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Brendan Lanctot

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Brendan Lanctot

THE TIGER AND THE DAGUERRETYPE: EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY LATIN AMERICA

In 1850 Charles DeForest Fredricks took a portrait of the Governor of Corrientes (Argentina) and, by way of payment, received a tiger. The episode, retold in numerous histories of early photography in the Americas, seems at first glance little more than a colourful anecdote set amid a rather dull litany of firsts: the first daguerreotype taken in this or that city, the first portrait studio, the first 'native' photographer, etc. Yet a close reading of the few primary sources about this unlikely encounter suggests that the oft-repeated vignette articulates in condensed form the unique power that photography possessed in mid-nineteenth-century Latin America. In giving a live beast in exchange for an image of himself, the local strongman not only makes a display of his authority, but also realizes a radical, if momentary, indistinction between animal life and social life – a literal enactment of what philosopher Giorgio Agamben identifies as the original activity of sovereign power. In this respect, the story of the tiger and the daguerreotype is representative of how, in the violent transition from colonies to republics in nineteenth-century Latin America, cultural practices were instrumental in making the idea of the modern state discernible.

Keywords: Argentina; visual culture; Latin American cultural studies; Latin American politics; photography

In 1850, during a voyage down the Uruguay River in the company of the botanist Aimé Bonpland, Charles DeForest Fredricks took a daguerreotype of Benjamín Virasoro, the governor of the province of Corrientes. In exchange for his portrait, Virasoro gave the photographer a tiger, which he wished to bring back to his native New York. The animal, however, died shortly after arriving in Buenos Aires.

As a survey of its bibliography reveals, much of the history of early Latin American photography consists of anecdotes repeatedly deployed with little variation or analysis. The curious episode of the photographer, the governor, and the tiger forms part of this repertory and, to my knowledge, first appeared in academic literature in Beaumont Newhall's *The Daguerreotype in America* (1961). Newhall quotes from 'How Fredricks Became a Photographer,' an anonymous profile published in *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* of New York in 1881. This is a reprint of 'Sketch of Charles D. Fredricks,

Esq.’, an article that appeared in *Humphrey’s Journal of Photography and the Allied Arts and Sciences* in 1869.¹ Since Newhall, at least nine subsequent studies have retold the vignette, more or less as I have done above, always referencing Newhall or his source, with one minor but significant variation: they either critique or amend the term used to describe the captive beast.²

On a basic level, the inclusion and repetition of this anecdote is perfectly understandable. Read alongside the seemingly dutiful litanies of firsts – the first exposition of the daguerreotype in this or that city, the advertisement for the first portrait studio, the first ‘native’ photographer, etc. – it stands out as a miniature picaresque narrative, the tale of an unlikely encounter and exchange, epitomizing the sense of wonder produced by early photography, a seemingly non-fiction equivalent to the portrait that Melquíades takes of the Buendía family in *Cien años de soledad* (García Márquez 1967: 67–68).

At the same time, through its uniform retellings, the story reinforces the ‘rhetorical structure’ that Geoffrey Batchen identifies as the conventional way of discussing the invention of photography. As the search for origins has long subordinated ontological inquiries, ‘a theoretically fragile edifice, that identity signalled by the word *photography*, has been erected on a rarely questioned foundation of endlessly repeated historical information’ (Batchen 1997: 24). In the historiography of early Latin American photography, we can specify that the building blocks of this structure are repetition and prolepsis. In aggregate, the anecdotes and references that narrate the diffusion and reception of the daguerreotype in Latin America treat these instances as the crude beginnings of something else, more often than not a national artistic tradition. Thus histories of photography in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Peru take the 1840 ports-of-call of the French vessel *L’Orientale* as an obligatory starting point, recounting the demonstrations of the device brought by the ship’s chaplain Louis Compte (or in the case of Argentina and Peru, a missed encounter). In serving as a foil and point of departure for later, putatively more sophisticated forms of cultural expression, descriptions of its laborious process and the wonder inspired by its non-reproducible, mirror images reinforce a teleological and Eurocentric conception of modernity. Daguerre’s invention functions in this narrative as a discursive figure whose strangeness and novelty effect a split between the itinerant photographers of the metropolitan north and their native subjects – be they landscapes or humans; the camera changes less advanced local cultures that come into contact with it (and never the other way around). In this way, the ‘rhetorical structure’ of photographic history readily girds to the foundational myths that *fin de siglo* elites deployed to justify the consolidation of liberal nation-states throughout the continent, myths in which the decades following independence appear as little more than an interruption or, at best, a slow, fitful start to a path toward order and progress that, in their minds, consisted largely of an influx of European immigrants, ideas, and technology to match the outflow of minerals and agricultural staples.³

Recent scholarship in Latin American cultural studies, however, has begun to dismantle this ‘theoretically fragile edifice’ by demonstrating how photography was a key instrument of state power alongside other new technologies and cultural practices in the late nineteenth century. Collectively, works such as Jens Andermann’s *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (2007), Paola Cortés-Rocca’s *El tiempo de la máquina: retratos, paisajes y otras imágenes de la nación* (2011), Natalia

Brizuela's *Fotografía e Império: paisagens para um Brasil moderno* (2012), and Beatriz González-Stephan's 'Cuerpos in/a-propiados: carte-de-visite y las nuevas ciudadanía en la pardocracia venezolana postindependentista' (2013) show the multiple ways in which photography was at the centre of efforts to classify, discipline, and (in)form national subjects, map the national territory, chart the advance of material and technological progress, and generally facilitate the expansion of state power. Consequently, the camera may have been an imported artefact of a foreign modernity that was adopted unevenly in Latin America, but it acquired new uses and meanings as it became integrated into this particular context. Thus, as Paola Cortés-Rocca astutely notes, photography does not merely represent or illustrate nation-building after the fact, but rather is constitutive of it, while registering the contradictions and interruptions of this process, too:

if visual technology occupies centre stage, it is not so much due to its capacity to visualize sovereignty, but precisely because it signals the time in which sovereignty is constructed through news forms of knowledge, classification, and domination over that which exists, that is, new forms of visibility. This is not, of course, a homogenous and seamless process. The nation as origin and as means of accumulating capital and territory, as a foundation and tool for the constitution of subjectivities that mark the limits of citizenship, as an imagined community or as a collective narrative is elaborated through progress and its reversals, through discursive levels of different temporalities and registers, through laws, images, and stories that are dispersed in multiple directions. (14)

Seen in this way, photography reveals the epistemic and physical violence that nation-states enacted at the close of the century to impose and naturalize a particular socio-political order. For example, by documenting the *Conquista del Desierto* (1878–1885), Antonio Pozzo's photographs inscribe the Argentine government's military campaign against the indigenous populations of the pampa within a 'paradoxical temporality of a past perpetually deferred' and thereby justify the advance of the national army over a supposedly empty expanse of territory (Andermann 2007: 188).⁴ In other words, photography does not simply accompany the monopolization of violence, it stages and disseminates a historical framework that produces the illusion of its transcendent necessity. Collectively these scholarly inquiries recover a vast visual archive that forces us to reconsider whether what Ángel Rama coined the 'lettered city' remained hegemonic throughout the nineteenth century or whether it was already fast becoming a (photo)graphic city in which various discursive practices mutually influenced one another. After all, the Franco-Brazilian inventor Hercule Florence as early as 1833 used the neologism *photographie* ('writing with light') to describe efforts to copy transcriptions of birdsongs, a process which he regarded as 'a way of printing images that emerged from his disenchantment with the observation of nature, and from the desire to register and describe their sounds' (Brizuela 2012: 75). As its very name implies, photography stands at the nexus of art and science, writing and picture, and connotes a procedure whose ultimate authorship is uncertain. It follows that if focusing on photography provides a more nuanced vision of the relationship between culture and politics in the nineteenth century, it does so by destabilizing the notion of *letrados*' exceptional agency that is at the core of longstanding myths of nation-building.

Thus, on the one hand, early photography facilitated the ‘primitive accumulation’ of capital, territory, and subjects, but, on the other, its ontological ambivalence points to how its effects exceeded its intended uses.⁵ Criticizing reductive applications of Foucault’s work, John Tagg insists that ‘disciplinary technologies, even in the forms in which they were incorporated into specific State apparatuses, remained irreducible to the workings of a centralized State machinery, let alone to an internal logic of the State’ (Tagg 2009: 21). In a broader sense – for, of course, photography is never just a disciplinary apparatus – Tagg’s assertion reminds us that the political cannot be reduced to what Jacques Rancière refers to as ‘policing’: ‘an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise’ (Rancière 1999: 29). Whereas policing emphasizes the administration of stable, pre-existing subject positions, true politics is for Rancière the disruption of a constituted order, a ‘removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted’ (36). Much as Florence’s earliest photographic experiments were intended to codify and transmit the sounds of animals, reproducing a new form of writing that sought to translate noise into language, ‘[p]olitical activity [...] makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard discourse where once there was only place for noise’ (30). In other words, while we must not understate the importance of photography as an instrument of power, it also captures the essential contingency of the ‘internal logic of the State’. Specifically in regard to nineteenth-century Latin America, I contend that photography exposes anew the basic dispute of politics in the turbulent period of transition between colonies and liberal republics, when new models for social organization were being violently contested, inasmuch as it suspends the distinction between nature and culture.⁶

As part of a larger inquiry into the role of various cultural forms in nineteenth-century Latin American politics, the present intervention engages in a close reading of the anecdote of the tiger and the daguerreotype to demonstrate how the discourse of early photography sheds a unique light on the struggle to define sovereignty that preceded and informed the relation between visibility and power announced in the titles of the aforementioned studies: the optic of the state, images of the nation, photography and empire. As Edgar Allan Poe remarked about the daguerreotype in 1840, ‘the consequences of any new scientific invention will, at the present day exceed, by very much, the wildest expectations of the most imaginative’ (38); in this same spirit, this essay is less concerned with how local elites used or proposed using photography to realize specific nation-building projects, than with how they and other subjects became implicated in processes that made the modern notions of the State and sovereignty discernible in the first place. During an era of great debate over the socio-political order that was to follow independence from Spain, ‘natural magic’ (as English inventor Henry Fox Talbot referred to his photogenic drawings) involved those that used it within ‘a unique moment, in the sense of a coupling of forces . . . [a] moment of the State [that] is capture, bond, knot, *nexum*, magical capture’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 460). ‘Magical capture’, then, refers to an operation by which a subject is bound to an abstract order as a constituent but interchangeable part. This is state power in an abstract sense; it is not intrinsic to a particular state. So, to suggest that early photography in Latin America functioned as an apparatus of magical capture is not to say that it solely offered a new mode of representation for making visible positive

attributes of individual subjects or imagined communities. Moreover, as Tagg points out, the State is not ‘a homogenous field of power relations saturating the territory of sociality,’ but a form ‘in constant interaction, internally and externally, with nomadic societies, non-state Societies, autonomous urban societies, and worldwide machines or ecumenical organizations’ (Tagg 2009: 36). In the case of Latin America, the nation-state did not arise *ex nihilo* or through a simple act of will, but negotiated and competed with indigenous cultures, vestiges of monarchical power, the Catholic church, regional caudillos, and the designs of the industrializing empires of the North Atlantic.

The standard, condensed version of the encounter between Charles DeForest Fredricks and the Governor Benjamín Virasoro might simply tell the story of a mid-century caudillo who sits for a portrait – a sign of his social position – and gives away a ‘tiger’, a savage beast, as a second display of power. Or it could just as easily be read according to the familiar script of civilization and barbarism, as it depicts an uneasy conjugation of scientific knowledge (or, alternately, entrepreneurial pluck) and brute force. Ultimately, either interpretation is plausible. Yet it is important to remember that here we are atop that ‘rarely questioned foundation of endlessly repeated historical information’ (Batchen 1997: 24), dealing with a single primary source and its retelling. In *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (2011), her study about another nineteenth-century frontier, Nicole Guidotti-Hernández reads repetitive accounts of violence – and their omissions – as ‘fragments of the very things selective memory bans from individual and national consciousness, the historical traces that are clearly there but not allowed to be heard, seen, or experienced’ (5). In a similar fashion, by rereading the episode from the ‘Sketch of Charles D. Fredricks, Esq.’ alongside other writings about early photography, my intention is not to verify or reconstruct an event that might have taken place in 1850, but to examine how, in its multiple iterations, the brief narrative both stages and conceals the constitutive exchanges of an emerging postcolonial order. Given the ontological ambivalence of photography, in swapping a wild animal in exchange for an image of himself, Virasoro effects a radical, if momentary, indistinction between the bare life of the animal and the social life of which he is a representative figure – a literal enactment of what Giorgio Agamben identifies as the original activity of sovereign power (Agamben 1998: 6). However, the scene locates the exchange within the broader context of coloniality: in the presence of none other than Humboldt’s erstwhile companion Bonpland, in a ‘contact zone’ far from the metropolitan centres of power, it constitutes an allegory of the complex relations among the natural world, scientific discovery, and aesthetics on the one hand, and, on the other, among subaltern subjects, local Latin American elites, and foreigners.⁷

Photography, as part of an emerging visual regime, inspired a paradoxical combination of desire and restraint. As memorably depicted in Théodore Maurisset’s 1840 lithograph, its public debut sparked *la daguerreotypomanie*, as urban masses eagerly sought to take, sit for, and view photographs. Yet, at the same time, photography required varying degrees of immobility and social control of its users, its subjects, and its audiences.⁸ Thus, if the study of early photography demands that we ‘account not just for the unconscious or conscious actions of one or two gifted individuals but for the yearnings of an entire social body’ (Batchen 1997: 53), it is no less imperative that we consider the limits of that indefinite collective subject and whether its invention and that of photography were mutually dependent.

Scrutinizing the place that Latin America occupies in the photographic discourse of the mid-nineteenth century underscores the particular geospatial imaginary upon which the yearnings of ‘an entire social body’ depended. Daugerre emphasized in a broadside published in late 1838 that, given the lengthy exposure times required to produce images by means of the process he and Niepce pioneered, ‘[t]he imprint of nature would reproduce itself still more rapidly in countries where the light is more intense than in Paris, as Spain, Italy, Africa, etc., etc.’ (Daugerre 1980: 12). As Natalia Brizuela observes, this and other early announcements lumped together locales far from the northern metropolises. From this perspective, ‘the ‘south,’ that region with an excess of sun, is not just the perfect place for producing photographs, but is also analogous to them’, because these peripheral regions offer ‘the promise of better material conditions – that is, more light – and more abundant agents – since it is a means for *nature to make an impression of itself*’ (Brizuela 2012: 100). The operative fiction is that, on the frontiers of imperialist expansion, nature passively presents itself via photography prior to and in spite of the presence of local subjects. The camera becomes an apparatus that renders process and product indistinguishable by diminishing human agency on both sides of the lens. Through this pathetic fallacy, it is as if the ‘south’ wishes to be photographed more than other regions. Framing, capturing and fixing images is thus not only more efficient in the torrid zones, but also more ‘natural’ in the sense that the knowledge and technique of the individual photographer permits a purely reflexive action to take place. Spain, Italy, Africa, etc., etc. have long been writing themselves with light; the camera merely captures this projected desire.

Though Daguerre does not identify Latin America directly, other contemporary texts make the connection explicit. An article published November 30, 1839 in the *New York Observer* enthusiastically announces the arrival of his agent François Gourraud in Gotham, but warns that his stay is to be brief, because he ‘is on his way to the Havana for the purpose of transmitting to Paris, photographic views of the scenery of that part of the world’ (qtd. in Newhall 1968: 26). The note implies a strong demand for such images from crowds that have beset ‘the shop-windows in Paris, in which the photographic pictures are exhibited’ to the point that ‘the streets are impassable in their vicinity’ (26). The locus of desire shifts from the object itself to the curious urban masses, and the photographer figures again as a mere intermediary, satisfying a pre-existing demand. The public desires to see what it has yet to see. This paradox is echoed in a letter written by a nameless German scientist, published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in December 1838 and subsequently reprinted in several English newspapers. Upon reading Arago’s announcement of Daguerre’s ‘machine’, its author confesses that he ‘felt something like the enviers of Columbus, when he made the egg stand on its end. I thought – ‘you might have made the discovery yourself long ago, if – you had happened to think of it’ (Anonymous 1839: 114). In likening the invention of photography to the discovery of the New World, via the apocryphal legend about Columbus, the scientist employs the analogy Brizuela identifies as common to early writings on photography: in his words, photography *is* America; it is a collectively desired object that lay hidden in plain sight and whose existence is, at least in retrospect, obvious.

To recapitulate the preceding paragraphs, Latin America appears in writings surrounding the debut of photography as an ideal site to take pictures due to its

abundant sun and, hence, a place where human agency in the production of images is supposedly diminished. In this way it acquires a kind of agency of its own, and in making itself visible it satisfies the desire to take and see photographs; process and product are rendered indistinguishable. As an assemblage of discourses and practices, a photograph is an index of a desire between bodies, social and otherwise, but in registering this affect it also reproduces the worldview that frames it. In this respect, the daguerreotype becomes a literal manifestation of coloniality, which Aníbal Quijano defines as a 'Eurocentric perspective of knowledge [that] *operates as a mirror that distorts what it reflects*' (Quijano 2000: 556, italics mine). My intention here is not to adopt a decolonial perspective and look beyond 'the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily distorted' (574), but to scrutinize the particular distortions on that polished mirror surface which helped imagine and distribute social bodies through the capture of various affective intensities.⁹ Yes, to sit for a daguerreotype involved striking and holding a pose. Yet beyond the disciplining of bodies through self-control, the photograph also engendered positions and impositions that located its subjects within a global social order.

Within this framework, let us take a closer look at the meeting between Charles DeForest Fredricks and Benjamín Virasoro. As recounted above, histories of photography offer variations of the anecdote in which the itinerant daguerreotypist receives a tiger in exchange for a portrait of the governor, and it dies shortly after reaching the Argentine capital. A beast for a photograph: far from the metropolis, the camera functions in a primitive gift economy. Yet the sole primary source referenced by these reiterations indicates that the terms of exchange are in fact more complex:

At the village of San Borja he [Fredricks] met the naturalist and companion of Humboldt, Bonpland, and embarked with him on a small boat, with a view of descending the river to Montevideo and Buenos Ayres. On the voyage, Bonpland paid a visit to the Governors of Corrientes and Entre Ríos, the former of whom desired Mr. Fredricks to take his Daguerreotype, and asked Bonpland what remuneration was proper. Bonpland replied that none was required, it being a matter of compliment to the Governor. He was not to be put off in this manner, however; and as the boat was about leaving the shore, several Indians appeared, leading a large tiger, which they chained securely in the forward part of the boat, saying: 'A PRESENT from the Governor to the young American!' This tiger proved to be an 'elephant' of prodigious size, and was a source of terror to the more timid. Bonpland was considerably disgusted and alarmed, but there was no way, in courtesy to the Governor, of refusing the gift, so they were compelled to take the novel traveling companion along. He afterward became a great pet of his master, who spent several hundred dollars on him, with the intention of bringing him to New York. Tiger, however, died in Buenos Ayres, notwithstanding the healing properties of an entire box of 'Brandreth's Pills,' which was administered! (Anonymous 1869: 431)

A scan of this fuller account reveals a larger cast of characters than the version that appears in the histories of early photography. First, the septuagenarian botanist Bonpland, long a resident of the littoral, functions as an intermediary between the daguerreotypist and the governor of Corrientes.¹⁰ Secondly, a group of Indians –

entirely omitted from the standard retelling – are the ones that physically carry out the transfer (and presumably captured the tiger in the first place). Third, the photographer and his companions meet not only Virasoro, but also General Justo José de Urquiza, the powerful caudillo of Entre Ríos who effectively installed his ally Virasoro as governor of the neighbouring province following the Battle of Vences in 1847. Two years later Urquiza would lead the military force that brought an end to Juan Manuel de Rosas's lengthy tenure as leader of the Argentine Confederation (1829–1852).

This mention, of what would be an unlikely reunion of the two governors precisely as the revolt against Rosas was beginning, suggests the vignette conflates, embellishes, or fabricates a series of events. This suspicion is heightened if we consult the diary that Bonpland kept during his downriver voyage with Fredricks. He never mentions meeting Benjamín Virasoro in person, though the governor's name appears in an addendum listing those with whom he corresponded during the journey (Bonpland and Lourteig, 1978: 131). However, the botanist does recall meeting Benjamín's brothers Pedro and José Antonio on the 3rd and 14th of June 1850, respectively, and it is in the company of the former that he simply and cryptically notes '[I] saw two very gentle tigers' (81). Several times during the remainder of the journey, Bonpland mentions a tiger travelling downriver with them. At first, on July 6th he refers to 'our gentle tiger' (83) – not quite 'a source of terror to the more timid', but a tiger still – though before he and Fredricks part ways in Montevideo, he comes to call the animal 'Mr fredrich's [sic] tiger' (97) and 'his tiger' (99). Bonpland also provides a brief account of his stay at Urquiza's residence at San José, Entre Ríos, which took place on July 13 and 14, roughly a month after coming into the possession of a tiger (90). At no point during these two short entries from Urquiza's residence does he mention Fredricks, though according to various sources the New Yorker and his partners Saturnino Masoni and George Penabert returned to San José in December of the same year and took a portrait of Urquiza, which provided the model for a lithograph that was printed in Paris prior to the Battle of Caseros and widely distributed soon after the regime change.¹¹ So, strangely, Bonpland's journal confirms the veracity of what seemed – to this reader, at least – the most unlikely part of the tale, the tiger itself, yet it gives no information as to how Fredricks acquired said tiger. What the botanist's travelogue suggests, in fact, is that the exchange itself is fictitious. As I said above, my point here is not to reconstruct an event or determine if it took place or not, but rather to call attention to the utter lack of scepticism accompanying the unchanging anecdote based on a single account, which appeared in print nearly two decades after the encounter between Fredricks and Virasoro allegedly took place.

The sole point of contention that histories of early Latin American photography have with their common source is not historical but taxonomical, and this apparent quibble underscores the larger, allegorical significance of the tale. Newhall, who seems to have rediscovered the text, is the only author to maintain without comment the word used in the original, saying '[t]he Governor of Corrientes pressed upon Fredricks a live tiger in exchange for a daguerreotype portrait' (Newhall 1968: 73). By contrast, James Levine in *Images of History* paraphrases Newhall – '[t]he governor of Corrientes gave him a live puma in exchange for a daguerreotype portrait' (Levine 1989: 16) – but corrects him in his footnote, commenting 'Newhall says the animal was a "tiger," but unless it had been imported from abroad it was probably a puma or jaguar' (188); Miguel Ángel Cuarterolo, in an article translated into English and published in the

Daguerreian Annual, states ‘Fredricks took his daguerreotype portrait, and Virasoro gave him a wild puma in return’ (Cuarterolo 2004: 300) and in an earlier article says ‘[t]he Governor of the Argentine province of Corrientes, Benjamin Virasoro, gave Fredricks and his partners a wild puma in return for a daguerreotype’ (Cuarterolo 1988: 34); in Vicente Gesualdo’s account, ‘[e]l gobernador de Corrientes, Virasoro, hacia 1850, le entregó un yaguareté vivo en pago de un daguerrotipo’ (Gesualdo 1983: 18); and Karp Vasquez tells how ‘[o] gobernador de Corrientes (Argentina) pagou seu retrato em daguerreotipia a Fredricks com uma onça viva’ (Karp Vasquez 2003: 32), though adds in footnote that it was ‘tiger’, no original. Contudo, como os tigres são asiáticos, deve ter sido uma onça mesmo, ou algum outro tipo de felino sul-americano’ (33). Thus, with the lone exception of Newhall, every contemporary retelling of the anecdote either omits the word ‘tiger’ and offers a supposedly more scientifically correct one in its place, or reminds the reader – often in a footnote – that the animal is not ‘really’ a tiger. In either case, the effect is the same, for the amendment treats the textual source – and language, more generally – as a mere intermediary between the writing of history and the events it supposedly represents. By passing on the word that in all likelihood would be used in the nineteenth century, the rhetorical manoeuvre lets a tiger’s tale pass for history.

The gesture is doubly ironic because it presumes a position of superiority akin to the one that led wild cats in South America to be called ‘tigers’ in the first place and, in doing so, overlooks the associations with political power that the term possessed in nineteenth-century Latin American cultural discourse. As we have already seen in Bonpland’s diary, *tigre* was in all likelihood the word used in any exchange between Virasoro and Fredricks, who spoke Spanish fluently. Moreover, much like ‘Columbus’s egg’, the term ‘tiger’ evokes the European imaginary that explorers, travellers, merchants, scientists, etc. historically imposed on the American landscape, its flora and fauna, and its inhabitants. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento refers to this custom in *Facundo* (1845) (Sarmiento 1977) to illustrate the folly of trying using ‘palabras del diccionario civil’ – or the vocabulary of modern political systems – to account for the rise of caudillo power in post-revolutionary Argentina. To do so, he argues, distorts historical understanding, ‘de la misma manera que los españoles, al desembarcar en América, daban un nombre europeo conocido a un animal nuevo que encontraban, saludando con el terrible de león, que trae al espíritu la idea de la magnanimidad y fuerza del rey de las bestias, al miserable gato, llamado puma, que huye a la vista de los perros, y tigre, al jaguar de nuestros bosques’ (61) (‘in the same way . . . the Spaniards, upon disembarking in America, would give a known European name to an animal they encountered, greeting the miserable cat called puma, which flees at the first sight of dogs, with the terrible name ‘lion’, which brings to mind the idea of magnanimity and force of the king of beasts, and tiger, to the jaguar of our woods’). At first glance, the terms of the analogy may seem stable: Sarmiento’s contemporary observers use ill-suited, imported terms to describe political instability in post-Independence Latin America, much as the conquistadores did with the natural world centuries before. Yet in the case of the latter, misnaming is an expression of power, whereas in the former it is a sign of impotence and ignorance. Moreover, Sarmiento makes clear that names evoke as much as they denote; ‘león’, for example, brings to mind moral and physical qualities associated with the kings of men and kings of beasts alike. In critiquing the use of words that ‘disguise and hide, creating erroneous ideas’ (61), the terms of his

analogy break down, signalling that what is ultimately at stake is not the precision or correctness of names, but rather the unique combination of magnanimity and force, of humanity and brute strength, required to make those names stick. He is, in other words, taking about sovereignty when he is talking about lions and tigers.

The link between naming and sovereign power becomes clear in the fifth chapter of *Facundo*, which begins with a chilling anecdote about the nickname of its subject, the caudillo Juan Facundo Quiroga (1788–1835) of La Rioja province. For Sarmiento, Facundo was the prototype of the provincial strongman that dominated the post-revolutionary period. Murdered in 1835, a decade before the publication of the eponymous book, Facundo dominated the Argentine interior through a combination of brutality and charisma, which rulers from Rosas to Carlos Saúl Menem have conspicuously emulated and echoed ever since. Stalked by a man-eating tiger, the young Facundo takes refuge high in the branches of a tree until his friends rescue him and let him stab the beast repeatedly until it dies. After revealing Facundo as the narrator of his own story, Sarmiento adds ‘a él le llamaron *Tigre de los Llanos*, y no le sentaba mal esta denominación, a fe. La frenología y la anatomía comparada han demostrado, en efecto, las relaciones que existen en las formas exteriores y las disposiciones morales, entre la fisonomía del hombre y de algunos animales, a quienes se asemeja en su carácter’ (80) (‘they called him *Tiger of the Plains* and this name did not suit him poorly, truth be told. Phrenology and comparative anatomy have demonstrated, in effect, the relationship that exists between exterior forms and moral dispositions, between the physiognomy of man and that of some animals, to whom [man] resembles in his character’). Examining the tale of endurance, sacrifice, and the mystical transfer of animalistic powers, Roberto González Echeverría calls attention to the centrality of misnaming in it:

The tiger enters the ‘strange scene’ also under the banner of a misnomer. We are dealing here not with a tiger, of course, but with a species of jaguar, ‘tiger’ being one of the approximations used by Europeans to name American natural phenomena that did not quite conform to their categories... Like the textual doubling in the mediation of discourses, knowledge is predicated on foreknowledge, *on capturing an object that discourse itself has molded*. (González Echevarría 1990: 122, italics mine).

The text initiates a chain of identifications that connects the tiger to Facundo to Rosas to Sarmiento to the reader by means of a language like the tiger itself, ‘primed, satiated, yet desirous for more’, a literary language that is ‘beyond the taxonomies of science’ (124). In other words, Facundo’s story within *Facundo* first conjures and then suspends the distinction between civilization and barbarism and, indeed, between animal and human. As Jacques Derrida notes, in Western culture it is precisely when the limit between man and animal is announced that ‘the essence of the political and, in particular the state and sovereignty has often been represented in the formless form of animal monstrosity, in the figure without figure of a mythological, fabulous, and non-natural monstrosity, an artificial monstrosity of the animal’ (Derrida 2009: 25). In revealing to his reader the origins of *el tigre de los llanos*, Sarmiento identifies a basis of sovereignty that is neither a vestige of the Spanish monarchy nor grounded in the ‘palabras del diccionario civil’ of republicanism; it is both, and something in excess of

both.¹² Much as Facundo does not eliminate the tiger, but takes its identity as his own, the book that carries his name does not deny the power of its subject; as González Echeverría asserts, ‘Sarmiento’s discourse is like the tiger’s, made up of misnomers, of violence represented as catachresis, motivated by a desire for the object that turns him into an object’ (124). It is an ‘outlaw discourse’ (124), underscoring how ‘beast, criminal, and sovereign have a troubling resemblance . . . [in which] there is . . . a sort of obscure and fascinating complicity, or even a worrying mutual attraction, a worrying familiarity, an *unheimlich*, uncanny reciprocal haunting’ (Derrida 2009: 17). In each successive capture of the celebrated episode of *Facundo* (the tiger eating human flesh and trapping Facundo in a tree, Facundo slaying the tiger, Sarmiento appropriating Facundo’s speech), the limit between the animal and the human, the non-political and the political, barbarism and civilization is suspended before being provisionally redrawn. In each case power resides not in the ability to suppress or eliminate the prior transgression, but to assume it and identify oneself as the unique inhabitant of this zone of indistinction. The story of the tiger in *Facundo* does not merely explain the origins of its protagonist’s nickname, it is also a parable about the origins of sovereignty that applies to both Rosas’s dictatorship and the liberal republic so ardently desired by Sarmiento and his fellow dissidents.

Whereas *Facundo* is concerned with the origins of Rosas’s power, as embodied in the figure of the slain caudillo, the oft-told tale from ‘Sketch of Charles D. Fredricks, Esq.’ deals with two erstwhile allies who would bring about Rosas’s downfall and, in a broader sense, concerns the limits of power. While the story of *el tigre de los llanos* depicts the transfer of sovereignty from one figure to another, the story of the tiger and the daguerreotype – particularly by focusing not on Rosas’s immediate successor Urquiza but on his subordinate Virasoro – dramatizes the subjection required by those who exercise the sovereign decision. The beast enters and exits this strange scene under very different circumstances. For starters, its capture is prior and unseen, presumably carried out by subaltern subjects. The governor takes the beast from the Indians, gives it away, and does not kill it. Presented as a gift to the daguerreotypist, the initially fearsome animal, ‘a source of terror’, becomes domesticated and humanized to the point that Fredricks medicates him with pills sold by his acquaintance George Brandreth, advertised as a cure-all that ‘restored millions to health, when all other medicines had failed, and the patient left to die’ (Anonymous 1859: 72). Bonpland, too, recounts how at one point in their voyage ‘the canoe that went ashore this morning brought back only a paltry little bit of meat for Mr Fredrich’s [sic] tiger’ (97), leaving the human occupants of the boat hungry. Yet in spite of receiving this preferential treatment, the ‘great pet of his master’ dies in the Argentine capital. Thus the short text anthropomorphizes the tiger and makes him ‘a bit ‘like’ the sovereign’ even in his death.¹³

The other object of capture in this tale is, of course, the governor, as he immobilizes himself for a few moments so that the American can take his picture. Though Virasoro asserts authority by taking the tiger and then giving it away, he does so after being subjected to the photographic process that captures his image and desire. In the subsequent exchange the involved parties determine that his indexical image and the tiger are of equal value. Of course, this is not a strictly monetary question for, ‘[j]ust as Latin America has long supplied raw material to feed the global economy . . . parallel to and intertwined with this trade in consumer goods is a no less material

affective economy, also often structured by a distinction between the raw and the refined' (Beasley-Murray 2010: 129–30). The scientist Bonpland may deem compensation for the portrait unnecessary, but the swap is hardly arbitrary: a governor is worth a tiger and not some other beast. This notion of value is reinforced by another oft-repeated anecdote from the 'Sketch of Charles D. Fredricks, Esq.' that tells of how, on an earlier voyage through Brazil and Paraguay, Fredricks took pictures of 'poor villagers [who] not over provided with *cash*, traded *a horse for a picture*' (Anonymous 1869: 431). By virtue of this accumulation, the daguerreotypist 'arrived at his journey's end in patriarchal style, surrounded by an immense drove of horses, which he finally sold at \$3 each' (431). In this telling, the portraits of subaltern subjects have a fixed value and provide Fredricks with an asset that one can readily convert into cash. By contrast, the tiger is an unproductive animal with no immediate exchange value. Thus the act of taking the governor's portrait brings together the beast and the sovereign, presenting a symbolic rehearsal of the decisive act of modern politics by conflating *zoē* – or natural life – and *bios* – or social life – in a zone of 'irreducible indistinction' (Agamben 1998: 9). A paradox is at work here, for while the daguerreotype of the governor is a sign of his power, it is necessarily overexposed in the sense that it lays bare the terms of authority. In giving the tiger away, the governor (re)presents himself as an embodiment of sovereignty, but in doing so he becomes the object of a cultural discourse that incessantly seeks to identify, name, classify, and capture otherness. Or, to quote González Echeverría again, he is 'motivated by a desire for the object that turns him into an object' (González Echeverría 1990: 124). In other words, the provincial caudillo serves a placeholder, a stand-in for a figure of sovereignty that is not fully discernible in mid-nineteenth-century Latin America, much as a tiger's likeness cannot be captured by the Daguerrean process.

The story of the tiger and the daguerreotype may seem at first glance to be little more than an amusing anecdote about the arrival of photography in a provincial backwater, a vignette that conforms readily to longstanding master narratives about modernity in Latin America. Yet its persistent repetition in histories of photography and the invariable correction, a second-order exchange – a 'jaguar' or 'puma' for a 'tiger' – suggest how an episode passing for history is, ultimately, an allegorical tableau illustrating the conditions for sovereignty in post-revolutionary Latin America. Fredricks, the governor, Bonpland, the Indians, and the tiger are historical figures that function in the condensed account of the exchange as representatives of the forces bound together through the practice of photography: capitalist enterprise, political authority, scientific knowledge, subalternity, and nature. A price is fixed: a tiger for a caudillo, a wild beast for a political animal. Yet this is not some kind of Faustian bargain in which the governor must give himself away in exchange for power; instead, the sovereign bond is asserted in the very act of giving his image away. The 'strange scene' of the tiger and the daguerreotype signals the existence of an affective economy that extends beyond the ability to carry out, as Juan Bautista Alberdi characterized the basic function of the Latin American nation-state in *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (1852), 'mercantile contracts or corporations formed especially to populate these deserts that we christened with the pompous names of Republics' (Alberdi and López 2003: 203). The vignette is thus a ciphered account of the constitutive tensions that make the idea of the modern state conceivable. As representative of the discursive production generated with the

emergence of photography in post-revolutionary Latin America, it suggests that beyond civilization and barbarism, beyond ideology and repression, emerging forms of power also depended on desires and habits as well as the poses and (im)positions they engendered. Indeed, the story of the tiger and the daguerreotype is emblematic of a political crisis that is prior to and more fundamental than an intra-elite struggle to impose and legitimize specific state-building projects. The ‘Sketch of Charles D. Fredricks, Esq.’ depicts a scene, far from capital cities or overseas metropolises, in which human agency matters less than the ways in which the camera organizes it. In doing so, it suggests how visibility conditioned the exercise of authority, independent of the express designs of caudillos, *letrados*, scientists, photographers, etc. Furthermore, the capture and exchange conflate nature and culture, thus evoking the basic antagonism of the political that, for Rancière, disrupts ‘the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ (Rancière 1999: 29). In this respect, this anecdote is hardly unique, but representative of the instrumental role of an emerging visual technology in the nineteenth century. To take a closer look at early Latin American photography, then, offers a more nuanced perspective of how various social actors became aware of emerging forms of political organization and social order, long before these came to be treated as inevitable, necessary or transcendent.

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Notes

- 1 The article is also reprinted in its entirety as a footnote in Benson Lossing’s *History of New York City* (1884).
- 2 These retellings appear, in chronological order, in Gesulado, Vicente, ‘Los que fijaron la imagen del país. Daguerrotipos y fotografías en la Argentina: entre el arte y la aventura’ (1983); Miguel Angel Cuarterolo, ‘The Daguerreotype in Latin America’ (1988); ‘Ciento cincuenta años de fotografía en América’ (1989); Robert Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (1989); Levine and Hoffenberg, *Cuba in the 1850s: Through the Lens of Charles DeForest Fredricks* (1990); Gesualdo, *Historia de la fotografía en América: desde Alaska hasta Tierra del Fuego en el siglo XIX* (1990); Cuarterolo, ‘Charles DeForest Fredricks, una aventura americana’ (1994); Pedro Karp Vasquez, *O Brasil na fotografia oitocentista* (2003); Cuarterolo, ‘Charles DeForest Fredricks. A Latin-American Adventure’ (2004).
- 3 For a succinct account of how recent historical studies have challenged these so-called *historias patrias*, see Jeremy Adelman’s review essay ‘Liberalism and Constitutionalism in Latin America in the 19th Century’ (2014).
- 4 Also see Cortés Rocca, pp. 130–49.
- 5 ‘Primitive accumulation’ is the phrase Andermann borrows from Marx to describe the paradoxical manner in which photography both represents and effects a capture of spaces and subjects by the state (186; 188–89).

- 6 Brizuela notes that '[it is] that unresolved tension between noise, sound, and voice that can be read as symptomatic of the crisis of the relation between culture and nature at the beginning of the nineteenth century' (78). For Rancière, this same tension is at the heart of the basic antagonism of politics, as 'the false continuity between the useful and the just points up the falseness of evidence of any decisive opposition between human beings endowed with the logos and animals restricted to sole use of the organ of the voice (*phônê*)' (21).
- 7 As Mary Louise Pratt (1992) defines the term in *Imperial Eyes*, 'contact zone' refers to 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (6). Adopting this perspective, she continues, 'emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power' (7).
- 8 As Jonathan Crary (2002) notes, '[t]he prioritization of visuality was accompanied by imperatives for various kinds of self-control and social restraint, particularly for forms of attentiveness that require both relative silence and immobility' ('Géricault, the Panorama, and Sites of Reality in the Early Nineteenth Century' 9).
- 9 Rosa Casanova and Olivier Debrouse's study of early photography in Mexico is called *Sobre la superficie bruñida de un espejo*, which refers to the one of the steps of the Daguerrian process.
- 10 For a detailed account of this voyage, see Stephen Bell's *A Life in Shadow A Life in Shadow Aimé Bonpland in Southern South America, 1817–1858*.
- 11 An advertisement Fredricks published in the *Comercio del Plata* (Montevideo) on December 25, 1851 included the announcement that 'on the next English steamer, life-size, lithograph portraits of the illustrious Generals Urquiza and Garzón will arrive from Europe' (qtd. in Weeks and Murray 2014: 60). On February 14, 1852, little more than a week after the battle of Caseros, another published in the *Agente Comercial del Plata* (Buenos Aires) describes the circumstances of their production: 'In their voyage to the province of Entre Ríos, misters Fredricks, Masoni and Penabert succeeded in gaining permission from the Generals Urquiza and Garzón to take daguerreotype portraits of the aforementioned gentlemen. As soon as they learned of the General Urquiza's sublime pronouncement, without wasting time they sent the original portraits of these illustrious persons to be made into lithographs by Mr. Lapofé and Leon Noel' (qtd. in Urquiza 2003: 43). According to Miguel Ángel Cuarterolo, 'Fredricks left record of this photographic session in the Argentine press in the *Diario Los Debates*, on April 2, 1852' (2004: 313).
- 12 In the introduction, Sarmiento praises 'las almas generosas, que, en quince años de lid sangrienta, no han desesperado de vencer *al monstruo que nos propone el enigma de la organización política de la República*. Un día vendrá, al fin, que lo resuelvan: y la Esfinge argentina, mitad mujer, por lo cobarde, mitad tigre, por lo sanguinario, morirá a sus plantas . . .' (Sarmiento 1977: 9, italics mine) ('the generous souls, who, in fifteen years of bloody struggle, have not lost hope of defeating *the monster that presents us with the enigma of the political organization of the Republic*. A day will come, at last, when they will solve it: and the Argentine Sphinx, half woman, for cowardliness, half tiger, for bloodthirstiness, will die at their feet . . .').

- 13 In the inaugural lecture of his seminar on sovereignty, Derrida reads Plutarch's 'On the Use of Reason by 'Irrational' Animals' as an 'ethical and political praise of the animal, whose moral and social, even political virtue goes above or before the law – a bit *like* (a 'like' that carries the whole charge of the question of an analogy), a bit 'like' the sovereign' (21). He then quotes two paragraphs from the text, concluding with the following sentence: 'Suppose humans trap or trick animals into captivity: if the animals are mature, they choose to reject food, reject thirst and choose to bring about and embrace death rather than accept enslavement' (qtd. in Derrida 2009: 22).

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Brendan Lanctot is Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Puget Sound. He is author of *Beyond Civilization and Barbarism: Culture and Politics in Postrevolutionary Argentina* (Bucknell University Press, 2014). His current book project concerns the cultural origins of populism in nineteenth-century Latin America.
