with a discussion on how the Marian Faith Healing Ministry relates to both local and global perspectives on religious healing and how the orthodoxy of religious healing more generally combines institutionalized theologies and traditional healing practices.

Already in the introduction, Wilkens discusses her use of the term traditional in relation to both socially and culturally complex belief-systems and societies. Although the term modern is not mentioned, the present reader cannot but associate a more classical distinction in the background, i.e., the one between traditional and modern or tradition and modernity. Wilkens avoids the issue by stating that tradition and traditional societies change and, at the same time, have awareness about change – although according to an understanding different from the modernist meaning of it. Following from this, it is later argued that while typical for many new religious movements are their antimodern and antipositivistic rhetoric, this particular Ministry encourages a process towards individualization and what is denoted as "cognitive individualization" or, perhaps, a modern mind-set if not linked to ideas of modernization. Wilkens interpretation is based on the Ministry's focus on: 1. the act of confession, that is, reflection on inner thoughts and intentions and, 2. Nkwera's theory of disease causation, that is, disease being caused by the fault of one of the persons involved or, rather, affected. Healing is thus connected with the necessity of repenting personal sins and to learn to have faith in God. Still, by combining text analysis with personal healing narratives of the members and participant observations at the Ministry's headquarter, Wilkens is also investigating the scope for individual interpretations and practices at play. In her analysis of religious healing and how a concept of healing is integral to religious practice in general, the author combines perspectives from the study of religion and from that of medical anthropology, so as to explore more generally the concept of faith healing as well as this particular Ministry's concept and practice of healing. The conventional distinctions within medical anthropology between illness, sickness and disease is not here applied, as the author rather follows Nkwera's terminology, when using disease to designate physiological, social, and cultural problems, while on an analytical level applying the term affliction or misfortune. Thus discussing the meaning of healing and of efficacy, Wilkens concludes that healing in this context is as much about feeling healed as about being healed in a biomedical sense. What is considered an effect of the ritual and whether the effects are regarded as efficacious healing is thus dependent on the interpretations of the participants.

The study further contextualizes the Marian Faith Healing Ministry within an environment influenced by Muslim, Catholic, Pentecostal, and biomedical knowing from both local and global contexts. In the case of the Ministry, Wilkens argues how Nkwera negotiates between mission Catholicism, conservative Marianistic Catholicism, folk Catholicism, traditional and Islamic healing experiences, socialism, and biomedicine. As already mentioned, he also mediates between modern individualism and traditional family orientation. Following from this, the Marian Faith Healing Ministry has been labelled a syncretistic group and the term inculturation is often applied because African beliefs concerning spirits and spirit illnesses are incorporated despite its claimed Catholicity. Syncretism should, however, as Wilkens argues, be understood as a dynamic development of the plausibility that certain religious structures, ideas, and practices have for the people of this particular time and place. Further advancements in this argument could nevertheless have been achieved if the author had broadened her approach and followed the members beyond the Centre, investigating more at depth their lifeworlds and their commonsensical concepts of well-being as practiced and experienced in their everyday-life surroundings. Focussing on religion and ritual practice at the Centre only, may suggest that the author locates religion as if outside the boundaries of culture or worldview, an understanding that, in the end, compels the author to enter into a debate distinguishing between faith and well-being in a wider sense of the term. One may, however, wonder why a so-called secular perspective on religion makes the author somehow miss the point despite her emphasis on the agency and reality of nonhuman properties as well as on the importance of exploring people's own approach to their "being-in-the world." Yet the combination of religion and healing should not be that surprising, which means that if religion is studied as integral to culture and thus in terms of a shared cosmology or worldview, it is forming part of a common way of "being-in–the-world." This being said, the publication is a valuable contribution to our understanding of contemporary religious orders dealing with healing and ritual practices in the present ideological, social, and cultural complexity which characterizes urban Eastern Africa. NB: The editor at LIT could have deleted the excessive use of *etc's* which are, in most cases, creating confusions rather than clarity and may have requested the author to bring in the particular information they allude to.

Kjersti Larsen

Wright, Terence: Visual Impact. Culture and the Meaning of Images. Oxford: Berg, 2008. 193 pp. ISBN 978-1-85973-473-5. Price: £ 19.99

The expectation prompted by the title of this book – "Visual Impact. Culture and the Meaning of Images" – is that the reader will be treated to a comprehensive general theory about the impact that images have on audiences, shaped (the subtitle implies) by cultural meanings. Not so.

Although the book's examples are drawn from many sources, its narrative arc is shaped like a funnel. It begins with a narrow premise and broadens out or progresses, culminating in the climax, which was a project in interactive digital media the author participated in early in this century (I gather finished in 2003). The theoretical arguments and examples of popular culture media that compose most of the book have been marshaled to justify and explain (at least to the author) why an interactive digital media project exemplifies and fulfills a particular psychological theory that the author has adopted as his own and champions.

The book begins with a notion (the camera/eye analogy and its precursors) and the author proceeds for several chapters to refute it. (I thought that it had long ago lost its purchase – see the art historian Jonathan Crary's enlightening account of 19th-century optical experiments, "Techniques of the Observer" – but apparently it was a live metaphor in some academic circles in the 1950s.) The author's theoretical stance from which he debates and critiques that metaphor (not his term) is derived from psychologist J. J. Gibson, whose evolutionary realism contradicted and challenged views of other academic psychologists in the 1950s. Gibson rejected the camera analogy, arguing, instead, that humans like other animals perceive a flow of information using a variety of our senses (fair enough) and (here's the problem, when taken to extremes of realism and universalism) that what we perceive must be "real" to the extent that, as organisms moving in our environment, we adapt to it and survive. That is a simplification, but it is the drift of Gibson's theory. Gibson was not interested in interiority, projection, imagination, or metaphor; his debate with E. H. Gombrich in the 1970s made that clear.

From these first premises and his analysis, the author moves to a consideration of "cultural" representations and perceptions in a chapter consisting of a brief review (too brief, and with odd logical leaps and citations used to refute each other when they do not even speak to each other) of s0me works on perspectival perception in "animals and obscure tribal cultures" (!) (47). He feels it necessary to get this cultural matter cleared up "if we are in the position of designing computer programs or building narratives that involve the participation and interaction of the viewer/user" (47). This chapter, then, must be what the terms "culture" and "the meaning of images" referred to in the book's subtitle. The conclusion is that, essentially, culture does not count in perception.

From there, the author writes several chapters on mass media, drawing especially on television news reportage and shows ("Star Wars" provides many examples) with a liberal sprinkling of movies, and dealing with reporting on disasters, such as the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia and news reporting on refugees. (According to his website, the author had extensive experience in television in Britain prior to joining the University of Ulster as Professor of Art and Design; he is, therefore, well-versed in much popular culture as obscure to some of us as "tribal cultures" are to him.) The gist of his conclusions, not nearly as tightly argued as his refutation the camera/eye notion, is that the news is distorted by conventions and by what E. H. Gombrich would call – but the author does not cite him here – schemata, such as the Madonna-and-child image. He offers what he sees as truer alternative methods, including simultaneous live feeds, in his chapter on "Collateral Coverage."

The book culminates in the last two chapters (aside from the 2-page conclusion): an account of a project created by a team (including the author) called "Interactive Village," an online "interactive multimedia production that aims to evolve a human-interest documentary-style viewing space through which users can navigate routes of their choice through village material: scenes, interviews, activities, and commentary" (141). The village is in the Czech Republic, and the project was done in the early 21st century with much cooperation from the villagers and from Czech anthropologists.

The question the author struggled with when doing the project was how to create an effective and appropriate narrative structure for the project's viewers to interact by means of. He favors an episodic and therefore (his "therefore") potentially reconfigurable narrative, unlike the linearity of the conventional drama derived from Aristotle (roughly: beginning, development, climax, resolution, end). Because of "Gibson's theory of ecological visual perception," the team abandoned the "traditions of the carefully planned documentary" (145) and tried to find a loose collection of materials with story potential which users would be able to navigate as narrative building blocks to put together stories of their own choosing. The author also allowed the user to navigate in one of three modes, or a combination, termed "Observational," "Didactic," or "Journalistic, "at "Basic," "Intermediate," or "Advanced" levels (think of a 3×3 table providing 9 choices). The account of the project's structure and options is fairly detailed, as are the author's thinking about narrative structure, and are therefore helpful. (It would have been even more helpful had it been comparative; it was close to the beginning of people with documentary inclinations experimenting with interactive digital forms. And it would be more informative if it were still available online; I searched for it online but to no avail.)

What, then, does a cultural anthropologist – one interested in narrative forms, in the purported "realism" of photographs, and in new media documentaries? When it comes to the "truth" of photographs, the intellectual and theoretical milieu that many of us have lived through or been trained in is informed by Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies, by Foucault and his followers, by Walter Benjamin and John Berger, to name only the most obvious. Unlike such authors, Terence Wright (like Gibson) does not imagine that the "truth" of perception/interpretation (which Gibson carefully separated, and which culturalists and E. H. Gombrich considered to overlap) is linked to the discourses of power in which it is embedded and the cultural and historical presuppositions informing its production and consumption. My guess is that for most contemporary anthropologists of the visual, photographs and media narratives are not "distorted" but culturally/historically constructed, which points our research to historical specifics and culturally-shaped sensory capacities rather than to universalisms. As for the Interactive Village project, at this point it is dated and outdated (a result of this book being published in paper years after its creation rather than online) and justification for experimentation did not require recourse to the universalist psychological theoretical scholarly buttressing it received. Yet Terence Wright's thoughtfulness about narrative possibilities was interesting, and would have been yet more interesting in the context of a discussion of other experiments in interactive digital ethnography being tried around the same time. Particularly critical, I think, is the issue of temporal-

ity: is the Interactive Village forever trapped in 2003? Is it updated, or does it now have live feeds? Are older story potentials archived and recoverable?

In sum, this book is not without interest; but its premises (and inferences, gaps, and leaps) are so far from those of contemporary visual anthropologists that it will likely be passed over, especially if one is looking for a book for teaching. Shelly Errington

Yalçin-Heckmann, Lale: The Return of Private Property. Rural Life after Agrarian Reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010. 225 pp. ISBN 978-3-643-10629-2. (Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, 24). Price: € 29.90

Agrarian reform in a post-Soviet society might seem like a topic of interest to a select group of agrarian economists, but Lale Yalçin-Heckmann has written a fascinating account of rural life in Azerbaijan that captures complexities rarely explored in scholarly literature on Azerbaijan. She begins this book with the observation that many rural dwellers in newly independent Azerbaijan did not cultivate land that was distributed to them for free through agrarian reform programs. This situation runs counter to the liberal economic notion that land ownership is sufficient motivation for land use. Yalçin-Heckmann argues against monocausal explanations by combining economic anthropology, political economy, and a focus on individual decision-making to assess why rural households did not cultivate their land even in cases of rural poverty.

Yalçin-Heckmann builds a solid, theoretical foundation for her study and cites three domains of explanation to frame her analysis. First, she asks how economic processes are embedded in spatially extensive economic and political structures. This focus directs her to assess the legacy of empires, state formation, Sovietization, patterns of economic development, and legal institutions of property in the region over time. Second, she asks how the composition and structure of rural households shape and motivate production and consumption at the household and village levels. This question motivates a survey of village households and their agriculture and other practices. Finally, she asks how ideologies of kinship and exchange influence land cultivation in ways not explained by rational, economic thinking. She weaves together a wealth of observation from her time in the field to address this question. She spent time predominantly in two areas: Təzəkənd and a settlement known as Pir in the Ismayilli region which is settled predominantly by Kurds.

Following an introductory chapter in which she lays out her theoretical framework, field methods, and data collection, in chapter 2 Yalçin-Heckmann takes a look at the historic role of agriculture, nomadic herding, and trade in Western Azerbaijan in pre-Soviet history. She recounts different interpretations of Russian penetration into predominantly Muslim areas of the Caucasus region and shifting policies of colonization and centralization. The predominance of the oil economy resulted in unevenly developed regions by the end of the nineteenth century marked in particular by the emergence of an industrial city in contrast to a countryside that persisted in traditional ways.

In chapter 3, Yalçin-Heckmann carries the narrative from socialist structures to post socialist reforms. Here, she describes the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* the objective of which was to encourage non-Russian national identities. Later, in the 1930s, Stalinist policy aimed to break up regional entities and force dependence on vertical integration with the central state. In Azerbaijan, resistance to Stalin's policies took the form of tighter adherence to local networks and traditions. Around this time, many political refugees from Iran and deported Armenians arrived in Azerbaijan changing the population dynamics. Gorbachev's reforms in the 1980s included an antialcohol campaign and the destruction of viniculture there. In the early 1990s, Azerbaijan's independence brought the Karabakh conflict and widespread chaos in the countryside as systems of law and order disintegrated. Mandatory military service drew many young men from rural areas into the conflict often against their (or their families') wills. These turbulent times also saw the revitalization of vineyards and wine and cognac production to be sold illegally on a large scale. Opportunities also emerged for an expansion of trade and migratory movements from Azerbaijani villages to cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. All of these processes affected the settlement patterns and identities of the rural Azerbaijani population. Despite maneuvering to acquire or use privatized plots of land, Yalçin-Heckmann points out that a lack of technical equipment, credit, transportation, and markets continue to limit the productivity of this land.

Yalçin-Heckmann shares the results of her village and household survey in chapter 4. She provides general information on her field sites: household size and composition, strategies for household plots (*məhlə* and *pay torpağı*), and general differences she observed in her rural field sites. Although almost all households cultivated their *məhlə* (household plot) as an important survival strategy, the size of these plots was not evenly distributed in the village. Also, the composition of produce grown on these plots had shifted toward fruits and vegetables for sale on national and international markets. In some areas, households gave sharecropping rights to others to cultivate their *pay* shares. These results provide some insights into variations among rural households and the cultivation of their allocated plots of land.

Chapter 5 takes a qualitative look at how and why households engage in a variety of strategies to mitigate vulnerability. Yalçin-Heckmann considers several femaleled households to consider ways in which decision-making depends on a social context rather than individual goals. Each of the women whose story is told faces different challenges and has a unique social standing that shapes her decision-making. In each case, the role of kin, especially men, the availability or lack of capital gained during the Soviet years, and each woman's social capital all influenced whether or not or how these households used their plots of cultivable land. Social practices of conspicuous consumption, such as elaborate weddings, funerals, and gift-giving traditions influence decision-