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### Issues Published in 2013

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#### Amst 58.1 (2013)

DOMINIK NAGL

The Governmentality of Slavery in Colonial Boston, 1690-1760

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores slavery in colonial Boston as a contradictory legal, cultural, and religious institution by introducing the concepts of ‘pastoral power’ and ‘governmentality’ as analytical instruments to the study of slavery. New England slavery was a culturally specific form of bondage that still rested upon pre-modern and religious notions of contract. An all-pervasive Puritan religious culture, and the spatial and social proximity of the slaves and their masters, gave New England slavery its unique character and produced a distinct way of slave management that is best described as ‘Puritan governmentality of slavery.’ In addition, it is suggested that the concept of governmentality addresses some of the criticisms leveled against Eugene Genovese’s model of slavery as ‘paternalism,’ as it allows for the recognition of resistance as a defining feature of slavery.

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JASON S. POLLEY

Race, Gender, Justice: Storytelling in *The Greenlanders*

**ABSTRACT:** In *The Greenlanders* (1988), a novel that I read as a meditation on the nature of justice, Jane Smiley crafts indispensable links between survival, legality, and shared narrative. In her critically ignored masterwork, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist posits how increased seclusion leads to the loss of collective stories in Greenland, the only established European civilization to fall apart and disappear. At the height of her fictional case study of justice, Smiley’s ill-fated characters disband their annual tribunal (evocatively titled the ‘Thing’). In doing so, they forfeit their chances of survival. To put it simply, the law equals life in Greenland. Without the Thing and its inherent—and essential—ironies, ironies that tie the practice of justice to memory, debate, and liability, the colony cannot endure. For Smiley, irony is the preserve of justice. Since irony is one way of creating correctives to the law, justice integrates incongruity in order to serve and protect. Without a system of law to question, however, there can be no corrective, no means by which to redirect the unjust courses of legality.

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MARTA PUXAN-OLIVA

A Mysterious Heart: “Passing” and the Narrative Enigma in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*

**ABSTRACT:** This essay argues that William Faulkner’s *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* use the device of the narrative enigma to

effectively tell stories in which the cultural practice of ‘passing for white’ in the United States under the Jim Crow system is strongly suggested. The secret is the essential feature of the social practice of passing, which makes the construction of the plot around a narrative enigma especially suitable. By not resolving the narrative enigma, the novels not only preserve the secret of the supposed ‘passers,’ but construct a narrative that departs from the most important conventions of the so-called genre of the passing novel. The truly modernist narrative strategy of placing an unresolved mystery to drive the plot even allows Faulkner to go a step further: the narrative can portray the Southern white fear of passing with even more significance than the actual act of passing itself. It is precisely the fact that the main characters, Joe Christmas and Charles Bon, have uncertain blood origins that allows and even urges the white community of Jefferson to build a story set only upon conjecture along established racial patterns. Therefore, the effect of the narrative enigma is twofold: it retains the racialization of the story and preserves the secret of the passers, while ambiguously uncovering the false grounds upon which the fear of miscegenation constructs and maintains racial boundaries.

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SARAH HEINZ

“Not White, Not Quite”: Irish American Identities in the U.S. Census and in Ann Patchett’s Novel *Run*

**ABSTRACT:** In most (post)colonial and intercultural systems, white skin has acquired the role of a normative model that has profoundly shaped hierarchies and identities. This paper will assess the role of white identity as the norm by analyzing the ambivalent position of the Irish in America as both white and non-white. Underpinned by findings from whiteness studies, this article will look at data from the U.S. Censuses of 2010, 2000, and 1990 with respect to the categories race, ethnicity, and ancestry. The analysis will then be related to Ann Patchett’s novel *Run* (2007), in which an Irish American family that adopted two black boys is faced with internal conflicts. The thesis is that in contemporary America, Irishness has become an attractive identity that is white and, at the same time, ethnically specific, an ambivalence that makes it possible to be different and special and to deal with trauma and guilt while enjoying the safety and privilege of whiteness. Irishness and whiteness are therefore flexible categories or self-identifications that are detached from notions of genetics, biology, and heritage and are free to be appropriated by everyone.

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ANDREW MILLER

Taking Fire from the Bucolic: The Pastoral Tradition in Seven American War Poems

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the role that the pastoral mode plays in seven American war poems: Herman Melville’s “The Scout toward Aldie,” Wallace Stevens’s “The Death of a Soldier,” Robert Frost’s “Range Finding,” James Dickey’s “Firebombing,” Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Bruce Weigl’s “The Song of Napalm” and Brain Turner’s “Eulogy.” The essay observes that, contrary to the way in which it is often presented in the European tradition, the pastoral in the American tradition is not invoked as a means

of taking cover from the horrors of war, but is instead described as being in league with war. Thus, the pastoral often takes the form of the counter-pastoral and reflects the negotiation that Leo Marx observes occurring between American depictions of nature and depictions of industrial urban life.

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Dimitrios Latsis

Nature's Nation on the Screen: Discursive Functions of the Natural Landscape in Early American Films

**ABSTRACT:** Although several cultural historians have tried to grapple with the discursive relationship between nature and technology during the ascent of modernity in America at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the issue has even been addressed in terms of its impact on contemporaneous visual culture, this contradiction remains unanswered with respect to cinema, the artistic form *par excellence* of the period. In this paper I address the issue by examining the variety of functions that natural landscape and its celluloid incarnations served in early American cinema. By considering potent actuality and fiction films of the period between 1895-1910, as well as nineteenth-century aesthetic constructs like 'transcendence,' the sublime (both natural and technological), and nature's role in the representation of the nation, I focus on the landscape's iterations in political, cultural, and narrative contexts, as well as the part it played in expressing anxieties and 'mastery' narratives attendant to the emergent modernity. This account bears out a concrete and apt explanation of the reasons why cinema occupies a privileged position in modern technological culture that has "inherited the alchemical dreams of the past" (Bryant 105). It is in this 'alchemy' that I propose the transposition of the natural into the visually reproducible takes place.

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FRANK MEHRING

**Forum:** The 1946 Holocaust Interviews: David Boder's Intermedia Project in the Digital Age

Review of Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (2010), and David. P. Boder, *Die Toten habe ich nicht befragt*. Ed. Julia Faisst, Alan Rosen, and Werner Sollors (2011).

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Amst 58.2 (2013)

Pragmatism's Promise

Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube – Guest Editors

MIRIAM STRUBE

Introduction: Back to the Future, or: Why Pragmatism, Why Now?

SUSANNE ROHR

### “Amazing Mazes”: The Locus of the Subject in Charles S. Peirce’s Pragmatist Epistemology

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores how Charles S. Peirce’s philosophy might contribute to recent debates dealing with the contemporary ‘ontological turn.’ What is at stake in these debates is the conception of the human subject in relation to its world. Accordingly, Peirce’s notion of this particular relation is of interest, but he never developed one coherent ‘theory of the subject’ in his philosophical writings. I argue that it is nevertheless possible to identify a subject in Peirce’s epistemology, which is located at the intersection of semiotics and pragmatism. The article thus brings together relevant parts from Peirce’s writings on semiotics and pragmatism and reconstructs a subject that is situated on the border between both areas and that combines the status of being both a function in a triadic sign relation and a pragmatist subject as *agens*.

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PETER SCHNECK

### Cognitive Style and Perceptual Skill in the Realism of Thomas Eakins: Pragmatism, Cognitive Science, and Art

**ABSTRACT:** During the late nineteenth century, new concepts of experience, cognition, and consciousness were being developed and negotiated in both scientific and artistic discourses and practices. Taking the example of Thomas Eakins, a major but also rather controversial American realist painter, the following essay discusses how concepts of perception, cognition, and experience prevalent at the time—and explicitly those expressed by American pragmatism—became translated into images that present cognitive syntheses rather than mimetic representations of the real. On a more general level, these historical observations will be used to discuss the potential of current approaches that align cognitive science with art in order to point out some obvious and some not so obvious continuities between nineteenth-century thoughts on cognition and experience and contemporary approaches in cognitive science. The focus of the discussion will be on notions like perceptual skill and cognitive style, as well as more recent concepts such as embodied and enacted cognition.

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WINFRIED FLUCK

### Crime, Guilt, and Subjectivity in Dreiser, Mead, and Lacan

**ABSTRACT:** For decades, Theodore Dreiser was seen as an old-fashioned naturalist with narrow-minded deterministic views and modest writing skills. In contrast, this essay focuses on the amazing modernity of his conception of the self in which an individual has to look at others in order to gain a sense of self and then acts in anticipation of what he thinks the reaction of the other will be. Dreiser’s intersubjective theory of selfhood bears striking similarities to that of the American pragmatist George Herbert Mead, who formulated his theory of the self at about the same time that Dreiser wrote his novels. Mead’s work has been a major influence on sociological theories of self and identity. For Dreiser, Mead’s trust in the intersubjective basis of democracy remains illusory, however. His characters need to look at others because they are driven by a deep sense of insecurity. Neither reason nor instinct can provide steady guidance, leading to an incalculable variability of results: on the one hand Carrie Meeber’s

success as an actress in *Sister Carrie*, and on the other a murder ‘by chance’ in *An American Tragedy*. This novel stands in a long line of works, ranging from Dostoevsky to Richard Wright and Albert Camus, in which an accidental or unmotivated murder poses a major challenge to classical philosophical theories of the subject because such seemingly incomprehensible crimes confront us with a hidden, inaccessible dimension of human subjectivity. Although their theories of self-formation are similar in crucial respects, there is nothing to be found in Dreiser’s world of Mead’s pragmatist confidence in the possibility of genuine intersubjectivity and the ‘progressive’ vision of society based on it. As his novels show, very different conclusions can be drawn from the open-endedness of self-formation.

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MIRIAM STRUBE

“The bread of life is better than any soufflé”: Wallace Stevens’s Poetics and the Extraordinary Ordinary

**ABSTRACT:** This essay begins with asking why the ‘studies of the everyday’—currently so popular in the humanities—have not yet taken pragmatism into consideration despite the fact that pragmatism has traditionally been concerned with the everyday, the common, and the ordinary. It then analyzes Wallace Stevens’s everyday poetics as part of the pragmatist tradition, especially as inspired by William James and John Dewey. This perspective helps to see the paradoxical doubleness involved when the ordinary is observed consciously and thus ceases to be ordinary, as it is turned into something extraordinary. Furthermore, it uncovers Stevens’s treatment of the ordinary as an expression of his political belief. Through this belief Stevens not only emphasizes democratic impulses but also the importance of becoming a part of an egalitarian collectivity.

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STEVEN MAILLOUX

Rhetorical Pragmatism and Histories of New Media: Rorty on Kierkegaard on the Internet

**ABSTRACT:** This essay begins with Hubert Dreyfus’s Kierkegaardian critique of the Internet and then turns to Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatist response, an unpublished text found in the Richard Rorty Papers. After considering these contrasting perspectives, the author proposes a third view, arguing that a rhetorical pragmatist should borrow from both Dreyfus’s critique and Rorty’s defense. The Internet does enable media users who are unthinkingly complacent in their passionate commitments as well as ones who are complacently unthinking in their detached, everyday busyness. But the Internet also provides its own unique opportunities for thinking critically and for challenging complacency. After proposing this more rhetorically pragmatic view, the author discusses Rorty’s published and unpublished comments on Kierkegaard more generally, concluding with Rorty’s comparison of Kierkegaard and William James.

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MIRIAM STRUBE

**FORUM:** Pragmatism’s Tragicomic Jazzman: A Talk with Cornel West

**ABSTRACT:** In this conversation Cornel West, one of the most versatile and provocative neo-pragmatists, discusses the social, political and cultural foundations for pragmatism, going back to what he calls the spiritual godfathers, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He also explores his own version, prophetic pragmatism, as a form of cultural criticism and social activism that is foremost concerned with everyday people and the underserved. In this context he turns less to classical pragmatists and more to Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois, Randolph Bourne, Josiah Royce as well as to Ralph Ellison, Herman Melville, and Toni Morrison, whom he sees as sharing elements of either his tragicomic or his anti-imperialist version of pragmatism. Beyond offering insights into philosophical and literary writers, he talks about pragmatist philosophy in policy making and politics, especially in regard to Barack Obama, and about popular culture. West here considers jazz as both symbolic democratic action and pragmatic in being flexible, fluid, and not tied to dogma but to a Love Supreme.

## Amst 58.3 (2013)

ANDREW VOGEL

### The Dream and the Dystopia: Bathetic Humor, the Beats, and Walt Whitman's Idealism

**ABSTRACT:** Among the many influences on the Beats, none looms larger than Walt Whitman from whom they adopted an idealistic vision of democratic equality, potent artistic honesty, and forthright sexual expression. In the greedy, conformist, paranoid America of the 1950s, however, the actualization of such a vision seemed terrifically farfetched. The distance between Whitman's vision of America and the dystopia described in "Howl," for instance, animated the Beats' literary project, but it also propagated an abiding sense of ideological doubt. This is one of the primary bases of the Beat ethos. Crucially, when the Beats invoke the distance between Whitman's idealistic dream of democratic vistas and the dystopia of 1950s America, they frequently do so in ways that are comical or that depict characters laughing. Allen Ginsberg, John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder, for example, all wrestled with doubts as to the idealism they inherited from Whitman, and they all associated this struggle with laughter. The distance between Whitman's dream and the Beats' dystopia is hardly a laughing matter, however, making such humor bathetic. Bathos can be defined as the laughable result of straining for a sublime ideal but tripping over hard reality into the absurd. Despite their range of forms and styles, Ginsberg, Holmes, Kerouac, and Snyder all reflect the bathetic impulse emerging from America's failure to manifest anything resembling Whitman's dream.

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FLORIAN FREITAG

### Rencontres américaines: Encounters between Anglo-Americans and French Americans in Kate Chopin's Short Stories

**ABSTRACT:** This article uses a revisionist approach to American local-color fiction—one that combines historicist or ideological hegemonic readings of local color as imperialistic with feminist, counterhegemonic analyses of the genre as a literature of resistance—to examine the depiction of Anglo-American characters in Kate Chopin’s short fiction in general and of their encounters with French Americans (Creoles and Cajuns) in particular. I argue that Chopin’s stories rely solely on the category of cultural affiliation (as opposed to a combination of the categories of race, class, gender, age, and geographical origin) to distinguish between Anglo- and French Americans and thus construct members of both cultural groups as regional characters. However, the texts nevertheless consistently associate Anglo-Americans with metropolitan, hegemonic, and French Americans with provincial, resistant perspectives. This categorization of Anglo-Americans as agents of cultural imperialism and of French Americans as resistant provincials is further confirmed by the texts’ regionalist critiques of Anglo-Americans and their local-color depictions of French Americans, which are continuously played off against and most often also balance each other.

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MEG WESLING

American Modernism on Display: Tourism and Literary Form in the Work Progress Administration’s Guide Series

**ABSTRACT:** Between 1936 and 1941 the Federal Writers’ Project produced guides to all forty-eight states, Alaska, and Puerto Rico, as well as to several cities and regions. Though numerous well-known and important American authors contributed to the American Guide Series, the books themselves have been almost ignored by literary critics, and scholars working with the American Guides have generally regarded them either as busywork to keep people employed during the Great Depression or as government propaganda meant to forward a particular vision of American patriotism and national bounty. This essay makes the case for reading the American Guides as literary texts, texts that engaged with the genres of regionalism and modernism, and texts that tell us something about the literary scene of mid-twentieth-century America. I start by situating the American Guides within the colonial politics of guidebooks and tourism, considering the ideological work that the guides performed. I then extend that focus to analyze how the texts subvert the guidebook genre’s realist representational strategies to embrace an experimentation and epistemological uncertainty that is at the heart of literary modernism. Finally, by focusing specifically on Zora Neale Hurston’s role as editor of *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, I draw connections between her literary work and her work for the Federal Writers’ Project to argue that such guides present a sort of ‘crisis modernism,’ a set of texts whose realistic representational strategies belie the epistemological crises that underpinned them. Through such a reading, I argue, we expand our understanding of what mid-century American modernism looked like, and we better interpret the political, cultural, and literary import of the massive undertaking of the Federal Writers’ Project.

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TOBI MEINEL

A Deculturated Pynchon? Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland* and Reading in the Age of Television

**ABSTRACT:** This essay examines Thomas Pynchon’s novel *Vineland* as a take on reading in the 1980s. *Vineland*’s suffusion with popular culture and

television references has led many critics to focus on its shift in style and content and to read it either as “Pynchon Lite” or as a critical commentary on contemporary American culture. Few critics, however, have picked up on Pynchon’s sustained concern with creating reader-character parallels. Through the figure of Prairie Wheeler, *Vineland* presents us, I argue, with a sophisticated allegory about the entrapments of superficial reading. Representing what Judith Fetterley has termed the “resisting reader,” Prairie guides us through the 1980s Culture Wars in which reading had become a political issue. Under its surface, then, *Vineland* appears as a highly self-reflective novel that complicates cause and effect in contemporary discussions about reading, mass culture, and television

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PHILIPP SCHWEIGHAUSER

**Forum:** Early American Studies Now: A Polemic from Literary Studies

Responses by ED WHITE, STEPHEN SHAPIRO, DUNCAN FAHERTY

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**Amst 58.4 (2013)**

**Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture**

**Ingrid Gessner and Susanne Leikam - Guest Editors**

INGRID GESSNER and  
SUSANNE LEIKAM

Introduction: Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture

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ANDREA ZITTLAU

Pathologizing Bodies: Medical Portrait Photography in Nineteenth-Century America

**ABSTRACT:** With the invention of photography in the first half of the nineteenth century, the camera soon became a widely used instrument in the field of medicine. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, photography helped to classify the pathological while defining the ‘normal.’ In this process the body became a highly de-individualized entity, but the individuality depicted in medical studio portraits reveals a struggle with scientific objectivity. This article engages with medical portrait photography by analyzing the photographs of Dr. James Buckner Luckie’s first and second case of successful triple amputation. The series of photographs is unusual because it shows a black man and a white man in a sequence. The pictures are trophies of medical success, but they also visualize the tensions which are characteristic of nineteenth-century American professional medicine: between racist assumptions, scientific discourse, and popular entertainment venues, as for example freak shows.

INGRID GESSNER

### Epidemic Iconographies: Toward a Disease Aesthetics of the Destructive Sublime

**ABSTRACT:** This article addresses a number of evocative nineteenth-century pictorial representations of yellow fever epidemics, including illustrations from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly* between the 1860s and the 1880s and photographs taken during and after America's so-called 'splendid little war' in Cuba in 1898. These pictures of diseased and dead bodies, which frequently sensationalized and sentimentalized the epidemics for American readers, constitute complex sites of tension: viewing them generates disgust that might also be accompanied with a morbid delight. These representations of the yellow fever experience embody striking contradictions between the aestheticization of the abject and the moral implications emerging from voyeuristic engagements with disease, death, and suffering that call for close examination. These contradictions provide a point of entry for critical engagement with the politics of aesthetic expression and ensuing ideological conflicts during the period. In order to understand more fully the processes of medical and imperialist power formation in the United States, the article reads these pictures as political instruments that destabilize notions of ethics and aesthetics and conjure up what Miles Orvell, in another context, has described as the 'destructive sublime.'

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SUSANNE LEIKAM

### Visualizing Hunger in a 'City of Plenty': Bread Line Iconographies in the Aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

**ABSTRACT:** The large-scale destruction of San Francisco after the earthquake and fires of 1906 confronted city authorities with the unprecedented task of providing food and water for several hundred thousand survivors. The long bread lines stretching through the ruined city were readily taken up as popular motifs by the masses of amateur and professional photographers and thus emerged as an iconic sight of the 1906 calamity. This article explores various transmedial framings of the bread lines and pays particular attention to the pictorial repertoire, reoccurring patterns and motifs, and the cultural functions performed by these visual representations. It also delves into the questions of the ethics of gazing at destruction and destitution and considers the effect of the sensationalist and voyeuristic visuals on financial aid and charity. Through a close examination of the disaster relief, this analysis also investigates the invisibilities and gaps in the bread line narratives and exposes strategic narrative appropriations of the bread lines as well as the discriminatory processes and the violence that accompanied the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.

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ASTRID BÖGER

### On-Site Disaster: Exposing Calamity in Twentieth-Century Art Photography

**ABSTRACT:** This essay looks at twentieth-century American art photography as an important arena of the calamitous by focusing on scenes of death, decay, and disaster centrally featured in many photographs by a group of well-known artists. It begins by revisiting Walker Evans's work for the Farm Security Administration, which depicts the human and economic disaster of the Great

Depression so artfully that one could miss the sobering subject entirely. Next, with Weegee and Robert Frank the essay considers two photographers of the New York School, whose work broke with established conventions of art photography in different ways in their search of a more immediate as well as authentic approach to depicting calamity. It is further argued that a significant step in the history of photography occurred in the 1970s, when William Eggleston, with the help of MoMA curator John Szarkowski, introduced color into art photography and thus produced highly evocative images giving the entire medium a new hue. In its final part the essay turns to the provocative work *On This Site* by Joel Sternfeld, which combines elements from all previous styles and yet manages to reposition American photography as a politically engaged art, enlisted here to commemorate unknown sites of violent deaths. One leitmotif connecting all photographs included here is the theme of traffic, both as a symbol of individual as well as national progress and simultaneously as a major site of man-made disaster. Moreover, each approach reflects a new way of representing traumatic incidents in the form of visual commemoration, leading to a rather different viewing experience in each case. Finally, each photographic oeuvre discussed below critically resonates with the ‘destructive sublime’ as theorized by Miles Orvell.

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KATRIN DAUENHAUER

**Between Ethics and Aesthetics: Photographs of War during the Bush and Obama Administrations**

**ABSTRACT:** This essay is concerned with photographs of war during the Bush and Obama administrations and particularly explores how the visual representation of war has developed between the two presidencies. Comparing pictures from Guantánamo and the capture of Saddam Hussein during President George W. Bush’s first term in office to photographs from Guantánamo and the killing of Osama bin Laden during President Obama’s first term in office, I argue that a careful reframing of the ‘war on terror’ has taken place during Obama’s presidency. Focusing on the disappearance of the enemy’s body from sight, I ask what ethical consequences this development entails by setting the question in the context of broader debates about the circulation of pictures of war and suffering.

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MILES ORVELL

**Forum: Photographing Disaster: Urban Ruins and the Destructive Sublime**

**ABSTRACT:** Photographers have recorded disaster and ruins for over a hundred years, but more recently the spectacle of material destruction has been a central and disturbing feature of American culture. This essay focuses on three sites of massive urban destruction: the city of Detroit, which has been succumbing gradually to decay under the weight of its economic collapse; the city of New Orleans, partially destroyed by the force of Hurricane Katrina in 2005; and New York City, whose World Trade Center was subject to attack and obliteration by Al Qaeda in 2001. Examining the work of documentary photographers Camilo Jose Vergara, Andrew Moore, Robert Polidori, John Woodin, James Nachtwey, and Joel Meyerowitz, I argue in this essay for the existence of a new category of visual representation: “the destructive sublime.” Exploring the range of aesthetic approaches taken in representing catastrophe, I also analyze the mixed response we have to such images—a response that

combines moral and ethical revulsion with aesthetic wonder and awe. The essay concludes with the claim that photography has worked against our tendency to amnesia, functioning in the twenty-first century as the necessary cultural historian of our distressed time.

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Email: [webmaster@amerikastudien.com](mailto:webmaster@amerikastudien.com)