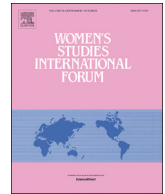




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Book review

Listening to images, T.M. Camp. Duke University Press (2017). 152 pp., (ISBN: 9780822362708)

How could one construct a radical visual archive of the African Diaspora that includes identification photography produced under violent subjugation with the purpose of categorizing, capturing, degrading, and surveilling black subjects? Through what modalities of perception, encounter, and engagement might one constitute such an archive? These are two of the main questions raised in Tina Camp's powerful book *Listening to Images*. Camp aims to rethink and open up foundational approaches to diaspora studies by proposing the method of *listening* to images, as an addition to the regular *looking* at images through a radical engagement with the genre of identification photography.

Camp analyses the capacity of identification photography to hold and transmit instances of refusal, fugitivity, and futurity in the black diaspora. Building on Paul Gilroy's proposition that sound and music can be a crucial modality of "a politics of transfiguration" (p6), she claims that sound does not have to be heard in order to be perceived. Camp argues, "sound can be listened to, and, in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt; it both touches and moves people. In this way, sound must therefore be theorized and understood as a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact" (p6). This requires an understanding of sound that puts emphasis on how frequency is constituted primarily by vibration and contact. By opening up the dominant understanding of listening as one that is reduced to that what we hear, Camp registers the lower frequencies of the images as "felt sound" (p7). She focuses on archives of identification photography - archives not produced at the desire of their subjects but that are required of, or imposed upon them, by empire, science, or state (p 5) - and explores throughout the book the relationship between the quiet, the quotidian and the everyday practices of refusal enacted and inherited by disposed subjects (p 4).

This book is not structured in a traditional, linear way. Instead, the concise volume offers chapters as four linked essays, connected with each other because they all challenge and contest the limits of contemporary discourses of resistance. Together, they form a powerful engagement with the discourse of fugitivity in African Diaspora studies and black feminist theory, all refusing the terms of negation and dispossession by enacting a practice of listening to quiet photography. The first chapter engages with passport photos and how, when listening closely, they refuse their presumed capture of being mute supplicants of governmentality. The third chapter movingly dives into convict photographs (mugshots) and demonstrates how "not a single face is docile" (p91), refusing the silence that is imposed upon them. By analyzing all the accompanying lists, tables, and ledgers (which included information on crime, trial history, religion, race, etc.) that were an attempt to categorize the subjects, Camp argues how the photos render them as fleshy individuals with presence and affect.

All chapters are compelling and interesting in their own way; however, I wish to highlight the second chapter in particular- "*Striking*

Poses in a Tense Grammar: Stasis and the Frequency of Black Refusal". In this chapter, Camp provides a powerful counter analysis of the notion of stasis. Instead of regarding stasis as an absence or a cessation of motion, she refers to stasis as "tensions produced by holding a complex set of forces in suspension" (p51), and as an "invisible motion held in tense suspension or temporary equilibrium; e.g., vibration" (p51). This chapter engages with late nineteenth-century ethnographic photos of rural African women in the Eastern Cape and early twentieth-century studio portraits of African Christians in the urban centers of South Africa. These ethnographic and studio are analyzed to focus on the complex set of tensions of the colonized women depicted - that defy the dualism between subjection and agency. By focusing on the muscular forms of stasis in both archives, listening to the stasis in the images brings to light "minuscule or even futile attempts to exploit extremely limited possibilities for self-expression and futurity" (p59).

This chapter juxtaposes two interesting archives in which Christian evangelism in Southern Africa plays a key role. The first collection, The Mariannahill photographs, depicts five black Zulu women who stand in front of the camera. These are photos created within the "religious economy" between Europe and Africa, missionaries and ethnographers, Christianity and colonization (55). However, Camp's theorizing of stasis and her method of listening to the depictions, illuminate an "effortful balancing of compulsion, constraint, and refusal that vibrates invisibly yet resoundingly" (57-58). Analyzed next to the studio portraits taken some decades later, a related tension comes up. These images embody the results of missionary conversion and education in which the women in the Mariannahill collection were engaged. It captures a refusal to capitulate -being made invisible and given the status of an outsider. The strategic choice of listening to these two archives together, movingly refuses the acceptance of impossibility of blackness living in dignity and with respect.

Camp engages with the different archives on both a personal, affective and academic account in a way to rethink the binary between agency and subjection and its relation to identification photography. Despite the profound engagement with the different types of archives, Camp could have engaged more with the listening she proposes and the difference and shift in focus it makes to simply looking at the images. However, it is admirable how Camp in a way leaves this open; it justifies the unsayability of the truths she seeks to illuminate, while also leaving room for interpretation and imagination to the reader.

One of the strongest points of the book is the author's personal reflections with the archives analyzed. In the CODA for example, Camp reflects on her own childhood memories and how while conducting this research, she realized how she misremembered an event that shaped much of her own early political consciousness: a photograph of the police arrest of Terrence Johnson in 1977. This powerful and personal ending resonates the same strength of the beginning of the book -detailing the precariousness and vulnerability of black life. Building onto scholars who have intensively engaged with the notion of black futurity such as Paul Gilroy, Alexander Welhiye, Fred Moten and Hortense Spillers, Tina Camp provides a powerful set of methodological and theoretical tools that contributes to the field by proposing a new form of

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engaging with archival practice.

Concluding, Tina Campt succeeds in a very convincing and profound way to turn to the agentive frequencies of identification photography. Scholars working in the field of Cultural Studies, Africana Studies, Art History, Visual Culture and Women's and Gender Studies will consider Campt's archival research, proposed methodology, and

theorizations of a grammar of black feminist futurity, to be evocative and rich.

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