Shamoon Zamir, *The Gift of the Face: Portraiture and Time in Edward S. Curtis's* The North American Indian (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2014), 334 pp.

By the time the first volume of Edward S. Curtis's work on *The North American Indian* was published in 1907, the scholarly discourse on whether photography was a science implemented to support accurate documentation (as, for example, in the field of ethnography) or an art as part of the movement of pictorialism was in full swing. More than twenty years later, Curtis had taken more than 40,000 photographic images of members of over 80 tribes. By 1930, twenty portfolios, thousands of pages of text, and more than 2200 so-called photogravures, of which about 1000 are portraits of human faces, had been published in the twenty volumes of this monumental project. By opening the first volume with the image of "The Vanishing Race—Navaho," Curtis certainly established a theme that runs through his entire work and that has led many critics to rightfully assert that Curtis's project was driven by the intention to preserve a record of Native people frozen in the past. In that vein, and leaving no doubts about his inspiration, Curtis wrote in the introduction to his first volume: "The information that is to be gathered […] respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost." Today, *The North American Indian* and its photographic record have come to be read as a lament on a "vanishing race" that neglects both the indigenous peoples' engagement with modernity and the colonial history of violence that has been part of the U.S.'s Manifest Destiny since the beginning of white settlement.

Against this background, Shamoon Zamir's insightful study *The Gift of the Face: Portraiture and Time in Edward S. Curtis's* The North American Indian approaches Curtis's work from a new angle. In his own words, his "study focuses on what is exceptional rather than typical" in Curtis's oeuvre (3). Zamir does not only take us back to the old controversy of photography being located between science and art, but also offers a fresh perspective on *The North American Indian* by stimulating a different reading of some well-selected photographs from the collection. By focusing on the portraits, a genre that constitutes a comparatively large part of the collection, he also urges us as scholars and students of the history of the representation of American Indians to revise the prevailing view on Curtis's work, which Zamir labels "cultural salvage," by opening up a different way of understanding. Focusing on the agency of Curtis's Native American models/sitters/posers (he uses these terms interchangeably) as part of a process of cross-cultural exchange, instead of conceptualizing them as passive extras and as partaking agents in the act of image-making, *The Gift of the Face* inspires its readers to inquire deeply into the motivation of the Native sitters to actively participate in and collaborate with Curtis and his team.

In his intellectually demanding study, Zamir does not argue in any way against the prevailing view that these often iconic images taken by Edward Curtis are staged. Quite to the contrary, he argues that they are very well-elaborated, staged performances, in which, however, the Native American models knowingly engage as "coauthors of the visual meanings of *The North American Indian*" (3). *The Gift of the Face* offers a close reading in the best sense of a thoroughly contextualized cultural studies approach against the backdrop of the deep cultural crisis that Native Americans were experiencing at the turn of the century, a crisis embodied by the realization that the ultimate end of pre-reservation times has led to a loss of lands, a loss of people, and a loss of parts of the culture. The study argues that the tribes were fully aware of this disastrous outcome, drawing attention to the Native American posers' preoccupation with time in Curtis's photographs, from "faces register[ing] a violence long endured but also an affirmation of their own historicity and subjectivity beyond their defeats" (8) to "faces that occupy time and are occupied by time" (66). To be sure, historicity and subjectivity (in the sense of subjecthood) are usually not considered to have been granted to the Native American people depicted in *The North American Indian*. Thus, the Native Americans posing in these images have to be understood in terms of "what it means to be a witness to such a breakdown, and what it means to survive it, creatively and with a sense of 'radical hope'" (9). The Native American participants' use of Curtis's photography as a performative space in which they reclaim their history by presenting themselves mostly, but not exclusively, in traditional outfits, is considered as a "protest against history" (71). This objection is only possible in this fashion because there is com-

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mon ground between Curtis and his sitters: "it is because Curtis's visual work is sensitive to this protest as it manifests itself in the self-presentation of his sitters that it achieves the art of portraiture" (72).

The focus on the face that provides the title to this study is more clearly explained as follows: "We can only fully grasp what is at stake in the gift of the face, in the ethics of Curtis's image, when we have grasped the workings within the image of a history that threatens to negate the human encounter pictured in the image" (54). In this context, the author reevaluates the potential of Curtis's photographic art as a contribution to "honor the Native American effort to live through the dislocations of culture and time" (9). In doing so, he argues that the display and performance of tradition on the part of Native people was a conscious decision to participate in a project representing cultural survival after all. However, in contrast to Curtis, Zamir perceives of tradition—along with Arnold Krupat—not as being in opposition to modernism, but as "names for different sorts of emphases and possibilities" (21). This close reading requires an approach to Curtis's work as "photo-text," which involves as much a thorough decoding of the images with regard to the motivation, perception, and worldview of the Native Americans portrayed alongside the texts that accompany them as well as, in some cases, a decoding of the images *against* these very texts. In any way, the study encourages us to focus much more intensively than has been done so far on the interaction between image or image group (or image sequence) and text. Most importantly, Zamir insists on analyzing these photographs in detail, including paying meticulous attention to the expressions, body language, and postures of the Native American models as well as the way their clothes are made and to measure these aspects within the framework of their contemporary cultural, historical, psychological, and economic situation. Indeed, as we know from the genres of portrait painting and photography in general, it makes absolute sense to follow Zamir's argument that a full comprehension of the cultural and historical value of *The North American Indian* is only possible, if we conceptualize the indigenous sitters as collaborators and coauthors—that is, if we (also) value Curtis's magnum opus "as a work of Native American autobiography and visual self-representation" (10).

In his convincing attempt at showing that he *does not* consider Curtis's work as ethnographic illustrations of cultural salvage, as is commonly done, but rather as "the product of a particular visual and textual practice" (17) or as "argument-making pictures" (36, 235), Zamir relies on a very small number of very carefully conducted, in-depth case studies. Nowhere does this phenomenon become more apparent than in chapter four, "Against History's Monopoly of Time," the longest and most complex case study of the book, which I will use as a representative example for Zamir's overall approach. Conducting a close reading of the famous photograph "In a Piegan Lodge," in which Curtis prominently erased a metal clock to (allegedly) cover the dynamic nature of Native American adaptation to modernity and thus to simultaneously (seemingly) deny modern Native American history and agency, this chapter revisits the most important and best-known manipulation of all of Curtis's photographic work. In more general terms, the intentionality and agency of the two Piegan Indians to participate in the making of the image, that is their "willingness to be there before Curtis's camera, their willingness to set out the display and to make themselves available as actors within Curtis's photographic *tableau vivant*" (63), already undermine notions of salvage ethnography. But beyond this obvious observation, Zamir's analysis is driven by three main concerns: first, to compare the published version with the original, unpublished negatives; second, not to reduce the reading of the photograph to the removal of the clock alone; third, to interpret the image alongside other photographs of Piegan individuals from the same volume in order to avoid an isolated or decontextualized interpretation.

"In a Piegan Lodge" was published in volume 6 (*The Piegan, the Cheyenne, the Arapaho*, 1911) of *The North American Indian* together with a very similar photograph, "Lodge Interior—Piegan." In both photographs, which were taken only a few minutes apart, the clock was erased by Curtis. Zamir's interpretation of the two images together with the original negatives reveals that the clock is working and thus being used, that it is still in its box, the retention of which can be interpreted as suggesting "that the possession and display of the clock can be read as a declaration of status," and that the way it is displayed by its owner "as a special object among other special ob-

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jects"—such as a pipe, a medicine bundle, and articles for accoutering the horse—thus hint at a "talismanic quality" (59). Even if, or rather because, the pipe and the medicine bundle are potentially ceremonial objects, and because the clock is actually used, Zamir concludes that the two Piegan Indians "appear to signal the ability to inhabit simultaneously culturally different temporalities." Thus, the "lodge exists within or, better, contains within itself, at least two distinct regimes of time, the time of a non-Native modernity and the time of Piegan culture" (60). In other words, read together, these photographs propose that "we see the coexistence of Native and non-Native times not as a parallel juxtaposition but as a dynamic relation"—or what Zamir calls "a hybrid temporality" (62). Certainly, we, as scholars, "need to try and see the image that Little Plume and Yellow Kidney [the two men depicted in "In a Piegan Lodge"] attempted to compose before Curtis's camera, not the image we register at first sight" (64). But, the author additionally claims that this hybrid temporality can be found in modulated form in the published version itself, if we are willing to redirect our attention from the removed clock and towards the industrially manufactured shirt of Yellow Kidney instead. Zamir further suggests including other photographs on the Piegan Indians into our assessment, such as those that portray a neatly constructed log cabin next to a tepee, sitters wearing other commercially produced clothes or a safety pin for the mere purpose of decoration, and people carrying industrially manufactured blankets, in order to acknowledge that the Piegans, the largest Blackfeet-speaking group, seem to have practiced "an active manipulation and appropriation of modernity—a creative transformation and not a resigned or forced accommodation" at the turn of the century (77). It is fascinating to follow this line of argumentation chapter by chapter in order to realize that what could be taken as the motto of the chapter on the Piegan Indians, namely "that the removal of the clock cannot be read in isolation" (82), does metaphorically serve as the methodological guiding principle for the whole book.

As *The Gift of the Face* advocates, it is very obvious that Edward Curtis himself, who is well known for his pedantic mode of operation, must have very consciously decided to keep these traces of modernity in his portrayals of Native Americans. Zamir adapts—or, rather, sort of reverses—the Brechtian term "alienation effect" (88) to name Curtis's method. In this light, safety pins, industrially produced shirts, and manufactured blankets can be considered as strategic devices creating alienation effects that estrange us from our very own conceptions of the Other, respectively the 'alien.' These conceptions are based on "a variety of stereotypes and attitudes that cluster around the notion of the primitive and that tame the challenge of difference by familiarizing the Other within our own categories" (89). Hence, and this is certainly the core of this radically new reading of Curtis's *The North American Indian*, as part of the mentioned alienation effect, "the fleeting signs of modernity" with which the Native American posers are displayed "make the viewer aware that what he or she sees are not Native cultures as they 'are,' but recreations of forms in which they existed until recently." According to Zamir, Curtis has thus mastered the challenge to make his viewers recognize that the men and women they see in their full tribal regalia (with small but visible adaptations to modernity) belong to the same time, the same modernity, are part of the same contemporaneity as they are. It is the shirt, the safety pin, and the clock that make viewers "face the historicity of Native American subjecthood by presenting this subjecthood, in its visual performance, as an apparent contradiction." It simply contradicts—or is in conflict with—the white mainstream audience's prevailing conception of 'Indians.' This reading not only challenges the assessment of Curtis's work as salvage ethnography as it was conducted in many a prominent study on the topic, it also drastically challenges the old assessment of Curtis's photographic work as an ethnographic *record*. To be clear, in Zamir's view it remains a record, after all—but now it is a testament of the collaboration between the photographer and his Native American sitters and, equally, "a record of the effort and act of this re-creation [of the past within the present] as a dimension of the histories of the men and women who are the subjects of Curtis's pictures, a record not of the play but of the effort of performing the play" (91).

It has to be noted that *The Gift of the Face: Portraiture and Time in Edward S. Curtis's* The North American Indian, by so strongly emphasizing the collaborative aspects, at times seems to be deemphasizing the degree to which Curtis's work simultaneously con-

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tributed to perpetuate widely-held ideas of the Vanishing Indian. However, given that this component of Manifest Destiny in *The North American Indian* is all too well known, the revisionist take on Curtis's oeuvre, as is offered here, is immensely important, convincing, insightful, refreshing, and innovative at the same time. The depths and sensitivity with which the author handles the topic is truly intriguing. Although conforming to all the conventions of an academic monograph, this elaborative approach pursued by the author is very much supported by the study being written, as Zamir asserts, "in the spirit of an extended reflective essay" (17), which initially needs some acclimatization by the reader. Once we start to accept this mode of writing, the study inspires us to recognize—maybe for the first time full-scale—the partnership between the (white) photographer and the (Native) posers that is an unequivocal ingredient in the making of any portrait, but more so of portraits of members of so-called 'Other cultures,' even though this partnership might exist within drastically asymmetrical power relations. The book makes a very valuable contribution to the most recent scholarship suggesting that we need to think in more complex ways about the active participation of Native Americans in the process of taking their photographs—and it shows us exactly how to apply this strategy. It is a fascinating reevaluation of the ways (post-)modern scholarship has been reading Edward S. Curtis's *The North American Indian*, a turning point for all of us who firmly believe in the assessment that images do not hold one single fixed meaning. And it is certainly a must for scholars and students in the fields of Visual Cultural Studies, Native American Studies, Anthropology, American History, Art History, and American Studies more generally.

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