesy Arnold Arboretum).

of the world but that feeble phantom of himself that his vision reflected from the world of things allowed him.

This relationship was easy enough to create with individuals or groups of two or three. But it was much more difficult with crowds, even small ones. And it appears that this is when the gramophone became useful. The disembodied voice suspended the heterogeneous interactions of social life that he found so irritating or threatening (the chatting landlady, the stinking latrine), turning all ears toward the box, all eyes toward the camera. On their way to the Amnye Machen, the party visited the grassland monastery of Dzangar:

> I invited the lamas to my quarters and there entertained them with a concert furnished by Caruso, Melba, Titta Ruffo, Plancon, Kreisler, Heifetz, etc. It was a most peculiar scene, an old Living Buddha sitting in my camp chair and intently listening, … door and window packed with lamas, also the roof of the building surrounding the courtyard.[48]

It was a cliché, of course. Juxtaposing phonographs and "primitives" had become an instinctive gesture for American travelers, playing out fantasies about the power of American technology to penetrate the globe's remote places. A 1910 *New York Times* article titled "America's Advance Guard" summed it up:

> "I have been all over North and South America and Africa," remarked a New Yorker, "and was surprised to find the phonograph and sewing machine everywhere. … I have heard Caruso singing in a Klondike dance hall, in the middle of the long arctic night, and Melba entertaining a crowd of naked niggers at Lagos on the west coast of

[48] Rock, Diary, 13 May 1926.

FIGURE 14 Listening to Caruso at Dzangar monastery (courtesy Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh).

Africa. I think these incidents gave me an even greater shock than the squaw with her sewing machine."[49]

Such scenes were a staple of expedition films—a popular genre in the 1920s—particularly of films about Africa and the Arctic. By 1929, a *Times* film critic could write, "It would seem that to show a film of Africa the following ingredients must be incorporated: A shot of natives listening to a phonograph; native women with pickaninnies slung on their backs … scenes of tribal dances with subtitles comparing them to the Black Bottom and Charleston…."[50] Yet there is a distinctive difference between most cinematic phonograph scenes and Rock's photographs. Expedition films showcased a 'primitive' sense of wonder at the disembodied voice; the focus of the concert audience's attention was nearly always the phonograph. But in Rock's photographs the audience is not attending to the phonograph, and their faces do not obviously display wonder or amazement. Instead, silent listeners turn their gazes, emptied and unified, directly on the camera. Nor do Rock's *accounts* linger on the wonder of the audience, except to comment on how their astonishment drew their gazes to the box, then to the camera. And to him, the magic of the phonograph did

[49] *New York Times*, "America's Advance Guard," 5 May 1910: SM2.

[50] *New York Times*, "Thrills in Motion Picture. 'The Wild Heart of Africa' Shows Game at Close Range," 27 May 1929: 20, 3, quoted in Robert J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925* (Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 1997).

not depend on the audience's "primitivity": nomads, ordinary villagers, or literate monks would all do. What was important was that they be rendered speechless, their gazes emptied, and their attention led to the camera lens.

Our bodies are given to us by the gazes of others, in which our own gazes have their origin; they are given to us by the voices of others, from which our own voices arise. Those gazes and voices clothe us with our own flesh. To have a body in this sense is to be part of that portion of the world that is added to it by the vision of others; it is to be subsumed in that coiling of vision back upon the world's "massive corporeality." The sliminess of the world was evidence for Rock of this inevitable sociality of corporeal being. The sputum that flowed over tables and floors, the mucus stuck to posts and walls, the feces that flowed in the streets, were shared corporeal substance. They were evidence that the lines between bodies and the world were indefinable; that his own body was given to him by gazes, voices, fluids, and microbes, of which he was neither the origin nor the titular. The unbearable sign of this, for Rock, was the contingency and heterogeneity of social experience. It is whenever this heterogeneity was paramount—when the market goods were jumbled together, when the crowd was looking in various directions and speaking of various things, rather than being "peaceful and well-behaved"—that he began to rave about slime.

Camera and gramophone were powerful instruments for dispelling contingency and heterogeneity. I suggested above that scholarship on photography has encouraged us to view the camera as an alienated extension of the senses. But Joseph Rock's problem was not Étienne-Jules Marey's, Eadweard Muybridge's, or Walter Benjamin's. It was not to divide time in order to perceive what the unaided could not. It was not to add appendages to the body to extend the reach of the senses in time or space. It was not to delve beneath the gaze or to open up an optical unconscious. It was to replace the body.

In Hawaii, using the pacing of Caruso's arias to time his camera's shutter, he had relied upon the mechanism of the gramophone to insert his body into the mechanism of the camera, integrating body and camera more fully. In west China, he went one step further. If a body is a social relation, he was replacing the terms of that relation with gramophone and camera. He was using the voice of the gramophone to organize the voices of others, using the eye of the camera to align the gazes of others, so that those voices and gazes would give him back a virtual body, composed of nothing more than camera and gramophone. The *virtue* of this virtual body was that it could encounter gazes and voices while being raised above the filth and the slime on packing cases and tripods. His carnal body, holding the camera, was reduced to a tripod—a support for this purified eye.

VI

Social relations do not exist apart from their materializations. Wandering west China, Rock found social relations taking material form about him at

every step—along roads, in marketplaces, in temples, among bodies gathered or dispersed. These material forms caught him up bodily, inserting him into various forms of relationships, with or without his conscious participation. His efforts with camera and gramophone were attempts to reshape these processes of materialization, moment by moment, finding ways to inhabit the world, just as he did many years later in his photograph of his younger self and Edward Muir listening to Caruso on the gramophone. And these efforts always included reshaping his own body. In this sense, he was attempting to find a way to inhabit this landscape on terms that he could find bearable. The mobile habitation he devised for himself included, at its core, compassionate fellowship with different bodies, configured as abject, though this compassion and this abjection was rigorously delimited in a social diagram of his own devising. He left no evidence that he reflected on these efforts in any explicitly discursive fashion, though he knew what made him feel relieved, useful, empathetic, or companionable and what made him feel disgusted, forlorn, or homicidal. Yet every step of his wandering journey—and every snap of a shutter or turn of a Red Seal record—involved negotiating a stream of affective responses to the materializations of social relations about him. They involved balancing, nurturing, overcoming, or suppressing affective responses, sometimes consciously, but often without much conscious reflection. As James Laidlaw points out, quoting Foucault, "reflection," or reflective thought, is "what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as an ethical subject."[51] Rock's maneuvers with camera and gramophone were indeed "reflective": they were about discovering his self mirrored in the eyes of others; they were about refashioning that self by remolding the material of its relations with others. The difference is that this reflection was not merely interior or individual: it took place between eyes and bodies; it was irreducibly social. Though this reflection may rarely have included much explicitly discursive cognition, neither was it merely automatic or reactive: it required effort and invention; it required manipulating social conventions; it required balancing anger against a sort of fellowship, revulsion against a kind of compassion. And in all this it required the exercise of a degree of freedom, a necessary component of any ethical action. My aim here has been to reveal the ways that technologies of perception participated in this ethical activity as tools for fashioning a habitable place out of the gazes and voices that comprised this world.

[51] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *Essential Works of Michel Foucault, Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 200, quoted in James Laidlaw, "For an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, 2 (2002): 311–32.