The Lapponicum Sea: Matter, Sense, and Affect in the Botanical Exploration of Southwest China and Tibet

ERIK MUEGGLER

University of Michigan

Only once in my lifetime have I had occasion to examine the fifteen thousand dodeca syllables of the *Polyalbion*—that topographical epic in which Michale Crayton recorded the fauna, flora, hydrography, orography, military and monastic history of England—but I am certain that Drayton's massive yet limited *oevre* is less tedious than the vast enterprise conceived and given birth by Carlos Argentino. He proposed to versify the entire planet; by 1941 he had already dispatched several hectares of the state of Queensland, more than a kilometer of the course of the Ob, a gasworks north of Veracruz, the leading commercial establishments in the parish of Concepcion, Mariana Cambaceres de Alvear's villa on Calle Once de Septiembre in Belgrano, and a Turkish bath not far from the famed Brighton Aquarium.

———Jorge Louis Borges, "Aleph"

In his own mission to versify the planet, or at least an exemplary portion of it, Captain Francis Kingdon-Ward (1885–1958) returned repeatedly, even obsessively, to certain places on the alpine plateaus of Northwest Yunnan and Southeast Tibet, where the vegetation, refracted through the Aleph of what I shall argue was a deliberate, laborious, and disciplined optical practice, became liquid, a sea:[1]

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[1] In Borges' story, the Aleph—or is it a fake, a reproduction of the real Aleph, elsewhere?—is a place in the basement of Carlos Argentino's house, discovered in his childhood, where, "without mixture or confusion, all the places in the world, seen from every angle, coexist." It is not a coincidence, I think, that the Aleph is the approximate size and shape of a camera lense: "a small iridescent sphere . . . two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside

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It is impossible to do justice to the Rhododendrons at the Doshong La as we saw them in June; the valley flanked by grey cliffs, roofed by grey skies, with the white snowfields above, spouting water which splashed and gurgled in a dozen babbling becks; and everywhere the rocks swamped under a tidal wave of tense colours which gleam and glow in leagues of breaking light. The colours leap at you as you climb the moraine: Scarlet Runner dripping in blood red rivers from the ledges, Scarlet Pimpernel whose fiery curtains hang from every rock; Carmelita forming pools of incandescent lava, Yellow Peril heaving up against the foot of the cliff in choppy sulpher seas breaking from a long low surf of pink 'Lacteum' whose bronzed leaves glimmer faintly like sea-tarnished metal.[2]

How must we understand the human encounters with the earth through which imperial science explored, collected, and archived the world? Historians of natural history have focused on the instrumental symbiosis between science and empire: the history of botany in particular is written as the history of British imperial expansion. Botany emerged as a distinct discipline in the world-transforming voyages of James Cook and Joseph Banks, Cook's natural historian on the *Endeavor* who made the Royal Botanic Gardens into an imperial (rather than merely a royal) institution.[3] The institutions of botanical science became clearing-houses for the massive plant transfers that resurfaced much of the subcontinent and Southeast Asia with tea and rubber.[4] The archival work of botany brought the entire world into the basement herbaria at Kew, Edinburgh, Sydney, Calcutta, Cape Town, and Singapore, layering the earth with the hierarchical relations of taxa and plant communities, bringing regions into being, plotting out the continent-spanning movements and distributions of flora, mapping the intersections of evolutionary time and global space. Thomas Richards suggests that by the last half of the nineteenth century, such archival work became a focal imperative for an empire that was spread far too thin to be capable, in most places, of any kind of exact civil governance.[5] Imperial administration produced knowledge in the form of facts—lists, surveys, maps, specimens, censuses, statistics—and circulated these facts through the system of knowledge-producing institutions that formed the empire's administrative

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it, with no diminution inside. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos. I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas. . . ." Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, Andrew Hurley, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1998), 281, 283.

[2] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1926), 105–6.

[3] On Joseph Banks' role as Cook's natural historian on the *Endeavor*, see David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science, and Empire, 1780–1801* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); and Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). On Banks' role in establishing the imperial scope of the Royal Botanic Gardens, see Ray Desmond, *Kew: The History of the Royal Botanic Gardens* (London: Harvill Press, 1995).

[4] Lucile Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Donald P. McCracken, *Gardens of Empire: Botanical Institutions of the Victorian British Empire* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

[5] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 3.

core: the British Museum, the Royal Geographic Society, the India Survey, and, of course, the network of Royal Botanic Gardens. The empire was, in part, a work of fiction, built on the certainty (at the beginning of the nineteenth century) and the myth (by its end) that these institutions could order knowledge into a coherent whole, when the empire itself had lost any hope of real administrative coherence. The botanical explorers who searched the globe for plants to fill out the taxonomies produced by academic botanists participated in an archival mythology through which the empire gained shape in the imaginations of its subjects. Yet to describe this participation merely as collecting positive facts for the archive hardly does justice to the patient, obsessive, lonely, and hopeful rendering of the earth into texts that characterized these explorations: it tells us little, for instance, about the complex sense of presence to the world that Frank Kingdon-Ward reaches for in the passage above as he renders the meadows above the Doshang La into a textual sea of flowers, and the articulations of that sense with imperial and cosmological orders.

As Hugh Raffles reminds us, such encounters were "tangles of science, space, and affect," contingent intersections of localized modes of knowing, apprehending, and representing; immanent taxonomies of beings, races, regions, and cosmologies.[6] We cannot assume that these tangles were framed within stable modes of human perception. We know that science did not supply a readymade style of apprehension: a disinterested subject, a stance of distanced objectivity—colonial theory has long since exploded that myth. Late imperial science was caught up in a revolution in the ideologies and technological foundations of perception. Walter Benjamin wrote that the optical technology of the nineteenth century had subjected the human sensorium to a complex training.[7] Jonathan Crary has made Benjamin's intuition more historically explicit, showing how popular optical novelties such as the stereoscope, produced a radical repositioning of the observer's relation to visual representation.[8] Nineteenth-century optical theories and technologies dissolved the previous century's rigid model of perception, in which the exterior world cast itself against the screen of the mind as though on the interior of a camera obscura. Ideas about perception came to focus on the perceiving subject and the tricks and vagaries of subjective vision. After the late nineteenth century, Crary argues, capitalist modernity generated a continuous re-creation of the conditions of sensory experience. Perceptual modalities were in a state of perpetual transformation. But at the same time, there emerged a "plurality of means to recode the activity of the eye,

[6] Hugh Raffles, "The Uses of Butterflies," *American Ethnologist* 28, 3 (2001):513–48; see also Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia: A Natural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[7] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973), 32, cited in Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 182.

[8] Jonathan Crary *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 128.

to regiment it, heighten its productivity, prevent its distraction."[9] What becomes clear as one examines specific historical projects like botanical exploration is the extent to which such training could be a voluntary project, taken up as a laborious and uncertain process of fashioning one's own relations to the world—both the world of things and the social world—with the aid of the sensory tools at one's disposal.

In the present article, I examine the labors of one botanical explorer of the imperial periphery as labors of perception. Frank Kingdon-Ward and the half-dozen other British (and one American) botanists who explored the borderlands between Burma, China, and Tibet immediately before the Great War and in the interwar period were traversers and reformulators of early twentieth-century time-space.[10] The world had just blown itself to bits. The certainties on which the great archival project of Imperial Britain had been founded were crumbling. The archival institutions that had centered and regulated the circulation of facts through the empire could no longer be relied upon to harness knowledge, control it, and organize it into a coherent imperial whole.[11] The moral prestige of national borders and frontiers, which had framed geographical and botanical projects, had been blasted away in the trenches of the "front" between the Allies and Central Powers in the war.[12] Even the gold standard was collapsing, that institution which had made the world transparent to British capital, delivered its bounty to the doorsteps of London, and, as John Maynard Keynes wrote, made it possible for any upper-class Londoner to "dispatch his servant to the neighboring office of a bank for such a supply of the precious metals as might seem convenient, and . . . then proceed abroad to foreign quarters without knowledge of their religion, language, or customs, bearing coined wealth upon his person."[13] But if imperial institutions could no longer underwrite dreams of coherence and totality for knowledge, other dreams—scientific and techno-

[9] Ibid., 25. While Crary focuses on optical technologies, the technologies of travel were also of fundamental importance in this revolution. See Renzo Dubbini, *Geography of the Gaze: Urban and Rural Vision in Early Modern Europe,* Lydia G. Cochrane, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[10] I borrow this phrase from Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 174, who writes it of Maxine du Camp. The other principal British botanists who intensively explored West China and Tibet in the interwar period were Ernest Henry Wilson (1876–1930), George Forrest (1873–1932), Frank Ludlow (1885–1972), George Sherriff (1898–1967), Reginald Farrer (1880–1920) and William Purdom (1880–1921). The Earl Cawdor accompanied Kingdon-Ward on one expedition; Reginald Kaulback and Ronald Brooks-Carrington were his companions on another; Kaulback later mounted one of his own. Joseph Rock was the American.

[11] Richards, *The Imperial Archive*. For a satisfying scholarly account of the dreams of coherence and totality underwritten specifically by the India Survey, see Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[12] Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32–33.

[13] John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

logical—were becoming possible. Carlos Argentino, whose ambition it was to versify the world, has such a dream in Borges story, "The Aleph": "'I picture [modern man] . . . in his study as though in a watchtower of a great city, surrounded by telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, the latest in radio-telephone and motion-picture, and magic-lantern equipment, and glossaries and calendars and timetables and bulletins' . . . mountains nowadays did in fact come to the modern Muhammad."[14]

Kingdon-Ward and his colleagues traversed this uncertain terrain, making the most of those technologies with which, as scientific observers, they were trained to align their senses. They struggled to reformulate their own relations to the world of things, striving, on the one hand, to bring things home as frozen, distant, luminous images, and, on the other, to plumb the promises of optical technology to bridge distance, to put one in intimate contact with the world of things. This was an intensively textual enterprise. Geographical botany aimed to force the landscape to yield names of known and new flora and of vegetative formula. Each such name carried with it an imperative for further text—the precise, formal, verbose language that outlined a species' distinguishing characteristics: its habit, bark, shoots, buds, leaves, inflorescence, calyx, corolla, stamens, ovary, style, stigma, capsule, and seeds. Published Latinate descriptions, often running to five or six closely printed pages, established the authority of each new species name: each was preceded by many drafts in English, in field notes, letters, herbarium notes, and lab notes. And this textual order demanded coordination—in notes, tables, maps, and scientific articles—with the other languages that poured out of this landscape: a confusion of names of towns, mountains, routes, rivers, crossings, passes, plants, and peoples, in a multitude of tongues and scripts. But this was only the beginning. Most botanical explorers of West China and Tibet were prolific authors of books and articles on travel and gardening. Frank Kingdon-Ward published twenty-five books and more than six-hundred-and-fifty articles—but a fraction of his textual output, which included letters, diaries, field notes, sketches of maps, and embryonic drafts of books never to be published. The practices of walking and seeing through which this landscape was apprehended, and its flora gathered, named, archived, and mapped, were principles of production for text. Writing (in all its forms, including revising and reading) was a means for working through the perceptual dilemmas to which these practices responded. It was a means for disciplining perception to the demands of optical technology, of filling in the enormous voids in representation that these technologies left open, and of preserving the prestige of the photograph, especially, as a model for perception.

Such textual practices were embedded in the colonial encounter in concrete social relations. To render the landscape and its inhabitants into text was to reg-

[14] Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 275–76.

ulate the senses; to regulate the senses was to channel perception through specific forms of social relation and to produce affective states appropriate to those relations; to produce affect in this way was to invest oneself in the production of, give oneself up to the grip of, or seek contingent escapes from national and imperial cosmologies. Here, I attempt to show how certain dialectically interrelated practices of perception emerged in this encounter from struggles to fashion particular modes of social relation. I do this with a partial route survey (rather than a comprehensive map) of the social geography of one botanical explorer.[15] In this, I am influenced by Raffles' echo of Nicholas Thomas' suggestion that "an interest in located subjectivities forms an analytic strategy which situates colonial representations and narratives in terms of agents, locations and periods . . . of colonialisms, rather than colonialism."[16] I would add only that an emphasis on specificity might extend beyond subjectivities to include practices, and that any such examination must also be comparative.

I sort out of Kingdon-Ward's extended encounter with the landscapes and inhabitants of Southwest China and Southeast Tibet two practices, which I call writing and revising. In writing, Kingdon-Ward struggled to create a mode of presence to the landscape that would, at the same time, help him disentangle himself morally and affectively from those among whom he traveled. In revising, he worked to refashion the landscape as a source of ecstatic affect, in order to create a regime of feeling that he could share with his popular audiences in Britain. Nearly all the botanists who intensively explored West China and Tibet in the early twentieth century used such practices of writing, revising, and reading the landscape to fashion Edens of the world of things, which they strove repeatedly to reach, the appeal of which brought them back repeatedly to those mountains. Their textual practices and the thousands of floral species that they sent to Britain as texts, images, samples, or cultivated plants worked to weave these Edens into Britons' imaginations of their own landscape and its relation to the far Imperial periphery. Ward's Eden—his eventual solution to the problems of perception and relation with which he was presented—was that frothing sea of flowers up on the Doshong La.

WALKING (EMPIRE AND OBLIVION)

I.

The fad of natural history had long shaped the aesthetic and scientific ambitions of those involved in British efforts to open up the Chinese Empire to econom-

[15] For the difference between route surveys and maps, and the processes through which the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India gathered route surveys of Southwest China and Tibet and compiled them into comprehensive maps, with panoptical pretensions and speculative approximate features, see Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

[16] Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1994), 8–9, quoted in Hugh Raffles, "The Uses of Butterflies," 515.

ic exploitation.[17] Until the Opium War (1840–1842), European activity in China was confined to Canton. British traders and envoys explored that city's gardens and markets for attractive plants, its shops and homes for flower paintings, and its environs for exotic ornamental trees. Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820) used his influence to recruit members of the Canton Factory to search out plants new to science and send specimens, seeds, and live plants back to Kew.[18] Banks appointed naturalists to accompany the Macartney and Amherst embassies to collect flora and fauna in China's interior, and both Kew and the Horticultural Society of London sent salaried plant collectors to Canton to examine the city's gardens for valuable plants and horticultural techniques.[19] The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) opened up new territories around the ports of Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Amoy (Xiamen), and Hongkong to the European activity. Almost immediately, the Horticultural Society hired an experienced plant collector, Robert Fortune (1812–1880), to travel to the newly opened regions to obtain seeds, herbarium specimens, and live plants, taking special notice of "the plants that yield tea of different qualities," "Peonies with blue flowers, the existence of which is, however, doubtful," and "the plant which furnishes Rice Paper."[20] Fortune's trip was a spectacular success; he made four more, and a host of botanical and zoological collectors followed him into China's interior.

A new circulatory system for trade and natural history sprang into being: the network of British consulates and Chinese Maritime Customs stations. By 1880, the British Consular Service had opened consulates in more than twenty Chinese cities and employed more than two hundred officers; the Maritime Customs Service employed more than six hundred foreigners of whom nearly four hundred were British.[21] Many of these officials made botany a pass-time or a passion, working nearby territories on their three-month summer breaks, and hiring Chinese peasants and hunters to collect for them when they were confined to office work. Like Joseph Banks before him, Sir Joseph Hooker (1817–1911), as Director of Kew, exercised his considerable political influence in the service of natural history in China by getting the Foreign Office to assign to the consular service young men interested in botany.[22] Consulates and customs houses, with their built-in microcosms of British domestic society and

[17] Far the best account of Western natural history in China is Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in China, 1760–1910* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1999). Fan does not describe the period between 1911 and 1945 explored in this article.

[18] Fan, *British Naturalists in China,* 20–21; John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State, and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140–42.

[19] Fan, *British Naturalists in China*, 18–45.

[20] Letter of appointment to Robert Fortune, 1842, Horticultural Society of London. Quoted in Tyler Whittle, *The Plant Hunters* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1970), 187.

[21] Fan, *British Naturalists in China*, 86–87; Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: W. Mullan, 1950) is an account of the largely British-managed Chinese Maritime Customs service, established in 1854 to oversee maritime trade at the treaty ports.

[22] Fan, *British Naturalists in China.*

their capacity to arrange transport, guides, and interpreters for travelers, became comfortable and convenient staging points for those who came to China specifically to collect for horticultural institutions and, increasingly, for private firms and syndicates.

Plants from China thus joined the enormous flow of new floral species from the expanding Imperial possessions that was challenging scientists at the great botanical centers at Kew, the British Museum, Edinburgh, and Glasgow to create new taxonomical categories and work through new problems of geographical distribution in relation to the new theories of descent. But Chinese plants were also big business. Endless in variety, infinite in novelty, evocative of every exotic territory of the empire and the globe beyond, such plants were exemplary forms of the commodity kitsch that transformed Victorian and Edwardian domestic spaces. The introduction of new flowers to seduce the tastes of gardeners and the scientific project of envisioning the ecology of the earth's flora were intimately interconnected, and they were both shaped by personal relations between a few heads of commercial enterprises, key scientists in imperial botanical institutions, and wealthy enthusiasts who signed on to syndicates.

In 1905, a wealthy cotton-broker and gardening enthusiast, A. K. Bulley, founded the seed and nursery firm Bees Ltd.[23] Inspired the success of the firm Veitch and Sons in marketing new Chinese plants, Bulley applied to Bailey Balfour, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, for advice on a collector to send to China. Balfour recommended a restless young member of his gardening staff, George Forrest, and advised Bulley to send him to western Yunnan.[24] Forrest explored the far northwest of the province from a base at the British customs station at Tengyue. Energetic, methodical, and dedicated, he sent home an astounding haul of new seeds and herbarium specimens, which Bees and Edinburgh divided between them. He made one more expedition for Bees Ltd. before abandoning it to work for a private syndicate. When Bulley asked for advice on a replacement, Balfour remembered the promising young son of his old friend, Harry Marshall Ward, who had died suddenly in 1906 after a brilliant career as a Professor of Botany, first at the Royal Indian Engineering College, then at Cambridge.[25]

Ward's son Frank had been born into a comfortable rural home near the

[23] On Bulley, see Brenda Maclean, *A Pioneering Plantsman: A. K. Bulley and the Great Plant Hunters* (London: Stationary Office, 1997). J. K. Hulme's *Ness Gardens, Bulley's Beginnings to the Present Day* (Ness: Ness Garden, 1983) gives a very brief history of Bulley's commercial garden in Ness, now the University of Liverpool Botanic Garden.

[24] On Forrest, see Cowan, *The Journeys and Plant Introductions of George Forrest, V.M.H.* (Edinburgh: Scottish Rock Gardening Club, 1952); and Brenda McLean, *George Forrest, Plant Hunter* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2004). Though a prolific correspondent, Forrest wrote no books and only a few articles, the most substantial of which were published in *Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh*, and *Gardener's Chronicle.*

[25] For a description of Marshall Ward's role in the new botany in Britain, see S. M. Walters, *The Shaping of Cambridge Botany, A Short History of Whole-Plant Botany in Cambridge from the Time of Ray into the Present Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Thames, attended public school at St. Paul's in London, and entered Christ's College, Cambridge on a science scholarship. His father's death had left the family in awkward straits, and, without finishing at Cambridge, Frank had accepted an appointment as a Junior master at the Shanghai Public School in the European residential sector of that city.[26] He had been teaching for two years when an American zoologist, Malcom P. Anderson, invited him to join a zoological expedition financed by the Duke of Bedford. He walked with the expedition from Wuhan through Hubei, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Sichuan in 1909 and 1910, discovering and naming two voles and a shrew.[27] He was still brimming with excitement from the trip when a letter from Bulley arrived in 1911, inviting him to go on a plant-collecting expedition for Bees Ltd., to Yunnan. He accepted immediately.

II.

In 1911, in the company of his personal servant "Kin" and a transport caravan, Frank Ward walked and rode from Bhamo, in Burma, to the British customs station at Tengyue, Yunnan, then to Dali, north to the Yangtze river, and over the Yangtze-Mekong divide to the French mission at Cigu on the upper Mekong. There, he employed as a collector a Tibetan resident of the mission, whom he called "Ganton." Ward, Kin, Ganton, and a rotating cast of muleteers and porters, spent the summer months collecting around Adunzi (Deqin) in the far north of Yunnan near the border with Tibet. It was the last year of the Qing; news of the revolution reached them on 11 October. Ward and Kin arrived in Burma again on the first day of 1912, without encountering any of the popular upheavals that were sweeping the more populous parts of Yunnan. Ward revised his diaries from this journey into *The Land of the Blue Poppy*, a popular success in Britain.

This book presented a vision of the cartographic body of the empire as a constitutive condition for perception. Sailing to Burma out of Shanghai and the mouth of the Yangtze, Ward found the empire laid out before him upon the sea: "I saw again the far-flung outposts of our eastern empire, strung like gems at either end of that magic tiara of the Indies, which guard the approaches to the South China Sea." He viewed Hong Kong and Singapore from ports, but he discerned their shape and "charm" in the map, where they were the jewels on either end of the tiara.[28] A month later, nine days out of Bhamo, he found the thick eastern boundary line of the imperial map inscribed in time and space: "On the

[26] All biographical details about Kingdon-Ward's childhood are from Winifred Kingdon-Ward, "The Flower Chief," unpublished MS, Royal Botanic Garden (RBG), Kew.

[27] The voles were *Microtus wardii* and *Microtus custos*, the shrew *Sorex wardii*. Kingdon-Ward's account of the Bedford expedition appears in a series of articles written for *The Shanghai Mercury* and later published as *On the Road to Tibet* (Shanghai: Shanghai Mercury, 1910).

[28] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *The Land of the Blue Poppy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 1.

fourth day we crossed a bridge which marks the frontier between two Empires. To us on our little island, a frontier sounds a more or less nebulous quantity, something drawn rather whimsically on maps and a chronic source of petty international jealousies as difficult to define as the boundary line which gives rise to them. But this elusive idea becomes almost a physical reality when one crosses the frontier of a British possession overseas, thus bringing to a focus, as it were, the days which are past and all that lies before one in the new world."[29] The optical metaphor was not coincidental. The line of the frontier focused time as though around the horizontal thread of spider silk which cartographers used to adjust and focus the telescope of that most important of surveying instruments, the theodolite. As he was writing this book, Ward was taking a crash course in surveying at the Royal Geographic Society, learning the use of theodolite and plane-table.[30] The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India had used theodolites to draw the boundary between Burma and Yunnan most recently in 1896; it would be redrawn again a year after Ward's passage following the invasion by British troops of the disputed border village of Pianma.

A theodolite was a precision telescope mounted on a series of adjustable, scaled axes, used to measure horizontal and, sometimes, vertical angles. In the eyepiece were placed three lines formed of spiders' web, one horizontal and two crossing it, so as to include a small angle between them. Before using a theodolite, one made a painstaking series of adjustments to the telescope's line of sight (collimation), its angle of horizontal deviation (azimuth), and its angle of vertical deviation. Surveyors were advised to make a final check for accurate adjustment by setting up the instrument so that a conspicuous elevated point could be seen both directly through the telescope and reflected from a basin of water, oil, or quicksilver; the horizontal thread of the telescope should bisect the object both directly and by reflection, thus proving its horizontal axis perfectly accurate. To observe with a theodolite, a surveyor precisely bisected two or more objects with the horizontal and vertical threads of the telescope, and read from the scales the resulting angles or magnetic positions.[31]

"On the care a Surveyor takes of his Theodolite depends much of the accuracy of his work," instructed the Survey Department's *Manual of Surveying for India* (1851). "If he neglect and be careless about the former, he will one day have to lament over the accumulated errors of the latter. . . . Never allow a Native Sub-Surveyor or lower subordinate of any sort to apply oil to any part of the instrument. . . . the strictest surveillance is necessary . . . to guard against the great negligence in this respect generally prevalent amongst Native Sur-

[29] Ibid., 4.

[30] Charles Lyte, *Frank Kingdon-Ward*: *The Last of the Great Plant Hunters* (London: John Murray, 1989), 45.

[31] R. Smyth and H. L. Thuiller, *A Manual of Surveying for India, Detailing the Mode of Operations of the Revenue Survey in Bengal and the Northwestern Provinces* (Cacutta: W. Thacker, 1851), 64.

veyors."[32] A theodolite was an instrument for the discipline of sight in the service of cartographic representation. Requiring the most painstaking precision in adjustment, observation, and recording, it called for a particular kind of observer, fastidious in his habits, respectful of the optical machine, ready to subject his vision to its strenuous requirements. Expensive to buy, heavy to carry, difficult to use, and delicate to care for, its employment required a strict attention to the bureaucratic and racial hierarchies of colonial India, in which a native labor force, unreliable in its own disciplinary and perceptual practices, provided the foundation for the technically disciplined perception of their superiors.

Like viewing an object along the horizontal thread of the theodolite, crossing the border of the empire provided evenly measured scales for perception. The passage from *The Land of the Blue Poppy* quoted above continues:

> Never shall I forget the thrill of joy which quickened me when I crossed the Yunnan-Burma frontier on January 1, nearly a year later, and looked back down the vista of months spent far from our heritage in the east. It was not that the future seemed much brighter than the past, for never had I enjoyed myself more; not that I found the efforts of a Public Works Department—erect telegraph poles and taught wires, reliable bridges, mile posts, and rest houses provided by a paternal government—filling a long-felt want; but simply that the act of crossing our own frontier again, with all that that frontier stood for, made my heart throb a little more quickly.[33]

The border bisected time and focused sight in both directions. To the west, space and time stretched out towards Bhamo and Delhi, delimited precisely by the erect, taught, and regular markers of telegraph poles and mile posts. To the east, the "long months" were given over to a telescopic optic: they were drawn together and flattened into a "vista." It could not be more clear that the frontier was a border between two very different sets of requirements for perception: on the side of the British Empire, the requirement, conditioned by the presence of the "paternal" imperial state, that perception move in accordance with foundational, disciplined, rhythms of time and space; on the side of the new, chaotic Chinese Republic, a requirement, conditioned by the perceived absence of that state, that perception find its way to views supported by other foundations altogether.

Ward had cartographic aspirations. In 1913, after narrowly missing him in Lijiang, his competitor George Forrest wrote, "[Ward] spent all his time here playing around with the theodolite, plane-table, compass, and other instruments . . . mapping country which was systematically surveyed by some of the best men on the Indian Staff before he was conceived."[34] Ward carried a theodolite on all of his subsequent journeys to China and Tibet, taking endless precautions that the mules and porters not damage or destroy it. Yet he found it nearly impossible to use. After the 1911 revolution and the incursion into Yun-

[32] Ibid. [33] Kingdon-Ward, *Land of the Blue Poppy*, 4–5.
[34] George Forrest to William Wright Smith, 24 June 1913, RBG, Edinburgh.

nan of British troops the following year, provincial authorities were sensitive to the possibility of British spies, and merely bringing the instrument out of its case aroused serious suspicious. Often, he could use it only in secret, at night.[35] When he used it later in better conditions, he made a hash of it, typically triangulating a base line on a peak only to find out later he had gotten the name of the peak wrong. Across the empire's eastern frontier, and away from its bureaucratic and military apparatuses, the conditions for disciplined observation that had made the maps of the India Survey possible no longer existed.

On his 1911 journey, Ward carried a map of Yunnan created in 1909 by Major H. R. Davies of the Light Infantry. Davies' surveys were sponsored by the Government of India and a British firm interested in building a railroad from the Burmese border to the Yangtze river; he had traveled with an escort of fifty men of the 19th Yorkshire Regiment.[36] This map helped Ward find his way. But it was an enemy of writing. On the main routes, described by the map in the greatest detail, he found nothing at all to write about. "The same incidents with only a background of varying details fall to the lot of most travelers in the interior of China, and I recall nothing very remarkable during the fourteen days which elapsed between leaving T'eng-yueh [Tengyue] and arriving at Tali-fu [Dali]." What he could write were irritated clichés, the experiences, as he says, of every (British) traveler: impudent villagers, a stolen thermos flask, a visit to a yamen to complain, a liana bridge. The first step towards writing something else was to stumble off the mapped route, away from the mules, and to begin walking. And the first tool for writing was the gun. On the road to Dali,

> After the mid-day halt I would leave the men to load the animals, and taking my gun, turn aside and wander alone amongst the park-like undulating hills, finding here sheets of mauve primulas blooming on emerald grassy slopes, dog-roses yellow and white, pale-blue irises, and other delightful flowers. Flocks of green parrots flashed screeching overhead, seeking the red berries of a species of mistletoe that grew on the pine trees; gorgeous little fly-catchers flitted timidly from bush to bush; and sometimes I would put up an Amherst's pheasant, perhaps the most magnificent of the tribe, with its handsome tail and rainbow neck.[37]

"As for me," he wrote, "I have an eye for plants, and take [no] more than a passing interest in men and things; and to my mind the high plateaux . . . now blazing with scarlet Rhododendrons and pink camellias, afforded such charming landscapes that I was almost oblivious of everything else."[38] Oblivion (or "almost oblivion") was a key word for what Ward sought while wandering off the path with his gun and while, at night, remembering the day and writing of it.

Stanley Cavell reminds us that to write is to establish a mode of presence to

[35] Kingdon-Ward to Scott Keltie, 5 Oct. 5 1915, RBG, Kew.

[36] The map and Davies' account of his travels comprise H. R. Davies, *Yunnan: The Link Between India and the Yangtze* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909).

[37] Kingdon-Ward, *Land of the Blue Poppy*, 9.

[38] Ibid.

the world.[39] *The Land of the Blue Poppy* records a search for such a mode, made possible by the border, but on the side of the border where the theodolite became merely a telescope, its inlaid silver scales knocked out of order or stripped away entirely. The book runs through a number of experiments with what this world is to be to the writer. It settles, eventually, upon wandering as a model for the way to move through the world and on an "eye for plants" as the way to see it. Increasingly, the writer follows the strategy he lays out in the passage above. Each step of his journey is followed by a description of the plants he sees, followed by another step, then another long plant description. This eventually allows him to begin to include in his writing the formal stages of his journey, in the caravan with the mules, previously passed over as uneventful:

> . . . we took matters fairly easily, making four stages from Hsiao-wei-hsi [Xiao Weixi] to Tsu-kou [Cigu]. Sometimes the narrow path was enveloped in the shade of flowering shrubs and walnut trees, the branches beating us as we rode, the air sweetened by the scent of roses, which swept in cascades of flowers over the summits of trees thirty feet high; sometimes we plunged into a limestone gorge, its cliffs festooned with ferns and orchids, our caravan climbing up by rough stone steps which zigzagged backwards and forwards till we were out of ear-shot of the rapids in the river below . . . [40]

The labor of traveling, like the physical labor of writing, was an endlessly repetitive drudgery, in which "nothing very remarkable" occurs, and about which very little may be said. Ward's solution was to set the world itself in motion, to give that motion the specific characteristics of a walking or riding body, and then to let that motion transfer itself to the traveling body. Here, the flowers, the rapids, the rocks themselves all move; the entire world is a thickly layered alternation of sun and shade, vegetation and limestone, sound and silence, like the alternating footfalls layered one over the other, of the mule caravan. The world moving around the travelers—the beating branches, sweeping cascades of flowers, and falling scree—allows a reader to imagine with clarity the alternating footsteps of the travelers moving in and out of the gorges, up and down the zigzag paths. This transfer of movement from world to travelers, and the concurrent absorption of the travelers into the moving world, is given a material analog by the branches that beat the travelers as they ride, depositing on their clothing, one assumes, some of their substance: leaves, petals, the scent of roses.

In *The Land of the Blue Poppy* Ward searches for a mode of presence appropriate to a world from which the border's thick parentheses have bracketed out the certainties of imperial time and space. This book is full of events, observations, and speculations, to a far greater extent than most of his later writing. But each meeting with an official, attempt to capture a girl's beauty on film, or story of a child's death is sandwiched between passages that continue this

[39] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 62.
[40] Kingdon-Ward, *Land of the Blue Poppy*, 30.

project of writing an absorptive wandering. This structured alternation moves the narrative along on its extended loop from the border near Tengyue and back again. The time of empire, measured in the routes and stages of Major Davies map and the mileposts and telegraph poles on the border's Western side, is deliberately dispensed with, in an effort to measure the world in the rhythms of the walking body. But then, all the long days of wandering are "brought into focus" along the thread of the border, subjected to the double effect of telescopic vision: at once made absent and brought close. In later journeys, this tension between giving the world the human body as its measure, and obtaining the world with technologically enhanced vision would sharpen, digging its way deeper into Ward's efforts to establish a mode of presence to this landscape and to give it over to vision, reproduction, and possession, by an increasingly avid British public.

WRITING (STEEL-NIB PENS AND SILENCE)

An ulcer on my tongue is giving me trouble—considerable pain, especially when I eat or speak. Yak dung fires here—good heat and a cheerful flame.[41]

I.

Ward first walked across the imperial border as a youth, and he grew to maturity figuring and refiguring his sense of self in relation to the diligently contrived strangeness and familiarity of the border's two sides. By 1924, thirteen years later, he had worked out ways to strip down this sense of presence to its fundamentals. This was not easy work. It required a rigorous system of exclusions that filtered out of the encounter between body and world the social conditions of perception: the labor of all those who accompanied and cared for him; the history of military incursions and political negotiations that established the border and made it possible for a British explorer to walk across it; the local institutions of the state that opened up the way before him; the social relations in which he was actually embedded on his expeditions, and all the exchanges, dialogues, claims, and recognitions these relations entailed.

Ward—now using his nom de plume, Kingdon-Ward—made another journey to Yunnan for Bees Ltd. in 1913. After he returned from China to Burma in 1914, he joined the Indian army and was posted, as a military censor, first to Victoria Point in Lower Burma, then to Mesopotamia: peaceful, often idle, assignments. He spent the war comparing the architecture around Basrah to that of the Mekong and Salween valleys in Yunnan ("an uncanny resemblance") and dreaming of an expedition across Tibet following the route of the Pandit A. K. (Raul Bahadur Kishen Singh Milamwal), who had walked secretly from India to Lhasa and down the Yarlung Tsangpo for the India Survey in the 1880s.[42] In

[41] Francis Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 27 Mar. 1924, RBG, Kew.

[42] Kingdon-Ward to Isaac Bailey Balfour, July 1914, RBG, Kew; Kingdon-Ward to Hicks, 2 Dec. 1915 and 22 Feb. 1917, RBG, Kew; Kingdon-Ward to Isaac Bailey Balfour, Feb. 1916, RBG,

1919, he botanized in Burma on the Yunnan border, and in 1921 and 1922 he returned to Yunnan twice for Bees Ltd., to Dali, Lijiang, Yongning, and Muli. Finally, in 1924, he made his long-planned expedition to the Yarlung Tsangpo (or upper Brhamaputra) river.[43] Hoping to be compensated more adequately than on previous expeditions, he arranged with two bankers and amateur botanists to manage a private syndicate of eight contributors, each of whom bought, for £150, a share in the seeds he would collect.[44] Bees Ltd. and the Royal Horticultural Society were among the subscribers. Bailey Balfour of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh helped him obtain small grants from the Royal Society and the Percy Sladen Memorial Fund. A wealthy amateur ethnologist, the Earl Cawdor, arranged to accompany him.

Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor walked and rode ponies from Darjeeling through Sikkim, over the Himalaya, across a corner of the Tibetan Plateau to Tsetang, up the Tsangpo gorge to the high mountain passes of the Doshang La, Nam La, and Tang La. Transport of their stores and equipment was arranged by their chief of staff, employed in Darjeeling and fluent in Tibetan, whom they called Tom, never learning his real name. These included six Venesta cases, each weighing sixty pounds, of jam, butter, milk, Mexican chocolate, tea, cocoa, coffee, Quaker oats, soup, tinned fish, army rations, and bacon, as well as steel boxes containing camera, glass slide negatives, field glasses, telescope, prismatic compass, aneroid, thermometer, theodolite, and plane table, and a growing mountain of plant presses.

Tom was assisted by two more Tibetan-speaking men from Darjeeling, Dick the cook, and Sunny Jim, as well as a crowd of Tibetan porters, muleteers, and yak drivers, men and women, mostly nameless, a few of whom Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor re-christened: Curly, the Walrus, Shock-headed Peter, the Lay Reader, the Golliwog, Lydia, the Bakeress, Mary Bennet.[45] Nearly every stage of their journey was smoothed by the local administrative systems of the Tibetan state, enjoying since 1911 an interlude in its clashes with Chinese military forces. Transport followed the efficient Tibetan system under which villages in fixed stages provided cattle, drivers, and porters, for a set fee: eight Indian annas per stage for a cow, yak, donkey, or porter; one rupee for a mule or pony.[46] Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor walked apart from the crowd of cattle

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Edinburgh. On the secret journeys in Tibet by Pandits for the India Survey, see Clements Markham, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys* (2d ed.); Survey of India Department, *Exploration in Tibet and Neighboring Regions, Part 1, 1865–1879*, *Part 2, 1879–1892* (Dehra Dun, India, 1915); and a memoir written by one of the Pandits: Sarat Chandra Das, *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet* (London, 1902).

[43] Kingdon-Ward, *Tsangpo Gorges*, vii.

[44] Kingdon-Ward to F. C. Stern, 23 Jan. 1924; F. C. Stern to Sir David Prain, 30 Jan. 1924; Arthur Bulley to F. C. Stern, 4 May 1924; F. C. Stern to Arthur Bulley, 8 May 1924; Dykes to F. C. Stern, 13 Feb. 1924. All at RBG, Kew.

[45] Kingdon-Ward, *Tsangpo Gorges*; Winifred Kingdon-Ward, “The Flower Chief,” 136.

[46] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 29 Mar. 1924.

and porters, accompanied by one or two of their men. Officials, monks, and village headmen had advance notice of their coming and arranged rooms and houses for their lodging and accommodations for their transport. The two Brits had little to do in the way of obtaining passage, transport, lodging, and food; they were free to walk, botanize, photograph, experiment with plane table and theodolite, and write.

The two men each composed a diary of their expedition. Kingdon-Ward's covers two bound notebooks in a small, even hand; it is the earliest of his dairies to survive a warehouse fire during the bombing of London, in which all others from the three-and-a-half decades between his first trip in China in 1907 and a second trip to Tibet in 1934 were destroyed. He wrote for a half hour to an hour at the end of every day of traveling or wandering, lying in his camp bed or sitting out-of-doors.[47] On rest days, he wrote little or nothing in his diary; some he devoted to writing letters and drafts of articles. His hand was slow, round, and deliberate; it rarely showed the effects of drink or fatigue, and it varied almost not at all through his life. His writing habits were ritualized and deeply conservative. "He wrote with a steel-nib pen," wrote his sister, Winifred, "which he dipped into a rough penny bottle of ink, pens came and went, the style which Father always used was replaced by the fountain pen and this in turn by ball points. But Frank went on dipping his steel nib into the rough little glass bottle."[48] A steel-nib pen requires distinctly more attention than a fountain pen; it gives writing a definite rhythm, dividing it into roughly equal units of two or three lines, after which the pen must be dipped again into the bottle, often between the words of a sentence. The hand must move at a more even pace to avoid ink blots; the resistance of the paper against the cheap nibs that Kingdon-Ward used is slightly greater, the furrows the nib cuts slightly deeper. Kingdon-Ward's writing practice had distinct affinities with his walking, which infuriated Lord Cawdor, who wrote his own diary dashingly with a fountain pen: "Move at his pace—God knows how he does it . . . —There's not much companionship to be got out of such a chap—It drives me clean daft to walk behind him—Stopping every 10 yards and hardly moving in between—In the whole of my life I've never seen such an incredibly slow mover."[49]

At the end of each day, Kingdon-Ward wrote the walk in memory, submitting it to the slow, even discipline of his steel-nib pen. Walking as perceptual experience and writing as multiple, layered acts of memory in relation to a dense but distant intersection of social relations each lent the other its form. In his dairy writing, Kingdon-Ward sought to assert rigorous control over this process. He sought to reconstitute the walk as *merely* perceptual, and as subject to definite rules for perception. He sought to hammer it out into two elements:

[47] Kingdon-Ward to Selina Kingdon Ward (his mother), 15 Apr. 1921, RBG, Kew.
[48] Winifred Kingdon-Ward, "The Flower Chief," 379.
[49] The Earl Cawdor, "Tsangpo Diary," quoted in Lyte, *Frank Kingdon-Ward*, 72.

the world as a single, extended, continuous, and visible surface, representing nothing and concealing nothing; the observer as a solitary seeing body, unencumbered by sociality, admitting to no debts and no claims—a structure that echoed that of a steel nib scratching its way across a sheet of notebook paper.

II.

On 23 March, the expedition crossed the Nantham La, established as the border between the British protectorate of Sikkim and Tibet in negotiations between British and Chinese officials in 1890.[50] The expedition followed the route taken by Colonel Francis Younghusband and 1,150 soldiers, 10,000 Indian laborers, tens of thousands of pack animals, as well as cartographers, botanical collectors, and zoologists in the British invasion of Tibet in 1903 and 1904.[51] The expedition spent the night in the border town of Yatung and then headed east to the village of Gautsa, still following Younghusband's route:

> March 25. Gautsa, Tibet. 13,000 ft. Sharp frost. Brilliant morning. Late start, 10 a.m. As we left Yatung the guard turned out and presented arms. We went up and shook hands with the Sikh Subadar, and had a few words with him. Then on up the steep stony valley. The khaki colored grass slopes and grey cliffs, slashed here and there with the deep green of pine forest, with snow on the hilltops, and the blue sky overhead was lovely. The barberry bushes shone redly, like Chinese lacquer, and the willows were tipped with silver pussies. The valley narrowed and we came to a place where the Chinese had built a wall across, and just above was a Chinese village with barracks, parade ground, Yamen, etc. The walls were of stone and the street paved with stone; but the village was completely destroyed. Rosa Mayesii was very common on the bush clad slopes here, and a few small Rhodos. . . . Passed an occasional flat with a wooden hut or two. Also the new mint, where a score of men and women were working on the road.[52]

Here, as everywhere in his diaries, Kingdon-Ward's writing moves across the world's surface with the technique he had worked out on earlier expeditions: one step of gleaming, shimmering, moving vegetation, one of something else (a built structure, an event, a speculation), and repeat. This passage is unusual for the number of observations of persons and built structures that crop up in quick succession as the expedition moves through Yatung. The Indian military guard, the wall, the Chinese barracks, and the new mint stand like bedrock outcroppings in the plant-covered surface of the world, and the complexities of history, empire, power, and race sedimented into their stones threaten to tear this surface apart.

Yatung was a nodal site in the British effort to make Tibet into a stable buffer-

[50] The Sikkim-Tibet convention was negotiated between the Chinese Amban Sheng Tai of Lhasa and the Viceroy of India, Lord Lansdown, and signed on 17 March 1890. The text is given in Alastair Lamb, *The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations Between India, China and Tibet, 1904–1914* (Toronto: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 239–41.

[51] First-hand accounts by British participants in the 1904 invasion of Tibet are given in Gordon Enders and Edward Anthony, *Nowhere Else in the World* (New York: Farrer and Rineheart, 1935); and Powell Millington, *To Lhasa at Last* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1905).

[52] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 25 Mar. 1924.

state that would insulate the northern boundaries of India and the protectorate states of Sikkim and Bhutan from Russian and Chinese power.[53] Since 1904, the British had maintained a customs house, trade agents, and a trade mart there, which handled a large portion of the trade between India and Tibet: the Sikh Subadar with whom Kingdon-Ward shook hands was the captain of the customs-house guard. The wall and barracks had been built by the Qing army after 1904 as obstacles to further British military incursions; since the 1911 revolution the Chinese military presence along the border had melted away, and the barracks were now abandoned. In 1920, alarmed that the warlord governor of Gansu Province, Ma Qi, had sent a mission to Lhasa to create an alliance with the Dalai Lama, the Government of India sent the Political Officer in Sikkim, Charles Bell, on a mission to Lhasa to offer the Tibetan government friendship, machine guns, Lee Enfield rifles, and military instruction. In addition, Bell offered assistance for some modernization projects: an English school at Gyantze and help with constructing a hydroelectric plant ten miles north of Yatung, which would power a mint to produce a new copper coinage. This was the "new mint" where Kingdon-Ward's expedition passed men and women working on the road; it was being heralded in Britain as a beacon of Tibet's new independence, modernization, and "electrification" under British influence.[54]

Kingdon-Ward was well aware of the complexities of the British relationship with Tibet and China in evidence at Yatung. He had spent the previous few days in Sikkim in conversation with the new Political Officer there, his close friend since his time in the Indian Army, Major F. M. Bailey, who was preparing for his own important mission to Lhasa later that year. Yet he took great care in his writing to occlude every suggestion of the dense, troubled nature of this landscape, working these outcroppings into the surface by taking the next step—moving immediately on from the destroyed village to the Rosa Mayesii bushes on the slopes. In this fashion, he let the historical nature of the world make itself seen without allowing it to disturb the tightly mortared mosaic of the landscape. History remained on the surface; there was no depth and no sedimentation: unlike the other Western botanists who traversed this and nearby territory, he never noticed graves.

III.

With writing, Kingdon-Ward struggled to hold the walking observer free from social involvement with the inhabitants of this purely visible world. Eggs are a good example. At nearly every village, the expedition was greeted by a headman, who made Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor a present of dozens of eggs. Dick

[53] See Alstair Lamb, *Tibet, China, and India 1914–1950* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1989); Clive Christie, "Great Britain, China and the Status of Tibet, 1914–21," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 4 (1976):481–508; Alfred P. Rubin, "The Position of Tibet in International Law," *China Quarterly* 35 (1968):119.

[54] On the Bell mission to Lhasa, see Lamb, *Tibet, China, and India*, 106–40.

cooked eggs and chapatties with cocoa for breakfast, eggs and tsampa with buttered tea for supper. Kingdon-Ward noted these gifts briefly and moved rapidly on, as if by compulsion, to the next vegetal observation: "News of our coming had been received and they were ready for us; headman presented me with 4 dozen eggs. I noticed a third sp. of willow here."[55] And again: "Were met by [Tibetan] soldiers . . . they were vastly polite and attentive and brought us wine; and the headman brought us a present of eggs, which all got smashed on the road. Saw a tree Peony not in flower here."[56] He took care to note, in a tone approaching satisfaction, when the eggs got crushed and when they were bad: "Of a dozen gift eggs presented by the village last night, more than half are bad—and the rest aren't good. (Must work that into my article. A visit to the Jongpen! [Dzongpon])"[57] His "article" (in fact a book) elaborated: "The Dzongpon brought eggs and flour; the good old Abbott, eggs and flour; the clergy, eggs and flour; the villagers eggs and flour. When we came to check the rations, we found we had 180 eggs, of which 179 exploded on contact; the 180th was a dud."[58] He accepted the eggs; he ate the eggs, but, by exploding them in his prose, he deflected the claims they made upon him.

He had to "play the game" (as he put it) of exchange for his expedition to move. Yet he constructed the rules of this game as particular to this far side of the imperial border. His own social personhood, he wished to believe, was constituted by different rules, so these exchanges could slide off him without getting a grip or making a mark. At every major town, the local governing official, or Dzongpon, would provide lodging, arrange for transport across his territory, and call upon Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor to welcome them. Here is a description of such an event, typical for its cursory length, if not for its bad-tempered tone: "Phari is a filthy hole.[59] The Dzong-pen called with number 2 ditto, and brought us the empty frozen carcass of a goat. He saw Cawdor's hunting knife and immediately wanted to lick it. Stayed on till we were tired of him. They brought a chest of scarves, which we are returning tomorrow."[60] And the next day, in a better mood, "We went off to the Dzong about 10 and were politely received. Drank tea and ate sweetmeats. Dzong-pen gave me a short and very blunt sword, we presented i.e. returned the scarves given yesterday."[61]

The scarves were given in the expectation that they or an equivalent would

[55] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 24 Apr. 1924. [56] Ibid., 3 May 1924.

[57] Ibid., June 23, 1924. [58] Kingdon-Ward, *Tsangpo Gorges*, 164.

[59] The "filth" of Phari was becoming a familiar figure in the representation of Tibet in Britain, especially in the Everest expeditions, which always passed through their town on the way to the mountain. (Only days after Kingdon-Ward passed through Phari, the 1924 Everest expedition arrived there). See Peter H. Hansen, "The Dancing Lamas of Everest: Cinema, Orientalism, and Anglo-Tibetan Relations in the 1920s," *The American Historical Review* 101, 3 (1996):733. On the cultural impact of the 1924 Everest expedition in Britain, see Gordon T. Stewart, "Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture in Britain 1921–1953," *Past and Present* 149 (1995):170–97.

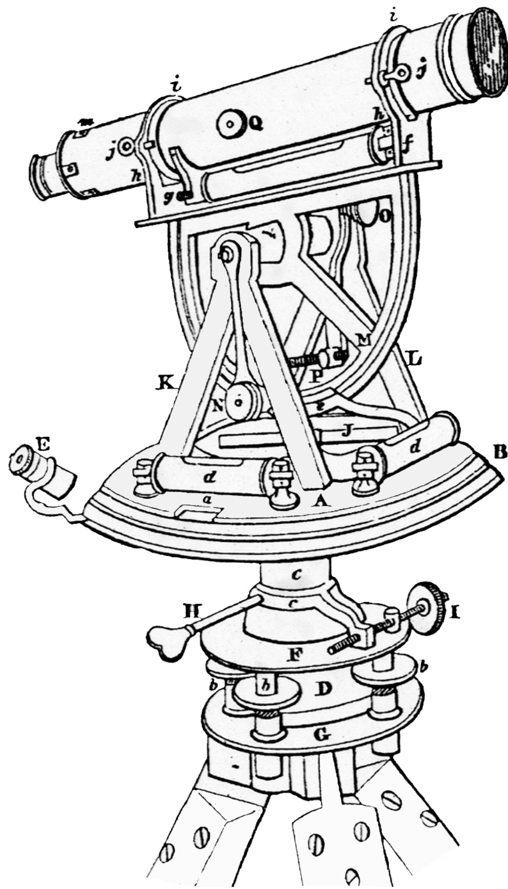
[60] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 26 Mar. 1924. [61] Ibid., 27 Mar. 1924.

FIGURE 1. Francis Kingdon-Ward, c.1911. Courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society.

FIGURE 2. Crates of seeds, packed and ready to ship, at the China Inland Mission station in Dali, Yunnan, 1914. Courtesy of Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Beneath the parallel plates is a female screw adapted to the staff h ead, which is connected by brass joints to three mahogany legs, so constructed that when shut up they form one round staff, secured in that form for carriage by rings put on them, and when opened out they make a very firm stand, be the ground ever so uneven.

The lower horizontal limb can be fixed in any position by tightening the clamping screw H, which causes the collar *c* to embrace the axis C, and prevent its moving; but it being requisite that it should be fixed in some precise position more exactly than can be done by the hand alone, the whole instrument, when thus clam ped, can be moved any small quantity by means of the tangent screw I, which is attached to the upper parallel plate. In like manner the upper or vernier plate can be fixed



CHAPTER III.]

FIGURE 3. Theodolite, from *Manual of Surveying for India.*

FIGURE 4. “Native surveyor at work.” Photo by Major C.H.D. Ryder, 1904, during the British invasion of Tibet. Courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society.

FIGURE 5. Porter with a steel Vanesta case. Courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society.

FIGURE 6. "Shugden Gompa." From Kingdon-Ward, *A Plant Hunter in Tibet.*

be returned as new scarves and gestures of friendship. Playing the game by his own rules, Kingdon-Ward did return them, ridding himself of both the scarves and the friendship they represented. This return was countered with the gift of the sword, which he parried, blunting it in his account.

Exchanges of words were even more crucial for moving the expedition along. Once it passed the end of the well-traveled road from Yatung at Gyantse, the expedition relied entirely upon passing travelers, monks, and villagers for information about the route ahead. Between the lines of Kingdon-Ward's diaries, Tom and Sunny Jim are busily at work querying these passersby. Yet when Kingdon-Ward mentions these crucial exchanges, it is to denounce them as unreliable, contradictory, or useless: "Just below Tsetang remains of an iron chain bridge, broken. Ferry working here instead. . . . Enquiries about the road elicited contradictory stories. At first they said no road by the river to Trap, then conceded that there was, but not beyond. Then said there had been a river path only last year, but an earthquake had destroyed it and killed 100 men at Trap; we are going there anyhow to see."[62]

He always went to see, but the route had nevertheless to be prefigured in exchanges of words before it could take material form through walking and writing. On previous expeditions the maps of the India Survey often limited the need for such exchanges, but the maps of this region were incomplete and outdated. The voices of passersby exerted a claim upon him, for he had to listen in order to move, but it was a claim he repeatedly and strenuously denied.

It was a well-worn orientalist trope, of course, that the language of Britain's colonial subjects was both unreliable and excessive. Kingdon-Ward liked this trope, for it solved the problem of how to evade the claims of the voices of this landscape's inhabitants. In other texts, he deployed it in tight relation to racist caricature to present a vision of "Asia" as a world where babble, excessive, meaningless, and ineffective, flows over the landscape like water. Thus, at a market in Lijiang: "Across the lake was an open meadow surrounded by booths and here a motley crowd had assembled. There were sallow-cheeked Chinese traders, fair-skinned Moso in pleated skirts, tall Tibetans from Chung-tien [Zhongdian], lanthorn-jawed Lisu with hooked noses, and round faced Minchia come out of the west, arguing, expostulating, pleading, bargaining, as Asiatics do."[63]

It was a spectacle: picturesque, interesting, even restful, as he made clear a few pages later, when he let the river Mekong itself add its voice to this Asiatic cacophony " . . . it is a fascinating pastime to sit and watch all these ever-changing tricks of the gamboling, shouting, Mekong waters, their voice rising in the summer, and dying away to a whisper in the winter as the red mud sinks out of sight, and the water reflects the blue of heaven."[64] He wished that spo-

[62] Ibid., 23 Apr. 1924.
[63] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *Mystery Rivers of Tibet* (London: Seeley, Service, and Co., 1923), 23.
[64] Ibid., 39.

ken language could always remain thus, an inconsequential babble, a feature of the land itself, compelling no dialog, exerting no force and no appeal.

It is not just exchanges with the landscape's inhabitants that are rigorously controlled. Even dialog with his companion, Cawdor, is excluded: the 1924 diaries contain only a single snippet of such dialog, in Sikkim, a few days before the expedition reached the frontier. ("A specimen of our conversation. 'What does Lepidote mean?' 'Covered with scales!' 'Oh! Like a fish!'"[65]) Within Tibet, Cawdor is very rarely mentioned, and his voice is never heard. Indeed, human voices of any kind are almost never directly present in these diaries. Voices are an intrusion in this relentlessly visual world; they break up its continuity by threatening to put the observing subject in the position of having to answer. It is telling that when Kingdon-Ward mentions the animal analog of human voices, it is frequently in association with physical disability, often a temporary collapse of his powers of vision. Croaking crows bring on blinding headaches; dogs are heard barking after the power of sight melts away: "Yak dung fire smoking abominably—thawed us, but our eyes melted at sight of it. Everything smothered under a film of fine ash, like Pompei. Dogs bark at us in every village."[66]

These are traces of a disciplined series of exclusions of history, exchange, dialog, and voice, through which the world was constituted as an extended, unlayered, visible surface, over which this solitary and monadic observer made his way. They are unusual traces: the bulk of Kingdon-Ward's diaries follow his footsteps across this surface, practicing absorptive wandering on the far side of the imperial horizon as I have already described. It was not that perception came first and then writing: not that writing merely represented selected elements of the perceived world according to the rules of a style or genre. As Kingdon-Ward wrote each day's walk, he was teaching himself how to see the world—cultivating, as he would put it, his "eye for plants"—and as he walked, he was already writing, already finding, in each new step and each new plant, the words that would move his writing along. The instrument of this process was the steel-nib pen, the analog, in memory, of the walking body, the friction-laden contact between nib and paper concentrating perception down to a single register: the eyes carried across a resisting topography of plains and gorges. The pen was an instrument of perception, and as the field of perception to which it gave access was purely visual, it was an optical instrument.

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Eye better, much less pain, but it wasn't much service for seeing. Everything blurred. Started out at 11 and went down the gully—the one daily walk of Tsela Dzong. Took photographs of Cassiope and Rhododendrons.[67]

[65] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 20 Mar. 1924. [66] Ibid., 18 Apr. 1924.
[67] Ibid., 29 May 1924.

I.

To distill pure perception out of its social field in one direction was to open up this solitary experience to a dense social terrain in another. While Kingdon-Ward kept his diaries to himself, he wrote them always with an eye to turning them into prose for others—letters home to his mother, sister, wife, and daughters; plant lists and botanical descriptions for his syndicate subscribers and scientific patrons; and, most prolifically, articles and books for a growing public readership. As much as possible, revision erased the body from the process of perception. The few references to bodily fatigue, illness, disability, and want that remain in his diaries disappear from the articles and books. Sounds and voices—the noxious crows and barking dogs, the birds that wake him up too early—disappear as well. At the same time, everything shines more brilliantly: in his books Kingdon-Ward turns the technique Elaine Scarry calls "radiant ignition" up to fullest luminescence, giving over the landscape more completely to the visual sense.[68] Finally, especially in his later books, the alternation of moving vegetation and walking body that I have characterized as absorptive wandering, while not disappearing altogether, is radically altered.

In the final week of June 1924, Kingdon-Ward and Cawdor, with their men, porters, and stores, had made their way from Gyantse, up the Tsangpo, over the Tang La, down the Rong Chu to its confluence with the Tsangpo, up the latter river again, and to Doshang La, a pass that led south toward Pemako. The expedition camped at the foot of some cliffs below the pass, and Tom and his men built a log bridge across the stream by the camp, cutting a path through the Rhododendron brush to give the two Brits access to a boggy valley that led up to the pass.[69] As always, Kingdon-Ward's diary writing about this walk alternated between steps and sights: the movement of the walk, flowers sighted, and repeat.

> June 24. Camp ~~Dochung~~ Doshang La. An amazing day, we climbed up the avalanche following the valley west of the ~~Dochung~~ Doshang La. . . . [strikeouts in original] Shortly after, on the alpine turf and rocks we caught sight of a blood red creeping Rhodo with very large flowers, lying prone; it proved to be sanguineum, (I think) [marginal note: resembling R. repens] and a wonderful sight it was. On the rocks also were two species of Diapensia, a salmony pink one and a sulfer one. We now climbed out of the valley, which higher up was full of snow, up a steep alpine slope, and so on to the ridge, where scrub Rhodos grew knee deep—masses of rose pink 'Lacteum,' and creamy yellow 'Souliei' with an occasional 'Cardorensis.' However, the going on the ridge soon became better.[70]

Revision expanded this tentative, peripatetic text, with all of its climbing and wading, and all its uncertainties about the names of places and flowers, into a full-voiced optical drama. In *The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges,* written from this diary, four and one-half pages take the pair from avalanche to ridge, the high point being the sight of that blood-red creeping sanguineum.

[68] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, 1999).
[69] Kingdon-Ward, diaries, 25 June 1924. [70] Ibid., 24 June 1924.

Once, when gazing across the torrent to a steep grass slope, I pointed out to my companion some brilliant scarlet leaves which formed a pattern on a rock; and he, taking out his telescope, looked at them long and carefully. 'Why,' said he, at length, 'they are not leaves, they are flowers; it's a Rhododendron, I believe.' 'What!' I shouted, almost seizing the glass from him in eagerness; and gazing as he had done, I realized that he was right. They were flowers, not leaves—flowers of vivid scarlet flaming on the rocks. Straightway we tried to cross the torrent, but finding that impossible, continued up stream to a dangerous-looking snow bridge; this we *might have* risked crossing, so great was our anxiety to reach the prize, but *at that moment* we observed another blaze at our feet, and there was Scarlet Runner as we called it [the sanguineum of the diary entry], laced to the rocks. For a minute we just stared at it, drunk with wonder . . . [my emphasis].[71]

A spot of color sighted at the end of a pointing finger, sighted again, twice, through a telescope; the rest of the passage describes a struggle to bridge the void between body and thing that optical technology brings into being—and then erases, for in the end, no dangerous crossing is needed, and the flower, speaking its own name, lies right at their feet.

Photography was exceptionally important to Kingdon-Ward. Each of his books and many of his articles contain a few photographs, and when still naive about the penurious world of publishing he dreamed of including a hundred photographs in a single book.[72] He carried a long-focus ¼-plate camera on all of his expeditions—or rather one of his men carried it, in a steel box slung over his shoulder with a leather strap. Along with the camera came a tripod, boxes of heavy and delicate four-by-five-inch glass slide negatives, and bottles of sodium sulphite, sodum carbonate, pyrogallic acid, potassium bromide, sodium hyposulphite, and acetic acid, as well as a ruby lantern and an assortment of trays for developing. Kingdon-Ward spent a great deal of time selecting "views," setting up camera and tripod, waiting for the right conditions of light and weather, and, when his subjects were human, cajoling or tricking them into enduring the camera.

Only a few exposed plates could be carried at a time, in plate holders that protected them from light. For this reason, and because the equipment was so heavy and tricky to set up, nearly all photographs were taken on excursions from a base camp rather than in passage. Photography was fundamentally sedentary, performed in those periods when the party settled in for a stay, arranging their things about them, as in July 1934, when they arrived at Shugden Gompa: "I had my boxes brought in and arranged along the fore walls. My table and chair were set up by the window, with the camp bed alongside. Field-glasses, compass, thermos flask and camera were hung from pegs. Lastly my flower presses and stacks of drying paper were piled in the center of the room against a square wooden pillar, supporting the ceiling. The bare room now looked habitable, or at least inhabited."[73]

[71] Kingdon-Ward, *Tsangpo Gorges,* 100.
[72] Kingdon-Ward to Isaac Bailey Balfour, June 1915, RBG, Edinburgh.
[73] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *A Plant Hunter in Tibet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 134.

In each of the places he inhabited—tents, houses, temples, monasteries—Kingdon-Ward set up a dark room. There, glass plate negatives were dipped in a developing bath, dipped again in a fixing bath, immersed for an hour or two in water, clipped to strings hung across a room to be air dried, then filed away in envelopes bearing negative numbers, captions, and exposure data. Finishing—making prints and lantern slides—waited until the return to England, where the negatives were turned over to a professional photographer. The walls, tables, chairs, windows, and courtyards that made photography possible also accommodated two other activities: arranging and labeling seeds and specimens and revising diaries to write letters and begin books and articles. Glass plates labeled and stacked in their rectangular boxes; stacks of absorbent paper, interleaved with specimens and notes; and notebooks folded together with their corresponding sheaves of paper for drafting revisions: these were the material forms for the consolidation and reinterpretation of experience which the domestic life of inhabited rooms made possible.

Kingdon-Ward wrote drafts of many of his books and articles in such rooms. Sometimes, as with a book on plant hunting and another on rock gardening, he interleaved drafts with the pages of his daily dairies or wrote them on the backs of drafts of letters. More often, he worked from his bound diaries, copying and revising them on separate sheaves of paper, and sending them home directly from the field for publication. To compose his twenty-five popular books, he followed his diaries through their order of days, erasing details, unifying fragmented experiences, and adding long ecstatic passages. Absent from the diaries but central to each of the books were moments of sudden revelation where, after a long, difficult ordeal in which visual perception was limited or obscured, the veil was ripped away, and a view of a flower or a peak, frozen, stark, and luminous, was presented. In some cases these revelatory moments appeared at the end of a quest for a photograph. The vision was never the photograph itself, which was inevitably lost or disappointing. Instead, the ordeal in which sight was disciplined toward the end of taking a photograph made possible a form of vision that borrowed all its characteristics from a photograph—or rather from a lantern-slide, projected onto a large screen in a darkened room.

I'll give one example. After his 1924 expedition to Tibet, Kingdon-Ward made three expeditions to North Burma, Assam, and the Southern Shan States in Burma and Upper Laos. In 1933, he returned to Tibet, crossing the Himalaya in Assam and following a portion of the route mapped in 1882 by the Pandit A. K., from Rima to Shugden Gompa in Southern Kham.[74] He was accompanied

[74] The diaries for these four expeditions were the material for three books; the diaries themselves, along with all Kingdon-Ward's other diaries from the period from 1925 to 1935 are lost. The books are *Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1930), which describes two expeditions to Upper Burma and Assam in 1926 and 1927 to 1928; *Plant Hunting in the Wilds* (London: Figurehead, 1931), which incorporates material from eight months plant collecting in 1928 in the Lohit Valley and a trip through Laos and the Shan States in 1928 and 1929; and *A Plant Hunter in Tibet*, which describes the 1933 trip to Tibet.

by a young Cambridge graduate out for an adventure, Ronald Kaulback, as well as three men from Darjeeling recommended by the local secretary of the Himalayan Club, and a fluid crowd of Mishmi and Khampa porters. In addition, for the first time, he brought along a professional photographer, employed by the Raycol British Corporation to make a color film of the expedition. The expedition left Darjeeling in early March and, by June, had reached its first plant-hunting ground, a pass named Cheti La on the road to Shugden Gompa. Kingdon-Ward had his porters build two huts near this pass. After a month, he decided to move on over the glaciated pass to Shugden Gompa, but not before filming three of the flowers he had discovered there: "the glorious Paraquilegia microphylla, unsurpassed as a cliff plant, Scarlet Runner, hissing in red rivers down the wet screes like molten lava, and Rhododendron sanguineum so scalding red hot that it seemed to clear a space for itself by melting the snow all round." He and Brooks-Carrington, the photographer, set up the camera on the glacier above the pass and spent five days there, returning to camp in the evening, waiting for the rain and storms to clear. They were assailed by storms and enveloped in clouds; the rain "sluiced everything and battered our bodies to a numb pulp. Only our hearts held on. . . . we cowered against the mountainside, getting colder and wetter until the rain ran out of us." Finally, on the fifth day, after they returned to camp in the dark, "The storm was over. A tempestuous calm succeeded. The peaks were reappearing, dead white in their clean new shrouds: they looked ghastly and corpse like. Suddenly the tip of Chömbö itself appeared, floating on a bank of cloud, the rest of the mountain being hidden. It was a wonderful vision, just that dead white cone, crystallizing out of the shapeless mist, faint at first then more sharply outlined. I took it for a sign, a promise for the morrow. And so it proved."[75]

But on the morrow, though the weather was fine, Kingdon-Ward seemed to forget about photography altogether, going on instead about the country lying beyond the pass. Brooks-Carrington's films of the expedition seem to be lost. Nevertheless, Kingdon-Ward found a way to accomplish the work of photography through revision. In retrospect—that is, in the settled rooms in which revision occurred—the five-day vigil prepared the senses to receive and project the world as a camera and lantern would. Vision was shut off, the body washed almost away. Darkened and empty, the senses screened out the world, all but the small window around Chömbö's tip, cropped off by a cloud, faint at first, then sharp as the focus was adjusted.

II.

Stanley Cavell writes of both romanticism and photography as responding to a condition that has been at the center of European thought since Kant, the bargain Kant struck with skepticism: that to assure ourselves that we can know the

[75] Kingdon-Ward, *A Plant Hunter in Tibet*, 119–20.

existence of the world we must give up any claim to know things in themselves—that which lies beyond appearances but does not itself appear.[76] Romanticism (among Cavell's most extended examples of which are Blake, Coleridge, Emerson, and Thoreau) is a response to the sense that subjectivity is interposed between us and the world; romanticism takes our subjectivity, the endless presence to us of self, as a route back to the world and a conviction of its presence to us. Photography articulates, in a sense, an opposite response. Photography, Cavell writes, overcame subjectivity in a way undreamed of by painting, a way that could not satisfy painting, one which does not so much defeat the act of painting as escape it altogether: by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction. . . . Photography maintains the presence of the world by accepting our absence from it. The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past."[77] This is not to maintain, as some historians of colonial photography do, that photography's effects depended upon a naïve sense that photographs merely give us the world unframed and unfiltered by the agency of the photographer.[78] For Cavell, if a photograph opens up onto reality, it does so precisely through the photographer's framing acts: the camera crops the world, selecting a portion of it and rejecting the rest: "the implied presence of the world and its explicit rejection are as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents."[79] Screened as a lantern slide show or a film (Cavell writes of cinema as an elaborated extension of photography) a photograph screens out the viewer's subjectivity from the world it presents. It is as though a photograph offers an explanation for our inability to know the world as it is: "The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it, placed at a distance from it. The screen overcomes our fixed distance; it makes displacement appear as our natural condition."[80]

Kingdon-Ward self-consciously made the lantern slide show the central condition of the botanical explorer's experience, the condition that made it possible to reproduce experience and bring it home. His manifesto about the role of botanical exploration in empire was a little book, probably co-written with his wife Florinda, called *The Romance of Plant Hunting* (1924), which drew on diaries from his 1922 expedition to North Burma, Yunnan, and Sichuan:

> After breakfast we set forth into the white mist. An extraordinary sense of remoteness overlays me; we seem to be in a new and injurious world, cut off from all that is dear and familiar by this impenetrable void. . . . Stop! What is that? Through the rain mist,

[76] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary, Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 31.

[77] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 23.

[78] As an example, see James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

[79] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24. [80] Ibid., 41.

we see, as though through a lense spectrelike and magnified, a new flower. Surely it must be imagination, a sudden image in the whirling rain! We have seen all the meadow flowers. A breeze rips open the veil for an instant, and we see clearly. Then a fresh exhalation seethes up from the valley and everything is blotted out again. It is like the opening and closing of a shutter . . . We peer through the engulfing mist, rubbing our eyes as the vision passes. Yet a few minutes later we are in the meadow, wading knee deep through them. They are real enough now.[81]

He reproduced this scene mechanically in his many books, never giving up, in reproduction, the strenuous alternation of desolation and ecstasy that accompanied the click of the shutter. The model of photography gave him a method to resolve the problem of translating subjective experience across the ocean to an audience in England. The solution was to present his audience with a world towards which he joined them on an equal footing, made vividly present in the absence of an intervening subject. His most avid and perspicacious reader in England was probably his sister Winifred. With a sure eye, Winifred collected the "photographic" moments of his prose in a manuscript biography of her brother—her effort to participate as fully as possible in his world. She knew exactly what she was about. Near the beginning of her manuscript she found in her own experience a formula with which to interpret and reiterate her brother's. In 1912, after his first expedition to China, Winifred attended her brother's first public lecture, with lantern slides: "For me this lecture was made especially memorable by a photograph of the 14,000 ft. Francis Garnier Peak at the head of Chung-tsung Pass. When it was thrown on the screen, there was a sudden intake of breath from the audience as the impact of the transcendent beauty of those everlasting snows struck. The picture seemed to project light from within with exemplary radiance, and Frank let it speak for itself without any commentary."[82]

Walking and writing were perceptual disciplines, aiming at a full alignment of the senses with the productive conditions of lens, glass negative, and slide. This discipline reached for the frozen image, bathed in light, calling for no commentary, engendering only its opposite: a sharp intake of breath. The lantern-slide shows in Kingdon-Ward's books worked toward a direct, optical relationship between Southwest China and England. Screening the world, they manifested a fixed distance between the perceiving body and the world and then overcame that distance by making it appear as a natural condition. To revise the perceptual labor of walking and writing into a prose slide show was to experiment with a fantasy in which imperial space found coherence and unity in this condition—an extended mimesis through which England and the colonized world reflected each other in images, no subject intervening.

The Romance of Plant Hunting is framed by a dream in which a photographic glimpse of a flower reproduces itself throughout England, transforming and

[81] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *The Romance of Plant Hunting* (London: E. Arnold and Co., 1924).
[82] Winifred Kingdon-Ward, *The Flower Chief*, 33.

healing the land. "Picture [the plant collector] in a remote valley. . . . He stands at the entrance to his tent peering through field glasses at the peak he proposes to climb in the morrow." He goes to bed and dreams he is climbing the peak. "Jostling mountains, cape beyond cape—and his hurrying thoughts are pulled up with a jerk. What was the brilliance which his questing eye just glimpsed. By heaven, what a find! It is a flower after all, and the whole world stands still while he worships." In his dream he is transported to the Chelsea flower show. He "rubbed his eyes. There it was! A great bank of it rose before him, and round him astonished crowds stood gazing at it. . . . Its delicate breath was in the breath of Sussex and Kent, its veined delightful leaves were shrouding rock gardens. . . . presently tired men would come home from overseas and having missed the loveliness of England would wander out of doors. . . . And, not knowing whence this flower had come, they would only say as they stood content before its beauty, "it's jolly good to be home."

I scarcely need point out how these visions are screened like lantern slides. Their abruptness of appearance, leaving the viewer rubbing his eyes, their radiance, as though they are the source of their own light, and the affective shock they create match point-for-point the conditions Winifred observed as Francis Garnier Peak appeared on the screen in a darkened London room. A slide is "present to me while I am not present to it," as Cavell puts it; that is to say, there is no bridge of voice, trade, labor, or history that reaches from the viewers into the world the slide gives them; there is only an "impenetrable gulf" made substantial and naturalized. The slide opens its radiant window by cropping out most of the world, and in this way implying an infinite extension of that window and the relation of subject to world it engenders.

III.

It was this extension that Kingdon-Ward was after when he returned repeatedly to the vision of the world as a sea of flowers formulated in 1924 up on the Doshang La. In his later writing, the huge plateau region between the Yangtze and the Tsangpo became the "Lapponicum sea" (Lapponicum is the name of a section of Rhododendron species). This was the "vortex" of a global "Rhododendron whirlpool," the origin of the genus, where species diversity was the greatest and the range of each species the most limited. This "undulating moorland, with wide, shallow, boggy, iceworn valleys and rounded billowy hills" was a place where a certain kind of perceptual experience became possible, a mode of ecstatic involvement in a world of visual plentitude, of which the diversity of Rhododendron species was the sign.

> The wealth and variety of Rhododendrons is simply astounding. . . . They form seas of sulpher, carmine, and rose pink; rivers of purple 'Lapponicum' flow into lakes of brick-red, lemon, and snow-white 'Anthopogon'; stains of cherry-brandy 'Glaucum' are splashed over a satiny lining of pink and mauve cherry-blossom 'Glaucum'; clumps of merry little pouting 'Campylogynum,' pink and plum purple, are plastered like swallows

nests against the grey cliffs, and pools of canary yellow 'Trichocladum' glow from the brown grass slopes. Along the snowfed streams the twin flowers of a royal purple 'Saluenense' nod in the rising spate. . . .[83]

In this sea of flowers, the hermetic principles of vision that Kingdon-Ward was struggling to practice reached their most perfect form, and the tension between the world as walked and the world as seen found momentary resolution. The 'Lapponicum sea' opened a window on the world, automatically rejecting what was beyond and thus infinitely extending itself past the cropped edge—like a photograph of a moorland that crops out a town or camp. Yet it simultaneously presented the possibility of entering bodily into the lantern slide. Kingdon-Ward's books showed him plunging and wading into this sea, plowing through it knee-deep for hours, wandering ecstatically in it for days. It was the kind of walking he loved best to write about, in which the body and the world rubbed off on each other, pollen powdering his clothes, his passage leaving a shining path through the waves. The viewer's subjectivity was reintroduced into this vision, but it was a strictly limited form of subjectivity bent entirely toward reproducing ecstatic affect. None of this walking involved any of the tensions and compromises of getting from place to place—no caravans, companions, routes, nor supplies. Yet none of the labor of excluding voice, exchange, sociality, and history was evident either; the lantern slide of the sea had already automatically eliminated all of this. The sea was a fantasy of an uninhabited, modernist artwork, into which one entered by becoming absorbed into a pure and limitless visual plentitude.

It was not by accident that when the "tired men coming home from overseas" caught sight of Kingdon-Ward's dream flower it was in a rock garden. Rock gardens were the perfect showcases for the hardy alpines that he and other collectors in this region were sending home and the material reflection in England of the 'Lapponicum sea.' He eventually produced a manual for rock gardeners of limited means. The rock garden, he insisted, was the ultimate accomplishment both of "man's aesthetic sense," and of the British Empire. In rock gardens, England showed the world "how gardening might bring peace and contentment to a ravaged generation."[84] "A rock garden is neither a copy of a mountain scene or a small scale model. It has a separate existence. . . . Nevertheless, it reflects the hills." Not a copy (that is, a representation) but a reflection: a rock garden directly imported the screes, falls, clips, outcrops and plants of the mountain world. It brought together brilliant visual fragments from all over the world into a single container that, as much as possible, displayed the sparkling, liquid animation characteristic of Kingdon-Ward's fantasy of the sea. His advice was not for the rich but for those willing to build their gardens

[83] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *Rhododendrons for Everyone* (London: The Gardener's Chronicle, Ltd., 1926), 57.

[84] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *Commonsense Rock Gardening* (London: J. Cape, 1948).

with their hands and eyes. Britain was to be "brought back to sanity," its industrial wounds healed over, and solace brought to its war-ravaged souls, through this "blissful occupation" this pure absorption into these dream-spaces that contained and possessed an entire world.

IV.

I have called this vision of the 'Lapponicum sea' "modernist." This may seem an odd label for such a vigilantly romantic and pastoral project. Yet, as a perceptual practice, it had much in common with certain modernist projects in the visual arts. Rosalind Krauss argues that many modernist painters attempted to distill pure, formal principles of vision, isolated from all other bodily and social conditions of perception. In this sense, John Ruskin himself was a kind of prototypical modernist. Krauss follows the child John Ruskin (through the adult Ruskin's autobiography) as he learns a certain mode of perception, grounded, like Kingdon-Ward's, in a consoling grid of exclusions. She watches him travel through Europe "luxuriating in a rapt stare" through the train windows. He is monolingual, and all the voices he hears are babble; he takes, as he wrote, "inconceivable delight in not understanding a word anybody says!" Ruskin, writes Krauss, "spent his life transforming the whole of nature into a machine for producing images, establishing in this way an autonomous field of the visual, characterized by those two qualities upon which the optical sense opens uniquely: the infinitely multiple on the one hand and the simultaneously unified on the other." She watches him lost in contemplation of the sea. He cannot take his eyes off of it: "And it functions for him in the same way as it does for Monet in *Impressionism, Sunrise*, or Conrad in *Lord Jim*. The sea is a special kind of medium for modernism because of its perfect isolation, its detachment from the social, its sense of self-enclosure, and, above all, its opening into a visual plentitude that is somehow heightened and pure, both a limitless expanse and a sameness, flattening into nothing, into the no-space of sensory deprivation."[85]

Kingdon-Ward's most remarkable book was a sober little manual called *Modern Exploration* (1945). It begins by describing the region of the 'Lapponicum sea' as "a veritable treasure house of plants . . . the meeting place of several floras which have developed apart, the Sino-Himalayan, Indo-Malaysian, Eastern Asiatic, Northern or Palearctic, and Mediterranean." In other words, it is a natural rock garden, the glittering contents of the world combined into a single container. Abruptly, this garden is immersed in an aquatic cosmology. The world, Kingdon-Ward explains, is three hollow spheres, the crust (or lithosphere), the ocean (or hydrosphere), and the atmosphere. "It is really rather surprising that there should be any lithosphere showing through the hydrosphere, or in other words that there should be any land surface at all. The

[85] Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 2.

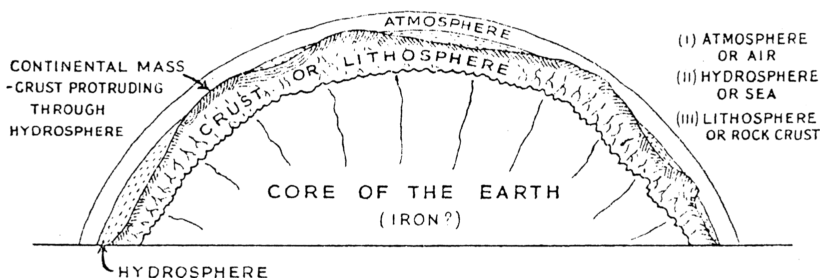

FIGURE 7. The spheres of the earth. From Kingdon-Ward, *Modern Exploration.*

sea is quite large enough and deep enough to drown all the continents two miles deep without leaving a trace. If that happened, the sea would be everywhere, the lithosphere nowhere, in contact with the atmosphere, and our three shells would be complete, in perfect contact, and concentric: air, sea, and rock."

He keeps returning to this vision. He imagines the world newly born, with no land, and no rivers pouring silt into sea: "Over the whole world, therefore, the sea would rest directly on the crust, the atmosphere directly on the sea."[86] And again, in explaining the origins of storms: "How violent the world climates would be if the position of land and sea were reversed. If on the other hand, the sea were continuous over the globe, severe storms would probably be unknown."[87]

The sea is the original source for the form of knowledge that lies at the foundation of the empire: the passion for collecting objects and facts to fill the archive, and the compulsion to extend that knowledge to encompass the world. "A first visit to the seaside inevitably arouses the latent imp in us when we see shells scattered along the beach in their fanciful shapes and colours. Immediately we begin to collect, and we cannot but distinguish different species such as cockles, fans, top, and spirals . . . If there are so many beautiful and curious objects along the sea shore, how many more must there be out of sight beyond the furthest point to which the tide goes out and beyond that again in the vast expanses of the ocean painted blue in our atlases?" In this sense, the sea is the name for an ideology of perception that undergirded the entire imperial project of knowledge creation.

Yet Kingdon-Ward's vision of the sea stretched beyond this ideology toward a fantasy of coherence in which optical immediacy replaces knowledge. Imag-

[86] Francis Kingdon-Ward, *Modern Exploration* (London: J. Cape, 1945), 81.
[87] Ibid., 82.

ined as infinite and serene, the sea was the source for the particular form of perception—that "blissful contemplation"—that he saw as indigenous to rock gardens. He pictured himself as a child, and found that he too could not take his eyes off the sea. "Many of us, when we were children, have sat on the seashore gazing out at the hard line where the sea and sky meet, and thought passionately of all of the wonderful sights hidden beneath the waves . . . What treasures seem to be for ever concealed! What sights!" For this child, the sea was already a rock garden: "Sea-green grottoes floored with tinted corals, gorges fringed with feathery forests of weed, delicate as lace, shells, larger, brighter, more cunningly twisted than any ever known, mermaids perhaps."

Krauss says of the little Ruskin that the investment of his stare in pattern and detachment from purpose was an example of his "modernist vocation." Eventually, for Kingdon-Ward too this stare comes full circle: "the motionless, silent, disembodied subject of the stare becomes its equally disincarnated object, becomes, that is, himself an image": Kingdon-Ward (or Ruskin) staring at himself staring, in blissful contemplation, at the sea.[88] The sea's tendency to cover all the land, quell all the storms, and turn the world into a static, concentric, and serene vision, is a figure for the tendency of this rapt stare to extend itself to infinity—to that hard line where sea and sky meet—and beyond, back onto itself, to enclose an entire, autonomous world. The form of perception that Kingdon-Ward found in the 'Lapponicum sea' was the ultimate aim of his "modern exploration"—a solitary absorption into a purely visual world, at once infinitely multiple and unified.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Southwest China and Tibet were last substantial "white spaces" on the maps of botanic, geographic, and ethnographic knowledge that layered the imperial archives. The mostly British botanical explorers who spent the decades immediately preceding and following the Great War walking through this area sought assiduously to fill in these spaces, even as the mythology of the archive was being undermined and perceptual foundations of the sciences this myth had relied upon destabilized. Hugh Raffles has shown how, in the context of nineteenth-century exploration of the Amazon, "Scientific knowledge turns out to be a negotiation of local knowledges of conjectural context."[89] In the case of Kingdon-Ward, and the others who amassed the seeds, texts, specimens, photographs, maps, drawings, conjectures, theories, and dreams through which, in the early twentieth century, Southwest China and Tibet took shape as a region in the archives and imaginations of imperial Britain, among the local knowledges being negotiated were assumptions about the very foundations of knowledge production. Late impe-

[88] Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 5.
[89] Raffles, "The Uses of Butterflies," 513–48.

rial science was caught up in the revolution in ideologies of perception and in its technological foundations that had been ongoing since the early nineteenth century. The story I have been telling here suggests that the peripheries of empire in particular were sites where the instabilities generated by this revolution became starkly manifest; where those who set out to amass knowledge for the imperial archive were forced to struggle to refashion their perceptual relations with the world. Empire had involved a demand for a certain kind of representational relationship with the world. Early twentieth-century imperial explorers of the earth's flora found themselves struggling to fulfill this demand on the one hand, and to recast it, on the other: to find their own mode of presence to the world through which they found themselves walking.

For Frank Kingdon-Ward, writing and revising and reading were technologies of perception, drawing on perceptual instruments such as theodolites, pens, and cameras to shape the body's interface with the world. To make words out of the body's movements over the landscape was to regulate the senses; to regulate the senses was to shape one's inner life and sense of self. The affects that emerged from these projects were neither pre-linguistic nor an effect of representation in language. They were complex products of the process of screening the world that I have been attempting to follow here, in which sensing and representing dialectically shaped each other. It is for this reason that affects emerged with the most clarity in practices such as walking, writing, and revising that straddled perception and language, converting one to the other and back again.

These practices staged the landscape as present in relation to a particular set of others, screening it through a particular set of social relations.[90] In writing, these relations were with the companions of Kingdon-Ward's walks. In writing, Kingdon-Ward disciplined his sight to spread out over the surface of the world to inure himself to the claims of their gifts and histories; he rendered himself all but deaf to insulate him from the claims of their voices. He struggled to establish a conviction of his presence to the world, his absorption into the world's surface as he waded through its flowers, his exchange of substance with it as he moved in and out of its shadows and gorges. The material practice of writing his diaries—the scratching of the steel-nib pen over the paper each night of his journey—gave him a frame on which to hang this developing sense of presence to the material landscape. In revision, these relations were with a popular audience. The material of these relations was books, articles, specimens, seeds, and photographs, rather than eggs, gazes, and voices; the spaces in which they intersected to inflect social personhood were the inhabited rooms or courtyards rather than the paths and camps of the journey; the tool with which the senses

[90] I choose the metaphor of "screening" deliberately for its double sense of projecting an image upon a screen for an audience (Cavell's sense), and for passing a substance through a screen or sieve. The social relations for and through which the world is screened provide both a receptive audience and an active grid of requirements for perception.

were reshaped to project these relations was the lens rather than the pen. Kingdon-Ward revised for his public and his nation; the perceptual relation to the world and the ecstatic regime of affect that revision organized were in imperial registers, rendering the world into images for the imperial archive, yet also reaching beyond this archive towards a modernist fantasy of ecstatic absorption in a world of total formal coherence. Rock gardens brought the 'Lapponicum sea' home to Britain. They brought together glittering, image-like fragments of landscapes from all over the empire and beyond and gave "owner-gardeners" a way to experience a simple, purified absorption into these images. These dream spaces, and the other products of this episode of botanical exploration, especially popular books and articles, offered Britons a new ideology of empire, a new and hopeful cosmology, like the Aleph of Borges' story, in which "without mixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, might coexist."

That writing and revising (as well as reading) were the practices to emerge from my own encounters with Kingdon-Ward is a contingent artifact of the archive: every step of Kingdon-Kingdon-Ward's particular project was intensively textual; its products and the social relations that produced and sustained it were worked out primarily through textual practices, rather than (as in many other cases) through maps, photographs, botanical specimens, or living plants. In the end, such practices can only be grasped dialectically: as partial practices, emerging only through fluid intersections with other practices, other modes of social relation, other regimes of affect, writing always involving revising and reading, and so on, both in their moment of production and in their emergence from the archive. To examine each as a moment in a dialectic is to understand the perceptual practices on which science was founded as enmeshed not merely within the immediate context of colonial relations but within a full range of social relations and regimes of affect, as well as the aesthetic endeavors, cosmological yearnings, and projects of self-fashioning to which they gave rise.