If you think you know what there is to know about the *The Family of Man*, the famous exhibition curated by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, which traveled around the world and lives on in book form (as well as, since 1994, as a permanent installation at Clervaux Castle in Luxembourg), this publication just might teach you otherwise. Bringing together a dozen scholars from several continents and academic disciplines, the collection of essays edited by Gerd Hurm, Anke Reitz, and Shamoon Zamir takes up, rather, turns against the familiar critique of *The Family of Man* as a universalizing, sentimental, and ahistorical work of postwar U.S.-American propaganda. More specifically, almost all contributors take critical issue with Roland Barthes’s scathing review of the exhibition, which he had seen in Paris in 1956, and which prompted him to make all of the accusations above in a text reprinted in his well-known *Mythologies* the following year. The collective attempt not only to revisit but also to reappraise the most influential photo exhibition of all time some sixty years later seems to have provided the common ground for the diverse group of scholars brought together for *The Family of Man Revisited*.

In his opening piece titled “Reassessing Roland Barthes’s Myth of *The Family of Man*,” Gerd Hurm “highlight[s] the omissions and errors in Barthes’s review, its open and hidden incongruities” (24), thereby opening up the debate reverberating throughout the book. In another contribution, an intriguing counterpoint to Barthes’s negative response is presented in the form of the opening speech given by Max Horkheimer on the occasion of the exhibition’s opening in Frankfurt in 1958, which is reproduced in English for the first time here. Reading his text, one wishes that Barthes had been present, as Horkheimer elegantly reconciles *The Family of Man*’s rhetoric of a common humanity with its focus on the individual: “[I]t is a symbol of their essential identity despite differences in their individual and national character, or as we philosophers say, it is a symbol of the identity of human beings in their non-identity” (49). Elsewhere in his text, as well as in another contribution also made accessible for the first time, titled “The Importance of Photography for Our Time” dating from 1960, Horkheimer offers rare insights into the power of pictures to elicit viewer identification, which gives them potentially superior affective power over other media or, for that matter, theory (51). Martin Jay’s piece on “Max Horkheimer and *The Family of Man*” goes a long way in placing the Frankfurt School intellectual’s interventions in their larger philosophical context starting with German Idealism but also including like-minded American thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Dewey. By looking at the exhibition’s undeniable claim to universalism as a Kantian *idea*, Jay argues, Horkheimer “was making clear what he saw as the regulative, counterfactual, even utopian quality of the notion of a unified humankind. As had Kant, he hoped that it might serve as a telos of human practice, rather than a description of what was destined to occur” (59).

Several contributions fulfil an oft-noted *desideratum* regarding *The Family of Man*, namely, studies of its actual reception. Thus, Shamoon Zamir takes a close look at visitors’ reactions to its 1955 installation in Munich, based on a survey conducted on site for the United States Information Service—the exhibition’s main sponsor—in order to determine if it reached its larger aims in cultural diplomacy. Next, Werner Sollors compares his responses to the photographs in the present to his recollections of a visit to the Frankfurt version of *The Family of*
Man in the 1950s, thereby providing a highly personal account of re-membering an important visual archive of the mid-twentieth century. Winfried Fluck, in turn, offers “Another Look at The Family of Man,” by emphasizing the important distinction between a picture and an image, the latter consisting of an aesthetic response hinging on audiences’ different experiences and cultural contexts at least as much as on the actual realities presented to them as photographs.

The next group of essays scrutinizes the medium of the exhibition, which is highly welcome considering that most studies of The Family of Man have been based on the catalogue only. Thus, Shamoon Zamir analyzes the concrete forms of participation that the original MoMA installation made possible, whereas Kerstin Schmidt broadens the scope considerably, by turning to the “Aesthetics and Philosophy of Place in The Family of Man.” She recognizes a humanism of relation made possible by immersive exhibitionary techniques enabling viewers’ identification and empathy with the subjects thus encountered. Anke Reitz’s “Re-exhibiting The Family of Man: Luxembourg 2013” offers a rare glimpse of the practice of re-exhibition in the context of the history and design of such major curatorial efforts while also allowing a look ‘behind the scenes’ of the permanent collection at Clervaux Castle.

Four remarkably original contributions round off The Family of Man Revisited. First, Miles Orvell purports to discuss the exhibition as a Cold War Pastoral, though it might surprise some readers that he soon zooms in on the color transparency of the exploding H-bomb as a sublime image of destruction. Its omission in the book makes for two ‘Families of Man,’ he argues, “the shock and awe of the original exhibition and the muted warnings that are implicit in the book version” (205). Next, Ulrike Gehring’s contribution contextualizes The Family of Man in postwar debates about American Art. Referring to Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, among others, she points out that their ‘all-over’ approach was also reflected by the exhibition’s layout, which in turn testifies to a shared new understanding of art as an arena for democracy. Eric Sandeen, finally, focuses on Carl Sandburg, whose contribution to The Family of Man has not been sufficiently recognized. “Sandburg deserves attention,” Sandeen writes, because he “strengthened the philosophical underpinnings of this effort and understood full well the importance of labouring over projects that would draw vast amounts of material together in an effort to help people see themselves” (232). Gesturing toward the exhibition’s transnational reach, the book closes with the poetic commentaries on the photographs as noted down by the Polish writer Witold Wirpsza following his visit to The Family of Man in 1962.

To conclude, the book presents many fresh perspectives on what was without doubt the most important photo exhibition of the twentieth century. Some readers might have wished for a more explicit focus on Photography in a Global Age, as announced in its subtitle, which would have brought the reappraisal of The Family of Man up to date also in terms of current media developments including related efforts at picturing humanity as one such as the work of Sebastião Salgado. Still, it is easy to agree with the editors that “[t]oday, when armed conflict, environmental catastrophe and economic inequality continue to threaten our future, it seems timely to revisit The Family of Man” (back cover). It does indeed.

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