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Near the end of Book IV of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates relays a story about Leontius who travels to Athens from the nearby port city of Piraeus. As he approaches the city from the north wall, he sees several dead bodies lying on the ground at the place of execution. Socrates reports: "He felt a desire to see them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, Look, ye wretches, take your fill of the fair sight." The story, Socrates suggests, illustrates how an inner war can break out when desire tries to take charge of reason. Leontius's appetite for a view of the gruesome scene is in conflict with his sense of restraint. The offspring of this inner turmoil is yet a third feeling: shame. The battle between his wish to look and not to look produces a sense of disgrace, a feeling that is itself a kind of surveillance, though this gaze is trained inward, toward oneself.

Plato's Socrates mobilizes Leontius's story as an analogy for the polis, as an illustration of how a just society needs harmony between its different elements. Scholars have long been split on the success of this argument. But if we leave aside the definition of a just society for the moment, the story offers a compelling illustration about the nature of breakdown—both individual and social. *Lynching Photographs*, the latest book in the University of California's new series, Defining Moments in American Photography, offers up a similarly rich case study. The deceptively slim volume consists of a short introduction by series editor, Anthony W. Lee, followed by two critical essays: Shawn Michelle Smith's "The Evidence of Lynching Photographs" and Dora Apel's "Lynching Photographs and the Politics of Public Shaming." Moving through its pages, the reader confronts an unsettling number of spectacles of death—both in photographs and narrative. And akin to Leontius, these dreadful scenes threaten to engulf the reader in a cloud of conflicting emotions: compassion and lasciviousness, curiosity and grief, all overwrought by a disquieting sense of shame. This book sets the reader on the path to the place of execution and then, like Socrates, meditates about the significance of the encounter.

Lynching Photographs focuses on the period from the end of nineteenth century to Emmett Till's murder in 1955, a time in which approximately five-thousand African Americans were put to death at the hands of lynch mobs. The essayists bear witness to these hangings, burnings, and castrations by attending to their photographic remains. In the first essay, Shawn Michelle Smith shows how these remains have lingered, how the photographs of these events have repeatedly returned to haunt our visible world. Smith focuses on a single example to make her case, the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana, on 7 August 1930. Shipp and Smith (as well as a third man, James Cameron, who escaped) were accused of murdering Claude Deeter, a young white man, and of raping his companion, Mary Ball. The case never got to trial. An armed mob broke into the jailhouse the day of the arrest, beat the accused senseless, mutilated their bodies, and eventually hung them in a tree outside the courthouse.

"Photography," Smith tells us in her opening pages, "documented lynching but also played a role in orchestrating it." In this case, local Marion photographer Lawrence Beitler arrived to capture the scene outside the courthouse with his eight-by-ten-inch view camera, tripod, and flash. The resulting image has become one of the most famous and recognized of lynching photographs. The two young men, strung up in a large maple tree, occupy the background of the image. Their limbs are bloodied and clothing torn. Gravity has pulled their broken bodies into an unnatural repose. The foreground is filled with the ebullient crowd: some people are looking at the bodies, some talk to one another, some smoke solitarily. But most of the faces are turned toward the camera—indeed so many that one gets the sense that these blithe figures are the true subject of this "portrait." One young and smartly dressed couple smile gaily at the photographer. In the middle of the crowd a middle-aged man with a blunt, black moustache points a stiff arm toward the victim on the right while looking intently at the camera. There is nothing beyond this macabre carnival. The scene is enclosed in the inky blackness of the August night.

Professional photographers like Beitler capitalized on these "spectacle lynchings" by producing souvenir copies of their images, often with the studio name printed neatly in the corner. In such cases, photography became an active participant in the ritual murder, as another means by which to dehumanize the victims. But portraying the victims was only secondary. These photographs were initially made as keepsakes for whites. Photographers manufactured photo-postcards of lynchings just as they might have produced pictures of Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon for passing tourists. These images were not made to document murder. They served as personal mementos and as a way to record these "community-building" events for posterity.

But as Smith is quick to make clear, the photograph-as-memento was only the first iteration of these images. The white press unapologetically published Beitler's image as a way to justify the mob's violence and champion their privileged position. But some newspapers—the Black press in particular—published Beitler's photograph in a way that protested against the event. The October 1930 issue of the NAACP's *Crisis* reprinted the image with the caption "Civilization in the United States, 1930: The lynching of Tom Shipp and Abe Smith at Marion, Indiana, August 7, 'by party or parties unknown.'" These publications

mobilized the image to point out the corruption of white law enforcers, politicians, and citizenry. They used the photograph against itself, so to speak—as a way to illuminate the savagery of Southern communities. The journalist Ida B. Wells investigated hundreds of lynchings and she also reprinted the photographs in her books and pamphlets to help make her argument that the practice was a deliberate, organized tactic of the white regime. Virtually from the beginning, then, lynching photographs were not only used as mementos or weapons of fear and intimidation. They also became the rallying cries for civil rights activism.

Indeed since the time of its production, the Beitler photograph has been harnessed to a remarkably wide variety of purposes, each of which Smith methodically catalogues throughout her essay: as a way to educate youth about the history of lynching in American and French textbooks, as raw material for contemporary artists trying to probe racial inheritance, as cover art for one of Public Enemy's rap albums, as support for anti-abortion propaganda, and most recently, as background display for discussion of the Senate's Anti-Lynching Apology Resolution (televised on C-SPAN in 2005). The sheer diversity of this list, Smith argues, shows that "lynching photographs deliver neither univocal nor fixed evidence. Photographs as *evidence* are never enough, for photographic *meaning* is always shaped by context and circulation, and determined by viewers." With this argument, Smith joins and contributes to the current trend in photography scholarship that finds meaning not in the image itself, but as she puts it, in the "context and circulation." This is a long way from Walter Benjamin's discussion of the "optical unconscious" or Roland Barthes's famously coined *punctum*. Smith staunchly avoids the idea that the Beitler image possesses an inherent power. Instead, she takes the more difficult route of embracing its malleability as proof of the instability of photographic evidence. Photographs may proclaim "that has been," she suggests, but this does not settle the meaning of "that." Surprisingly, and perhaps even bravely, this essay champions photography's failures. Her sparse tone largely avoids the lure of moralism and she offers no enigmatic theoretical interventions. The proof, as the saying goes, is in the pudding. The winds to which Beitler's image can be blown prove that photography utterly fails to secure the meaning of the events it records.

The second essay in *Lynching Photographs*, by Dora Apel, takes off from this starting point but slows down the circulation to dwell on the affective dynamics of each context. The essay is an example of what Patricia Clough calls "the affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences. Like the other turns that have shaken up academic fields in recent decades—the linguistic turn, the cultural turn—the affective turn leans upon earlier theoretical formulations of the body and emotion. Apel's particular question is how the varying uses of lynching photographs affected the audience's response to the image, or as she puts it: "How, as an effect of that widening circulation, did images that initially evoked white pride, affirmation, and entitlement come to elicit outrage instead, and even guilt and shame, polar opposites of the emotions of the supremacists?" To answer, Apel tracks five key lynching cases that exhibit the characteristic shift from pride to outrage: Jesse Washington, lynched in Waco, Texas, in 1916; George Hughes in Sherman, Texas, in 1930; Rubin Stacey in Fort Lauderdale in 1935; the aforementioned Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion in 1930; and Emmett Till, who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955. Apel, like Smith, does not spare the reader any of the horrific details. This is difficult knowledge to bear, and on more than one occasion this reader found herself wishing she had not taken this path past the place of execution.

To explore the affective dynamics of these aesthetic encounters, Apel relies on a few key sources, the first of which is British art historian John Taylor. In his book *Body Horror*, Taylor suggests there are two possible reactions to public pictures of violence: guilt and shame. In his view, guilt is inward focused and therefore socially unproductive, but shame has the potential to raise questions and encourage some form of moral confrontation. While Apel reaches to the sociological literature for confirmation of Taylor's position, she quickly dismisses psychoanalytic explorations of the subject. By choosing her alliances in this way (and alienating others), Apel implicitly regards emotion as a cultural practice rather than a psychological state. Emotion comes from the outside, so to speak, rather than from the inside. There is recent literature that could support such a view (Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* comes to mind), but Apel herself gets caught on this choice during her formal analysis of the photographs. Discussing the picture of the lynching of Rubin Stacey from 1935, for example, Apel spends much time trying to imagine her way into the psyche of the three young girls who can be seen surrounding the corpse. "It is possible," she writes, "that all of these girls, from the one at the right who scowls vengefully to the one on the left who just tilts her head in a carefully restrained glance, 'look' but do not 'see.' It may be reasonable that this doctrinarian into 'looking but not seeing' began at the lynching site as a way of normalizing and domesticating the terror, producing a numbing emotional effect." Apel imagines what the girls are feeling and then speculates about whether these feelings are subject to the mechanism of denial. The problem is that we can never know what these young witnesses felt. We may attempt to imagine their feelings based on the photographic record of their expressions, but as Charles Darwin pointed out long ago, the expression of emotion does not necessarily tell us about the internal feeling. Or to return to Shawn Michelle Smith's argument from the previous essay: photographic evidence is never enough; meaning is always shaped by context and circulation—and determined by viewers.

Apel describes the girls as "looking but not seeing," which I took to mean "looking without knowing." The girls' vision is not the problem; it is their seeming incapacity to display a moral understanding of what it is they perceive. "Looking without knowing," it should be pointed out, was one of Sigmund Freud's earliest descriptions of our capacity to warp the significance of a perception. He first investigated the phenomenon in *Studies on Hysteria*, published in 1895, although he continued revising the notion up until the time of his death in 1939. In that early book Freud even describes his own experience with the condition, what he names in a rare moment of lyricism "the blindness of the seeing eye." His pioneering work on group psychology, moreover, opened an important route for thinking about the emotional dynamics of a crowd—a subject that clearly preoccupies Apel. Freud's writings might be particularly significant here because they coincide with the period under scrutiny in *Lynching Photographs*. There is much, in other words, that could have been plumbed from the psychoanalytic literature that is dismissed so quickly at the outset.

The essay's most conspicuous misstep, however, is its positioning of shame as guilt's nobler sibling. As I mentioned, this setup comes from John Taylor (who himself takes it from the political theorist John Keane). Sources aside, by ranking these two complex emotional states in this way, Apel loses some of the nuance of both. Guilt is reduced to a nagging sense of culpability that is "self-regarding" and socially "unproductive." Shame, meanwhile, is elevated into a beneficial "moral confrontation" that can potentially lead to "political intervention." Shame is widely acknowledged as one of the base emotions that regulate our sense of what is and what is not appropriate behaviour. Because it is tied to exposure, shame always involves the gaze of another (even if this is only an imagined gaze of an imagined other). People feel shame when they fail themselves or fail to live up to the cultural mores of the group. Here it might be worthwhile to recall Leontius's encounter with the bodies outside of Athens. Shame is produced in this instance by the clash of desires. Leontius is ashamed because part of himself regards his appetite for the gruesome sight as improper. Guilt, in contrast, arises when one feels they have harmed others (in reality or phantasy). People feel guilty when they violate other people. Shame may be more significant to Apel's study because of her focus on photography—a form that intrinsically involves the gaze of another—but this is not reason to disavow guilt as "self-regarding" or "unproductive." There are many scholars (Melanie Klein most notably) who regard guilt as a necessary emotional state for the possibility of meaningful reparation.

Despite this misstep, one sympathizes with Apel's project. In part, she is trying to define the moment in which a community's sense of shame was transformed into a shaming project, that is, the moment in which shame became a transitive verb. At some point in the last century, the idea of public shaming became a useful political tactic, a means to expose corruption. In the American context, lynching photographs might have a central part to play in this transition. As Apel rightly points out, one of the most significant of such moments was Mamie Till's refusal to hide the horror and grief of her son's murder. Indeed, the image of Emmett Till's dreadfully disfigured body laying in an open casket in Chicago in 1955 might be one of *the* moments in which shame gathered its potency as a political project. With the circulation of that single photograph, shame seemed to cross the boundary to become part of the polis. The emotion was harnessed as a powerful collective force that could command public contrition.

Although she never mentions it, Apel's discussion of public shaming reminded me of that quiet moment from *To Kill A Mockingbird* when Scout unknowingly breaks up a lynch mob. All the girl does is call out to one of the mob's members, Mr. Cunningham, whom she recognizes. Her polite inquires about the man's son cut through the mob's collective furor, defusing its force by rendering its members back into individuals. No doubt the scene turns on the dynamics of shame, but not because Scout sets out to humiliate Mr. Cunningham.

People without shame are merciless. This is what makes the jovial crowds so difficult to bear in lynching photographs. Gazing upon these blurry faces, one brushes up against the limit of what is bearable to think about. But the political project of shaming is not necessarily free of cruelty. As Martha Naussbaum has forcefully argued in *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law*, bringing shame into line with the force of law can bring more killing in its wake. Appealing to emotion is often a way people attempt to skirt more reasonable thinking, indeed, a way to disavow thought itself. Shame, in other words, offers no ethical guarantees. The shift Apel describes, moreover, is clearly not a permanent evolution in American politics, as the recent Abu Ghraib prison photographs make clear. Emotions are fleeting things. Nevertheless, Apel sees much hope in the work of public shaming. Her argument might be summed up with one of Burke's memorable lines: "While shame keeps watch virtue is not wholly extinguished from the heart." Socrates left room to disagree about shame—especially as an action of the polis. But whichever side one takes, no doubt much can be gained from contemplating the things of which we are most ashamed.

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