

1 The Digital Closet

ALEXANDER MONEA

In this timely book, Alexander Monea explores the notion of the “Digital Closet”: a “new regime of automated content moderation” which targets sexual speech online. It argues that censoring of sex-related topics and images is defended through traditional “family values”, but that mainly “alt-porn” and non-pornographic nude content are suppressed. Mainstream, straight porn still flourishes.

The publication amasses an impressive range of examples of how heteronormativity seeps through the digital world, from US anti-sex work laws and the manosphere’s mobilisation of them, to sexist work environments in Silicon Valley and the very codes of digital infrastructures. YouTube’s Restricted Mode, for example, let a bisexual speak about her boyfriends whilst censoring videos about girlfriends. A sophisticated analysis of the free dataset ImageNet, used globally to train machine vision

algorithms, reveals a set of hugely heteronormative data.

Most of the cases explored are set in the USA. However, because this is where many of the world’s tech giants are based, national internet legislations have major global impact. The book also provides several examples of world-ranging corporate powers, such as how the anti-sex morals of Apple impact all major platforms by gate-keeping 20-25 per cent of the world’s phones. In this way, platform capitalism and global digital imperialism hover around the Digital Closet, although neither a Marxist nor anti-imperialist critique are employed at a deeper level.

Some crucial issues, such as the relationship between “porn” and “overblocked content”, and modes of resistance to the Digital Closet, are yet to be analysed. Still, Monea offers an extensive investigation of how heteronormativity prevails, and shapes what we see online.



Words
Fanny Wendt Höjer

—

mitpress.mit.edu

2 Another Country

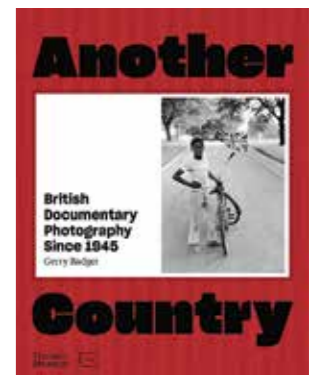
GERRY BADGER

“Documentary photography is dead! Long live documentary photography!” In this lavishly illustrated history, curator and critic Gerry Badger guides the reader through the genre’s continuous reinvention in Britain, from the post-war era up to the pandemic. Through the medium’s many incarnations – blending with fashion, photojournalism and portraiture – there have always been voices in the UK who see documentary as the poor relation to pictorialism, and just as many others who view it as a genre rich in creative potential, yet to be fully realised.

Early on, the author sets himself the slippery task of defining the genre in its entirety, touching on the uneasy relationship that Britain, compared to other European nations or to the USA, has traditionally had with photography, and in particular the idea of recording the world, whilst simultaneously expressing something fundamen-

tal about it. The selection of works, from the unflinching black-and-white observations of Chris Killip (1946-2020) through to the brashly acerbic political photo-collage of Cold War Steve (b.1975), show that documentarists attempt to reflect the world as they see it, but not without visually commenting on their surroundings through concepts, staging or layered narratives. Chapters move forward in time, taking in the work of more than 165 lens-based practitioners including Lee Miller, Vanley Burke, Tom Hunter and Chloe Dewe Matthews.

The title recalls a line from L.P. Hartley’s 1953 novel *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there” and certainly Badger shows documentary as a tool through which to connect with a Britain of the past. However, this tool can also propose new ways of thinking – revealing “another country” entirely.



Words
Rachel Segal Hamilton

—

thamesandhudson.com

3 Design Emergency

ALICE RAWSTHORN & PAOLA ANTONELLI

The authors of *Design Emergency* set their scene at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in 1948. It was there that a group of design students spent a fruitless summer working with their tutor, maverick architect Buckminster Fuller, on a self-supporting emergency shelter-dome. One early prototype was so flimsy they called it “the supine dome.” But by the following year, the design was cracked, and the “geodesic dome” went on to become an icon of 20th century aesthetics and disaster relief efforts.

Just as Fuller’s generation was prompted by the need to build back after WWII, Rawsthorn and Antonelli suggest that we are now in the throes of yet another design emergency. Covid-19 has wrought havoc on our social infrastructure whilst casting into relief a number of ongoing, slow-burn catastrophes, from the climate emergency to the refugee crisis. This text comprises interviews with

dozens of contemporary designers, in fields ranging from space travel to health care, from “architectural acupuncture” to “building with waste.” Preambles on “design in the time of Covid-19” and a transnational “history of design emergencies” frame the debate. Design is not essentially to do with style or ornament, but with the very processes, systems and structures that shape our lives with each other, and with millions of other species.

Amongst the projects surveyed over the proceeding four sections – covering technology, society, communication and ecology – are the plans for the Great Green Wall of Africa, 8,000 kilometres of vegetation stretching a from Senegal to Djibouti. Elsewhere, Vinu Daniel, founder of Indian architecture firm Wallmakers, discusses the convergence of post-colonial and ecological thinking in his building practice using waste materials.



Words
Greg Thomas

—

phaidon.com