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**Nancy Martha West.** *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia.* Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000. xviii + 242 pp. $16.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8139-1958-4.

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In the past twenty years, there has been a surge in published studies on the history of the advertising image. Fueled by Walter Benjamin's, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag's theorization of the photograph, most of these studies concentrate on the implications of various advertising images on the culture. One can also find shelves of studies dedicated to the history of photography as found in literature; from inquiries into Edgar Allan Poe's early portrayals of flash photography to articles about Julio Cortazar's play with the moving image. Nancy Martha West's recently published *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* is unique in that it is about the marketing of photography by Kodak and the desires that company awakened in twentieth-century Americans.

From the 1840s to the 1880s, sorrow and death were regularly photographed and post-mortem photography became extremely popular among Americans. In 1888, Kodak marketed its No.1 camera, with 100 exposures and everything began to change for photography. West points out that this was "probably over ten times as many photographs as the average middle-class American owned at the time"(2). Photography could now rest squarely in the hands of amateurs and middle-class photography now promised to fulfil the American dream of "effortless abundance" (2). West points out that this is exactly the historical moment that Susan Sontag's argument about the image becomes true. Even the most ugly or disturbing of images can be magically transformed into something aesthetically pleasing through photography's ability to arrest the flow of time. West historicizes Sontag's argument: "Before Kodak, however, no system existed to condition such a purely aesthetic and emotional response to photographs" (2).

The study's strength lies in its use of historical artifacts, Kodak's actual advertisements, to draw conclusions about what the role of snapshot photography was and still is in the Modern American home. West contends that Kodak, along with the four other industries of leisure, toys, fashion, and antiques, aims to "provide a special kind of commodity" and all five industries underwent dramatic transformations at the end of the nineteenth century (5). She argues that "each serves to

transform a surface attention to the world-the desire for beauty, pleasure, and innocence-into things or, more precisely in the case of leisure and fashion, into the semiotics of packaged experiences and appearances" (5).

This is the heart of her study: the difference between Kodak and these other industries and Kodak's use of the similar values and desires they were all marketing together. West writes, "While these other industries acknowledge their participation in the construction of fantasy-in the case of leisure, a pleasurable antidote to labor or daily routine; in the case of toys, a nostalgic view of childhood; in the case of fashion, an erotic of novelty; and in the case of antiques, an intimate and innocent past-Kodak advertising presents its idealizations as real" (5).

The study is well organized around Kodak's relationships with these other industries. After a short history of the company, the advertising images' association with each individual industry forms the chapters of the study. The last chapter is an analysis of Kodak and World War I with an emphasis on narrative. This is a book, then, about the relationship between Kodak, its advertising images, America's desire for snapshots and the worlds an average middle-class photographer can create by snapping them him or herself. West claims that the company "commodified memory" by "offering its consumers the means to preserve their memories" (9). This guarantees that traditional modes of remembering the past will be forgotten. She writes, "Kodak taught amateur photographers to apprehend their experiences and memories as objects of nostalgia, for the easy availability of snapshots allowed people for the first time in history to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased" (1).

West does not take a traditional approach to Kodak's images and does not employ individual analyses of its advertising strategies in a war with the American public. Instead, she analyzes Kodak and the images it deployed in its advertising as part of American culture and tries to map the ever-shifting relationship between American culture and the company. This strategy proves useful because it allows the study to branch out into previously unstudied and undeveloped territory.

The most interesting part of West's study is when she writes about the one thing that could not ever form the subject of a Modern photograph: death. But, the repressed must always return, and West shows how mortality and death tinged America's snapshot collections. In a bizarre twist, West includes a Coda to her study, about Kodak's last and unfinished death campaign. She points out that "In this campaign, Kodak acknowledged for one brief moment that we take pictures to ward off death and sorrow -- and that for once death does strike, photos can have a meaningfulness that outweighs and cuts through the usual nostalgia when such documents are taken for granted" (202). One snapshot included the caption "That was the last time Dad was with us" and another: "She died the year after Sally was born, you know" (203).

Kodak's advertising images ended after George Eastman's suicide, and West's study ends on this equally strange and quiet note. ***Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*** is an extremely well researched, innovative study that historicizes the over-theorized field of photography. West grounds her research in close readings of actual advertising images deployed by Kodak and therefore offers an extremely convincing argument about the roles Kodak played in the creation of an American culture of nostalgia. The book provides well-documented insights into America's twentieth-century preoccupations with collections, snapshots, documentation, and memory. It will be of great use to scholars and students of numerous fields including popular and American culture, photography, and Modernism.

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